

*A Patristic Commentary*



# THE BOOK OF John

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*A PATRISTIC COMMENTARY*

*THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO*

# **ST. JOHN**

**PART ONE  
CHAPTERS 1 TO 8**

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In the Name of  
The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
One God.  
Amen.

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# INEXPRESSIBLE HEIGHTS OF GLORY

During the writing of this book, a certain thought crossed my mind and I often hesitated to document it. I felt sad that I had not begun to enjoy the Gospel of St. John earlier on in my life. Had I done so, I would have spent the rest of my days soaring in the glories that this Gospel offers. These are glories that are hard to communicate in any human language.

As I studied the Gospel of St. John, I came to understand the meaning of what Origen, meant when he wrote his meditations and sermons on this Gospel. He stated that he believed he could not complete his interpretation of St. John until he had passed into heaven. Only there would he be able to complete that task! Indeed, I feel that no one can achieve a full understanding of the depths of St. John's writing; and that all would be revealed only as we meet with our glorified Savior and as we partake in His heavenly glory. Only then will we comprehend the amazing implications of this Gospel, and in a way that transcends all that can be said here.

May the Holy Spirit carry every soul into God's divine embrace. May He enlighten the inner vision so that the soul may enjoy all the divine glory and understanding that our amazing Lord wishes to offer to us. Consequently, we will be ablaze with divine love and longingly seek to meet with our Savior.

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. JOHN**

The Gospel according to St. John answers the need of everyone: the simple and the scholar. St. John's words are extremely simple: hence he appeals to the simple as they find themselves closely drawn and comforted. On the other hand, those with spiritual experience find the opportunity to dive into his writings without ever reaching its depth<sup>1</sup>.

### **THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN AND THE EARLY CHURCH**

The Gospel according to St. John attracted the heart of the early Church and lifted it to

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<sup>1</sup> El Khoury Paul El-Faghaly: *The Gospel of St. John*, The Biblical Association, 1992, p. 14 (in Arabic).



perceive the sublime divine mysteries. This is the result of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, St. John uses a style that is spiritually attractive and which is far removed from difficult philosophical terms or dry theological language.

- ❖ We may venture to say that **the Gospels are the first- born of all the Holy Books, and that from among the Gospels the first- born is the Gospel of St. John.** Unless we lean on the Lord's bosom (Jn 13:23), and accept St. Mary through Jesus Christ as our Mother (Jn 19:27), we will not understand its message. By doing so, we become another St. John, and the Lord Jesus Christ will appear to us just as He had appeared to St. John. According to those who have presented a truthful report about St. Mary, she had no son other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus had said to His Mother: "This is your son," (Jn 19:26). He did not say: "This is your son as well." It is as though He was telling her: "This is Jesus whom you have conceived." Indeed, every person who has become perfect does not live but rather it is Christ who lives in him (2 Cor 4:7). And since Christ lives in him, it is possible to refer to him and tell St. Mary: "Here is your son, Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup>

Origen

- ❖ All the others - the evangelists Mathew, Mark, and Luke - have risen slightly above earthly matters. That is they have dealt with the events that Jesus did on earth, while they spoke only briefly about His divinity. They seemed to be just like other people who had accompanied Him on earth. **In contrast, the Eagle - that is St. John - is the one to preach the sublime Truth, as well as the one who contemplates and turns with piercing vision towards the inner eternal Light...**

In spite of that, we are the ones who are weak and crawl upon the earth: we walk among men with difficulty, we venture to uphold and comprehend these sublime matters, and we lead ourselves to believe that we have comprehended these issues since we have meditated on them or spoken about them.<sup>3</sup>

St. Augustine

- ❖ As for the blessed St. John...we find that he possesses a fiery desire and a mind that yearns for matters that surpass the human mind. He ventures and draws close in order to explain the sublime Birth which is impossible to report in its totality - the Birth of God, the Word. Yet he realizes that "It is the glory of God to conceal matters" (Prov 25:2); and that the honor due to God exceeds our understanding and comprehension. Hence, it is hard for anyone to understand or explain the features of the Divine Nature.<sup>1</sup>

St. Cyril, the Great

The Gospel of St. John specifically achieves the '**fullness**' of the Holy Bible: it is as though that Gospel represents the '**epicenter**' of the mystery of the Bible.

**Fr. Maximus, the Confessor** likens the Holy Bible to the Holy Church, and the Gospel of St. John as the **Holy of Holies within Her**. Through St. John's Gospel, we enter into the sanctified depths of the Holy Bible, we get acquainted with Its Mysteries, and we break through

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<sup>2</sup> Commentary on John, Book 1:23

<sup>3</sup> On the Gospel of St. John, tr.36: 5

<sup>1</sup> St. Cyril the Great: he interpreted the Gospel of St. John. This was translated by the Center for Patristic Studies, January 1989, pg 12. I have borrowed many of the sayings of St. Cyril the Great quoted in that translation.

the veil.

**St. Clement of Alexandria** justly calls it the ‘**spiritual Gospel**’ that leads the soul to recognize the glories that have been prepared for her through the love of God the Father, the redeeming act of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit. St. Clement finds that the **Gospel of St. John constitutes the spirit while the other three Gospels constitute the body**. The latter present the tangible facts and events in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, His service, and His redeeming work. **The Gospel of St. John comes to present an interpretation of what lies behind these events, and to reveal their depths and implications**. Hence the Gospel is in harmony with the words of the Lord: “...that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (Jn17: 3).

This is the **spiritual Gospel** since it raises the believer into the spiritual world. It does not allow him to remain on the material plane: For when He had satisfied the multitudes with bread, they rejoiced (Jn 6:26), but He invited them to partake of the eternal Food (Jn 6:27).

In the Lord’s conversation with Nicodemus about the new Birth, the Jewish scholar’s concept was limited to his own mother’s womb. However, the Lord Jesus Christ raised him to see with his heart’s vision that “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Jn 3:1-6).

In the Lord’s conversation with the Samaritan woman, we find that her thought is limited to her material bucket, Jacob’s well, and his herds. However Jesus lifts her heart to the Divine Source. From this, He offers her Water that will gush within her into sources of Living Water that flow into eternal life.

When **St. John Chrysostom** began to give sermons about the Gospel of St. John, he spoke about St. John, the evangelist. He presented His Gospel and made a comparison between him and other speakers and actors. He explained how the latter attracted the masses by their skillful use of the language as well as music, and by parading in attractive masks. As for St. John the evangelist, he spoke as though he stood on a heavenly platform: Many of the people to whom he spoke had already become like angels; and he yearned that the rest of his listeners would be transformed likewise. He only armed himself with the Grace of God and considered himself in the company of heavenly hosts. To these, St. John presents the joyful message of the Lord Jesus Christ.

❖ Now this man appears before us: the son of thunder, the beloved of the Lord Jesus Christ, the pillar of all Churches in the world, the one who holds the keys of heaven, who drank of the Lord’s Cup, was baptized by His Baptism, and confidently leaned on his Lord’s bosom... He entered wearing the robe of incomprehensible beauty, for he appears before us having put on the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 13:14; Gal 3:27). His beautiful feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace (Eph 6:15); and he is dressed, not with a girdle around his waist, but around his shoulders. His robe is not made of crimson hide, neither is it covered by gold on the outside. But it is woven and fashioned of the Truth Himself. Now St. John appears before us to head and proclaim openly the Truth. He does not appear wearing a mask and ready to play a theatrical role. He does not attempt to force the crowds to believe him, but rather uses gentleness and kindly looks and words to achieve his message without resorting to musical instruments such as the violin or similar objects. Indeed he only uses his tongue and speaks with a voice that sounds sweeter and more effective than a harp or any other musical tool. His platform is all the heavens and his stage is the whole inhabited planet. His band consists of all the angels. As for his hearers, they are human beings,

many of whom are angels or wish to become likewise. These will not be able to enjoy fully his words unless they get transformed and demonstrate that change through their acts. As for the rest, they are like young children who hear yet do not understand... they are playful and leisurely, and only live to possess wealth, power, and sensual pleasures. What they hear is the Truth, yet their demeanor does not stress that which is great or noble since they hurry towards the earth that is used to make bricks.<sup>1</sup>

❖ He is no longer the fisherman and the son of Zebedee, for he is now the one who knows ‘the deep things of God’ (1 Cor2:10), and of the Holy Spirit - by this I mean that he plays on that harp. Therefore, we wish we would listen to him. Note that he does not speak to us as a person in any way, for his words come from the depths of the spirit, and from the mysteries that have not been revealed even to the angels. Indeed, the angels have learned about them from the voice of St. John, and at the same time as we have. So they really got to know about matters through us and which we already knew. Another apostle explains this by saying: “...to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places (Eph 3:10). Therefore, if the leaders, powers, cherubim, and seraphim have learned these matters from the church, it becomes clear that they are very eager to listen to these teachings. Indeed, we are granted such a great honor since the angels have learned about these things which they had not known before.”<sup>2</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

## **==THE WRITER**

\* The word John means: ‘Jehovah is tender.’

\* He is the son of Zebedee from the house of Sidon in Galilee. The Lord Jesus Christ called him and his older brother, James, to follow Him. Herod Agrippas, the First, killed James in the year 44 B.C.

\* It seems that he was relatively well off as his father used to hire men to handle his boats (Mk 1:20). Moreover, the high priest knew who John was (Jn18: 16). His mother, Salome was a virtuous and pious woman who always followed the Lord (Mk15:40)...She participated with the other women in buying expensive spices for the body of Jesus. Most probably she is the sister of Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn 19:25).

\* He became a fisherman by trade, and he and his brother James were fishing partners with Simon (Lk 5:10). The Lord Jesus Christ chose Simon, Andrew, John, and James to be His first disciples. Because John and his brother had fiery tempers, the Lord named them ‘**Boanerges**’ which means the ‘sons of thunder’ (Mk3:17). John became the apostle of love. He was extremely gentle and his gospel, letters, and revelations all revolve round ‘**love**.’ He continued to preach about love till his old age. In his interpretation of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, **St. Jerome** reports that in his old age, the disciples of John used to carry him and take him up into the pulpit to hear him utter these words: “My children, love one another. This is the Lord’s commandment: if you follow just this one commandment, it will be good enough for you”<sup>1</sup>. John is known as ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved,’ (Jn21:20).

\* **St. Ireneaus** reports that John was twenty-five years old when the Lord Jesus called him to be His disciple.

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom1: 2*

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom1: 3*

<sup>1</sup> *St. Jerome: Comm. On Galat.6: 10*

\* Like Peter and James, John is considered from the special ones privileged to be alone with the Lord Jesus in many instances: such as at the Transfiguration (Matt 17:1); the raising of the daughter of Jarius (Mk 5:37); in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:37); and at the time the Lord predicted the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (Mk 13:3). The Lord entrusted him and Peter to prepare the place where He would hold the Passover with the disciples (Lk 22:8).

He in particular leant on the Lord's chest (Lk 13:23); and he accompanied the Lord and stood at the foot of the Cross where he received St. Mary as his mother (Jn 19:20-27).

\* After the resurrection of the Lord, he was with Peter when he healed the lame man at the gate of the temple that is called Beautiful (Acts 3:1-6). He was also with Peter when they were sent to Samaria to lay their hands on believers so that they might receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17).

\* St. Paul considered him to be one of the pillars of the church (Acts 15:6; Gal 22:9).

\* He preached in Asia Minor, namely in Ephesus; was tortured under Dematious, and was exiled to the Island of Patmos. There he enjoyed the revelations concerning the Day of the Lord: The book of The Revelation of Jesus Christ. He remained in exile until his death. According to **St. Jerome**, St. John remained in the world for sixty-eight years after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Based on that, he lived for two or more years into the second century A.D. This means that he lived to be almost one hundred, for he was a few years younger than the Lord. Others believe that he died in the year 98 A.D. during the reign of Trojan (98 - 117 A.D.).

\* In his book 'The History of the Church'<sup>2</sup>, **Eusebius the Caesarian** recounts a story about St. John the apostle. It reveals how much he was concerned, even in his old age, about the salvation of the human soul and the amazing ways he used to fulfill that task. The historian borrowed the story from the book written by **St. Clement of Alexandria** entitled 'Who is the Rich Person Who will be Redeemed?'

The story recounts that after St. John returned from the Island of Patmos; he went to the city of Ephesus to resolve ecclesiastical matters and to appoint bishops. He also visited some of the neighboring pagan areas. In one of these cities close by - probably Izmir - he introduced to the bishop of the local church a young pagan who had accepted faith. St. John was very concerned about him and underlined that that youth would be a trust he delivers into the bishop's hands. The latter consequently tended him until he was baptized. However, the youth soon made the acquaintance of some corrupt youngsters who encouraged him to lead a life of pleasure and squandering. When they needed money, they resorted to stealing and he would join them. Thus he became progressively involved in one crime after another and he even formed and led a gang to steal, plunder, and kill. Eventually, St. John returned to the city and asked the bishop about the youth. The bishop informed him: "He was led astray...he spiritually died, for he has reverted to his evil days and has become an indecent person and a robber. Instead of being a church member, he has gone to the mountains with a gang who shared his disposition." The saint could not bear the news, and asked for a horse that he mounted in spite of his old age. He rode to the area where robbers hid where they captured him and carried him to their leader. Upon seeing the saint, the gangster felt so embarrassed that he tried to flee. However, St. John ran after him and shouted: **"Why are you running away from me? My son, I am your father and I am harmless and advanced in age. If need be, I am willing to die for your sake just as the Lord Jesus Christ suffered death on our behalf. For your sake, I will sacrifice my life. Stop. Believe, for the Lord has sent me to you."** The youth instantly felt ashamed and stopped. He

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<sup>2</sup> Eusebius: Hist. Ecc. 3: 28



held his head down, and spread his arms in fear while he wept bitterly. St. John was overjoyed and led him back to church, where he stayed with him until he felt assured he would be well.

\* **St. John Cassian** tells the following story: "As St. John was one day cuddling an eagle, a young hunter came by and wondered at the sight. He asked the saint why a great man like him would waste his time as such. The saint responded by asking him: "What are you holding in your hand?" The youth answered: "It is a bow." The saint said; "And why is it loose?" The youth replied: "Because if it remains taut all the time it loses its flexibility which is what I need to have when I shoot an arrow." The old saint said: "Therefore you should not be upset with me, my young friend, because I sometimes release the strings of my soul. Otherwise I would lose its power and I would be let down when I turn to it in the time I need."<sup>1</sup>

\* The historian **Eusebius**<sup>2</sup> also reports how St. John was extremely concerned about preserving the upright faith from the trends of heretic thoughts. He bases his report on the writings of **St. Clement, bishop of Lyon**. He reports that the Saint went into a public bath to bathe, and there he heard the heretic Kirnasius (proclaiming that the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ is an earthly one; and that He loved to go to dinners and engage in impure physical relationships). Upon hearing that, St. John jumped out in great dismay, and ran away as he could not bear to be under the same roof with that man. He told his companions to follow his example and said: "Let us escape lest the bath would collapse due to the presence of Kirnasius, who is the enemy of truth"<sup>3</sup>.

\* Using the words of Apollonius - who is believed to have been a bishop of Ephesus, **Eusebius**<sup>4</sup> the historian, also tells us that the apostle St. John, by the grace of God, raised a person from the dead.

\*The scholar **Tertullian**<sup>5</sup> reports that St. John was thrown into a tub filled with boiling oil and that the Lord rescued him.

## PLACE AND DATE OF WRITING

According to the testimony of **St. Iraneaus, Bishop of Lyon** (177 A.D. - 200 A.D. approximately), who is a disciple of St. Policarpus, St. John delivered his Gospel to the bishops of Asia where he lived with them until the reign of Emperor Trajan. He had it published in Ephesus.<sup>6</sup>

This testimony continues to be accepted in both the Eastern and Western Churches with hardly any opposition. However, some critics have recently raised doubts concerning the authority of St. John and consequently questioned the place and date of his writings.

Concerning the place of writing, some think it to be **Antioch** or **Syria**. They base their assumption on the information given in the **Acts of Ignatius**<sup>7</sup> - (which is a document with uncertain date) - and which mentions that St. John was closely bound to Antioch. The response to this is that St. John did stay in Antioch for a short time, but then he went to Ephesus where he resided for a long while..

Other critics believe it was written in Alexandria and their claim to that is that the oldest manuscripts of St. John's Gospel have been found in Egypt. They also explain that the writing reflects a Hellenic style that corresponds to the thought of the School of Alexandria and that had

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<sup>1</sup> Collat. XXIV c.2

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius: Hist Ecc 3:28.

<sup>3</sup> Refer also to Eusebius 4:14

<sup>4</sup> Eusebius: Hist.Ecc 5:18:4.

<sup>5</sup> Tertullian: Praescrip., Haer., 36

<sup>6</sup> Adv. Haer.3: 1:1 PG 7:844

<sup>7</sup> PG 5:984

been inspired by Philo, the Jewish Alexandrian thinker. The response to this theory is that the academic climate of Egypt led the School to have it in its possession at a very early date. By having it at the School, the Gospel could play a significant role in the life of her church and its fathers. This does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that it was written in Egypt<sup>1</sup>.

Concerning the rejection of some critics to the testimony that the Gospel was written in Ephesus, their view is based on the following:

First: Most of the recent critics confirmed, during the first half of the twentieth century, that the style of writing of the Gospel of St. John is **Gnostic and Hellenic**. They say that it is a style that is not consistent with the First Century after Christ but belongs rather to the Second Century. Therefore, they insist that even if St. John was the one who wrote the original text, yet it had to have been rewritten by a Gnostic hand in Alexandria or Antioch during the Second Century. In 1947, the Manuscripts of the Dead Sea were discovered, as well as the complete Gnostic library found at almost the same time in Naga Hamadi in Upper Egypt. These confirmed the opposite of what these critics insisted upon. Consequently, scholars withdrew and believed in the veracity of ecclesiastic tradition. Most of them became convinced that the Gospel of St. John was written in the First Century and that St. John most probably is the one who wrote it while he lived in Ephesus. We will return to this subject when we will speak about “the Gospel of St. John and Gnosticism.”

Secondly: Some critics have tried to raise doubts concerning belief that the Gospel was written by St. John in Ephesus. They claim that the saint was martyred with his brother by Herod Agrippa the First in Jerusalem in the year 44 A.D. They have presented evidence that can be refuted based on the following considerations:

1- In St. Mark's Gospel, chapter 10:39, the verse says that James and John would drink of the same cup as the Lord Jesus Christ. They claim that this means that John must have been martyred with his brother; otherwise St. Mark would have changed his version. The response to that is that St. Mark was obligated to report the exact words of the Lord Jesus Christ, and had no right to alter any of them, thereby leaving the interpretation to the reader. The Lord used the cup as a symbol to prophecy the sufferings that the two disciples were to undergo. It does not necessarily indicate martyrdom or the spilling of blood<sup>2</sup>. Besides, if Herod had killed the two brothers together, St. Luke would not have mentioned the death of James only (Book of the Acts of the Apostles). He would have mentioned both brothers: **“Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also,”** (Acts 12:2, 3).

2- The critics depended on a brief expression that occurs in the writings of two later authors: namely, Philip of Sidea, a writer of the Fifth Century; and George Hamartolus, who wrote in the Ninth Century. In their writings, they referred to Papayas who stated that the Jews had killed John and James. The response to their statements regarding that matter cannot be taken seriously since these two writers are known to be inaccurate historians<sup>3</sup>. C.K. Barrett states that Ireneaus and Eusebius are acquainted with the writings of Papayas and that he does not mention anything about the martyrdom of St. John<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, the fact that Philip of Sidea names St. John as the Divine leads one to be suspicious since St. John was not known by that title in the days of Babias- in the Second Century. Concerning what George Hamartolus has written, the matter was not taken seriously as he came back to the subject and reported that St. John had

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<sup>2</sup> Donald Guthrie: *N.T. Introduction*, 1975, p262

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>4</sup> *The Gospel according to St. John*, 1965, p87

passed away peacefully (without martyrdom).

3- In the Syrian records of the Acts of the Martyrs - 411A.D.<sup>1</sup>- the commemorations of St. John and St. James are celebrated on the same day, i.e. December 27. They are celebrated as two apostles from Jerusalem. This agrees with the Calendar of Carthage- written in 505A.D. approximately<sup>2</sup>. Yet some scholars point out the error that is made as the Baptist follows the name of St. John. Moreover, in the sermon of **Fr Avrahat**,<sup>3</sup> he says that we may add the names of John and James only to the names of Stephen, Peter, and Paul as apostles who died as martyrs.

The response to the above is that some confusion has occurred between St. John the Baptist and St. John the Apostle. The following provides positive evidence that St. John did not die with his brother:

1- St. John is mentioned as one of the pillars of the Church in Galatians 9:2: and the date to that is after 44 A.D.

2- The archaeological finds of the grave of St. John in Ephesus by Austrian scholars support the traditional ecclesiastic thought<sup>4</sup>.

3- According to Polycrates, the Bishop of Ephesus had written to Victorinus, the Bishop of Rome, in the year 190 A.D. approximately, to confirm that John the Apostle had lived in Ephesus and had died there<sup>5</sup>.

Concerning the **date of the writing of the Gospel of St. John**, it was penned towards the end of the apostle's life. This is based on ecclesiastical tradition. It is clear that it was written after the destruction of the temple of the Jews in Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D- (refer to Jn 2:19, 20; 4:21). Thus the writing took place probably during the period after the believers had been banned from the gatherings of the Jews around the years 85 to 90 A.D. - (refer to Jn 9:22; 16:2).

## THE AIM OF THE WRITING

The Evangelist tells us about his object in writing the Gospel in the following words: “**...that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name,**”(20:31). Note the following in the above verse:

A- The word ‘**believe**’ occurs in Greek as ‘*pioteonte*’ and this appears in the Seniaid, Vatican, and Koredethi versions. It is used in the present tense and not in the past tense to indicate that the Gospel has been written to reinforce a faith that is established already<sup>6</sup>. Hence, he is not presenting a new faith, but rather he seeks to uphold the faith of the church, and which she already enjoys, and seeks to prevent anyone from deflecting from it.

B- The core of faith is that Jesus is the Messiah, and that He is the Son of God. According to W.C.Van Unnick<sup>7</sup>, the word ‘Messiah’ is not a mere title but it necessarily implies ‘the one anointed’: ‘The anointed king.’ In contrast to the Gentiles, this is the issue that only the Jews could recognize. As for the expression ‘Son of God’ the Hellenic world could understand it more than others. In any case, the association of the two expressions was fundamental to indoctrinate and ascertain faith of those from Jewish or Gentile origin. Every believer has to recognize that Jesus is the subject of all the old prophecies, and that He is the Son of God and is consubstantial with Him in essence. Hence He is able to offer redemption and renew our nature.

Scholars have remarked that the word ‘Messiah’ occurs in this Gospel only without any translation and just in its own right. It is as though St. John intends to underline the concept of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. H Leitzmann: *Diedrei altesten Martyrologien (Klein Texte, 2)*, 1911, p.7f

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.5.

<sup>4</sup> Nelson: *A New Catholic Commentary on the Holy Scripture*, 1969, p. 1033.

<sup>5</sup> Eusebius: *H.E.3: 31:3; 5:24:3f. PG20: 485*

<sup>6</sup> Guthrie, p 271.

<sup>7</sup> “The Purpose of St. John’s Gospel,” *Stidia Evangelica*. 1959, p382- 411

the Jews. Consequently, we find him presenting us with the words of Philip to Nathaniel: **“We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote...”** (Jn 1:45). Also the invitation of Andrew to his brother Simon Peter: **“We have found the Messiah”** (which is translated, the Christ) (Jn 1:41). This is the picture of the Lord Jesus Christ that we find in the Gospel of St. John from its very beginning - a Messianic picture<sup>1</sup>.

It is the picture of Christ as the King and Messiah that the Jews have awaited for long, and Whom the Evangelist ascertains in more than one passage. He reports that when the Lord entered Jerusalem they **“...cried out: ‘Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!’...His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him,”** (Jn 12:13-16). Before Pilate, the Lord admitted that He had a Kingdom (Jn 18:33-37). He was claimed as King of the Jews (Jn 19:3, 12-15, 19, 20). St. John is the only one who reports that the crowds sought Him to crown Him as King but he withdrew from their midst (6:15). The Lord did so because their concept of a Messianic King was different from His own.

This presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ as the **Messiah King** whom the Jews had been awaiting for so long, led some scholars to consider that St. John was a Jewish man with a bitter heart. They explain that this was due to the enmity that the Jews expressed towards the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what Lord Charnwood claimed in 1925. However, some scholars, such as F.Taylor, observe that this was not the main object; and that St. John was bitter towards anyone who expressed hostility towards the Lord, whether that came from a Jew or from a non-Jew. Other scholars- such as A.T. Robinson<sup>2</sup> -find that the Apostle did not direct his Gospel to the Jews, but rather to Christians of Hellenic origin.

C- The aim of this Gospel is to ascertain the **Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ**, as He is the Son of God. The Apostle had no intention to go into theoretical discussions or philosophical arguments. He just proposes that we enjoy life in His Name. Our faith in the Lord’s divinity touches our lives and redeems our very souls. Consequently, after the New Testament had been written, the first sermon we find in our hands begins with these words<sup>3</sup>: [It is appropriate for us, dear brethren, to think of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Judge of the living and the dead. Therefore we should not belittle the issue of our redemption, for if we do, we will be belittling (the Lord Jesus Christ) and will consequently receive so little from Him<sup>4</sup>.]

It is as though this Gospel comes to claim, with greater clarity and elaboration, what the other evangelists have presented to us. It announces the divine aspect. In this context, Origen says: [None of the evangelists announced the Lord’s divinity as clearly as St. John. He is the one through whom the Lord says: **“ I am the Light of the world”, “ I am the Way, the Truth, the Life”, “ I am the Resurrection”, “ I am the Door”, “ I am the Good Shepherd”**].Moreover, we find in Revelations: **“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last”**<sup>5</sup>.

In other words, this Gospel presents to us the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son, as well as the implications of this unique relationship in the lives of believers and its role in their redemption. By revealing the Person of Jesus Christ as the only Son of God, St. John wishes us to believe in Him, become saved, and attain eternal life. The evangelist underlines that the Lord’s contemporaries neither realized the full extent of His perfection nor the implications

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<sup>1</sup> Guthrie, p.272

<sup>2</sup> *New Testament Studies*, Number 6, 1960. Pgs.117-131

<sup>4</sup> Clem. 1:1:1L2

<sup>5</sup> *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John: P1*, 6.

of His words nor deeds. That seemed to be beyond their comprehension. His blood relatives, such as His Mother, and His brothers (His cousins), His friends, the Jewish teachers, the priests, as well as the Samaritan woman and Pontius Pilate...all these did not comprehend His words and were astonished at His acts<sup>1</sup>.

\* I dare to say, dear brethren that St. John himself did not speak of the issue in its entirety. Rather, he speaks insofar as he was able to comprehend. For he was a human being who spoke about God. It is true that God inspired him, yet he remained a human being<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

D- The Lord preserved the life of this apostle and did not allow him to be martyred at an early time as the other disciples. It was His will that **St. John would present to the young Church the Truth in a clear manner - the Gospel of St. John - and to lead her to the Day of the Lord so that She could ultimately perceive the opened heavens and the Revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

\* Can't you see, it is not without a reason that we say, this Apostle is speaking to us from heaven? Just observe how, from the very beginning, he attracts the soul upwards, and provides her with wings, and lifts up the minds of his hearers. In this manner, he lifts the soul above all that is tangible matter, and to heights above the earth and sky. He holds the soul's hands and leads her to heights that are above the Cherubim and Seraphim themselves; and even above thrones, authorities, and powers. In a word, he urges her to go on a journey that transcends all creatures<sup>3</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* St. Paul's spirit was heaven- bound and he said: **"For our citizenship is in heaven,"** (Phil 3:20). The same is true of St. James and St. John; and therefore were called **'Sons of Thunder'** (Mk 3:17). St. John was like someone who lived in heaven and consequently saw the Word of God<sup>4</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

St. John lived into the end of the First Century and was the last one from among the Lord's disciples and apostles to leave this world. He lived to see a new generation of Christians, and he was - if we can correctly say so- the link between the Apostolic Era and the Post-Apostolic one. He wished **to convey the final apostolic word about the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to protect the Church from the invasion of wrong ideas.**

Some scholars find that the Evangelist intended to face some of the Gnostic movements, such as Docetism, as these proclaimed that it is impossible for the Divine Word to become real flesh and incarnated. This was due to their perception of matter as being evil. Consequently, the Apostle ascertains in his Gospel that Jesus is truly the Son of God and that He truly became incarnate. This was not fiction, for he says: **"The Word became flesh."** We could not have enjoyed redemption if He had not carried our nature in Him, and actually shared our life. The Evangelist reinforces the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ: in the wedding at Cana and as he takes on the role of everyone's servant. He turns the water into wine, a task that involves creation, yet he presents it as a humble service and does not expect to be given a seat of honor. At the well of Sikhar, the Lord appears tired and thirsty. At the tomb of Lazarus, he is overcome and weeps. In the upper room, he washes His Disciple's feet; and on the Cross, He got thirsty.

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<sup>1</sup> C.M. Laymon: *The Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible*, 1980, p707

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate1: 1*

<sup>3</sup> Homily on St. John, 2:8.

<sup>4</sup> Letter22: 5.

The aim of this Gospel is **to link the historical Jesus and the Lord who is present in His Church**. He uses the events that occurred in the life of the Lord to proclaim His nature as the glorious God Who works in His Church<sup>1</sup>.

### **OTHER AIMS OF THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN**

Some scholars find that five theories have been proposed about the aim of writing the Gospel of St. John:

1- To allow the believer to attain the promise of eternal life through the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnated Son of God, and to make him experience heavenly matters as the Evangelist himself demonstrates (Jn 20:30-31). This is what we have discussed earlier.

2- To answer heretics and contemporary inventions, as well as antagonistic Jews. Doing so entails defending the Christian faith: a matter we will discuss later on.

3- The theory of wanting to complete what had been recorded in the other Gospels regarding other events. Among those who hold this theory are Eusebius the Caesarean<sup>2</sup>, and St. Jerome<sup>3</sup>. It is hard to believe that this is what the Evangelist aimed to accomplish. He really provides us with a revelation of the Holy Spirit through reporting the conversations and discussions between the Lord Jesus and certain persons and groups. These reveal the nature of the Lord, His redeeming mission, and His divine capacities. The Lord puts these to our service, besides granting us His sublime gifts and sending the Holy Trinity to live within us. St. John presents to us a wonderful and practical source of writing about the Living God and provides a most complete body of theological knowledge.

An old tradition holds that St. John wrote his Gospel in answer to the request of the Bishops of Asia Minor who were his partners in the ministry. **St. Clement of Alexandria** reports (in about the year 190 A.D.) the following: [John, who is the last of them all, having understood the apparent facts revealed by the Gospels (the other ones), was urged by his disciples and inspired by the Holy Spirit to write a spiritual Gospel<sup>4</sup>.] It seems as though they requested him to write a theological interpretation to what the Apostles had written earlier on. Though, historically it is necessary to remark that each Evangelist has recorded his Gospel through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and has conveyed a distinctive theological principle that is also complimentary to the other Gospels.

4- St. Clement of Alexandria was inclined to side with what some called the didactic theory, which presents the Lord Jesus Christ as the Teacher. Although this is a fact, yet He is not a Teacher Who presents external or apparent knowledge. Rather, He is a Teacher Who embraces His students as members of His Body, savoring His life as a life they could live and attain as their own.

5- The theory of counteracting contemporary philosophies with the purpose of harmonizing between philosophy and Christian faith does not appeal to us. We do not believe that this is the object of the Holy Spirit. Rather, the object of writing this Gospel is to present the Divine Gospel Truth. It does not mean that this Truth rejects or opposes all philosophies, but that It sifts them and rejects all falsehoods. Especially during the time of St. Clement of Alexandria, the School of Alexandria was preoccupied with studying the possibility of harmonizing between the living Faith and philosophy. This involved what truths they embodied, and not what human

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Oscar Cullmann: *The N.T.*, 1968, p46.

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius: *H.E.*3: 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Comm. On Matt., Prolong.*

<sup>4</sup> Eusebius: *H.E.* 6:14:5-7.PG 20:552



beings had corrupted by their dreams and imagination<sup>5</sup>.

## THE RESPONSE TO HERETICS, CONTEMPORARY INVENTIONS, AND HOSTILE JEWS

Some of the Church fathers, like **St. Iraneaus- Bishop of Lyon<sup>1</sup>**, **St. Jerome<sup>2</sup>**, and **Victorinus of Pattau**, as well as others, find that the aim of St. John's Gospel is to respond to contemporary heresies and inventions and to the hostile Jews who resisted the Church.

**Victorinus of Pattau** reports that towards the end of the Third Century and at the beginning of the Fourth Century, St. John wrote his Gospel after he had finished the Book of Revelation. [This was after heretics had spread their writings, such as: Valentinus, Kirethus, Apyon. There were many others who belonged to this satanic school of teachings in all the other parts of the world. This obliged the bishops in the neighboring areas to meet with St. John and obligated him to write a Gospel of his testimony<sup>3</sup>.]

It is true that the Apostle undertook the defense of Christian faith facing a number of groups who resisted the Church. However, his Gospel is essentially focused on the gift of the Holy Spirit Who has inspired the Evangelist to reveal the Divine Truth in touch with our redemption. Thus, His Gospel does not stop at the negative side.

There is no doubt that this Gospel provides a living Source out of which the Church continues to drink and draw strength as she confronts the inventions that appear through the years. In the response of **St. Iraneaus** to heresies, he quoted one hundred verses out of St. John's Gospel. **Hipollituss; St. Athanasius, the Apostle; and St. Cyril, the Great** quoted from him too. **St. Clement of Alexandria** often borrowed from him as well.

## FIRST: THE RESPONSE TO THE HOSTILE JEWS

The resistance of the Jews to the Lord Jesus Christ is apparent in the three preceding Gospels. St. John uses the word 'Jew' seventy times, in contrast to its use five or six times in each of the corresponding Gospels. He uses the word to convey different meanings, such as the following:

- \* With a national implication that has nothing to do with religion; for example, in the conversation with the Samaritan woman (9:4).

- \* In the context of religious authority, such as the authority of those in Jerusalem who opposed the Lord Jesus Christ (22:9); 18:3; 8:13).

The Bible makes a distinction between the words '**the Jews**' and '**Israel.**' The latter has a positive meaning and refers to the real inheritance mentioned in the Old Testament. St. John the Baptist had come to baptize with water until Jesus appeared to Israel (1:31). Nathaniel was described as an Israelite in whom there is no guile (1:47). When St. John speaks about the feasts and customs of the Jews (2:6, 13; 7:2) we do not get any sense that indicates embarrassment or scorn.

The Jews resisted the Lord Jesus Christ: "**You are His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples,**" (9:28). They sought to kill Him, therefore the Lord counted them as '**children of Satan**' (8:44 -47). This is because they wanted to carry out the murderous acts of their father from the beginning of time.

The Jews denied that He is the Messiah and the Son of God (5:18; 8:40-49). They conspired and planned to kill Him (10:30-39; 11:8-50). They banished from their gatherings

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<sup>5</sup> Fr Tadros Y. Malaty: *The School of Alexandria, Introduction*

<sup>2</sup> *Comm.on Matt., prolong.*

<sup>3</sup> PG 5:333

those who confessed their belief that He is the Messiah (9:22; 12:42).

There was also another group called **The Ibyonions**. These were believers of Jewish origin. They were adamant that it was necessary for Christians to uphold Jewish customs and the tradition of the fathers. In their zeal for Moses and the prophets, they considered that the Lord Jesus Christ was merely the son of David and that he had never existed prior to His incarnation. They believed that the Lord was just a great prophet whom they had been expecting. They called themselves 'Ibyonions': that is a Hebrew word -ebyon- that means 'poor.'

### **ST JOHN CLARIFIES THE FOLLOWING POINTS IN HIS GOSPEL:**

- \* There does not exist any sort of comparison between Moses- the recipient of the Commandments and the Law- and the Lord Jesus Christ the Giver of grace and Truth (1:17). The first provided manna, whereas the Latter is Himself the Bread of Life (Jn 6:23).

- \* The end to Jewish traditions (1:-10).

- \* Worship is not associated with the Temple (2:1-10)

- \* The resentful Jews are not the children of Abraham, but rather the children of Satan (8:39-44).

- \* The resentful Jews will not meet with Moses to share fellowship in the Lord's glory for he will condemn them (5:45).

### **SECOND: THE SUPPORTERS OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST**

Some believe that a few of the disciples formed a group that glorified St. John the Baptist and favored him over Jesus Christ. They believed him to be the greater one since he came before Him, and since he was baptizing. In **Recognitions**, a work credited to **St. Clement**, we are told that these disciples considered St. John the Baptist to be their teacher and not Jesus. These people lived in the Christian world and they opposed Christianity. They were influential, especially in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-8).

Those who hold that opinion - that this Gospel has been written to resist those who favor St. John the Baptist- find that the Evangelist ascertains that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Light of the world (1; 8-9); that the Lord came after St. John the Baptist although He really existed before St. John the Baptist; and that the Lord is greater than him (1; 30). Besides, he confirms that the Lord - and not St. John the Baptist- is the Messiah (1:20; 3:28); and that St. John the Baptist came to bear witness for the Lord so that the Lord increases while St. John the Baptist decreases (3:30).

St. John confirms, through the testimony of St. John the Baptist himself, the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ: The Baptist is not the Light but rather he is a witness to the Light (1:6-8); that he is not the Groom but the friend of the Groom (2:28-30); that he is not the Lamb bearing the sins of the world, but that the Messiah alone is the Lamb of God Who bears the sins of the world (1:29).

This Evangelist has clearly proclaimed the deep feelings of the Lord Jesus Christ more than any of the others. This is powerfully apparent in the Lord's final prayer in Chapter 17 when He prays out loud. Thus the Evangelist offers to us a picture of the Incomprehensible Lord which he admits is so hard to express: he leads us into the perfectly divine mystery and reveals the Lord's utter manhood so that we stand in awe and astonishment!

St. John did not ignore the greatness of St. John the Baptist, for he recognized that he was a messenger sent by God (1:60); and that he was the burning and shining light (5:35).

### **THIRD: THE RESPONSE TO SOME INVENTIONS**

**St. Iraneaus**, who lived in the Second Century, mentions in his book '**Against Heresies**'

that the Gospel of St. John opposes Kirethus, of Asia Minor, who is the proponent of the Gnostic trend. St. Iraneus believes that Kirethus claimed that the Lord is the son of Joseph and that the Messiah is a heavenly element that descended upon Him at the time of His baptism, and that It departed from Him after His death. He also claimed that the Creation occurred through a creative power and not through God.

**St. Iraenius, the Bishop of Lyon** mentions Ibyion together with Kirethus; and this led **St. Jerome** to believe that the Gospel of St. John was written to answer Ibyion and his followers who belonged to a conservative Christian faction.

There is also the opinion that St. John's Gospel is directed against **the declared Docetists** who spoke about visualization concerning the body of the Lord. They claimed that Jesus, the Messiah, did not really become incarnated and that His body was not real but seemingly real or ethereal, or a fancy of the mind. Hence He appeared to be human and consequently His suffering and death were manifested.

#### **FOURTH: A CALL TO DISPERSED CHRISTIANS OF JEWISH ORIGIN**

St. John mentions twice those who have believed in the Lord but who lacked the courage to proclaim their faith. Such people feared they would be banished from the meetings of the Sanhedrin. Mention is first made in Ch 12:42: **"Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue."** The second mention occurs in Ch 19:38: **"After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus."**

#### **FIFTH: SUPPORTING ALL CHRISTIANS IN THE WORLD, REGARDLESS OF ORIGIN**

The Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to be the Light for every person (1:9). He is the Lamb of God Who carries the sins of the world (1:29); He came to redeem the world (3:16); having been raised on the Cross, He attracts everyone to Him (12; 23); for He is the Savior of the world. The Jews scornfully wondered if He would go to the Dispersion to teach the Greeks (7:35). Thus they prophesied unwittingly of the work He would do among the Gentiles. We hear about that from some of the Greeks who asked Philip: **"Sir, we wish to see Jesus,"** (12:20-21). In talking about His task as a Good Shepherd, Jesus ascertains that He has other sheep that do not belong to this fold and that He must bring them so that there will be one flock and one Shepherd (10:16). In 4:35, we learn that the Lord has come to save not only the Jewish nation but to gather and unify the dispersed children of God. Some Samaritans made the acquaintance of the Lord and recognized Him as the Savior of the world. He Looked upon the fields of Samaria and found that they were white and ready to be harvested (4:35).

#### **THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN AND THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS<sup>1</sup>**

Although the Gospel of St. John is different from the analogous or Synoptic Gospels- the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke- yet we cannot chop it completely away from them. This is because the Evangelist assumes we have knowledge of the preceding three publications; or that at least we are familiar with the tradition on which they are based <sup>2</sup>.

The first ecclesiastical opinion is embodied in the words of **St. Clement of Alexandria<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> We have previously dealt with the Synoptic Gospels in the Introduction of the book: *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, 1983, p.18-23.

<sup>2</sup> Cullmann, p.45.

<sup>3</sup> Eusebius: *H.E.*6: 14:5-7

and this states that St. John wanted to present a spiritual interpretation to the three Gospels written earlier. This opinion has prevailed throughout the ages and is still accepted by many scholars. However, some recent critics find no positive or negative relationship between this Gospel and the other three. Others believe that St. John knew St. Mark and St. Luke but did not know St. Matthew.

It is worthy to note that we assume that the reader is familiar with the other three Gospels. For example, in John 1:40 St. Andrew is introduced to us as follows: “...**Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother...**” although no previous mention had been made of St. Peter. In John 6:67, St. John assumes that the reader is familiar with the twelve disciples. In John 1:23- 34, he records St. John the Baptist’s witness for the Lord, and assumes that the reader knows about the Lord’s Baptism at his hands.

Some are of the opinion that the three Gospels are similar to the itinerary or journey of the Lord Jesus Christ from Galilee to the holy City where He offered Himself as the unique Passover offering. On the other hand, they find that the Gospel of St. John relates a number of occasions when Jesus resided in Jerusalem; and he mentions the feast of the Passover three consecutive times. Finally, he speaks about the eve of the last Passover when the Lord died as the Lamb of God in order to present a new feast for the whole world, to be filled with the joy of His Resurrection, an event that would be commemorated and celebrated as “the Christian Passover.”

St. John the Beloved has recorded this Gospel through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; and after the time of the writing of the three Synoptic Gospels. He records his Gospel to the universal Church to clarify the nature of the Savior, who is the divine and eternal God, the Son of God, and the Savior of the world

\* It is for a good reason that St. John begins his story with the Eternal Presence. In contrast, St. Matthew starts his Gospel with the relationship of the Lord with Herod, the king; whereas St. Luke starts with Tiberius Caesar; and St. Mark starts with the Lord’s baptism at the hands of St. John the Baptist. St. John skips all these matters and **crosses over all the times and ages**<sup>1</sup>.

\* Why does St. John speak briefly about God’s plan: “And the Word became flesh...” (14), whereas the other evangelists began by speaking about it? He left out all the other matters: the pregnancy, His birth, His upbringing, and His growth to... speak promptly about His eternal Being? ...He does so in order to frustrate those who wish to belittle that subject, and **to attract them towards heaven**. That is why it is for a good reason that he starts his story from a heavenly peak and from the eternal Being. Thus while St. Matthew, St. Luke and St. Mark begin by speaking respectively about king Herod, Tiberius Caesar, and the Baptism of St. John the Baptist; St. John the Evangelist abandons all these matters and draws the minds of his listeners to the ‘Beginning.’ He does not wish their thoughts to be attached to any detail or be bound by certain limits as the other evangelists have done by mentioning Herod and Tiberius and John. What we are trying to indicate is that it is astonishing that **St. John, who dedicated himself to this sublime teaching, did not ignore the Plan (of Redemption). The other evangelists were not confined to these limits either and are not silent about His actual Being before all ages**. It is for a good reason that One Spirit moved all these souls and they therefore demonstrated great harmony in their stories<sup>2</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> Hom.4. PG 59:27.

<sup>2</sup> Homily 4:1.

\* St. John was particularly favored, above all the other companions and evangelists, and granted a special gift from the Lord. He leaned on His chest during the Passover - an indication that he drank deeper mysteries out of the Lord's profound heart. Consequently, he spoke of matters that pertained to the Son of God. These matters could arouse the curious minds of children but they would not satisfy them as they are beyond their comprehension. On the other hand, for those who are more developed and have attained some kind of inner manhood, these matters provide words that can be experienced and are fulfilling<sup>1</sup>.

\* In the four gospels, or more correctly in the four books that constitute one message of good news or 'gospel', St. John is deservedly likened to an '**eagle**' due to his spiritual discernment. Through his words, he has achieved greater and more sublime heights than all the other three evangelists. By his ascendance, he has sought to elevate our hearts too. This is because the other three evangelists walked with the Lord on earth as though He was a human being. They speak very rarely about His Divinity. As for St. John, it is as though he belittles His passage on earth- as is evident in the introduction. He shakes us with his thundering words and carries us not merely above the earth, but beyond all the surrounding air and skies. Indeed, he carries us above all the angelic hosts and other ethereal armies. Thus he attains the One Whom '**all things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made**'<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**St. John relates only the following events in the way the other three gospels do, but that is where all resemblance ends:**

- \* The Lord's Baptism- (by implication) 1:23-34.
- \* The Cleansing of the Temple 2:13-16.
- \* The Feeding of the Crowds 6:1-13.
- \* Walking on the Water 6:16-21.
- \* The Anointing in Bethany 12:1-8.
- \* The Lord's Triumphal Entry in Jerusalem 12; 12-19.
- \* Announcing the Betrayal 13:21-30.
- \* His Sufferings and Resurrection presented in a special way.

Besides, St. John mentions seven miracles only. He chooses them out of countless miracles and wonders; and the ones he relates are new to us since any other evangelist does not relate them. An exception to that is the Lord's walking on the waters; and the feeding of the crowds, which he records as an introduction to his words about the Eucharist.

St. John mentions events and conversations that have not been mentioned by any of the evangelists and thus his words are new to our ears. He does not repeat what has been mentioned before, such as the birth of Christ, His lineage, His temptation, the sermon on the mount, the transfiguration, the parables, the last supper, the suffering in the garden of Gethsamene, the resurrection, etc...he is often satisfied by merely alluding to them.

## **THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN IN THE LIGHT OF THEOLOGY AND HISTORY**

There is no doubt the St. John's Gospel has a distinctive character that sets it apart from the other gospels. Thus if the latter have been inspired by the Holy Spirit for a historical purpose while each, at the same time, focuses on one specific aspect of the Lord Jesus Christ; then this Gospel has an overwhelming theological nature, even though it is also presented within a historical framework.

St. Mark mentions one trip from Galilee to Jerusalem (Mk10:1). As for St. John, he

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 18: 1*

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 36:1*

mentions three trips (Jn 2:13; 5:1; 7:10). In St. Mark's Gospel, the event of the cleansing of the Temple is related towards the end of the book (Mk 11:15); whereas in St. John, it is mentioned near the beginning (Jn 2:13 etc...).

St. John the Evangelist focuses on the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He wishes to proclaim that the Word of God Who transcends time has submitted to time, and consequently holds a place in the history of mankind. Actually, he did not wish his Gospel to be an exposition and history of the life of the Lord; but rather intended to underline His reality as the Logos - the Divine Word, the Light, the Truth, the Life, the Resurrection, etc... It is as though this Gospel intends to ascertain that to experience the internal joy of the Kingdom of God, it is essential to get acquainted with the Person of the Messiah and Redeemer; and to realize how His mysteries work within us. That is why the Lord submitted to time and **'the Word became flesh'** (1:14).

As human beings, we are clothed with flesh that obeys and submits to the factor of time. By willingly submitting to time and invading our history through His incarnation, the Lord Jesus Christ has not shattered time but has sanctified it in a special manner. That could explain why St. John speaks intensely about the ages and the times.

He says:

**"...now it was about the tenth hour..."** (1:39);

**"...it was about the sixth hour..."** (4:6; 19:14);

**"It has taken forty-six years to build the Temple..."** (2:20);

**"...and it was winter."** (10:23);

**"And it was night."** (13:30).

**The Apostle's interest in recording time could be to underline that the Lord had a real body and became part of the history of mankind. His incarnation was not mere fiction as some have claimed, such as the Docetists.**

As St. John delves deeper into theology, and as he is the first theologian, he explains to us God's Intention and "Plan" (in Greek, 'eikos ecomomia', eikos meaning house, nomos meaning law or tradition): **"Wisdom built herself a house"** (Prov 9:1). Wisdom is the Lord, and the first house for Him is the holy Virgin Mary. By His incarnation through her, the Lord came into the world. The holy Virgin is the image of the Church that is also the house of God (1 Cor 3:9-17)<sup>1</sup>.

## **THE RISE IN THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HISTORICAL ASPECT**

Recently, some scholars have attempted to interpret the Gospel of St. John from a purely theological perspective, and thereby missing its historical value. However, they have found themselves faced with this reality: this theology has been recorded within a historical framework<sup>2</sup>. Consequently, the trend grew towards the inclusion of the historical, social, and geographical aspects of this Gospel; giving special importance to the events that have been recorded in it and are not found in the other Gospels. Examples of these studies are those made by each of these scholars: Albright, Higgins, Leal, Pallard, Stauffer, and others. These have focused on the following<sup>3</sup>:

1- The events recorded in Chapter four which speak about the Samaritans: their theological beliefs, their manner of worship on the Mount of Ghorazim, and the exact location of Jacob's well.

2- In Chapter five, there is detailed information about the pool of Bethesda: its name, location, and architecture.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Monastery of St. George for Skills, The Gospel of St. John, A Reading and Commentary, 1986, p.10.*

<sup>2</sup> *The Anchor Bible: R.E.Brown: The Gospel according to John (1-X11), 1981, p. XL1.*

<sup>3</sup> *The Anchor Bible: R.E.Brown: The Gospel according to John (1-X11), 1981, p. XL11.*

3- Theological essays concerning the Feast of the Passover (Chapter 6); and the Feast of the Tabernacles (Chapter 7, 8). These provide us with accurate information about certain celebrations and feasts, and the readings made in the Jewish Temple during these occasions.

4- Specific details about Jerusalem: such as those mentioned about the pool of Siloam (9:7); Solomon's Porch being a shelter in the winter time (10:22-23); and the Pavement in the court of Pontius Pilate (19:13). In other words, we may state that this Gospel presents us with accurate knowledge about Palestine before the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D. and the demolition of its landmarks.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF ST JOHN'S GOSPEL

### 1- A Gospel of Divine Holiness

This Gospel reveals to us God's holiness in a marvelous and joyful way. The word 'holiness' in Greek is 'ayios' and means non-terrestrial. Holiness is a name that pertains to God alone and St. John uses it to proclaim matters beyond our comprehension. In the past, God's holiness was associated with fear:

**"...so that all the people who were in the camp trembled,"** (Ex 19:12 -25).

**"You cannot see My Face, for no man shall see Me and live"** (Ex 33:20).

**"Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips...For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts,"** (Is 6:5).

The Gospel of St. John reveals to us the depths of the New Testament as he announces that the Heavenly has descended on earth and His holiness is associated with glory and not with fear: **"...the Word... dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory..."** (Jn 1; 14).

### 2- A Gospel of Faith Activated by Redemptive Love

This Gospel is characterized by its use of certain terms that are repeated, and that are different from those that occur in other Gospels. Probably, the most important words repeatedly used are: **believe-** (98 times); **know-** (55 times); **live-** (55 times); **testify-** (21 times). These words have not been repeated at random or without reason, but it is done by the will of divine inspiration in order to reveal the aim of this Gospel: that is to instill **faith based on spiritual knowledge, so that man may live with a spirit of love.**

Note that the word 'believe' has been used 98 times, out of which it has occurred 74 times in the first 12 chapters. These chapters are called 'the book of wonders or miracles', and they cover seven miracles made by the Lord. They all seem to focus on 'faith' as it is the mysterious essence of our life and redemption. Note also that the word '**believe**' occurs in this Book 39 times to convey not just the belief in the Lord's words, but the necessity that **man surrender himself to God or that he move towards Him in a practical manner** and as indicated in 12:11: **"...because on account of Him many of the Jews went away and believed in Him."** It could be that the word originates from the Hebrew language and means that a person surrenders himself trustfully <sup>1</sup>.

The word '**know**' occurs repeatedly too. This enables the Apostle to ascertain that faith, that implies the trustful surrender to God, involves the surrender of the wise soul that **accepts God's love and becomes acquainted with his mysteries**, and consequently runs into His embrace. Faith is not accepted by the foolish, and it does not imply ignorance, but it goes side by side with real knowledge. That is especially true of the knowledge God Himself reveals and makes acceptable to the mind; for even though it exceeds the mind's ability, yet it does not oppose or contradict one's being in any manner.

**Knowledge** in this context does not imply mere theoretical understanding. It implies full unity and integration with Love and Truth: fellowship with Life. The Evangelist clarifies this

point in his First Epistle: **“...that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ,”** (1Jn:1:3).

The purpose of that knowledge is to have ‘fellowship with God’ so that he may live and work within us. Consequently, **we will embody the nature of His love.** This love is a sacrificial love that He pours within us so that we may experience and live it in practice. The Gospel tells us: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life,” (3:16). This is the redeeming love that the Son has offered, as the Lord explains: **“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself,”** (12:32). **“...when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end,”**(13:1). Faith in the Cross enlightens our perception, and enables us to get acquainted with God as the redeeming Lover of mankind. Hence the Lord confirms: **“When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He,”** (8:28). We will know Him as the living God, who loves His creation to the very end.

**That explains how faith is associated with knowledge and love: leading man to experience the living faith through spiritual knowledge, and to practice the nature of love.**

**The Redeeming Love** that we taste and that consequently leads us to respond to God with love arises from the eternal nature of love that exists between the Father and the Son (3:35; 15:9). Through that love, we too show it towards one another (13:14).

Thus, the evangelist St. John, who is the apostle of love, speaks to us about the following:

- God’s love for the Lord Jesus Christ.
- God’s love for mankind revealed through offering His only begotten Son.
- The Lord Jesus Christ’s redeeming love for mankind, especially in His farewell words.
- Our love for God.
- Our love for one another as an indication of our fellowship with the Divine Love.

### **3- The Gospel of Truth**

The word ‘**truth**’ occurs in this Gospel 25 times. It is used in a different sense than that used by the Gnostics or the Hellenic writers<sup>1</sup>. Here ‘truth’ is not the fruit of mere human thought, or a human philosophy to be acquainted with. Rather, it is the ‘**evangelical truth**’ that implies the following:

**First: The Divine Word Himself** who frees the soul from bondage to sin: **“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,”** (8:32). Through the Divine Word, we become holy according to the farewell words of the Lord: **“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth** (17:17).

**Second: It is divinely announced to us,** for the Lord says: **“He who is from God hears God’s words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God,”** (8:47). Also, **“ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom God will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you”** (14:26).

**Third: Truth implies living and practicing a way of life:** **“But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen that they have been done in God,”** (3:21). **“...Walking in truth,”** (2 Jn:4).

### **4-The Gospel of the Spirit**

The Evangelist transports us to the realms of divinity in order to acquaint us with the holy mysteries. He enables us to taste and experience them. In this way, there is no need for human

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<sup>1</sup> Nelson: *A New Catholic Commentary on the Holy Scripture*, 1969, p 1035



controversies or philosophical debates. Rather, there is the need for the Holy Spirit Who enlightens our inner sight. Since it is the Spirit that inspires the Apostle to write, then he asks his readers to enjoy the work of the Spirit. Consequently, they will be enabled to understand the mysteries of the written Word, and perceive the redemptive Divine work as events unfold.

The disciples were not spiritually guided to understand the words of the Lord Jesus Christ until He was glorified, for He said to them: **“Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up”...‘Therefore when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said,’** (Jn2:19, 22). **‘His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him,’** (12:16). **‘For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead,’** (20:9).

They had heard the words of the Lord and witnessed the events, yet they needed the Spirit to open their inner sight so that they could understand and believe. It is for this reason that St. John underlines that physical sight alone is insufficient and that faith is what grants the sight to gain inner vision.

**‘Jesus said to them: “But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe,”** (6:36).

**“And this is the will of the Father who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up the last day,”** (6:40).

**“Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed,”** (20:29).

**‘...And immediately blood and water came out. And he who had seen testified and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe,’** (19:34, 35).

**‘Then the other disciple who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed,’** (20:8).

The Gospel clearly states that there are those who perceive with the physical eye, but do not discern with their inner vision: **‘And Jesus said: “...I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be blind”,’** For it is through faith that the Gentiles saw the One Whom they had not seen actually in the flesh. In contrast, the Jewish leaders were blinded in spite of having seen Him with their own physical eyes.

The same principle of physical and spiritual sight applies also to the sense of hearing. There are those who hear the sound with their ears yet their inner ears are closed. The Bible tells us: **‘Then a voice came from heaven, saying: “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.” Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it had thundered...’** (12:28, 29).

\* The words of St. John do not matter at all to those who do not wish to be liberated from this earthly bestial world. Moreover, no benefit is gained from worldly matters. Thunder shocks us, as it is a sound void of meaning; whereas the voice of that Man comforts a believer and relieves his weariness. It does not upset us: it upsets devils only and their slaves.<sup>1</sup>

**St. Augustine**

### **5- The Gospel Witnessing for the Lord Jesus Christ**

There is no doubt that the essence of apostolic life is to be a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ. And St. John writes his Gospel to proclaim his testimony for the Lord as He is the **‘Messiah, the Son of God.’** He presents his confirmation in a manner that would appeal to the

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom1: 4.*

mentality of the Jews and within the framework of their traditions. Therefore he presents a number of different testimonies:

**A- The Testimony of the Law for Jesus Christ:** St. John clearly explains that He fulfills what came in the Books and prophecies, which specifically refer to the events pertinent to His sufferings (12:38; 13:18; 15:25; 17:12; 18:9; 9:24; 19:24, 36). The Lord Himself asks us to search the Scriptures (5:39).

**B- The Testimony of St. John the Baptist:** (1:7, 15, 19, etc...; 3:26, etc...; 5:53, etc...).

**C- The Samaritan Woman:** (4:39).

**D- The Testimony of the Crowds:** (12:17)

**E- While the Lord proclaims that man cannot be his own witness, He clarifies that the Father witnessed for Him on various occasions:** (5:31-36; 8:17 etc...; 10:37; 14:10 etc...).

**F- The Testimony of the Holy Spirit for Him** (15:26, etc...).

**G- The Testimony of the Disciples for Him** (15:27).

We will postpone, at this point, writing about the testimony for Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the confirmation of His divinity. We will deal with these issues when we get to the main exposition of the Gospel in order to avoid repetition and unnecessary extension. Actually, this subject is the core of the Gospel and the Evangelist opens and ends his Book with it: he clarifies the eternal relationship that exists between the Father and the Son. This is what angered the Jews and drove them to seek to kill Him (5:18).

Notice how St. John, the beloved, focuses the **light of the Lord Jesus Christ** on certain persons as he relates them to the Lord. Thus, he calls St. Mary **‘the mother of Christ’**, and calls himself as **“the disciple whom Jesus Loved.”** It is as though the saints carry names merely to indicate their closeness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **6- The Gospel for the New Commandment or the Gospel of Love**

Although this Gospel has not reported the Sermon on the Mount, or the Parables of the Lord, or any rules related to Him specifically; yet it presents to us a new commandment that the Lord has focused upon. This commandment is neither a charter of rules nor a code of laws. Rather, it is a way of love that does not burden man but that offers fellowship in the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lover of Mankind. He Himself says: **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another,”** (13:34, 35).

He spoke in length about the relationship of God and the universal Church as being one of love. Union with the Church is like union between newly wedded couples. St. John the Baptist describes the Lord as the Groom/Bride of the Church: **“He who has the bride is the bridegroom...therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled,”** (3:25-28). He also ascertains that growth is achieved by eating His Body: **“I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever...,”** (6:48-51). The Lord likens Himself to the good Shepherd (10:11); the Doorkeeper (10:3); and the Door (1:7). He then describes Himself as the Vine and the Church as the Branches (Ch 15).

In this Gospel, the writer is described as the one who leaned on the Lord’s bosom, and as the disciple whom Jesus loved. The Lord is depicted as the One who shares with people their daily lives as for example in the wedding at Cana (Jn 2); and at the tomb of Lazarus, when the Lord shares the grief of the sisters and weeps (Jn 11). The same is evident when the faith of someone grows weak: as in the case of Thomas, and the Lord strengthens him (20:27-28); and when Paul fails, the Lord encourages him not to retreat and supports him by telling him about love (21:15-18). St. John introduces the Lord’s farewell speech by saying:

**“...having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end” (13:1).** This is no exaggeration, for He sacrificed Himself for our sakes: **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (3:16).**

Note that in the Gospel of St. John, there is no explicit parable except when the Lord speaks about the good Shepherd (Jn 10).

### **7- The Messiah of the Joyful Youth**

The Lord began His service by attending the wedding at Cana, for He is the Friend of young people and the Source of their joy. St. John does not mention the names of the couple at whose wedding the Lord went and made His first miracle (Jn 2). They were probably related to the Lord by family ties and consequently He had been invited with His mother to attend.

### **8- The Gospel records the Dialogues of the Lord**

Most of these come in the form of questions or arguments directed to Him. Through His responses, the Lord reveals the truth about Himself and His mission. As examples, we mention the following:

- \* Nathaniel: “How do you know me?” (1:48).
- \* **The Jews:** “What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?” (2:18).
- \* **Nicodemus:** “How can these things be?” (3:9).
- \* **The Samaritan Woman:** “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” (4:9).
- \* **The Jews:** “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” (6:52).
- \* **At the Feast of the Tabernacles:** “How does this Man know letters, having never studied?” (7:15).
- \* **The Crowds:** “You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill you?” (7:20).
- \* **The Scribes and the Pharisees:** “Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?” (5:8).
- \* **The Jews:** “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, ‘You will be made free?’” (8:33).
- “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?” (8:48).
- “Are You greater than our father Abraham who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do you make Yourself out to be?” (8:53).
- “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?” (8:57).
- \* **The Disciples:** “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (9:1).

That is how this Gospel achieves its aim: it presents the questions and the arguments and how the Lord answers and reveals His mysteries!

The Gospel also contains **a number of general speeches and that could be directed to certain people:**

- 1- Baptism and the New Birth (3:1-21).
- 2- Eternal Life (4:5-21).
- 3- The Source of Eternal Life (5:19-47).
- 4- The Bread of Life (6:29-59).
- 5- The Teacher of the Truth (7:14-29).
- 6- The Light of the World (8:12-20).
- 7- The Crucified Lord is the focus of faith (8:21-30).

- 8- The Spiritual Liberator (8:31-59).
- 9- The Good Shepherd (10:1-180).
- 10- The Oneness of the Divinity (10:22-38).
- 11- The Savior of the World (12:20-36).

**The Gospel also presents the Lord's farewell speeches to His disciples. He speaks to them about the following:**

- 12- His Death on behalf of the Whole World (12:20-36).
- 13- Holiness and Sanctification (13:31-14:31).
- 14- Union with the Lord (15:1-27).
- 15- The Holy Spirit, the Comforter (16:1-33).

### **9-A Liturgical Gospel**

The Gospel of St. John is the most 'liturgical' of all Gospels. In other words, it proclaims the mysterious presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. He announces the presence of the Lord at the wedding of Cana- not as a mere guest- but as the mystery of a hidden joy as He turns the water into wine. He reveals His divine presence through His conversation with Nicodemus, at night, about the mystery of baptism. This is also portrayed in the healing of the man of Bethesda.

As soon as the Lord gave up His spirit, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear. At once, water and blood came out (19:34). This is the Blood of the Eucharist, and the Water of Baptism. It is as though the Church is born at this instance: a new Eve is born from the side of the second Adam.

Thus the Messianic events and speeches in this Gospel have a truly liturgical quality embodying ecclesiastical mysteries. Examples are found in the dialogue of the Lord with Nicodemus about the new birth or baptism (Jn3), and in His speech with the crowds that can be called Eucharistic speech (Jn 6).

### **10- The Gospel of Power and Energy**

The Gospel of St. John is characterized by a distinct and dynamic energy. It offers us the flow of creation towards the Father through the Messiah and the Lord Jesus Christ: "...Jesus knew...that He had come from God and was going back to God," (3:1, 3). It is a true Passover episode through which the Lord raises believers into the Father's embrace through the Cross. He says: "Your Father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad" (5:56).

The Gospel of St. Mark is likened to a lion as it makes believers rejoice with the heavenly hosts, singing hymns of victory and thereby sounding like conquering lions. The Gospel of St. Luke is likened to a bull's face: a symbol of believers who give their lives as a sacrificial offering of love to God in the name of the Lord Who is the true sacrificial Offering. The Gospel of St. Matthew is likened to the face of a man. In contrast, the **Gospel of St. John is likened to an eagle that carries us up and soars to the heights of divinity. He leads us upwards into the heavens themselves to acquaint us with the sublime mysteries of God, and hence we can exclaim: "...and we beheld His glory!" (1:14).**

### **11- His Interest in Certain Numerals**

For example, **the number 3** is used to record in the following instances:

- \* The Lord goes to Galilee three times.
- \* In Galilee, He chooses to do three miracles;
- \* The Lord goes to Judea three times;
- \* There, He does three miracles;
- \* The Gospel records three out of the seven pronouncements the Lord makes while hanging on the Cross!

\* It speaks of three appearances of the Lord after His Resurrection.

**He was also interested in the number 7:**

\* The Gospel mentions seven witnesses for the Lord (review the section here entitled A Gospel witnessing for the Lord, the Messiah)

\* In the whole Gospel of St. John, only seven miracles/ wonders performed by the Lord are recorded.

\* The expression 'the last Day' is repeated seven times.

### **12- His Style is Absolutely Overwhelming**

In reading the Gospel of St. John, the believer experiences a special pleasure for he discovers the ultimate in spiritual inspiration. The style is pure and extraordinary in that the writing is robed in apparent simplicity. The topic is the 'Messiah' Himself Who is the 'Word of God.' It is He Who raises the soul to enable her to discover the Divine Mysteries through Him and with no intermediary.

St. John lived for more than half a century after the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. He meditated on Him by the help of the Holy Spirit Which the Lord had promised to send: "...for He dwells with you and will be in you...He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you," (14:17, 26). "...He will guide you into all truth..." (16:13). His personal experience with the Lord during His life on earth, and the special place he held as His disciple, enabled his soul to take flight, through the Holy Spirit, and explore heavenly matters. Consequently, his spirit enjoyed her beloved and glorified Lord Jesus Christ; and he was enabled to write, by the spirit, this Gospel. He sought to elevate every soul so that it would taste that very same experience.

### **13- The Last Book of the Holy Bible to be Written**

We have mentioned that **this Gospel is distinguished from among the Synoptic Gospels** as it was written towards the end of the First Century. It was probably the last book of the Holy Bible to be written. It was done with the purpose of completing, rather than repeating, what had been written before. Consequently, it possesses the following features:

\* Whereas all the written Gospels are concerned with the service of the Lord in Galilee, and have not dealt with any other trip except the one the Lord took to Jerusalem in the last week of His life on earth; this Gospel is more concerned with the Lord's service in Judea, in Jerusalem, and in the Temple. That explains why some have called the first Gospels 'Galilean' Gospels, while they called St. John's Gospel 'The Jerusalem Gospel.'

\* The first Gospels relate in simple language the Lord's interaction and dialogues with the common people. As for 'The Jerusalem Bible', it deals with the interaction between the Lord and the Jewish scholars and leaders more than with His interaction with the public. Consequently, some scholars claim that the Messiah of the Synoptic Gospels seems to be different than the One portrayed in 'The Jerusalem Gospel.' Actually, it is the Lord Jesus Christ Who speaks to the people in a common language: He draws on examples from their daily lives, is He Himself who uses another form of language when he converses with scholars and frankly reveals Himself and His Father. This led the disciples to tell Him: "See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech!" (16:29).

### **14- A Combined Artistic and Historical Unity**

The Gospel of St. John represents an artistic and historical unity, so wonderful and unique. The Lord's sermons and dialogues are linked to events concerning time, place and objectory. St. John includes seven miracles linked to seven speeches that reveal the nature of the Lord and His divine mysteries.

## **15- The Use of Analogy**

This Gospel is distinguished by its use of analogy or parallels. We mention the following as examples of this feature:

- \* The Book of Genesis begins by the sentence: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.' St. John starts his Gospel as follows: 'In the beginning was the Word...All things were made through Him...'

- \* The act of Creation was completed in six days; and the renewal of the Creation started from the sixth day after St. John the Baptist began witnessing for the Lord (1:19-2:1), to the moment the Lord attended the wedding at Cana. At that event, He changed the water of our lives into the wine of His love.

- \* We find a parallel and contrast between the vacillating Nicodemus, a Jewish leader (Ch 3), and the Samaritan woman who is an outsider yet witnesses for Him and attracts the whole city (Ch 4).

- \* When he spoke about eating His holy Body, many were repulsed (6:66). This is paralleled and contrasted by the disciples' increasing devotion to Him. This is expressed by St. Paul who says: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life... ." Also, we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," (6:68, 69).

- \* When the Lord opened the eyes of the person who was born blind (Ch9), the Pharisees met to challenge Him and claimed that He was a sinner (9:24). In contrast, the one who was healed witnessed for Him right before their eyes and challenged them with his words. Therefore the Lord said: "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be blind," (9:39).

## **16- Variations in Style**

St. John's Gospel displays a variety of styles. Thus he sometimes uses symbolism, at others he uses a narrative style, besides using dialogue, sermons, logical reasoning- (Sophism), didactic or instructive style...However, all along, he maintains a harmony and fluency that achieves a unified and complete literary work that indicates that it is written by one person.

Indeed, one of the features that characterize this Gospel is its language. While the expressions 'the kingdom of God' and 'the kingdom of heaven' occur often in the Synoptic Gospels, they are used twice only in St. John's Gospel. In contrast, the expression 'I am He' is repeated in this Gospel while it is not found in the other Gospels<sup>1</sup>.

## **THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN AND THE OLD TESTAMENT**

The Gospel of St. John is considered the Gospel that quotes the least or that quotes indirectly from the Old Testament. In the Greek text- the 'Nestle Greek Text'- we find only 14 quotations taken from the Old Testament. In the 'Westcott-Hort' text, we find 27 quotations taken from the Old Testament. In contrast, there are 70 in the Gospel of St. Mark, 109 in St. Luke, and 124 in St. Matthew. In spite of this, many scholars find a strong link between the Gospel of St. John and the Old Testament since the picture he draws of the Lord Jesus Christ is consistent and typical with that presented in the Old Testament: both present the Lord as the Messiah, the suffering slave, the King of Israel, and the Prophet<sup>2</sup>.

Donald Guthrie<sup>3</sup> reports that the great emphasis put on the extent to which Hellenism has affected the Gospel of St. John has hampered the study of the Old Testament in the light of St. John's Gospel. Actually, St. John presents the Lord Jesus Christ as part of Jewish history; and that when the Jews rejected Him they were really rejecting Someone related to them: 'He came

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<sup>2</sup> F.M. Braum: *Jean le Theologien*, t. 11, *Les Grandes Traditions D'Israel*, 1964

<sup>3</sup> Guthrie, p.237

to His own, and His own did not receive Him,' (1:11). The Lord went to the Temple and practiced his rightful authority 'when He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen...' (2:15). Nicodemus who was a ruler of the Jews knew the rights of the Lord as a Teacher (3:12). The Lord considered Himself as one of the Jews who had the promise of salvation. Accordingly, He tells the Samaritan woman: "...we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews," (4:22).

Some scholars find that the Old Testament is of paramount importance and influence on this Book, especially the Books of Genesis and Exodus, as St. John moves from the letter of the word to the Spirit of the word; and from the shadow and symbol to the Truth:

1- The Book of Genesis opens by speaking about **God as the Creator** who has conceived the whole world out of His love for mankind. The Gospel of St. John opens by speaking about the Word of God (the 'Logos') through Whom everything came into being. He is the Creator and the Renovator of creation, He enlightens every person with His brilliance.

2- St. John underlines **the struggle between the Lord and Satan** who has murdered people since the beginning of time (Gen 3; Jn 8:44). The Lord has granted us victory over Satan, as He says: "now the ruler of this world will be cast out (12:31). For He has come Who is born of a woman and Who shall bruise the serpent's head (Gen 3:15).

3- In the Book of Exodus, **the Ark of the Tabernacle represents a sanctuary** in which God lived in the middle of His people. St. John's Gospel comes to claim the glory of the Son of God incarnated and dwelling among us (1:14).

4- **The healing bronze serpent** (Num 21:4-9), is a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior (Jn 3:14).

5- **The heavenly manna** (Ex 16), is a symbol of the sacrificial Body of the Lord (6:25-58).

6- **The water from the rock** (Ex 17:1-7), is a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ who says: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink," (7:37).

7- **The pillar of fire** that served for light to them (Ex 13:21-22), points to His words: "I am the Light of the world" (8:12; 12:35).

8- In Exodus, God reveals Himself to Moses and says: "**I AM**" or "**I AM WHO I AM**" (3:14). The Lord Jesus Christ ascertains more than once in St. John's Gospel and says: "I am He."

9- The **Passover** occupies a central place in the Book of Exodus (Ch 12). During the Passover, the Israelites crossed from Egypt and out of slavery to flee towards the Promised Land. The Gospel of St. John comes to reveal to us the real Passover: it is our crossing away from this world and going to the Father (13:1, 16:28).

The Evangelist mentions the three Feasts of the Passover that were celebrated during the Lord's service on earth. If he had not mentioned them, we would not have been able to know that the Lord had lived for about three years and a half after the thirty years preceding His baptism.

\* At the first feast (2:13 etc..), The Lord **cleaned the Temple**, and in doing so proclaimed His zeal for it. He ascertained to the Jews that He would rebuild a new Temple in three days-through the resurrection of the temple of His Body.

\* At the second feast (6:4 etc...), the Lord announced **the offering of His sacrificial Body** as the true Bread granting eternal life.

\* At the third feast (12; 31), the hour had come for His glorification as **He rose on the Cross**, thereby granting His believers eternal life.

10- The Lord gives **new meanings to the Old Testament**: the Jews, according to the Old

Testament, proudly maintained to be the children of Abraham who was given the promise. They proclaimed that they observed the law - especially by observing the Sabbath. The Lord clarified to them that He is the Only Begotten Son and Giver of true adoption: He is the Lord of the Sabbath! He indicates to them that they are not Abraham's children, but the devil's because of their denial of Him and of their desire to kill Him. They did not observe the Sabbath, and even Moses would accuse them to the Father (5:45).

11- **The Lord Jesus Christ urges the Jews to read the Old Testament** so that they would realize that it testifies for Him. He tells them: "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life," (5:39, 40). He underlines that anyone who believes in Moses, believes in Him, for Moses has written about Him (5:36). By saying so, the Lord clearly explains the continuity that exists between the Old and the New Testaments.

12- This Gospel underlines clearly that what has been achieved through the Lord Jesus Christ is directly related to our redemption. Besides, it had been predicted fully by the prophets of the Old Testament. For example:

- \* The victorious entry of the Lord into Jerusalem (12:14).
- \* His being rejected by the Jews (12:38, 40).
- \* Not breaking the Lord's legs (19:36).
- \* Abraham's vision of the day of the Lord and consequent rejoicing (8:56).
- \* Isaiah's vision of His glory (12:42).
- \* Isaiah's prophesy about John, the forerunner (1:23).

Guthrie comments as follows: [The Lord's quoting from the Old Testament and the comments of the Gospel of St. John indicate that the whole of the Holy Bible points to the Lord Jesus Christ: He is the fulfillment of the Old, and the Truth that will guide us to interpret the implications of the Gospel<sup>1</sup>].

## **THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN AND Gnosticism<sup>2</sup>**

By just flipping through the Gospel of St. John, we discover a feature that is totally different from the other Gospels. For while he presents the life of Jesus Christ in Palestine, he also underlines that in the Lord all the prophecies of the Old Testament have been fulfilled. However, and until very recently, scholars considered that the personality of Jesus Christ, according to St. John's exposition of Him in this Gospel, is more compatible within a Hellenic and Gnostic setting than with the way the Lord is depicted in the other Gospels. This opinion is being rejected by many scholars, as we shall observe later on in this work.

Some critics have maintained that Gnosticism, with its focus on **inner knowledge** as the road to salvation, has affected the writer of this Gospel. Yet Gnosticism appeared in the Second Century after Christ, whereas the Gospel of St. John had been written at the end of the First Century. Some may argue that the roots of Gnosticism are to be found in the earliest stages of paganism and even in Jewish times; and that some Christians in some way or other had accepted it since the First Century.

\* In any case, the Gospel of St. John battles Gnostic ideas as they deny the humanity and sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Jn 19:34, a soldier pierces the side of the Lord with a spear and blood and water immediately flow out. What else could this be but an instance of His humanity? St. John accordingly says: "And the Word became flesh," (Jn 1:14). In St. John's First

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<sup>1</sup> Guthrie, p.238

<sup>2</sup> Jerome Biblical Commentary, p. 416-7 *The Anchor Bible: R.E. Brown: The Gospel According to John (1-X11)*, 1981, p. XL111, L11, LXV.



Letter (4:2-4), and in the Second Letter (v. 4), he says that those who do not confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh are deceivers and are not of God.

Some scholars claim that we do not find in this Gospel the same Lord Jesus Christ that we find in the other Gospels that relate the parables and simple instructive behavioral teachings. Rather, St. John's Gospel presents symbols and specific definitions, such as: "I am the Bread", "I am the Light", "The Door", "The Shepherd", "The Truth", "The Life", "The Way", and "The Vine." We also find names such as 'The Logos', 'the Truth', and 'Knowledge.' Note also the use of antithesis, such as: the light and darkness, truth and falsehood, the spirit and the body.... All this has driven scholars to say that the Jesus depicted in this Gospel seems to be moving in a Hellenic world in the Second Century. Other scholars add that the writer believes in Gnosticism.

It is true that the Lord Jesus Christ, according to the Gospel of St. John, presents Himself repeatedly in awesome sacred expressions: "I AM HE." He came into a dark world that hates the light; he came into a world of falsehoods as of being the Truth; into a world of hatred and enmity while He is Love Himself. By His coming, He distinguishes between two categories of men: one that accepts the Light and another that flees from the Light. The first category believes in the Truth, while the other rejects It. Yet this thought is different than the duality found in Gnosticism. Indeed, the Gospel of St. John does not present a specific teaching concerning the origin of truth or that of evil; and that is what precisely occupied the Gnostics.

These studies could have constituted an obstacle as they seem to arouse doubts in some of the simple-minded concerning the validity of this Gospel and whether St. John the Evangelist is the writer. However, two important discoveries were made around the year 1947 whereby the Lord willed to transform these studies into factors that would strengthen believers all the more.

First: **The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls** or the scrolls of Qumran: these have presented the world with a library about **the sect of the Essenes**. They document a period of time between 140 B.C. and 68 A.D. These writings reveal that the thoughts and expressions used in the Gospel of St. John are typically Palestinian and reflect the First Century after Christ.

Secondly: The discovery of **a complete Gnostic library in the region of Naga Hamadi in Upper Egypt**. This offers to the world, and for the first time ever, Gnosticism in its principal origins. Previously, we were gaining information about this subject from the writings of the fathers who opposed this school of thought. We had heard about the names of books without finding complete editions. Today, this discovery has provided us with information that reveals the vast disparity between the world of Gnosticism and the Gospel of St. John; besides indicating the definite differences between them. There is no longer any doubt that this Gospel does not depend on Gnostic sources. Indeed, it has been revealed that any words that were thought to have Gnostic origins are actually pure Jewish and Palestinian words that were in common usage in the First Century after Christ.

Some scholars, such as Braun, Barret, and Quispel have made comparative studies between the Gospel of St. John and the Gnostic manuscripts found in Naga Hamadi. Examples of these manuscripts are: 'The Gospel of Truth' (dating back to 140 A.D.), and 'The Gospel of Thomas.' They compared the ideas and expressions and came to the following conclusions:

**1- It is impossible to place the Gospel of St. John among the Gnostic writings** that have been found in Naga Hamadi. But it is possible to say that the Gnostics have made use of the Gospel of St. John in their writings during the Second Century A.D.; and that they have presented ideas not found in this Gospel.

**2- There are strong distinctions between the Gospel and these manuscripts in the content of thoughts as well as expressions.**

3- There are some expressions that are shared in both writings, yet the Gospel uses them in a specific way while the Gnostics have used them with different implications and for completely different purposes.

The above explains the relationship between St. John's Gospel and the writings of Christian Gnostics or heretics. Yet, we may ask: "Is it possible that this Gospel has opened the door to Gnosticism?" or "Has it prepared the way for it?"

\* Some scholars find that the Gnostics could have been influenced by Judaism as they misunderstood some of the texts of the Old Testament and not because of St. John's Gospel. This Gospel has distinguished between light and darkness, yet it has not presented an ideology concerning the source of either of them.

\* The Gospel of St. John focuses on '**faith**' and considers 'knowledge' to be a '**divine gift**' granted through a divine revelation. This is an issue that contradicts Gnostic thought.

### THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN AND HELLENISM

St. John has been accused - or the writer of this Gospel - of divesting Christianity with a Hellenic character for the purpose of attracting the Hellenic mind. As proof, they cite his use of the term '**the Word**' or '**the Logos**' as a borrowing from Greek philosophy.

The answer to the above is that St. John does not use this term in the same way as it used by Hellenic or Gnostic philosophers; or as used by Philon - a Jew from Alexandria who presented Jewish thought in a symbolic Hellenistic style. St. John gives the term a scriptural meaning that can be understood in the light of the Old Testament and its teachings about 'Wisdom.' It is Wisdom that has come to mankind to transform them into houses of God, and as the Book of Proverbs says:

"Wisdom calls aloud outside; she raises her voice in the open squares;

"Wisdom has built a house, she has sewn her seven pillars," (9:1).

'The Word' in Hellenic thought represents the governing mind inherent in the creation: it is the first newborn creature. In contrast, St. John speaks about 'the Logos' as God's own utterance. The Logos is the Only Son: He is of God and resides with Him. He does not exist outside God for He is indeed one with Him in essence. In Hellenic thought, we do not find the expression 'the Word of God incarnate dwells among men for He proclaims to them His divine mysteries.' There is then a distinction between 'the Word' as used by Hellenic scholars and 'The Word' according to the Bible.

If we study carefully the '**LOGOS**' according to St. John's proclamation in his Gospel, we will find that It is equated with 'wisdom' as per the teachings in the Old Testament:

A- **Eternal:** (Prov 8:22; Sirach 24:9; Ws 9:5). [Read Jn 1:1].

B- **Seated in Heaven,** He descends to the earth, to live in the midst of Israel (Prov 8:31; Baruch 3:37; Si 14:8). [Read Jn 1:14; 3:41; 6:38; 16:28].

C- **A bounty of the glory of the Most High:** (Ws 7:25); [Jn1:14; 8:15; 11:4; 17:5).

D- **Teaching the divine mysteries to man:** (Ws 9:16); and all that pleases God (Ws 8:4); leading people to Life (Prov 8:25; Si 4:12). [Jn 3:19; 7:40; 14:19]

E- **Uses the voice of the speaker "I"** (Prov 8; Si 24)

F- **Calls man and appears to him** (Prov 8:1; Ws 6:16); [Jn 5:14; 9:35;]. He calls His disciples "My children" (Prov 8:23; Si 6:18), [Jn 13:33].

### THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN AND THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

It is regrettable that many critics have recently become exceedingly engaged in researching the extent to which this Gospel is marked by Hellenic thought, language, and culture. This has led some to believe that the writer could never have been a Jew! However, the study of

this Gospel exposes the writer's relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and the character of the Evangelist: St. John is preoccupied with revealing the nature of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**First: As the King of the Jews:** He is the spiritual King, the Messiah that the prophets awaited, and the One Who preoccupied the people of the Old Testament.

“Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (Jn1:49).

“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” (12:13).

- Pilate...said to Him: “Are You the King of the Jews...Are you a king then?” Jesus answered: “You say rightly that I am a king...” (18:33-37).

“Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.” (19:12).

“Shall I crucify your King?” (19:15).

- And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS (19:19).

**Secondly:** The Gospel affirms repeatedly 21 times that the **Lord Jesus Christ is the Messiah**. This is in contrast to 19 times in the Gospel of St. Matthew. Indeed, the words spoken by the Lord, as well as His acts, all fulfill the Messianic hope<sup>1</sup> to the people of God:

\* He came to purify His Temple in Jerusalem (2:13-22).

\* He is the One “...of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets, wrote...” (1:45; Deut 18:18).

\* In Him, the words of the prophet Isaiah were fulfilled (6, 35:5), when He opened the eyes of the blind (9:6); and made the deaf to hear, and the lame to walk, etc...

\* The Giver of freedom (Jn 8:36; Is 61:1).

\* The true Light that shines on those sitting in darkness (Jn1:5; 9; 8:12; 12:46; Is 9:1; 60:1).

\* The Source of Living Water given to quench the thirst of His people (7:37 etc.; Ch 4; Ex17:1-7; Is 55:1; 58:11).

\* The Shepherd King who personally cares for His people (Jn 10; Ez 34).

\* The Judge of the living and the dead, and this is a Jewish title used distinctively for God (Jn 11).

\* The Gospel, in its entirety, almost repeats the words of the Samaritan woman: “I know that a Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ)...Could this be the Christ?” (4:25, 29).

**Third:** This Gospel is characterized by the claim of the Lord Himself: **“I AM He”** with which He presents Himself to mankind. In the Old Testament, “I am He” indicates the One God, the Maker, and the Savior (Ex 3:14; 10:2; Is 42:8; 43:10-11; Ex6:7). That explains why the words of the Lord are repeated in this Gospel: **“I AM He”** proclaims the nature of God as the Source of Salvation:

“I am the Bread of Life,” (6:35).

“I am the Light of the world,” (8:12; 9:5).

“I am One who bears witness of Myself,” (8:18).

“I am the Door of the sheep,” (10:7).

“I am the Good Shepherd,” (10:11, 14).

“I am the true Vine,” (15:1, 5).

“I am a King,” (18:37).

**Fourth:** The principle theme running from the beginning to the end of this Gospel is the presentation of the Lord as the Kingdom in itself: note that the Kingdom has been mentioned twice only (3:3-5; 18:36). Yet He is revealed through our delight in the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who is our eternal Kingdom.

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<sup>1</sup> Nelson: *A New Catholic Commentary on the Holy Scripture*, 1969, p1023.

“...that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life,” (6:40).  
“.... No one comes to the Father except through Me,” (14:6).  
“.... He who has seen Me has seen the Father...,” (14:9 etc.).

This clear theme that runs throughout this Gospel has also been presented in the other Gospels. It is the ultimate outcome and conclusion that people reached towards the final days that the Lord Jesus Christ spent on earth.

**Fifth:** The Lord Jesus Christ is not presented as a lawgiver setting forth laws or rites. Rather, He is presented in Person as the mystery of life. He is ‘Life’- (14:6; 1:4). He announces to His flock the mystery of His coming to earth: “...I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly,” (10:10). “...Because I live, you will live also” (14:19). The Lord affirms to Martha: “I am the resurrection and the life,” (11:25). He came to graft us onto Him and be branches in His Vine, thereby carrying His life within us (15:1-8).

Our delight in the Lord Jesus Christ - ‘**the life**’- is achieved through the complete change that touches our nature during the mystery of Baptism - (3:3-8), our unity and steadfastness in Him through the mystery of the Eucharist - (6:52-58), and receiving remission of our sins continuously through the mystery of Repentance - (20:23). All these have been fulfilled by the power of the Cross and the blessings of His Blood.

**Sixth:** In each chapter, St. John presents to us a certain aspect of the nature of the Lord that grants us salvation and fulfills all our needs.

\* By reading the Gospel of St. John, we get to understand the Lord from the perspective of His divinity: the Creator of all; and from the perspective of His incarnation: He came to reform the fallen creation<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**WHO IS JESUS?**

**Jn.1: The Divine Word Incarnated, Grantor of divine adoption.**

**Jn.2: The Son of Man with Divine Power, who gives joy and renewal of our souls.**

**Jn.3: The divine and able Teacher, the Giver of the new birth.**

**Jn.4: The amazing Winner of souls.**

**Jn.5: The great Physician**

**Jn.6: The Bread of Life.**

**Jn.7: The Living Water.**

**Jn.8: The Light of the World.**

**Jn.9: The Giver of Insight.**

**Jn.10: The Good Shepherd.**

**Jn.11: The Giver of Life and Resurrection.**

**Jn.12: The King of Israel.**

**Jn.13: The Washer of feet.**

**Jn.14: The heavenly Comforter.**

**Jn.15: The true Vine.**

**Jn.16: The Dispatcher of the Holy Spirit.**

**Jn.17: The great High Priest.**

**Jn.18: The suffering Messiah.**

**Jn.19: The rejected King.**

**Jn.20: The Conqueror of death.**

**Jn.21: The Lifter of fallen souls and their Promoter into heaven.**

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<sup>1</sup> *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 67:1.*

\* Do not be in doubt - in your understanding of the mystery of the Trinity- that you are doing anything beyond man's capacity. St. John, the Evangelist, did just that: for he soared beyond the flesh, beyond the earth that he walked upon, beyond the seas that he saw, beyond the air where birds fly, beyond the sun and moon and stars, beyond all the intangible spirits, and beyond his own mind. He did so with his own reasoning mind, and sublimated and spilled himself above and beyond all this, high up wherever He may be found<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

## **THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN AND THE FATHER**

Since the Lord Jesus Christ is the focus of this Gospel, the Evangelist affirms that He is the Eternal Word of God. He came to reveal Himself to us and to accomplish the messianic and redeeming offering on our behalf - (20:47), granting us life- (10:10), since He is from above and above all- (3:3). At the same time, the Evangelist **affirms the role of the Father** in order to save us from falling into the error committed by the Gnostics. Hence the only Son is with the Father, and He is the Word and the Son at the same time, Who has been sent by the Father- (5:36; 6:57; 11:42; 20:21). He came to proclaim the words of the Father (3:34; 6:29; 17:3); and to perform His work- (10:36) He who sees Him sees the Father, and he who believes in Him perceives the Father- (5:23 etc; 12:44 etc; 14:9).

Therefore this Book is the Gospel of the Messiah: The Messiah is the Word of God and the Redeemer. Consequently, the Messiah is one with His Father, fulfilling the Father's will that is at the same time in harmony with His own. This is what we shall notice more clearly as we proceed with our study.

\* St. John is like an eagle soaring upwards and reaching the Father Himself. He says: **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God- (1)...**The chaste writer explains mysteries that married people could not handle<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

## **ST JOHN AND THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Some name this Gospel **"The Gospel of the Holy Spirit."** Throughout this Book, the issue of the Holy Spirit is clearly and powerfully raised.

In the discussion between the Lord Jesus Christ and Nicodemus, the Lord speaks about the role of the Holy Spirit in the new birth (Ch 3). The Lord clarifies the difference between natural birth (physical) and spiritual birth. It was hard even on the Jewish teacher Nicodemus to understand the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore the Lord presented to him a tangible example; He likened the Spirit to "the wind that blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (3:8).

The discourse of the Lord in this passage about the birth granted by the Holy Spirit is considered one of the principal signposts of the Gospel of St. John. It is in harmony with the rest of this Book, for we will be able to comprehend the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ only through our grasp of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, this will enable us to worship God in spirit and in truth (4:24). This is possible through the Spirit of God Who lives within us and not due to our own ability.

The Lord saw the crowds, celebrating the feast and practicing its rites, without feeling any inner spiritual fulfillment. Consequently, He stood up on the last day of the feast and promised to offer the Holy Spirit as the living water springing within the believers (7:37-39).

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<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 20:13.*

<sup>1</sup> *Against Jovinianus, 1:26*

In His farewell speech - Ch.14-17), the Lord could offer nothing else to comfort His disciples but the promise of the Holy Spirit. He is the Comforter- the Paraclete- that the Lord grants to His Church in order to affect and shape it constantly and ultimately transforms her into the image of her Groom:

\* For He is Her Advocate [this is the literal translation of the Greek word: the Paraclete]. He is the Spirit of Truth that bears witness to the Lord. He does so not through mere theoretical words but through His power to shape our nature into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ and His likeness.

\* The Holy Spirit is the speaker as the glorious Lord Jesus is no longer present in the flesh (since He has risen to heaven). He teaches, leads, and guides the disciples the truth, and bears witness through them (14:26; 16:13etc).

\* He is the Comforter- (16:6 etc...) as we carry the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN AND THE CHURCH**

Many scholars consider that the earlier holy Gospels have been written for the world - whether the people are Jewish, Roman, or Greek- in order to acquaint them with the Lord Jesus Christ as a spiritual King, a true Servant, and the unique friend of all mankind. Consequently, all would believe in Him, and enjoy His redeeming work. Ultimately, they would rise from being slaves to become sons of God. As for the Gospel of St. John, these scholars consider that it has been written specifically for the Church and therefore it has been called '**The Gospel of the Church**': it presents to us '**the Christ of the Church**', even though St. John does not use the term 'church.'

The principal theological premise here is to establish a link between the historical Jesus as He appeared to be in His life on earth and the Christ of the Church Who is ever-present and works within Her. In other words, since the Lord Jesus Christ who is 'the incarnate Word of God' is central to the Gospel, then His Church- with Her ministry and worship, including specifically the holy mysteries- holds a principal position in His favor. St. John therefore discusses the following points:

1- **The mission of the Church** (Jn.4:31 etc; 12:20 etc.).

2- **Her offering of worship 'in spirit and in truth.'** He strips the Temple in Jerusalem of its glory in order to proclaim it - through the Church – of the crucified Lord resurrected from the dead (1:14, 51; 2:13 etc, 4:19 etc).

3- **Regarding the holy mysteries of the Church:** We find that St. John puts special emphasis on the mysteries of the Church such as **Baptism, the Eucharist, and the Priesthood:**

\* The Evangelist presents **the baptism of John** as a testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ - (1:8) and a preparatory road to His baptism by the Holy Spirit (1:15; 25:23).

\* At the wedding in Cana (2:1-12) The transformation of the water used by the Jews for purification into wine is a Messianic sign that His hour had come (2:4); and probably points to the Eucharist too.

\* The Lord spoke clearly to Nicodemus about the mystery of Baptism (3:1-7).

\* The Evangelist speaks clearly about **the Eucharist** (6:22-50). This is also referred to in the event of the feeding of the crowds (6:1-13). Here we see the Lord as He **satisfies believers through the mystery of the Eucharist offered in His Church.**

\* The mystery of Baptism is also referred to in the healing of the lame man of Bethesda (5:1-14), since human nature is healed. Also in the event of opening the eyes of the blind man (9:1-7) by washing him in the pool of Siloam that means the one dispatched or sent forth.

\* The Blood and Water flowing from the side of the crucified Lord (19:34) indicates the

unity of the two mysteries: Baptism and the Eucharist, and the way they complement each other.

\* He speaks about the **mystery of Priesthood** (20:22-23).

4- In the earlier Gospels, mankind is divided into good and evil; whereas in this Gospel the Evangelist writes about '**Christ of the Church**' and makes a distinction between believers and non-believers. In believing, we are not judged (3:18) and we are granted eternal life (3:36). Moreover, we move from death to life. However, it should not be mere theoretical belief (13:34,35), but a living faith coupled with love and observation of God's commandments (21:114-24).

5- **The promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit in the farewell words of the Lord** as the Spirit would be the Comforter of the Church, Her Intercessor, and Leader (Ch 14- 17).

6- **The Lord Jesus Christ presents Himself repeatedly as 'I AM'** since He is the focus of life, glory, and hope in the life to come. In the same way, He is now the focus of His present Church.

## THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN AND THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE CHURCH

As this Gospel has been written for the churches found all over the world, it bears the thought of the "**Universal Church.**" It is, therefore, not directed solely to the Jews. This line of thought is clear throughout this Gospel. We may quote a few examples:

1- The Gospel of St. John presents the Lord Jesus Christ as:

"The Lamb of God who takes away **the sins of the world,**" (1:29).

'That was the true Light which gives light **to every man** who comes into the world' (1:9)

'But **as many as received him,** to them He gave the right to become the children of God, even to those who believe in His name,' (1:12).

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life," (3:16).

"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, **will draw all peoples to Myself,**" (12:32).

'...He prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that **He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad,**' (11:51,52).

"And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that **everyone who sees the Son** and believes in Him may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up in the last day," (6:40).

"And other sheep I have **which are not of this fold;** them also must I bring, and they will hear My voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd," (10:16).

"I do not pray for these alone but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they **all** may be one," (17:20,21).

"... Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed," (20:29).

2- **The Universality of the Church became evident due to rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ by the Jewish people:** They turned their backs to their Redeemer and sought to kill Him (4:3, 44; 7:1-8; 11:7-16). Jerusalem had become the capital of Israel and the city of the Messiah (12; 12-19). That city was marked by turmoil (1:19 etc.; 5:23). The Lord abandoned the Temple (8:59), and moved away from the walls of the city as He headed towards Golgotha, (19:17).

3- '**The Temple of Jerusalem**' is replaced by His Father's house- (2:12), full of glory- (12:14), from where redemption is granted- (4:22). The Lord proclaims the glory of the **Temple of His Body**- (2:20 etc) that offers a mystery of resurrection to all mankind.

4- The heretic city of 'Samaria' is transformed into a place of worship in spirit and in truth (4:23 etc...).

5- The whitened fields that are ready for the harvest point to the harvest of future times

and are symbolic of the non-Jewish world.

6- Because the Evangelist is writing to all peoples- even the non-Jews- he interprets the words: Rabbi- (1:31); Messiah- (1:41); Cephas- (1:42). He also elaborates on the Jewish custom of purification- (2:6), and of burial- (9:40); as well as their relationship with the Samaritans- (4:9); and the Passover as a Jewish feast- (4:6). We find that he also gives a geographical description of Bethesda- (5:2); and the court of Pontius Pilate known in Hebrew as Gabbatha- (19:13)...All this reveals that St. John is writing to speakers who lived in Ephesus and used the Greek language- whether these are of Jewish or Gentile origins. He believes that the universal Church is not confined to the Jewish nation.

### **THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN AND ETERNAL LIFE (eschatological life)**

The Synoptic Gospels lead the reader towards the Kingdom of God which is anticipated at the end of time and would be fulfilled soon by the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. In contrast, St. John the Evangelist affirms that a believer attains eternal life through his everyday life.

This Gospel does not describe the end of time and the end of the world; or the final coming of the Lord to judge the world. Rather, it speaks about eternal life that is achieved through the redeeming work we enjoy when we accept the Cross. Consequently, we taste eternal life through its pledge here on earth; and as we experience its glory by the kind of life we lead here:

- \* He proclaims the glory of the Lord- (1:14; 2:11; 11:4, 40). This brings the Church to taste the pledge of eternal life where we see the Lord in the fullness of His glory and get acquainted with His mysteries.

- \* Redemption actually elevates us above time and is a victory over death. It is achieved through active faith, and as the Lord says: “Most assuredly, I say to you, He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from life to death,” (5:24).

- \* Eternal life becomes a reality for us as we observe the following:

- A- The prince of this world has been condemned (3:18, 19).

- B- The Evangelist proclaims that the fullness of time has come and that history has been fulfilled at the time the Lord Jesus Christ died on the Cross.

As whoever tastes the Gospel of St. John, truly finds himself elevated to eternal life - through its pledge - and hence he beholds the glorified Lord within his innermost depths, and experiences the real victory over death and over the love of this world. One feels victorious over Satan who subjected the world for a while and who is now bound and driven out as he has no place within us. The cross of the Lord has led us into this living and heavenly experience.

- \* Don't you realize that it is not without reason that the Evangelist speaks to us from heaven? Notice how from the very beginning he draws our souls and gives them wings and ascends with the minds of his listeners. He holds our hands and leads us above all tangible things, above earth and heaven and above the angels themselves: above the cherubim and seraphim: above the thrones and leaders and authorities - in brief, he leads us on a trip that travels above all creatures<sup>1</sup>.

### **St. John Chrysostom**

C.H. Dodd<sup>2</sup> believes that St. John was trying to correct the intention of the Ecclesiastical and Eschatological thought; and that he, therefore, presented 'a realized eschatology.' That

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 2:8.*

<sup>2</sup> *The Apostolic Teaching and its Development, 1944, p65 ff.*



means that eschatology is an actual reality and not just a mere future prediction. However, scholars have rejected this as a main premise for the Gospel. Their argument is based on that though some chapters that speak about the life at the end of time as a life that is experienced in the present through its pledge. The Evangelist does not ignore the future life at the end of time (5:25-29), but both paths run side by side<sup>3</sup>.

### THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN AND THE MIRACLES

In the Gospels preceding the Gospel of St. John, we find an abundance of miracles performed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Through them, the Lord reveals His divine tenderness and great love for mankind. Although St. John knows about them all, he chooses to relate only seven of them in his Gospel whereby we would accept to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ - some consider he chooses eight of them. He says: "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name," (20:30,31). "And there are also many other things that Jesus did, that if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written," (21:25).

It is, therefore, clear that the Lord performed these miracles to lead us to have faith and enjoy eternal life. This is what Nicodemus felt as he said: "...no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him," (3:2). The Lord also affirms: "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe," (4:48). He holds these signs as testimony against unbelievers, as He says: "If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin..." (15:24).

The chief priests and the Pharisees realized how these miracles would affect the life of the people, and so they said: "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this everyone will believe in Him..." (11:47,48).

| THE MIRACLE                                                                       | THE MEANING                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| 1- Water turned to wine-2:1-11.                                                   | - The renewal of human nature and lending it eternal joy. |
| 2-A nobleman's son healed- 4:47-54.                                               | - Faith is a prerequisite for eternal life.               |
| 3- A man healed at Bethesda- 5:1-9.                                               | - The power of the renewed life.                          |
| 4- The feeding of the multitude- 6:1-4 ;(Matt 14:13- 21; Mk 6:32-44; Lk 9:10-17). | - Jesus Christ is the living Bread.                       |
| 5- Walking on the water- 6:15-21 ;(Matt14:22-36; Mk 6:45-56).                     | - Jesus Christ our leader in the royal path               |
| 6- The healing of the man born blind-9:1-14.                                      | - Jesus Christ is the light of life.                      |
| 7- Lazarus rose from the dead- 11:1-44.                                           | - Jesus Christ is our resurrection and Conqueror of death |
| 8-Catching fish-21:1-14.                                                          | - Complete fellowship in the new life.                    |

### THE AUTHORITY OF THIS GOSPEL

The universal Church unquestioningly accepted the authority of the Gospel of St. John from the beginning. The testimonies of the Church came even from heretics and heathen groups and these admitted that the writer of this Gospel is St. John ever since the beginning of the

<sup>3</sup> Cf. L Van Hartingsveld: *Gie Eschatologie des Johannesevangeliums*, 1963

Second Century, that is shortly after its writing. Only a few known as the 'Algi' group disagreed with this, according to **St. Epiphanius**<sup>1</sup>. These opposed the Gospel as it contradicted their belief in the Logos. It is not clear whether the Algi were a group or just one person. At any rate, they did not have an audience among the public or in the Church.

### **FIRST: THE TESTIMONY OF THE CHURCH AND THE HERETICS**

The Gospel of St. John was found among the Old Greek manuscripts that contained the New Testament, such as the Sinai and the Vatican versions. These had been written from versions that were even older than them. They were similar to manuscripts of the New Testament that had been translated before and could date back to manuscripts written in the Second or Third Centuries, just as the Syrian or Latin ones that included this Gospel. As for the testimony of the **first Fathers of the Church**, we do not hear anyone voice having any doubts concerning the author or any suspicion that someone other than St. John has written this Gospel. We mention the following as examples:

\* **St. Ireneaus, Bishop of Lyon in the Second Century**: he based his case against the Gnostics on the Gospel of St. John. He testifies that the authorized versions are four. He also testifies that St. John published his Gospel in Ephesus<sup>1</sup>.

\* Some fathers have borrowed certain expressions directly from this Gospel, or have used them without referring to the source. This is found in the following: the **Epistle of Barnabas**; the **Book of the Shepherd by Hermes**; in the writings of **Papias**; **Clement the Roman**; **St. Justin, the martyr**; **Theophilus of Antioch**; **St. Ignatius of Antioch**; **St. Polycarp**; **Tertulian, the scholar**; **Origen**; and **St. Clement of Alexandria**.

\*The testimony contained in the Muratorian Canon, in the Second Century-170-200A.D. approx.-is powerful in its statement that the writer of this Book is St. John.

\* **Tatian**, the disciple of St. Justin, borrowed much from this Gospel, and began his work entitled 'Diatessaron' with the same introduction as that of St. John's Gospel.

\*Many heretics borrowed from St. John's Gospel, such as Heraclion and his teacher Valentinus besides Basilides-in 120A.D. Moreover, Gnostic writings- such as the Gospel of Truth- borrowed from this Gospel.

### **SECOND: THE TESTIMONY OF THE HEATHEN**

The heathen philosopher Salsas, an enemy of Christianity, borrowed from this Gospel the material he used to write his book against Christianity and to attack the four Gospels around the year 178A.D. He mentions details that have been written only in the Gospel of St. John.

### **OPPOSITION TO THE AUTHENTICITY OF ST JOHN AS THE WRITER**

Many scholars and critics have discussed the validity of the authorship of St. John, the son of Zebedee. They have presented numerous and complicated theories. Some have attempted to consider that it has been produced by the apostolic Church and not as the work of one person. Some suggested that its form indicates it was written in the Second Century. This could be due to possible links they saw between the Gospel and Gnosticism, as we have pointed out earlier. Others have tried to confirm that the writer is a non-Jew.

E Haenchen presents a summary of the critical problems relevant to this matter and covers the period from 1929 to the fifties<sup>2</sup>.

**The following is a summary of the response to those who deny the authority of St.**

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<sup>1</sup> Adv. Haer.2: 31.

<sup>1</sup> Adv. Haer, 3:1:1

<sup>2</sup> Theologische Rundschau, n.f., 1955, p. 295-335

## **John as the writer of this Gospel:**

### **CLUES IN THE GOSPEL THAT REVEAL THE CHARACTER OF THE WRITER**

Although the Evangelist has not mentioned his own name in this Gospel, yet he has included clues to his character through which we are able to recognize him. These are:

#### **A- HE IS AN EYE-WITNESS**

In the introduction of the Gospel, the Evangelist says: "We saw His glory," (1:14). Some have tried to interpret the plural term 'we saw' as an intention to convey 'all Christians', and does not refer to the writer. Hence the term alludes to a spiritual rather than a material meaning. In this way, the writer of the Gospel is 'The Apostolic Church' and not a witness<sup>1</sup>. Many scholars do not accept this line of thought especially that the verb, used in the Greek context means physical sight and not spiritual sight. Even if it were interpreted as spiritual vision<sup>2</sup>, St. John confirms in more than one place that he is a witness who is reporting the truth:

**'And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows he is telling the truth, so that you may believe,' (19:35).**

**"This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true," (21:34).**

It is clear that the writer is a 'disciple' and an 'eye witness': this is relevant to St. John who writes in the same style in the introduction of his First Epistle: **"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life...the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life..., "(1Jn1).**

#### **B- THE BELOVED DISCIPLE**

One of the indications incorporated within the Gospel itself, and pointing to St. John as the writer, is the title he humbly gives himself without mentioning his name: '...the disciple whom Jesus loved,' (21:20; 19:26). Some modern critics have attempted to raise suspicion concerning that issue but have differed on defining the identity of that disciple. They claimed he is:

1- **The rich youth** who, it is reported, Jesus looking at him, loved him (Mk10:21). Yet we have nothing in the Bible or in tradition to prove that the youth returned and believed after he had left the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore this opinion is of no value.

2- **Nathaniel:** the response to that is that we know very little about him. Moreover, when the Evangelist speaks of him he mentions him by name (21:2), while in that same chapter we get the words: 'the disciple whom Jesus loved....' (21:20). Therefore the last words are intended to distinguish him from Nathaniel

3- **Lazarus**<sup>3</sup>: as the sisters had sent for the Lord saying: "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick," (11:3). The response to that is that Lazarus was not with the Lord in the 'upper room' when he would have leaned on His chest and for the verse to be relevant which says: '... Peter...saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper...' (21:20). It is clear from the three other Gospels that the Lord Jesus Christ was solely with His disciples during the last supper. Moreover, the Evangelist repeats the name of Lazarus in chapters 11 and 12, so why would he hide his name after that?!

4- Some believe that this title does not indicate a specific person but carries a symbolic

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<sup>1</sup> C.K.Barett: *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1956, p.138

<sup>2</sup> Guthrie, p.242.

<sup>3</sup> J.N.Senders defended this opinion in many works, including: B.A.Mastin: *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1986. This was followed by F.V.Fison, and E.F.Harrison

significance. In this way, the writer of this Gospel could be the Church as an entire entity and not as one person. This thought is not satisfactory and hard to accept for it denies that disciple any historic place as an eyewitness; and this is contradictory to all that is reported about him in this Gospel<sup>4</sup>.

The above exposes the different conflicting opinions. As for positive indications that St. John is the disciple whom Jesus loved, they are the following:

1- Ever since the Second Century, the writings of the church fathers speak about the disciple whom Jesus loved and identify him to be John, the son of Zebedee. To them, St. John is the writer and this was a matter they did not question. M.F.Miles<sup>1</sup> notes that **Origen, and St. John Chrysostum** have found in the description: 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' the key that reveals the object of this Gospel.

2- He is one of the Lord's disciples according to the testimony of the Gospel of St. John and in which he is referred to as 'the disciple'- (21:20). This is further underlined by the indication that he leaned on the Lord's chest during the last supper (21:20)

3- Some scholars find that St. John is one of three disciples who were close to the Lord, and who accompanied Him on many occasions when the rest of the disciples were absent<sup>2</sup>. When St. James was martyred in the year 44 A.D., St. Peter and St. John were still alive: for we are told that both were together in Jn 20:2. Therefore this could be no other but St. John.

4- St. John is mentioned by name in the other Gospels: twice in Matthew's, nine times in St. Mark's, and six times in St. Luke's. In St. John's Gospel, however, he is never mentioned by name. It is evident that the writer is St. John and that he refrained from giving his name due to his humility.

5- This disciple was very close to St. Peter as we are told in (21:7; 20:2). The only time St. John appears without St. Peter is when the Lord, from His Cross, entrusted him with the Virgin Mother to be his own (19:26). So who is that disciple who always accompanied St. Peter? There is no doubt that it was St. John the son of Zebedee since he was with him and with James, while the other disciples were absent, on many occasions and as we have mentioned earlier (review Mk 5:37; 9:2; 14:33). The Lord appointed these three to prepare the Passover for Him (Lk 22:8). They were together even after the Lord's resurrection (Acts 3:1; 4:13). They are mentioned in Acts 8:14 as the ones delegated to go from Jerusalem to Samaria. When St. Paul speaks about the pillars of the Church, he mentions James, Cephas (Peter), and John (Gal 2:9). All this indicates that this is St. John: the disciple whom Jesus loved and who was St. Peter's companion.

6- Some scholars note that when St. John the Baptist is mentioned in this Gospel his name is just mentioned as 'John 'without any title attached to it. This strongly supports the ecclesiastical concept that the writer is St. John the son of Zebedee who insisted on not mentioning his own name in this Gospel: he found that there was no need to make a distinction between himself and St. John the Baptist by including a specific title.

### **C-THE PALESTINIAN BACKGROUND**

Some wonder if the Gospel, having been written by St. John the son of Zebedee, bears any proof that the writer is a Jew who had lived in Jerusalem? And was he an eyewitness of the Lord? Or was he a Second Century man from Antioch or Alexandria?

Scholars respond that this Gospel includes many indications and testimonies that prove

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Correll: *Consummatum Est*, 1958, p.204 ff.

<sup>1</sup> M.F.Miles: *The Spiritual Gospel*, 1960, p.9 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Review our commentary in this study about the character of St. John

that the writer lived in Palestine in the First Century, and that he was a Jew. For example:

### **1- His knowledge of Jewish customs and traditions**

He often presents accurate details about the Jewish way of life and traditions during the period prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, such as:

- \* The rites of purification [2:6].
- \* The rites of the Feast of the Tabernacles [7:37; 8:12(the Enlightening)].
- \* The rites of purification for the Feast of the Passover [18:28; 19:31-42].
- \* The teachings of the Jews governing their lives, such as the law governing the observation of the Sabbath [5:10; 7:21-9:14, 23, et...].
- \* His knowledge about the anticipation of the Jews for a prophet with the spirit of Elijah [1:19-27]; and their understanding that Christ, the Messiah, 'remains forever' [12:34].

### **2- His knowledge of Jewish history**

The writer knows exactly the years it took to build the Temple (2:20). He knows about the enmity that existed between the Jews and the Samaritans (4:9). He also knows that the high priest at the time of the Lord's crucifixion is the same Caiaphas and that his father in law was Annas (18:13; 11:49; etc..)

### **3- His knowledge of Palestine's geography**

The writer has accurate knowledge of Palestine: he knows the Hebrew name for the Pool near the Sheep Gate and that it has five porches. He knows that there are two villages named 'Bethany' (12:1;???28:1). He speaks about the spring of 'Aenon' near Salim (3:23); and says that the Sea of Galilee is the Sea of Tiberias (4:21). Moreover, he indicates that the city of Ephraim is close to the wilderness (11:54).

### **4-He retained the style of the Hebrew language**

Although St. John has written his Gospel in Greek, yet it bears the style of the Hebrew language. This is due to the difficulty faced by a writer using a language other than his own native one. This feature appears in the terms and the expressions he uses, as well as in his emphasis on figures.

**5- He incorporates details not mentioned in the other three Gospels:** these could not have been included by anyone unless he has been an eyewitness and is acquainted with the people and their names, for example:

- \* The detailed report about Nicodemus (Ch3).
- \* The report about Mary and Martha (Ch 11).
- \* The incident with Malchus (18:10).
- \* The report about Annas and Caiaphas (18:19-320
- \* The report about the women at the Lord's tomb (20:15-17).
- \* The report about the Lord's delivery of His mother to St. John's care while He was on the Cross (19:27).
- \* The report about St. Peter and John himself after the Resurrection (21:5-23).

St. John also records fine details about events that can be presented only by an eyewitness. For example: he states that there were six water-pots (2:6); the distance the disciples had rowed away from the coast was two hundred cubits approximately (21:8); and the number of fishes they caught was fifty three,

(21:11). He also mentions that the loaves were made of barley (6:9); that the odor of the oil of spikenard filled the house (12:3); the emotions of the officers when the Lord was arrested (18 :); and the weight of the spices used for the Lord's body (19:39).

Note also the accurate description of the reactions of the disciples (2:11 etc.; 4:27; 6:19;

12:16; 13:22; etc...); and the Lord's sympathy and reaction (13:1.61??; 6:15, 24; 2:11).

The above examples and many other details confirm that St. John is an eyewitness to all he has written in his Gospel.

### **THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN, THE FISHERMAN**

Some scholars refuse to recognize that St. John is the writer of this Gospel. They validate their stand by saying: **'Is it logical to believe that an illiterate fisherman can write such a Gospel while we consider it to be better than anything that Sufi philosophers have ever written? This is a kind of unparalleled and unforced fluency that is awesome?'**

The response to this is the following:

**First:** Even if the disciple were illiterate, yet we believe that the entire Holy Bible has been inspired by the Holy Spirit (2Peter1:21). Hence, even though the human element is instrumental yet the Holy Spirit sanctifies, elevates, and grants it tremendous power. He also embraces the human being to shield him/her from committing any fault.

**Second:** St. John was actually qualified to write this sublime 'spiritual Gospel' based on the following:

1- He was not illiterate as many claimed. Actually, he was not just a fisherman: he was a merchant who traded in fish and his father had people who worked for him just as any rich man would have at that time. There is a great probability that he enjoyed learning and sought to increase his knowledge. It is a typical custom of the Jews to take up a certain craft such as fishing- and every Jew had a craft-just as Saul of Tarsus practiced the craft of making tents (Acts 18:3).

2- We know that the Word of God is offered to all mankind- beginners as well as mature people. This is clear in the words of St. Paul: "...we speak wisdom among those who are mature..." (1 Cor2:6); "But solid food belongs to those who are of full age (Heb 5:14). Just as the three evangelists-Matthew, Mark, and Luke offered the Word of God to the simple people, we may say that St. John was one of three who were very close to the Lord and who were chosen to accompany Him in grave circumstances. These were events that revealed the mystery of His Person and His message. It is this disciple whom Jesus loved and who leaned on His chest - (21:20) - who was to write to the mature. It is as though the first three Gospels represent the invitation to accept the faith and belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as the redeeming Messiah, the Servant of mankind, and the divine Friend. As for this Gospel, it represents the complementary education in faith for mature believers. It is the **'spiritual Gospel'** that is offered to those who have become genuine Christians and hence it elevates them to enjoy the ultimately divine mysteries.

**Third:** We have commented on the extent to which this Gospel is related to the Old Testament as it underlines that the Lord is the true Lamb of God, and not a Passover symbol, for in Him the prophecies are fulfilled. The discussion between the Lord and the Jews is meant to reveal that He is greater than Abraham and Moses...this agrees with St. John since he is a Jew who perceives the divine mystery. He yearns that every Jew, as well as every Gentile, enjoy the One Who is the 'subject of the prophecies.'

**Fourth:** We have also indicated that this Gospel does not contain any kind of Hellenic Gnosticism. A number of scholars had made this claim before the Gnostic library was discovered in Naga Hamadi. The discovered manuscripts that were found and brought to light around 1947, however, reveal that the writings belong to the religious group known the Essenes or monks from the Jewish city of Quomran. The style of St. John is similar to that of these manuscripts and appropriately so since he studied under St. John the Baptist

who lived in the wilderness. He learned lot about them being neighbors. The attitude of the Essenes towards religion was a spiritual, Sophist, mystical, and symbolic one rather than a tangible concept. Their life rotated around the conflict between light and darkness, between truth and falsehood...It is as though St. John came to announce to them that he had found the One Who would fulfill their heart's desire. He was Someone who would not only lead them to know the light and the truth, but Who would offer Himself to them as the 'true Light' and the 'Truth': through Him we are enlightened and enjoy the

Truth!

## **SYNOPSIS**

Scholars have agreed that this Gospel is notable for its detailed and goal-oriented parts. In spite of that, they are not unanimous about the breakdown in itself. For instance, the divisions D. Mollat sets up are that the Gospel, after the introduction, is divided into nine parts according to the liturgies observed for the principal Jewish feasts:

**A-The Introduction to the Gospel** Ch 1:1 - 18

**B-The Nine Parts**

1- The first week of Messianic service Ch 1:19 - 2:11

2- The First Passover Ch 2:12 - Ch 4

3- The Sabbath Ch 5

4- The Second Passover Ch 6

5- The Feast of Tabernacles Ch 7 -Ch 10:21

6- The Feast of Dedication Ch10:22 - Ch 11:54

7- The Third Passover Ch 11:55 - Ch 19:42

8- The Resurrection Ch 20

9- The Appearances of the resurrected Jesus Ch 21

However, the most prevalent manner of marking the divisions is the one proposed by A. Feuillet, C.H. Dodd, and R.E. Brown. This consists of two main parts plus an introduction and a conclusion:

**A- The Introduction** Ch 1:1- 18

**B- The Book of Signs** Ch 1:19 -Ch12

**C-The Book of Suffering** Ch 13 -Ch 20

**D- The Conclusion** Ch 21

Feuillet finds that the Gospel as a whole covers two subjects: the proclamation of the Lord Jesus Christ and His submission to suffering until death on account of this proclamation. Based on that, it is possible to divide the Gospel as follows:

**The First Book: The Book of Signs**

1-Establishing a new testament by instituting baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit Ch 1:19 - Ch 4:42

2- Revealing Himself: that He is one with God, the Source of life Ch 4:43 -Ch 5:47

That He is the Bread of Life Ch 6

That He is the Light of the world Ch 7 -12

**The Second Book: The Book of Suffering**

1- Revealing Himself to His disciples through love, comforting, and oneness Ch 13 -17

2- Suffering is the road taken to establish the Church Ch 18 -Ch 19

3- Resurrection and its association with the descent of the Holy Spirit Ch 21, 22

**To facilitate the study of this Gospel, we propose the following divisions:**

**First: The Introduction: The Word Incarnated Ch 1:1-18**

**Second: Signs and Deeds that reveal His Divinity Ch 1:19-Ch 12**  
**Third: His Revelation of His Identity to His Own Children Ch 13-17**  
**Fourth: The Son of God Sacrificed Ch 18-19**  
**Fifth: His Resurrection Testifies to His Divinity Ch 20**  
**Sixth: The Conclusion Ch 21**

***AN INSPIRATION FROM THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN***

**GRANT ME TO SOAR WITH YOUR EAGLES IN YOUR SKIES!**

**\*Allow me to lean on Your chest with the Beloved St. John  
And to accompany You up to the Cross  
And to receive Your Mother from You as a Mother for me.  
Yes, and grant me the wings of the Spirit so that I become an eagle, and join him  
In flight in your heavens, and enjoy fellowship and glory with You.  
I would live among Your angels  
And get to know Your divine mysteries that provide heavenly food and satisfy my  
innermost depths!**

**\* Grant me to soar with my thoughts towards Eternity,  
This that cannot be conceived by a heavenly or earthly being.  
I stand and rejoice at Your birth before the beginning of time  
Shine upon me O Word of God, with Your Father and Your Holy Spirit,  
Then my soul will be filled with the brilliance of the Trinity.  
Hence I will tread upon the darkness of the world  
And soar in this amazing brilliance!**

**\*You became incarnate for my sake, O holy One who has granted me life,  
You have enlightened me; hence I am no longer counted as one of this world.  
Indeed, by Your grace, I enjoy divine adoption:  
Having become a Son of God, the world cannot find room for it within me!**

**\*May Your Holy Spirit carry me to the mysteries within Your Book:  
To see You- the King- hanging on the Cross!  
I do not seek You to reign in the way the crowds sought to have You  
But, rather, to establish Your throne in my depths that I may cherish Thee.  
I will not take the road of philosophical arguments  
For I recognize that You are the royal Messiah Who grants lordship.  
I perceive You as the King of kings and the Giver of a Royal Life.**

**\*You are the Lamb of God Who carries the sins of the world!  
You have been crucified and hence reconciled us with Your Father.  
You have drawn us to You, and hence our sins have been replaced by Your  
righteousness.  
You have opened Your arms to embrace and enfold the Jews, Samaritans, and  
Gentiles together.  
By Your Cross You have poured love into us, O Lord of true love,  
We have become an icon of You and will not become separated from Love, neither  
will You leave us.  
We have received fellowship with Your Nature, and love flows in our veins.**



Neither hatred, nor contempt, nor wickedness can ever creep stealthily within us.  
\* Grant me, with the bride and bridegroom of Cana, to drink of the wine of Your love.

Grant me, with Nicodemus, to discover the mystery of the new birth.  
Grant me, with the Samaritan woman, to drink from the sources of Your Holy Spirit.

Grant me, with the one born blind, perception that enables me to see You within me.  
Grant me, with the sick man of Bethesda, to be steadfast and rejoice,  
Hence I would walk towards Your divine Embrace and reach my true home.  
\* Let me hear You as You reveal Yourself to me.  
Your words 'I AM' have a special sweetness for You are Jehovah who lives within me!

According to Your promise, let me hear Your voice saying:  
I am the heavenly Bread, he who eats Me will enjoy the eternal feast.  
I am Life, without Me you would not exist.  
I am the Light of the world, I shine on you hence you experience the eternal light.  
I am the Truth, I bring you into the divine mysteries.  
I am the Resurrection, death will never be able to bind you!  
I am the Door, I lead you to come into My embrace.  
I am the Good Shepherd, I carry you - with all your frailty - on My shoulders!  
I am the true Vine, stay steadfast in Me and I will abide in you!  
\* Allow me to accompany You in the upper room, as well as to Gethsemane,  
Let me go with You where You will be judged and crucified,  
And to sit at Your tomb looking out for Your resurrection.  
Reveal Yourself to me, and make Your resurrection shine within my depths!  
Yes, throughout the days of my estrangement I will continue to meditate on every detail of Your amazing work:  
These events will continue to be my reason for offering praise with all the heavenly ranks.

To You be the glory, O true Love and Truth: the One who grants love and freedom!

AMEN

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE INCARNATED WORD

The soul watches in astonishment and deep awe as the Evangelist, St. John the Beloved, appears as an eagle in flight. He soars in the realm of divinity rather than in the tangible world. He invites us to cross over, and join him to go beyond time. He leads us to perceive the Word of God Who is never separated from the divine Mind. The Mind, too, is never separated from His Word: the only Son and consubstantial with His Father in one and the same essence. St. John invites us to perceive and acknowledge the Giver of life and the Source of light, the Creator of time and of every being in the heavens and on earth. Nothing preoccupies His Divinity other than His unique and beloved man!

Being inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Evangelist leads us to divine truths that affect our being and our future eternity and glory. Thus he does not present us with a mere literary form, but he invites us to partake of the depth of God's love and which cannot be fully explained in human words.

#### **Witnessing to the Lord Jesus Christ**

In this chapter, St. John speaks about the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ and presents his own testimony:

[1-5; 10-14; 16-18]. He also presents the testimony of St. John the Baptist: [6-9; 15; 19-37]. The Lord manifests Himself to Andrew [38-42], to Philip [43-51]. Their testimony is also indicated in these verses.

**1- The Lord Jesus Christ is the everlasting Logos, one in essence with the Father [1-2]. He is the Donor of life and light, and through Him, we are granted the privilege of adoption to the Father [3-13].**

2- St. John the Evangelist opens his Gospel by introducing the divine Word as the **Source of all divine blessings**, especially blessing the creation and our adoption to the Father, besides a wealth of other blessings **'grace for grace' [16-18]** that he elaborates in the next chapters.

**3- The official testimony of St. John the Baptist before Israel: 'priests and Levites'** came to ask him three questions. His answers are extremely concise. It is a testimony that represents a public confrontation between them. Briefly, his answer is that he has no name, for he is only **'the voice of one crying in the wilderness'** announcing the coming of the Lord, [19-28].

**4- The testimony of St. John the Baptist before his disciples [29-37]:** He initiates and elaborates about the Lord as he is speaking to the remnant about whom Isaiah prophesied: **"...the remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob to the Mighty God"** (Is 10:21). St. John the Baptist is speaking to the new Israel who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and Who will lead them into the New Testament. He affirms that the Messiah is coming, not in the person of a glorified king as the Jews thought, but as a suffering and rejected person: His glory is His love and His shouldering of the sins of the world [36].

**5-The submission of St. John the Baptist's disciples to the Lord Jesus Christ:** here a truly personal and sincere meeting occurs that leads to a full renewal of life, of name and of the whole existence. We watch the Lord Jesus Christ entering into the core of Simon's being and occupying his depths thereby transforming him into Peter the apostle. Hence, his name, his mission, his life, and his whole existence are changed [42].

**6- The invitation of the Lord Jesus Christ to the rest of His disciples in Galilee since**

**the beginning.** St. John announces the revelation of the eternal and hidden mystery as he affirms that man will see the heavens open and angels of God ascending and descending upon the person of Jesus Christ [50-51].

**1- The Word of God1-13**

**2- The Word became Flesh14-18**

**3- The Testimony of John19-34**

**4- The Testimony of the first disciples35-53**

## **1-THE WORD OF GOD**

The Gospel of St. John begins with an introduction that is different than that of the other Synoptic Gospels. The introduction to the Gospel of St. Mark presents a description of St. John the Baptist and his work as an angel who prepares the way before the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One whom the prophets and fathers yearned for and they waited the day of His coming. The introduction to the Gospel of St. Matthew presents the lineage of the Lord beginning from Abraham. He then proceeds with the story of His birth, and indicates that He is the unique King who has come to restore the fallen kingdom of David, and to convert believers in Him into a royal nation. St. Luke begins his Gospel by writing a public and literary introduction (1:1-4), followed by the story of the birth of St. John the Baptist, then by that of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. He indicates how the Lord's sacrificial love and unique friendliness satisfies every soul, and fills every inner vacuum. In contrast, St. John begins by revealing the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ as the eternal Word long before He became incarnated. He does so to liberate us from the constraints of time and to soar into the embrace of the eternal Father. Consequently, we learn of God's plan concerning us and His will to lead us to redemption and eternal glory. He acquaints us with the One with Whom we will have fellowship in glory and eternal life. The introduction [1-18] thus underlines what is written in the Gospel as a whole: God proclaims Himself through His Word [1-13] as well as through His deeds [2-5] and ultimately through the divine incarnation for the glory the Father [14-18].

The introduction is mostly written in a distinctively poetic style and uses particular words that mark it from other Gospels. This has led scholars to question if that was a liturgical hymn that the apostle has borrowed? Or is it an addendum that he affixed after he had written the rest of the Gospel and could serve as a summary that reveals the aim of the Gospel and interprets it? Or is it an introduction written to announce the subject of his Gospel before beginning the task? The truth of the matter is that the object of the introduction is to introduce the reader to the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the subject of the Book, as the eternal Word. He is the One who works with the Father in the Creation. As He is the Father Himself, He proclaims the Father, and presents Him to us as though He is presenting Himself. He is the Wisdom of God speaking to us. He presents Himself, the Word of God, so that we might possess Him as a mystery granting us eternal life. He is the Life of every being, the Light of every person. He is the Eternal Who became incarnated and lived as a man. His own, the Jews rejected Him in spite of the testimony of St. John the Baptist for Him. However, a sincere remnant was found and they accepted Him and became children of God and members of the Divine Family.

We sing this introduction and the following verses each morning (Jn1:1-17) in order to comprehend that meeting the One Who alone can lift us up and carry us into His Father's embrace is actually the reason for our daily renewal. This does not lead us to hold in contempt or belittle time but rather, it leads us to sanctify it as a means to go beyond it. In the morning prayers, we think of our Savior as the Alpha and Omega- the Beginning and the End- and so

enjoy a holy beginning and a glorious ending.

**St. Augustine**<sup>1</sup> tells us that his friend Simplicius informed him that a philosopher and follower of Plato commented on the sentences found at the beginning of the Gospel of St. John and said they deserve to be written in letters made of gold.

Matthew Henry reports that Francis Junius, who was totally immoral in his youth, got converted and became upright by the grace of God and after accidentally coming across this Gospel and reading it. His father had told him about it. He experienced the power and influence of St. John's Gospel over him, and it gripped his attention. For an entire day, he became oblivious of his surroundings and his movements, and physically shook with fear. This day marked the beginning of his spiritual life.

**The verses (1-13) present eight great truths about the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, these are:**

A- He was and continues to be the Eternal One: **'In the beginning was the Word'** [1].

B- He was and still is the notable icon distinguished from the Father: **'...and the Word was with God'**, [1].

C- He was the Word while He was still God, [2].

D- He is the Partner with the Father in eternity, [2].

E- He is the Creator of the world, [3].

F- He is the Source of all life and light, [4, 5, 9].

G- He is God Who proclaims Himself to the fallen world, [10].

H- He came into man's world and His own rejected Him [11]; as for those who received Him, they attained a new birth [12-13].

### **The Logos**

In the Chaldean manuscript, in an attempt to rewrite the Old Testament, the Messiah is called '**Memra**' meaning 'Jehovah's word .' It also says that many of the matters that are reported in the Old Testament and that were brought about by God were really done by the Word of God. Moreover, it teaches the Jews that 'the Word of God' was with God.

The word '**Logos**' is used to mean two things:

**\* The Word that brings about creation or pregnancy or Logos endiathetas;** that means the thought by which the mind gets impregnated. This enables the achievement of all activity as it works in unison with the soul. Hence it is appropriate that the Second Icon be considered the Word of God; born of God, He is the principal and eternal Wisdom. **There is nothing more certain than the fact that we think, and there is nothing more mysterious than the discovery of our thought processes.**

**\*The articulated word Logos prophorika**, that is speech itself, is the natural signal to what is in the mind. In the same way, Jesus is the Word used when the Father spoke 'in these last days' (Heb 1:2); and He guides us to listen to Him (Matt.17:5). He informs us about the thoughts of God as well as the thoughts of men. He is the Word speaking to us about things pertaining to the Father for He is the Truth and the Amen, as well as the true witness to the Divine Mind. In this aspect, He is different from St. John the Baptist who is 'a voice crying in the wilderness' and is not the divine Word.

**St. Augustine** makes a comparison between the bread that fills the stomach and the Word that satisfies the mind. When He provides food to the people, He cannot offer the same bread to all those present; whereas He offers the Word to everyone and all the people receive it fully in

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<sup>1</sup> *De Civitate Dei, Lib 10, ch.29.*

their minds. **Truly, the word of man is amazing as it is presented to all in its entirety: how much more efficient would the Word of God, the Creator, be?**

\* If I wished to feed you, I could fill your stomach but not your minds. I would offer food to satisfy you, and do you not break it up to share together? Could my bread go to every single one of you? For if one of you gets it, then the rest would get nothing. However, note now that I am now speaking and you are all receiving my words. Not just that, but you all are receiving them in their entirety. **How amazing are my words! So how much more amazing is the Word of God?! Hear this also: I speak with utterances so that speech is delivered to you without getting separated from me. It reaches you while it does not depart from me. Before I spoke, I possessed the words while you did not have them. Now I have spoken the words and you have started to receive without my losing any of them. How amazing are my words! And how much more would the Word of God be?!<sup>1</sup>**

**St. Augustine**

\* O you foolish men, you speak as though you do not distinguish between the uttered word and the divine Word that exists before the beginning of time and is born of the Father! I say born and not just uttered. In Him there are no syllabic words but there is the fullness of the infinite Divinity and life without end (Col. 19,2:9, 3:4; Jn 1:4,5:26; 11:25, 14:6; Rev 1:18)<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

**‘In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God,’[1].**

Written in the Hebrew language, this statement is composed of three stanzas that are musically balanced, with the term ‘Word’ and the verb ‘was’ repeated three times. The use of the verb in the past tense reflects that the ‘Word’ has been continuously present from the beginning and does not refer to time. Note these stanzas: **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God:**

**‘In the beginning’:** The Book of Genesis starts with these words: **‘In the beginning God created...’** The writer here is speaking about the beginning of Creation, or how time began with the Creation. As for the introduction of the Gospel of St. John, he starts with the state of things before the Creation and before time and history, when there was nothing but God Himself. He starts with the beginning of existence: **‘In the beginning was the Word,’** and so indicates the eternal Word Who began that which had no beginning. The Apostle repeats this idea when the Lord tells the Jews: **“Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning,”**(Jn 8:25). In other words ‘I am the Being who originally spoke or spoke since time infinite. In his First Epistle, St. John says: **‘ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes...’** (1 Jn 1:1). The Lord tells the crowds: **“ Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it, and was glad...before Abraham was, I AM”** (8:56, 58).

**Origen** presents a number of interpretations for the word ‘the beginning.’ He also distinguishes between the relationship of the beginning with the Creator, as well as that of the beginning with the Creation. Ultimately, He is the beginning as He is the Wisdom and power of God (1Cor 1:24).

The Apostle confirms that the **Word** is **‘in the beginning’**, and before all time and not just before the Lord’s incarnation. From the beginning, the world came into existence through

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on N.T.Lessons, 70:3

<sup>2</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book, 4:9:102.

His creation, **thus He was there from the beginning**- that is before time was. The Psalmist sings of the timeless of God Who is ‘...**Before the mountains were brought forth...**’ (Ps. 90:2; Prov. 8:23).

He is with God, and no one is to imagine that believing in the Word would draw him away from God: for the Word is with God and can never be separated. They are of one essence (Heb 1:3), and He is the object of the Father’s joy (Jn 17:5), and His beloved Son (Prov 8:30).

**St. John Chrysostom**<sup>3</sup> wonders why the Evangelist does not begin by speaking about the Father and chooses to begin with the Son, who is one with Him in essence? Why did he begin by calling Him ‘the Word’ rather than the Son who is consubstantial with the Father? The Saint explains that the Evangelist begins by manifesting the person of the Lord Jesus Christ as being the incarnated ‘**Word**’ as this enables him to elaborate later on about His being the ‘Son of God.’ The title of ‘the **Word**’ confirms the oneness and the title of ‘**the Son, one in essence**’ confirms the distinction. Consequently, the two titles are complimentary to each other. **St. John Chrysostom** justifies that by explaining that one often separates between the Father and the Son, and thus thinks that a change - which was not there before - has occurred in God due to the birth of the Son. This is the result of one’s concept of a tangible birth as it actually occurs in the creation, and that it did not occur long before time ever was. If the Evangelist had started by speaking about ‘the Son of God’, some could have suspected that these were two separate gods. In order to avoid this, St. John begins by the title ‘**the Word**’ that no one would ever imagine is separated from God. Consequently He was the Father before which He was’nt such called

\* The Evangelist calls Him ‘**the Word**’ as he intends to begin teaching that this Word is the Only Son of God and so that no one would doubt that His birth is a tangible one. Thus, by giving Him the title of ‘the Word’ he voids and prevents, in advance, any wicked intrigues or concepts, which might trouble anyone. He underlines that the Son proceeds from the Father, and that He was born without pain (change)<sup>1</sup>.

\* In order to prevent anyone from thinking that He was not a new born due to his use of the expression ‘**in the beginning**’, he immediately adds that He was ‘**with God**’ before proclaiming that He was God. He also wishes to prevent anyone from thinking that the Word is just a simple thing and a mere utterance or a thought so he adds a specific preposition...he does not say ‘He was in God’ but says ‘He was with God.’

\* He does not call Him ‘Word’ but adds the defining article ‘the Word’ to distinguish Him from the rest of (men’s utterances)<sup>2</sup>.

#### **St. John Chrysostom**

\* The expression ‘**In the beginning**’ proclaims that there was nothing but the Everlasting Being, and that He is an absolute Being<sup>3</sup>.

\* ‘**He was the Logos**’ since the term ‘being’ is used to refer to a person and when referring to present time. However, to refer to God we need to indicate infinity. Hence, when we use the verb ‘was’ we use it to indicate past events related to our nature; whereas when we use it to refer to God we are proclaiming His eternity<sup>4</sup>.

\*The Word is an actual divine essence standing out as an icon and apart from His Father but free of any conflicting split. In order to avoid thinking that the divinity of the Son is lesser than that of the Father, the Evangelist promptly presents the evidence of His divinity by saying:

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<sup>3</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 2:7.*

<sup>3</sup> *Comm. On John, hom. PG59: 13.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid, hom. 3 PG 59:18,19.*

**‘And the Word was God’<sup>5</sup>.**

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Since He was a newborn, it is with good reason that St. John and others - be they an apostle or prophet- have not ascertained that He was a created being. While He is the One Who spoke of Himself humbly during His stay on earth, yet He did not wish to remain silent on this issue.... He uttered humble words (Jn 5:30; 12:49).... If He had been a created being, He would have said: “Do not think I am born of the Father, but rather that I am created and not born, and I am not one in essence.” However, in face of His reality, He spoke words that oblige human beings to accept involuntarily the alternative thought, such as His words:

**“...I am in the Father and the Father in Me...” “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). The Lord also says: “...that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father...” (Jn 5:23); “For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will (Jn 5:21). “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working (Jn5:17); “As the Father knows Me even so I know the Father (Jn10:15), “I and My Father are one,” (Jn 10:30)<sup>1</sup>.**

\* **Isaiah the prophet** was astonished and said: **“And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living...”** (Is 53:8). Indeed, all traces of the birth of the Everlasting One have been eradicated from the earth for it is inconceivable to the human mind. And since it is beyond comprehension, then how can we say that He is created? We can clearly define the time creatures came into being and how they came about; but we are incompetent when it comes to defining the time when **the Beginning** came to be.

\* Concerning **‘the Beginning Archi’** Who is above all and over all **‘He was the Word.’** He is not one of the natural creatures that are found under the feet of the Beginning, but He is above all creation for He is **‘in the beginning.’** In other words, He is of the same character and is constantly present with the Father, having the same nature as the One Who gave Him birth...from Him and with Him; He has lordship ‘archi’ over all.

**St. Cyril, the Great**

\* By stating **‘He was in the beginning’** and not ‘after the beginning’ the implication is that there was no beginning without the Logos. In proclaiming that **‘the Logos was with God’** the Evangelist intends to indicate the absence of any fault in the relationship between the Son and the Father, since the Logos completely invades His thoughts while God is all pervading <sup>2</sup>.

\* Fearing the inadequacy of our minds, lack of training and inadequate hearing, St. John does not present the title of ‘the Father’ lest we imagine the physical picture and associate that with the presence of a mother as well. Neither does he mention **‘the Son’** so that no one would conceive the Divine as some human being. That is why St. John names Him the **‘Logos.’** Therefore, when you hear about **‘the Word’** you will not imagine something that resulted as a whim: it is, rather, like the word that proceeds from your mind without any external interference<sup>3</sup>.

\* Those who present to us good thoughts concerning such mysteries are actually unable to provide adequate expression concerning the nature of the Most Divine.

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<sup>5</sup> Use has been made of some extracts written by St. John Chrysostom, and taken from the series of treasured manuscripts of El Baramos: *The Interpretation of the Gospel of St. John* by St. John Chrysostom, prepared by Fr Augustinus of El Baramos, 2001.

<sup>1</sup> Homily 3:3

<sup>2</sup> On the Faith

<sup>3</sup> Against Eunomius, book 4:1.

They speak mostly about the brightness of Good's glory and attempt to describe His essence (Heb1:3), the image of God, and that **'in the beginning was the Word and the Word was God'** (Jn 1:1). All these expressions appear to us like gold from a treasure trove, as we have not seen the Divine Person. But to those who are able to perceive the Truth, this is more like **'gold with studs of silver'** (Sg of Sol1:11), than mere brilliant gold. For, according to the Holy Bible, **'the tongue of the righteous is choice silver,'** (Prov.10:20).

Thus we realize that the nature of the Most Divine is beyond any expression we use to attempt to comprehend Him.

Our understanding is comparable to what we set as our goal; yet no one has seen or could see Him except it is through a mirror and in part (1Cor13:12).

This reflects our thoughts or the reflection of what lies in the spirit in a specific manner.

Every word representing these ideas seems to be like a point that needs to be extended since it falls short of adequately expressing what is in the mind....

Moreover, every word that is said in an attempt to explain God seems like a tiny drop that cannot be extended to measure up to its intended target; for it is directed to express the incomprehensible by using limited expressions. It is only through faith in these concepts that it can establish independently a nature that transcends all intelligence<sup>1</sup>.

#### St. Gregory of Nyssa

\* He is proclaimed as the Word, the Son, the Power of God, and His Wisdom: **The Word** since He is without blemish; **the Power** since He is perfect; **the Son** as he is begotten of and proceeds from the Father; and the **Wisdom** for He is one with the Father since time everlasting and one with Him in Divinity. This does not mean that the Person of the Father is one with the Son; for there is a clear distinction between the Father and the Son who comes as a result of birth. Thus the Lord Jesus Christ is true God from true God, everlasting from Everlasting, and perfect from perfect<sup>2</sup>.

#### St. Ambrose

\* There is One God Who has proclaimed Himself through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ: He is God's Word (the Logos). He is not a mere utterance but an essence: He is not a mere vocal means of expression but a Person born by Divine Power<sup>3</sup>.

#### St. Ignatius

The word **'Logos'** was a familiar word to both Jews and Gentiles: Heraclitus recognized it, in about 500 A.D. to mean the all-inclusive mind that rules and controls the universe. This was a popular concept adopted and propagated by Stoics. In Hellenic Judaism, the 'Logos' stood for an independent Person and this idea developed so that it was linked to wisdom (Sophism) (Ws 9:1,2; 18:15). Hence **Philon of Alexandria** incorporated philosophical expressions and Biblical concepts and said that the Logos has come into the world as an example and as an image of Divinity.

\* In the Greek language, *'logos'* has numerous meanings: it means the word, the mind, esteem, and the reason of separate things that depend on all this to come to existence. By all this we proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>4</sup>.

#### St. Jerome

\* We do know that the Lord Jesus Christ was not born in the same way that an uttered

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<sup>1</sup> *The Song of Solomon, by St. Gregory of Nyssa: Transl. Into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 3.*

<sup>2</sup> *On the Christian Faith, Book 1:2:16*

<sup>3</sup> *Ep.ad. Magn. 8:1*

<sup>4</sup> *Letter 53 to Paulinus, 4.*



word is born; for He is the ultimate essence and living Word. He is not uttered by lips and spread to vanish, but He is eternally born of the Father and cannot be described in essence. Therefore, **‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’**: Sitting at the right hand of God, the Word understands the Father’s will, is eternal, and everything exists by His command.

The Word descended and ascended, whereas the word - which we pronounce - just descends and does not ascend.

He utters ‘the Word’ and says: **“I speak what I have seen with My Father...”** (Jn 8:38).

The Word possesses authority, have dominion over everything, for the Father has delivered all to the Son (Matt11:27; Jn 5:22)<sup>1</sup>.

#### **St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* If there had been a time when the Son did not exist, the Father would have been a subdued Light; for if He has no brilliance, how can He be anything other than subdued Light? The Father is constantly present, and so is the Son...for the brilliance is born of the Light. Consequently, Brilliance is as everlasting as the Light from which it is born: Light is eternal and so is Brilliance. Light begets Brilliance, but has He ever existed without His Brilliance?... May you acknowledge that God gives birth to His everlasting Son<sup>2</sup>.

#### **St. Augustine**

The use of ‘with’ here conveys the sense of ‘being with Him eternally’; that is the Word shares with the Father His eternal quality without any separation.

\* **‘The Word was with God’** therefore He is as eternal as the Father Himself for there was no Father without the Word. Rather, God (the Word) was with God (the Father), Each having His own Person.

#### **St. John Chrysostom**

**St. Ambrose** underlines the equality of the Word with the Father. He bases his belief on the fact that the Evangelist mentions the Word before the Father. If the Father were greater with respect to the nature of Divinity, he would not have dared to do so. St. Paul the apostle also follows the pattern when he mentions the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ before the love of the Father (2 Cor 13:4). The order of the words (pertaining to the Trinity) is often the same, hence it is appropriate not to question the order or the degrees. In God there is the Father and the Son united in the Divinity and inseparable<sup>3</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom** responded to the objection of the followers of Arius concerning the equality of the Word or the Son with the Father. They justified their claim by stating that the word ‘God’ is used here without a definite article: **‘And the Word was God.’** This is the same thought that the witnesses of Jehovah adopt currently. The Saint dismisses this claim as he clarifies that the Holy Bible sometimes speaks of the Father and the Holy Spirit without attaching to their names a defining article. Moreover, there are instances when the Son and the Word are referred to as the God and here a definite article is prefixed. Speaking on the same subject, the Holy Bible assigns to the Word the same characteristics of God Who is the Everlasting, the Creator, and the Giver of life and light. For had He been lesser than God, the Bible would have revealed that clearly to avoid any confusion.

\* The Evangelist has not used any expression to indicate limitations, for he does not say: ‘He has a beginning’ but rather **‘In the beginning.’** By using **‘was’** he leads us to the concept

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<sup>1</sup> Essay 11:10.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 68:1

<sup>3</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 5:9:117

that the Son has no beginning. Someone may say: ‘Notice that a defining article precedes the Father (the God), whereas the Son has no article preceding it and therefore He is a god. How then can we explain the words of the apostle: **‘...our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,’** (Titus 2:13); and again: **‘...who is over all, the eternally blessed God,’** (Ro 9:5)?

It is true that here the Apostle refers to the Son without using the definite article, but he does the same thing with the Father, at least in the Letter to the Philippians (2:6), where he says: **‘...who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God’**; and again in the Letter to the Romans: **‘Grace to you and peace from God (with no article) our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,’** (Ro 1:7).... And again when he speaks about the Father, he says: **‘God is a Spirit’** (John 4:24). Indeed, not having an article preceding the word ‘Spirit’ does not negate the spiritual nature of God. Similarly, in the instance where no article precedes the Son, the Son does not become lesser than God<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘He was in the beginning with God’ [2]**

\* By stating that **‘He was in the beginning with God’**, St. John reveals to us that the Lord Jesus Christ shares with His Father the feature of eternity. Hence, upon hearing that the Only Begotten **‘was in the beginning’**, you need to understand that He was before all reasoning creatures or before all ages.

\*The Father has never been without the Word. Indeed, God has always been with the Word, but Each in His appropriate Person<sup>2</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* **‘And the Word was with God’**: The Father and the Son are not one in Person, for Each is a Person that can be perceived in the other due to their unity in essence: He is God from God, the Son from the Father.

\* **‘He was in the beginning with God’**, that is the Son, Who is with the Father, and born from His essence, is the only begotten Son who is referred to by the word ‘He.’

**St. Cyril the Great**

\* The Logos can also be ‘the Son of God’ since He is trusted with the mysteries of His Father, Who is ‘the Mind.’ In contrast, the analogous Son is called ‘the Word.’ Just as the word exists within us and is the messenger to what the mind comprehends, so is the Word of God. For He knows the Father and proclaims that Whom He knows. No creature can enter into a relationship with Him unless He leads him. No one knows the Father except the Son and to whomsoever the Son reveals the Father (Matt. 11:27). As He is the Word, He is the great Counselor on Whose shoulders dominion rests (Is 9:6 LXX). He became King as He suffered and carried the Cross. The Book of the Revelation speaks of the Word, the Faithful and the True riding a white horse (Rev 19:11): I believe that He is coming to abide in us in order to clarify the Voice of Truth that He carries (mounts)<sup>3</sup>.

**Origen**

**Origen**, reports that the prophets of the Old Testament enjoyed the Word of God that was revealed to them (Ho.1:1; Is.2:1; Jr 14:1). Hence, it is reported: **‘The word of the Lord that came to Hosea the son of Beer...’** (Ho 1:1). The word Hosea means ‘the Savior’, and Beer means the ‘wells’; hence everyone who has enjoyed redemption is a child of the wells that flow out of the depths of the wisdom of God. He is Wisdom’s child, and according to the Holy Bible: **“...wisdom is justified by all her children,”** (Lk.7:35; Matt.11:19). Concerning the Father, the

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<sup>2</sup> Homily 4:1

Bible says: **‘And the Word was with God’**: it does not say ‘The Word came to God’ for the Word is eternal with the Father<sup>4</sup>.

\* Nevertheless, the Word came to mankind who could not have previously accepted the journey of the Son of God, and Who is the Word. On the other hand, the Word did not come in order to be with God and as though it had not previously been with Him; for He has been always with the Father. In that context, the Bible says: **‘The Word was with God’** (Jn.1:1), since He did not come to be with God<sup>5</sup>.

\* The same verb **‘was’** refers to the Word when He was in the beginning and when He was with God. He was never separate from the beginning and never departed from the Father. To reiterate, He did not come to be in the beginning as someone who was not there in the beginning. Moreover, He has not changed from being non-existent with God to being existent with Him: He has been there, since time everlasting and before all ages: **‘In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God’**<sup>1</sup>.

\* Additionally, by His coming to the prophets, He shone upon them with the light of Knowledge and granted them to perceive, as though with their own eyes, matters they could not comprehend before His coming. As for His being with God, the Word is God for He is with Him<sup>2</sup>.

Origen

**‘All things were made through Him**

**And without Him nothing was made that was made’ [3].**

The Evangelist presents the Word as the ‘Creator’ for by Him all was made, and without Him there was nothing that was made. St. John speaks about this only after clarifying the eternal relationship between the Father and the Word. Hence, the Father and the Son (the Word) and the Holy Spirit are intrinsically united: the absolute love and life. This Divine Nature that overflows with love does not need a heavenly or earthly creation to achieve love in a practical way. Love operates among the Divine Persons since eternity: the Creation is the result of overflowing divine love. It did not occur as a necessary instrument to achieve God’s love but, rather, it is the fruit of that love. What we say about the Creation is also true of Redemption since it is the New Creation.

The eternal Word is the Creator and the Redeemer: He achieves the will of God that is at one with the will of the Son.

In saying **‘All things were made through Him’**, He is distinctly set apart from all heavenly, human, and material creations: He is the Creator of everyone and everything wherever it may be.

**‘...through Him...’** underlines that through Him all came into being, or he Created all. The verb **‘was’** here, as used in the Greek text, has a different meaning from its use in the context of **‘the Word.’** Here it indicates creation while it refers to the Almighty Presence when used in conjunction with ‘the Word.’

The preposition **‘through’** is used to convey that He was the means, the path, and the sustainer. Indeed, He has created and continues to plan for His creation as He cares for it and guards it. This is how St. Paul the apostle expresses this thought: **‘For by Him all things were created... through Him and for Him...and in Him all things exist,’** (Col.1:16, 17;

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<sup>4</sup> Commentary on John, Book 2:4 -8.

<sup>5</sup> Commentary on John, Book 2:8

<sup>1</sup> Commentary on John, Book 2:9.

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on John, Book 2:10.

**'...upholding all things by the word of His power,'** (Heb. 1:3); **'...for in Him we live and move and have our being,'** (Acts 17:28).

**St. John Chrysostom** finds that the Evangelist focuses on the unified work of the Word and the Father in the course of the Creation. He explains that St. John intends to reveal the divinity of the Word and His equality with the Father. Hence he says: **'...and without Him nothing was made that was made,'** in order to affirm that the role of the Word in the Creation is fundamental. Without Him, it would have been impossible to achieve the Creation or sustain its continuity.

When Moses the prophet speaks about the Creation, he says: **'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,'** he was worried that someone would think the earth is eternal and so he ascertained it had a beginning and it is the masterful work of the Creator. If the Word had been a creature, the Evangelist would have affirmed his being created rather than speaking about Him as the Creator of all.

\* Who could commit such a mistake and proclaim that the One who creates and makes all things is at the same time a creature? I wonder: Has God created Himself? ...who could think in this way? God in His wisdom has created all things (Ps104:24). If that is so, how can we assume that wisdom is created of itself? <sup>1</sup>

**St. Ambrose**

\* If you assume that the expression *'through Him'* indicates that He is lesser since it makes of the Lord Jesus Christ an instrument used for creation, then hear what (David) says: **'Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands,'** (Ps 101(102):25). What he says about the Father as a creator also applies to the Son: he would not have said this if he had not believed Him to be the Creator and not just another's helper. Hence the expression **'through Him'** is used for the sole reason that the Psalmist has: no doubt that the Son was not born. Concerning His title of Creator, this underlines that He is no lesser than the Father in any way. Listen to how He speaks about Himself: **'For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will,'** (Jn.5:21)<sup>2</sup>.

\* Do you not agree that by adding: **'...and without Him nothing was made that was made'**, St. John has ended all the difficult issues? The statement: **'...and without Him nothing was made that was made'**, is complemented by: **'All things were made through Him...'** Hence, he embraces all things the mind can comprehend (things that exist in the intangible world) yet do not include the (the Holy) Spirit...

Lest someone says: "If everything was made through Him, then the Spirit was born as well"; I answer: "I am convinced that what was born was born through Him: whether it is tangible or intangible or in the heavens. That is why he did not use an absolute expression such as 'All things ', but he said **'All things..., made,'** referring to creatures. As for the Spirit, he is not a creature...do you not see the accuracy of his teachings... he has excluded the Holy Spirit from all other creation.

As St. Paul had received the same grace, he writes in the same Spirit and says: **'For by Him all things were created...'** (Col.1: 16). Notice here the same accuracy for the same Spirit (the Holy) has stirred this soul as well. None of the creatures are excepted from being the work of God...**'whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers.'** The expression 'whether' is all-inclusive and underlines that there is nothing else to be understood other than this: **'All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was**

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<sup>2</sup> Hom 5.PG 59:37

made'<sup>3</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Could the Word be made by God? No, Because He too was with God since the beginning. Are the things that God has created different from the things that the Word has created? No, because all things were made through Him. By what means were they created by Him? Because in Him was life and before creating them life existed. What has been created was not done by life but by the Wisdom of God, and before creating them, life existed. That which is created moves on and transpires, whereas that which is found in Wisdom can never transpire<sup>4</sup>.

\* If you say: '**All things**' then you will not be lying since this Word is called the Wisdom of God; and as it is written: '**In wisdom You have made them all**' (Ps.104:24)<sup>5</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* The bride regards attentively the hand of the bridegroom as it represents his power to work, saying, "**My beloved put his hand by the latch of the door...**" (Song of Sol 5:4). Yet it is impossible for human nature to embrace the infinity of divine nature, and the bride says: "**And my heart yearned for him,**" (Song of Sol 5:4)...every soul is astounded at her capacity to comprehend the dazzling works made by God for they transcend human capacity. This is due to the inexplicable and incomprehensible Divine Nature that makes these wonders. Every living creature is the product of this Hand that appeared by the latch. That explains why St. John cries out in his Gospel saying: '**All things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made that were made,**' (Jn. 1 :). Isaiah the prophet expresses the same thought and calls the hand the power of God to work: "**For all those things my hand has made, and all those things exist,**" **says the Lord** (Is.66: 2). The mind is unable to comprehend such achievement: the beauty of the heavens with the stars and the sun, and the rest of the wonders of nature. However, the human heart fears the power of God. If man is unable to understand all the works of God, then how can he comprehend God Who is above all that is in the creation?<sup>1</sup> =====

\* Let us go back to these verses and benefit from the above so that they echo the words of the friends of the bride: "**What is your beloved more than another beloved, O fairest among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved that you so charge us?**"

Let us listen attentively as our veils have been lifted up: let us turn towards the Truth with our inner eyes.

How does the bride describe to her bridesmaids the One she is seeking?

How does she describe in words the stature of the One for whom she is yearning?

How does she prepare the virgins for the One they do not know? On the one hand, Christ has not been created yet there is an aspect of Him as a creature: we know that the One not created is eternal and found before the world was established, and that He is the Creator of all. On the other hand, there is an aspect that is created as He was formed according to our lowly flesh (Phil 3:21). We might understand these words better by examining them in the light of the Holy Bible: We know that **in the beginning was the Word, that He had always been with God, that the Word was not created, and that without Him nothing was made that was made**' (Jn 1:1-3). The Word was with God and the Word was God, and through Him all things were made. We also know that Jesus Christ was born, that is, He became flesh and dwelt among us. His incarnation clearly revealed his greatness: He is God, the only begotten Son of God who

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<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St. John, Hom. 5:2.

<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 3:4

<sup>5</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 67:3.

<sup>1</sup> Song of Songs by St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 11.

abides in the Father's embrace. He appeared in the flesh, and according to St. John: **'...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth,'** (Jn.1: 14)<sup>2</sup>.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

**\* All things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made':** since we believe that everything was created through the Son, therefore we cannot consider Him to be one of the whole (of the creation). Indeed, He is totally different for He does share the nature of the created beings. We do confess that He alone is by nature the true God.

**\* He did not receive power from someone else to create, but He is the power of God the Father. The only Son Who does everything with the Father and the Holy Spirit. For everything proceeds from the Father by the Son. If the Son were created separately from the Father, the Son would not have been able to say: "I am in the Father and the Father in Me,"** (Jn 14:10).

St. Cyril, the Great

**St. Augustine** says that some - such as the followers of Manni - believe that Satan has created certain creatures, such as flies for example. He answers such believers, as the followers of Manni, that God is the sole Creator of all things. He has created even these creatures that appear to be insignificant or harmful, for the well being of men and to dismantle him of pride. [You need to know, my brethren, that these creatures have been created to restrain our pride by presenting hardships for us. Thus God diminished the pride of the people under Pharaoh by sending flies, and frogs; rather than tanks or lions: He humbled them as they submitted to the most insignificant of creatures<sup>1</sup>.]

St. Augustine

**'In Him was life, and the life was the light of men' [4].**

The Evangelist draws a distinction between **'life' as a creative element** and **'life'** that is created and temporal. He speaks of the Word not just as a living Person but as **'life'** as well. This is what the Lord Jesus indicated when He spoke of Himself as being born before all time: **'.... to have life in Himself,'** (Jn 5:26). For He is the essence of the incomprehensible life. Hence the Evangelist says: **'...the life was manifested'** (1Jn 1:2), and this is through incarnation.

Creative life grants life to others, **"For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will,"** (Jn5: 21). It is not that there is life in Him, but He is life itself. Hence **'All things were made through Him.'** The Bible says: **'...that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life...'** (Deut 30:20). The Psalmist also sings: **"For with You is the fountain of life; in your light we see the light,"** (Ps 36: 9).

**'...and the life was the light of men,' [4].** When we receive Him as our life, we become enlightened. Moreover, we realize that our temporal life on earth is a divine gift that motivates us to be attracted to 'eternal life' where the brightness of eternal glory shines. In heaven, we will be with the Lord Jesus Christ and know Him fully. We will enjoy seeing Him, become united to Him, and rest steadfastly in Him, and ultimately, we will have attained eternal life: **'And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent,'**(Jn 17:3).

Just as the Word is the creative Life and Giver of created life, He is also the essential

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<sup>2</sup> Song of Songs by St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 13.

<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 1:15

Light inherent in the divine nature and the One that cannot be approached. He shines upon us with His grace so we consequently become a light that reflects the radiance of His light wherever we go. When the Lord declared Himself to Saul of Tarsus, Saul said: “...**a great light from heaven shone around me, and I fell to the ground...**” (Acts 22:7).

\* The Evangelist calls Him both ‘**the Light**’ and the ‘**Life**’; for he freely grants us light. It is light that proceeds from knowledge and the life that arises from it. The use of one name, or two, or three, or more is insufficient to teach us about God. We need to be ready to comprehend His mysterious features through numerous means<sup>2</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**St. John Chrysostom** believes that since the Lord Jesus Christ is Life or the source of life, He can only be eternal. Otherwise, who could have granted life if He Himself did not exist at some point in time?

\* He is life...that has no beginning and no end; and therefore is truly Life as should be. For if there had been a time when there was no Life, then how can other life be formed if Life itself did not exist?!<sup>3</sup>

\* St. John says about the Lord Jesus Christ: ‘**In Him was life...**’ so that just as the Father possessed life within Himself, He gave His Son the same innate possession of life.

St. John did not say: ‘And the life was the light of the Jews’, but he put it in an all-inclusive way, thus: ‘**...and the life was the light of men.**’ For the light was not for the Jews alone, but it was offered to all in general. They came to this same knowledge, as this light was set to shine on all.

You may wonder: what is the reason that led him to omit the addition of ‘angels’ to men and rather chose to say ‘**...and the life was the light of men**’? We say: Because what he said at the present time is offered to all mankind: He came to them to carry the glad news of good gifts<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Nothing that has been created has been made without Him; for He is the life that made the creation possible<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Hilary, Bishop of Poitier**

\* ‘**In Him was life...**’: He grants the creation the blessing of existence, and He also grants the blessing of continuity. Out of His goodness, He grants eternity to creatures who do not possess it innately. Hence He becomes the life to everything that came into being so that it continues to exist within the limits of its nature.

\* If the Son were not of the essence of the Father but rather from an external origin, then He would have been subordinate to the Father just like other creatures. **But how then could He give life to all, while He is among all that has been created?** ... How can we interpret these words of the apostle, St. Paul, concerning the nature of God: “**...who gives life to all things...**” (1 Tim 6:13). How can the Son be a creature and at the same time be able to give life to all...then the creation would be able to give life to itself and would not need God at all. Moreover, there would be nothing to differentiate between the divine nature and other creatures. Indeed, the creation would be like God and have power to do the same work as God.

\* If the Son is not of the essence of God the Father...then how could the Psalmist

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<sup>3</sup> Homily 4:3

<sup>1</sup> Homily 5:3

<sup>2</sup> On the Trinity 2 (20)

conceive the amazing wonder of Him who is by nature God: **“In Your light we see light,”** (Ps.36: 9). **If the Son, as a creature, shines on all things created, then the creation would be shining on itself and would not need the light of God, her Creator.**

**St. Cyril, the Great**

\* If anyone wishes to possess the Word, and if anyone wishes to have the Word, he does not need to search outside himself for something to offer: he needs to offer himself. By doing so, he does not lose himself in the same way that someone would lose the price of something he has bought<sup>3</sup>.

\* He who possesses the Word, let him offer himself: that is the price of the Word. It is said that he who gives does not lose himself, but, rather, possesses the Word and is devoted to Him. Indeed, he wins his own soul too as he comes to the Word who is his own Creator<sup>4</sup>.

\* The Bible speaks about Wisdom and says: **“She is the radiance of the everlasting light...”** And in another passage: **“She is a reflection of eternal light, a perfect mirror of God’s activity and goodness,”** (Ws 7:26)...let us draw a parallel from this to find a common factor between two elements as this will enable us to comprehend the fellowship found in the Eternal. Light proceeds from fire, and light produces fire. Hence we may wonder which is the result of the other? Every time and as we light a candle, we will have to remember that there is something intangible and indescribable: we know that a candle needs to be lit in the darkness of this world...**present to me a fire without radiance and I will believe that the Father existed been without the Son<sup>2</sup>.**

**St. Augustine**

\***Origen** believes that the Messiah first came spiritually and then came physically. He came in the Old Testament to those who were perfect, and who had become mature and were no longer children. They were not in the custody of teachers and educators: they had matured in the fullness of their spiritual time (Gal.4: 4). Such is the case of the patriarch fathers and the prophets who contemplated the glory of the Messiah. Just as the Lord visited the perfect ones before the tangible journey He made in the flesh, He likewise does not visit those who remain children after He has come, and who do not wish to become mature<sup>2</sup>.

\* If we understand that **‘In Him was life’**, the One who said: **“I am...the life,”** (Jn 11: 25), then we will say that no one who lacks faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is alive. Moreover all those who do not live for Him are dead. Their lives are spent in sin rather than for the Mind (Logos): in other words, it is a life of death<sup>3</sup>.

\* Let us study the expression: **“He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living...”** (Mk 12:27). This is equivalent to the statement: ‘He is not a God of sinners, but a God of saints’.... He is the God of the fathers and of all the saints. No one can find a record anywhere that mentions that He is a God of any wicked man. Therefore, and since He is the God of saints, and that He has been described as the God of the living, we may state that the saints are alive, and that those alive are saints. **Indeed, no one can be considered alive unless he truly exists as a saint<sup>4</sup>.**

\* If the life is equivalent to **‘the light of men’**, then no one existing in darkness is alive; and no one alive exists in darkness. Indeed, everyone who is alive is also in the light and everyone in the light is alive. Consequently, only the one who is alive is the son of the light, and

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<sup>3</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 67:1.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 67:11.

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on John, Book 1:37-38.

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on John, Book 2.115



the son of the light is the one whose deeds shine before men (Matt 5:16).<sup>5</sup>

\* St. Paul says that there was ‘darkness and now there is the light of God,’ (1Cor 2:14-15). Hence, **it is possible for darkness to be transformed into light**. This is not hard for someone who believes in the potential of man to change, and to become better. ...Or get worse<sup>6</sup>.

\*It is possible for the One who possesses the light of men, and who gives its rays to fulfil works of light and is the the light of knowledge (Ho.10: 12 LXX). We also need to consider the opposite aspect, which suggests that, every wicked act, but still called knowledge, does not proceed according to the truth, and as such has darkness as its basis<sup>7</sup>.

### Origen

\* This kind of light affects the mind but not the senses: it enlightens the soul itself. The Lord Jesus Christ explains this: **“No one can come to Me unless the Father Who sent Me draws him,”** (Jn 6:44). On this theme, the Lord proclaims that He (the Son) is the One who gives ‘light’ [9] and therefore, if we hear such a saying about the Father, we should not think it speaks of the Father alone for it applies to the Son as well. The Lord also says: **“All things that the Father has are Mine,”** (Jn 16:15)<sup>1</sup>.

\* **‘And the light shines in the darkness,’ [5]**. He designates death and sin as darkness since the light of the senses does not shine within the darkness but rather shines on the outside of it. As for the preaching of the Lord, it shines in the midst of oppressing sin and dispels it. By undergoing death, He conquered death, and healed those who really believed in Him. That is how neither death nor sin can conquer the Word. It is radiant everywhere and shines with the power due to Him<sup>2</sup>.

### St. John Chrysostom

\* The Light of the mind is more sublime than the mind and surpasses all minds. This is the Life through Whom everything was made<sup>3</sup>.

\* Do not be in darkness, O mankind, and do not be unbelieving. Do not exist in darkness, in wickedness, in covetousness, in greed and lusting for the world: this is darkness. **The Light is not absent, it is you who are absent from the light**<sup>4</sup>.

### St. Augustine

**‘And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it,’ [5].**

The work of the ‘Sun of Righteousness’ is to shine with His light upon the world, yet He does not oblige those sitting in darkness to receive His light. A man who rejects the light, and holds on to darkness, becomes a darkness that cannot comprehend or tolerate the light. Whereas a man who accepts the light becomes a light to the world and cannot tolerate darkness.

Since the Word incarnate is ‘the true light’; then Satan who has forsaken the source of light has become ‘darkness.’ He exerts himself to attract all mankind to his kingdom and consequently have dominion over them. That explains why the Lord called him ‘the power of darkness,’ (Lk.22: 53).

The kingdom of darkness is established in the absence of the true light. That is when mankind is separated from the divine Word and therefore have no “life”, no ‘light’, no ‘truth’, and no ‘peace.’ This is where deeds of darkness occur, such as spiritual death, denial, lies,

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<sup>5</sup> Commentary on John, Book 2: 132.

<sup>6</sup> Commentary on John, Book 2; 136

<sup>7</sup> Commentary on John, Book 2:158

<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, Hom. 5:3.

<sup>2</sup> Homily 5:3

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 3:5

<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate3: 5.

hatred, dissensions, corruption, etc...

Darkness can neither comprehend the light nor tolerate it. Hence it takes a hostile stand as an attempt to prevent the light from touching it. The darkness imagined it could eradicate the 'Sun of Righteousness' by crucifying Him. It did not realize that through the Cross it has destroyed itself, and that consequently the 'Sun of Righteousness' shone on those who sat in the darkness: **'The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined,' (Is 9:2).**

\* **'Darkness'** is the nature that needs to be enlightened- that is the created nature...he considers that the reasoning creation lacking the divine nature is darkness. Hence it is incapable to produce anything independently and with its own potentials.

\* The Word shines over all things that are able to receive His rays and His light.

\* The Word, that is the Son is unknown to darkness. This is because the reasoning creature living on earth, that is man, has worshipped the creature rather than the Creator (Rom 1:25). He did not comprehend the light for he did not know the Creator.

#### St. Cyril the Great

\* Light shines in the darkness, and in this life, and in the body. At the same time, darkness pursues it, yet it will not defeat it. I mean that the opposing power continues its shameful attack against the actual Adam but it collides with God and gets defeated. Hence by tearing darkness away, we get close to the light, and consequently become fully light and the children of the perfect Light<sup>1</sup>.

#### St. Gregory, the Theologian

\* St. John says: **"...the darkness did not comprehend it"**: for it is impossible to have a defeated Messiah. Moreover, He cannot live in souls that do not want the light. However, do not be disturbed if the light does not embrace all, for He does not abide forcefully or by intimidation. Indeed, as a result of a person's will and acceptance, God brings His light to him. Do not close your doors in the face of that Light for you will enjoy great happiness. However, this Light descends due to faith, and when it comes it richly enlightens the one receiving Him. Moreover, if you lead a pure life that is worthy of the Light, He will continue to dwell within you. The Lord promises that: **"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make Our home with him," (Jn 14:23).**

A man who closes his eyes cannot enjoy the sun's light. Similarly, no one can share and enjoy the Eternal Light unless he opens up his soul's inner perception and strives to keep his focus steadfast in every possible manner.

How can this be achieved? When the soul is cleaned from all desires: for all sin is darkness- a deep darkness. This is clear in the way people unconsciously and secretly commit sin: **"For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed," (Jn 3:20).** **"For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret," (Eph 5:12).** Moreover, a man living in darkness knows neither friends nor foes: he is unable to make a distinction among the nature of things. That is typical of a man living in sin. Thus a the one who seeks to make huge profits does not distinguish between friend and foe; a covetous man carries hatred even to those closest to him; and a plotter is in constant conflict with everyone in common...

Briefly, a sinner is no better than a drunkard or a madman. Just as wood, lead, silver, gold, and precious stones appear to be similar at night due to the absence of light and thus hindering the perception of any distinctions among them, so is the one who leads a corrupt life:

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<sup>1</sup> Oration 39, on the Holy Lights (Epiphany), 2.

he is unable to make a distinction and comprehend the grandness of self control or the beauty of philosophy (wisdom)<sup>2</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* He who strays away from the true Light, that is moving away from God, becomes blind immediately. Yet, he does not realize the result and his judgment even though it has actually been delivered already<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* The Psalmist expresses our yearning: **‘Woe is me, that I sojourn in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar! My soul has dwelt too long...’** (Ps 120:5; Vulgate 6). ‘Kedar’ means ‘darkness’, and darkness represents the actual world, for we are told: **‘And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it’**<sup>2</sup> [5].

**St. Jerome**

**‘There was a man sent by God, whose name was John’** [6].

The verb ‘was’ in Greek means ‘became’ as opposed to ‘was’ that occurs in verse 1: ‘the Word was...’ where it conveys ‘being’ in the sense that He was and is timeless

The Holy Bible does not say: ‘God sent John the Baptist’ for the focus is on the mission itself: **‘...a man sent by God...’** The aim of that mission was to bear witness to the divine Word who is the Light shining upon those sitting in the darkness.

\* Since you are told that John has been sent by God, then do not think that he speaks of his own words. Rather, he speaks with the words of Him who has sent him; and therefore he is called an angel: **“Behold, I send My messenger...”** (Malachi 3:1). Note that the virtue of the angel is that he does not speak of his own words<sup>3</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe,’** [7].

St. John the Evangelist is preoccupied by the proclamation of the person of the Messiah: that we may believe in Him, and consequently enjoy the everlasting Life as our Light in this world and glory in the life to come. For this purpose, he presents numerous witnesses and we note the repetition of the verb ‘to witness’: it occurs 33 times throughout this Gospel as well as the noun ‘a witness’ that is repeated 14 times.

Concerning ‘the witness’ the reference is to: the witness of the Father for Him (5:31); the witness of the Lord Jesus for Himself (8:14); the witness of the Holy Spirit (15:26); the witness of the Lord’s deeds (5:36); the witness of the fathers and the prophets (5:39); the witness of John the Baptist (1:7); the witness of the disciples (15:27); as well as the witness of the Samaritan woman and the Samaritans to Him (Ch 4); that of the blind man whose sight was restored (Ch 9); and after His resurrection, the testimony of Thomas.

**Origen** says that the ‘voice in the wilderness’ witnessed for the Word. He presents six testimonies:

1- He witnessed to His greatness as He comes after Him even though He is the Eternal Who preceded Him. He is the Giver of all gifts and the Informant about the Father (Jn 1:15-18). All these expressions include in the testimony of St. John the Baptist who came before the Messiah, not, as some believe that part of it is the testimony of St. John the Evangelist.

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<sup>1</sup> *Sermon on N.T. Lessons*, 67:5

<sup>2</sup> *Letter 39:3*

<sup>3</sup> *Homilies on St. John*, Hom. 6:1

2- His witness before the messengers sent by the priests and the Levites coming from Jerusalem (Jn 19:1-27).

3- For a third time, he testifies to the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ and indicates that he is unworthy to loosen the straps of his shoes (Jn1: 26-27), while He is there among them and they did not know Him.

4- On the next day, St. John the Baptist testifies that He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Jn 1:29).

5- His witness after he saw the Holy Spirit descending and resting upon Him (Jn 1:33-34).

6- For the sixth time, he witnesses before two of the disciples that He is the Lamb of God (Jn 1:35-36)<sup>1</sup>.

\* Someone might ask: What does all this mean? Is the testimony of a slave to his master valid?... I answer by telling the words that the Lord Jesus Christ gave to the Jews: **“Yet I do not receive testimony from man...”** (Jn 5:34). If you would ask: If Christ did not need this testimony, then why did God send John the Baptist?! I say response is: He did not send John because He needed His testimony for this is a serious blasphemy. Then why? The Evangelist tells us himself: **‘...that all through Him might believe...,’** Do not think that John the Baptist bore witness in order to add some credibility or trust in the Lord. No, he did so in order to make those of his own nature (human beings) to believe<sup>2</sup>.

#### St. John Chrysostom

\* The Evangelist did not assume the role of being the sole witness to the Lord Jesus Christ; for although it is a true testimony yet he did not want to disobey the Law (that requires two or three witnesses)...this is particularly important as he is proclaiming matters that are above the grasp of the human mind. For that reason, he brings in St. John the Baptist to join him and bear witness.

\* A veiled opinion spread among some people, that St. John the Baptist was not a real man, but one of the heavenly angels, vested by flesh, and sent by God to preach to people. This is a myth that resulted from misinterpreting the words of God, saying: **“behold, I send My messenger, and He will prepare the way before Me,”** (Mal 3:1 ;). Because these people had abandoned the truth, they had misunderstood the meaning of the word ‘angel.’ It means a servant or a messenger while it does not specify the real essence of that servant.

#### St. Cyril the Great

**“He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness to that Light,” [8].**

\* The Baptist chose to live in the wilderness and away from the pleasures of the city. He proclaimed his steadfast adherence to a life of virtue. Hence he progressed to the pinnacle of righteousness to which no man could attain. This led people to be amazed at his style of living and some even imagined him to be the Messiah...Some imagined him to be the Light Himself.

\* These words are reported about St. John the Baptist: **“He was the burning and shining lamp...”** (Jn 5:35). Although saints are said to be lights...yet we do not deny the gift that they have received from ‘the Light.’ Note that the light is in the lantern and does not come from it. Similarly, the light of the saints does not emanate from them: it is the result of the Truth that hence they **‘shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life (Phil 2:15, 16).**

#### St. Cyril the Great

\* St. John the Evangelist does not say these words for no reason otherwise his words would be of no value. He does so to dismiss any doubt as commonly thought that the witness is

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on John, Book 2:212-218.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, Hom.6: 1.

greater than the One for whom he testifies. Therefore the Evangelist immediately, and from the beginning, dismisses these assumptions and unearths them. He reveals the identity of that witness, the identity of Him for whom he witnessed, and the distinction between the two<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* John was a light, yet he was not the true Light. If he had not been enlightened, he would have suffered from the darkness. However, he became a light by his being enlightened<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“That was the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world,”**  
[9].

This was a popular expression used among the Jewish teaches, every newborn child sees the light of which he was deprived while he was in his mother’s womb. Here the light means the new life since the newborn is blind and at his birth he sees the light. In other words, at his birth he is introduced to a new life that is different from the prenatal condition. Similarly, the Lord Jesus Christ shines with the light of His presence upon a new world that everyone, who is born spiritually, enjoys.

St. Cyril the Great considers that faith is the lamp, and the incarnate Word of God is the light. He says: [God’s Word is the subject of our belief: He is the Light. The lamp is faith, while He is the true light that shines to every man who comes into the world (Jn 1:9)]<sup>3</sup>.

The word **‘true’** implies the sole Light that has the power to reveal the One Who is wholly Truth, and informs us of the divine mysteries. Indeed, He is a perfect and constant Light, that is never interrupted. This true Light is the sole One who can enter into the knowledge of the Father, the true God (Jn 3:17). He offers Himself to us **the true and perfect divine Truth, the true Bread** descending from heaven, **the true Vine** with Whom we can enjoy unity as branches of Him, who is the Vine. Through Him we can become true **worshippers**: worshipping Him in spirit and in truth.

He is the Light **‘...which gives light to every man who comes into the world...’** [9]. He wishes to save everyone and to attract him or her to the Truth. He does not wish to conceal Himself from anyone, yet He does not obligate any to accept Him.

St. John does not say ‘He gave light’ but, rather, that He **‘gives light’** as this is a constant situation: the door of His love is constantly open. Indeed, He descends to everyone to invite him to enjoy His light. Hence everyone is entitled to receive and enjoy Him.

He is the Light that enriches everyone receiving Him by granting him divine enlightenment that surpasses the mind. As for those who reject Him, they are like those whom the sun has hit in their weak eyes and blinded **“He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts”** (Jn 12:40) And as the Lord said: **“For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind,”**(Jn 9:39).

**‘...who comes into the world...’** does not refer to ‘every man’ but to ‘the true Light’, for the Word, the true Light, came to the world in the flesh. Human discernment didn’t occur, but in the same way as the sun shines on our earth from afar. This happened by His coming to our world and appearing among us.

\* Where are they who claim that the Lord Jesus Christ is not a true God? He is called here **‘the true Light’**, the Truth itself, and Life itself.

\* If He gives light to every man who comes into the world, then how do we still find

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 6:1.*

<sup>2</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 2:6.*

<sup>3</sup> *In Ius. 11:33-36.*

large numbers who are not enlightened yet? Because not all have become acquainted with the dominion of the Lord. Then how does He give light to every man? He gives light to all and according to the person's capacity to receive light within himself. As for those who reject or who shut off the eyes of their minds and refuse the rays of that Light, then their darkness is not due to the nature of the Light. It is due to their wickedness, which has turned them away from the Light<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* We will become like the Light as we come close to the light of the true Christ. According to the Lord's words, if we leave the dark atmosphere of the world and live in the heights, we become lights (Jn 9: 5; 1:9). The true Light that lights in the darkness descends to us. However, if the filth of sin covers our hearts, it darkens the brilliance of our light<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa**

\* Anyone who originates from nothingness does not possess the power to progress. However, the rays of the

Light that proceeds from men is granted to them when they become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). Thus, when they become the image of the divine nature they are called lights and each becomes a light.

\* Since the Son is the splendor (rays) of the glory of God the Father, He is consequently the true Light.

\* Since the mind of man is considered a lamp, and this is how the Psalm refers to it: **"You will light my lamp"**; then why is it said that we are light? Because a lamp receives its light from another source. Since the only Son is the sole One who shines in the darkness that is within us then He is the true Light; while we are definitely not the true light.

\* If the Son is not truly the sole Light, and that this is also a feature of all creatures as well, then how do we explain these words: **"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light," (1 Peter 2: 9-10)**. So why is there darkness within us? And what is this darkness that we were living in, if we are truly the light?

\* The Holy Bible frequently speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ as the divine Light or the Light of the Father (Ps 4:6; 97:11; 89:15; 112:4; Is 60:1; 42:6; 2:5; Jn 12:35 -36; 1Jn 2:9-10).

**St. Cyril the Great**

\* The light of the sun that is visible to us sheds its light upon everything - even upon the smallest and least significant animals. Similarly, righteousness and wisdom are the true Light, and the mind may be blocked and clouded from perceiving this Light and it gets confused as a result of some prevalent anger. Just like the sun that sets down upon man's anger, so is the case with this ship when the Lord is absent from it. Everyone shakes as a result of his own storms, wickedness, and evil desires<sup>3</sup>.

\* The Lord Himself shone as gloriously as the sun. His clothes became white as snow, He Himself shone as the sun. Thus He indicated that He is the Light who gives light to every man who comes into the world. Just as the sun is important to the physical eye, so is the Lord vital to the eyes of the heart<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 8 PG 59:48.

<sup>2</sup> On Virginité, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 25:5.

<sup>1</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 28:2.

**St. Augustine**

\* A righteous and enlightened person enjoys constant daylight throughout his life. His light cannot be touched by darkness. He gives praise to God seven times a day for he has sublimated himself above this world that has been created in six days.

When I attain the Lord's Paradise, and contemplate on the reason for the creation and God's wisdom, I acknowledge that His rulings are altogether justice.

**St. Didymium, the Blind**

**'He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him', [10].**

This is so amazing! He has created the world through his power, and He has descended to it to be in our midst. He sends His Light to us and to be within us. However, the evil world has rejected Him and chosen to walk in the darkness of ignorance rather than in the light of knowing Him.

If a person walks in darkness, he cannot justify himself. His darkness is not caused by His Creator. It arises out of his evil will and actions which have rejected the true Light.

\* St. John speaks of the Lord and says: **'He was in the world, and the world was made through Him....'** By these words, the Evangelist carries us upwards too. He leads us beyond all time and into the presence of the only One. Anyone who hears that the world was made through Him is obliged to acknowledge, confess and worship Him. Even though a person could be extremely insensitive, or hostile, or waging war against the glory of God.

**St. John** says: **'...and the world did not know Him,'** for there are those who have deviated and cannot perceive distinctions. They have wrestled and become wild to the greatest extent; while there are others who have come to know Him.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* **'...and the world did not know Him,'**: not because He is unknown but because the world is weak. The Son shines, yet the creation disperses the blessing. The Word granted the creation the power of sight so that all may perceive, through nature, that He is Lord. However, the creation has abused that gift and has turned all living things into stumbling blocks that obstruct meditation on the Lord. Creatures have become egocentric and have buried the gift of insight through negligence.

\* Truly, the world is condemned for its ingratitude, and its inability to comprehend God...the Prophet expresses this reality as he quotes these verses in reference to the children of Israel: **'So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes,' (Is 5:4).**

**St. Cyril the Great**

\* The world that the Lord has created is not the same one that has not known Him.

What is the world that He has created? The heavens and the earth.

How is it that the heavens did not know Him whereas the sun grew dark as He suffered on the Cross?

How is it that the earth did not know Him whereas it rumbled and shook as he hung on the Cross?

**'The world did not know Him,'** as we are told about its ruler the following: **'...for the ruler of this world is coming and he has nothing in Me,'** (Jn 14:30). The evil ones and the unbelievers are called 'the world': they are named after the thing they have loved.

**By loving God, we become gods; and by loving the world, we become 'the world.'**

**However, ‘... God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself,’ (2 Cor 5: 19).**

\* All things witness to Him in every way, yet who were those who did not acknowledge Him? They are those who became known as ‘the world’ on account of their love for it<sup>1</sup>.

\* The world was created by Him: the heavens, the earth, and all that is in them. Yet **‘the world did not know Him.’** Those who love the world, and hate the Lord: this is the world that did not know Him. For the world is evil since those who have preferred the world to God are truly evil<sup>2</sup>.

\* **‘...and the world did not know Him,’:** this is not the world that we are told about: **‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself,’ (2 Cor 5:19).**

There is an evil world, as well as a godly world. The evil world consists of the evil ones in it, and the godly world consists of the godly ones. This is what we often notice in a field as we say: ‘This field is full of good seeds,’ or ‘ This field is full of weeds.’ Similarly, we may say that a certain tree is full of fruit while another may say that it is full of leaves. In each case both sayings are true, for the fact that it is full of leaves does not negate that it is full of fruit; neither does its being full of fruit negate that it is full of leaves.<sup>3</sup>

\* The world is evil because its inhabitants are evil; just as a house is evil not due to its walls but due to its inhabitants<sup>4</sup>.

**‘He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him,” [11].**

God has not created man to serve Him for He has no need for the services of mankind. His unique love for mankind, He wants each to be His very own and part of His household. According to Genesis 5:24: **‘...Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.’** Although we do not know how God took him, or where He took him, yet he was removed to be with God forever and to be welcomed as one of the members of the divine family.

The Lord shows His supreme love for believers by relating Himself to them in these words: **‘ I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’** The prophet Moses reveals this relationship as one where God considers a congregation as His own personal portion: **...the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.’** (Gen 7:6). This thought has often been voiced by many prophets as they proclaim that God reserved a people to be His own.

And the Word incarnated descended to live among His own; yet His own did not receive Him. The rejection was a joint one as it came from the high priests, the scribes, the Pharisees, and the leaders of the people. Even one of His disciples joined and rejected Him, and thus these words were fulfilled: **‘...and those who hated me wrongfully have multiplied ....who hate me without a cause,’** (Ps 39:19; Ps 69:4).

\* The Lord heard the prayers of the prophets and was concerned that mankind would be annihilated. Consequently, He sent His Son from heaven as a Healer. According to the prophet: **‘ And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come...,’(Mal3: 1)...where? ‘...to His temple’!** Another prophet, on hearing that, says: **‘O Zion, you who bring good tidings, get up into the high mountain...say to the cities of Judah....’** Say what? **‘Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand,’** (Isaiah 40:9, 10). Moreover, the Lord Himself declares: **“...behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst,”** (Zech 2:10). Nevertheless, the Israelites rejected salvation and consequently He **“will gather all nations and all tongues,”**

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 2:11

<sup>2</sup> *Sermon on N.T. Lessons*, 46:5

<sup>3</sup> *Sermon on N.T. Lessons* 31:3

<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate



(Isaiah 66:18). For' **He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.**" Lord, You will come, and what will you grant to the Gentiles? **"...I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see My glory. I will set a sign among them..."** (Isaiah 66: 19). For when I have been crucified, I grant all my soldiers a seal on their foreheads<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

Reflect on the words of St. John: **'He came to His own'**: not because the Lord needed them since it is inconceivable that the Divine entity would be in need; but He came to extend goodwill to His own people.

St. John emphasizes his admonition to those Jews more poignantly as he says: **'...and His own rejected Him.'** For although the Lord came for their well-being yet they rejected Him. And not only that, but they also threw Him out of the vineyard and killed Him

**St. John Chrysostom**

**' But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,..'[12].**

He had come to His own yet His own rejected Him; yet in the midst of them a few faithful ones were found who received Him. These were driven out of the synagogue and were forbidden to worship in the temple. They were treated as though they were heathen and not as disciples of Moses nor as the children of Abraham, etc...The Jews did not realize that these few were the sacred yeast for the firstborn in the heavenly Church: this was the source of joy for Moses and the rejoicing of Abraham and Jacob. These would serve in the new Temple, and join the congregation of the saints and heavenly hosts.

In the early days, the Lord had called His people **'Israel...My Son. My firstborn'** (Ex 4:22). And now this yeast has occupied that ultimate rank through God's adoption: they have become **'partakers of the divine nature,'**(2 Peter 1:4).

\* The Lord has adopted the slaves and made them brothers. He ransomed the exiled and granted them to be partners in His inheritance<sup>2</sup>.

\* If they are children of God; if they have been redeemed by the grace of the Savior; if they have been bought by His precious Blood; if they have been born from water and the Holy Spirit; and if they have been appointed to inherit the kingdom of heaven; then they are truly the children of God<sup>3</sup>.

\* "The heirs of God are heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ." He has no fear of having others sharing in the inheritance; since His inheritance will not diminish if many others come into it. Indeed, these will become part of His inheritance; and He in turn will become their inheritance. Listen to the means by which they have become an inheritance for Him: **'The Lord has said to Me, "You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give the nations for Your inheritance", '** (Ps 2:7,8). And listen to the means by which He becomes an inheritance for them: the Psalmist says: **" You O Lord are the portion of my cup and my inheritance** (Ps 16:5). Let us attain Him, and may He possess us as our Lord. May we attain Him as our Salvation and Light. What does He grant to those who receive Him? **'He gave them the right to be His children, even to those who believe in His name,'** so that they may cling to the Wood and cross the sea<sup>4</sup>.

\* Do not be astonished, O man, that you have become a son through grace, and have been

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<sup>1</sup> Essay 12:8.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 53:2

<sup>3</sup> Sermon on N.T.Lessons31: 6

<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate2: 13

born of God according to His Word. For, initially, the Word first chose to be born of man in order that you could be born of God according to the plan of redemption. Hence, tell yourself: “It is not without reason that God wanted to be born of man, for He considered me so important and desired to make me immortal: for my sake, He was born as a man who is vulnerable to death<sup>1</sup>.”

**St. Augustine**

\* Just as the Lord Jesus Christ is a true Son, so we also become children of God when we receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Bible says: **‘For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the spirit of adoption,’ (Romans 8:15).** Since we have become children through the power of the Holy Spirit, it is clear that in our Lord Jesus Christ we are called the children of God: **‘...as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God,’** (Jn 1:12).

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic**

\* However, adoption rests upon us, that is it is dependent on ‘our willingness.’ St. John elaborates by saying that many **‘received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believed in His name.’** That indicates that they were not the children of God before they believed. However, by choosing to believe they are qualified to become His children<sup>2</sup>.

\* He is not similar to you who have become enlightened and thereby have become children of God...thus you are children by adoption according to that which is written: **‘...as many as received Him, He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.’** Truly, we have been born by the water and the Spirit, but Jesus Christ was not born from the Father in this way. At the time of His baptism, God spoke to Him, saying: **“This is My Son,”** (Matt 3:17). He did not say, “He has become My Son” but rather: ‘This is My Son.’ Thus God proclaimed that He is the **‘Son’** even before baptism<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* If you ask: what have those who accepted Him received? I will answer: It is in the words of the Evangelist: **‘...as many as received Him, He gave the right to become children of God.’** The Evangelist explains this good gift that God grants to those who receive the Lord and underlined them in a few words: **‘He gave the right to become children of God’**: whether they were slaves or free men, heathen or wise or foolish, whether women or children, elderly, rich or poor, leaders or common people: all become qualified to receive the same blessing. Who could be similarly just and benevolent to mankind?

In spite of that, not everyone is granted that grace: it is only granted to those who want to receive it, and to those who persevere to attain it. Those have the power because they have been offered to become children; and had they rejected the offer, grace would not pursue them or work in them. Granting grace is a gift from God, but receiving faith is up to man.

\* Why did the Evangelist not say: ‘He made them children of God rather than **‘to them He gave the right to become the children of God’**’? To clarify that we need great zeal to maintain the image of adoption which has been impressed upon us at the time we were baptized. This occurs by keeping ourselves free of impurity and depravity. Besides, no one can seize that power from us unless we first deprive ourselves from it. He who has delivered this grace into our hands is greater and higher than all. At the same time, he wants to show that grace does not

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 2:15

<sup>2</sup> Essay 7:13

<sup>3</sup> Essay 11:9

descend on man without his will, but rather fills those who have desire and toil for its sake. Consequently, it becomes in their power to become God's children. Had they not chosen that for themselves, grace would neither have descended upon them, nor would it have acted within them<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘...who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God’ [13].**

For a Gentile to be accepted as one of them, the Jews used to demand that he fulfill three requirements: circumcision, baptism, and presenting a sacrificial offering. By doing so, he would be considered as born again and a member of God's people and worthy to enjoy the divine covenant. However, the Jews of Egypt neglected circumcision and could not be saved from bondage under Pharaoh. They could not enjoy being born again unless they would be circumcised and would offer the blood of the Passover. It appears to be necessary that their blood would mingle with the blood of the lamb in order to be sanctified, saved, and born again. However, when the only begotten Son of God came, He offered mankind to be sons of God, Who adopts them, by a spiritual birth blessed by the Water and the Spirit.

St. John, the Evangelist, reveals the action of the Word in the life of man. He presents Him as the Creator by Whom all things were made. Then, he clarifies that He is the ‘Life’ Who grants life. This is the true Life that shines on man to make him enjoy the light whose source is the true Light. Through this insight God reveals Himself to man who consequently has faith in Him. This faith is accompanied by a new spiritual birth through the Water and the Spirit. It is a new birth granted by the Spirit of God, and through it we become the first born of the new creation and the living yeast for the Gentiles: **‘Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures,’**(James 1; 18).

It is a birth that is unique in its kind as it is not the fruit of natural elements. It neither proceeds from blood or from physical instincts. It is neither the result of a physical will nor achieved through a human plan. Indeed, it is a heavenly birth coming from God on high. It is a birth from God in which the natural element of blood has no share. It is free from all natural instincts, human ability or human planning.

In the Greek version, the word ‘blood’ occurs in the plural and not in the singular to indicate reference to the bloods of the father and mother. It does not refer to the Jewish ‘blood’; for they boasted that they descended from the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of the blood of the chosen people.

This new birth is an issue of great value to St. John: **‘Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God!’** (1 Jn 3:1). **‘ If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him,’** (1 Jn 2: 29). **‘ We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him,’** (1 Jn 5: 18).

\* They have been born of Adam as a necessary process (and they had no choice in that)...but they are born of the Lord Jesus Christ through their own will and through grace.

Mankind is not obligated to be born from the Lord Jesus Christ.

They have not been born of Adam as a result of their own wish. In any case, all those who have been born of Adam are sinners bound by sin; whereas those born of the Lord Jesus Christ have become righteous through Him and not through their own power...

Death was the penalty of sin, and in the Lord was the gift of mercy and not a penalty of

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 10:2*

sin...

There was no blemish in Him that deserved the decree of His death, yet in spite of that He died. In your case, you have faults, so do you reject death? ...

You have died through Adam; therefore arise through the Lord Jesus Christ: both are tasks to which you have to submit.

You believe in the Lord now, therefore do not rebound to what is necessary through Adam.

The bonds of sin will not pursue you forever because the temporary death of your Lord has slaughtered your eternal death.

This applies to grace and to the truth, my brothers; for the Lord has promised both and has revealed them<sup>1</sup>.

\* As mankind is granted the power to become children of God they are born of Him. Note that they are born of Him and are ‘... **born, not of blood,**’ as in the case of their first birth. The first is a miserable birth arising from misery. As for those born of God, what were they before that? What were they born of the first time? Of blood and from the union of the blood of a male and female: from physical union between a male and female. That is what they were born of.

What are they born of now? Of God.

The first birth proceeds from a male and a female, and the second proceeds from God and the Church<sup>2</sup>.

\* They had been born, but they became born of God. The water of baptism is the uterus of their mother<sup>3</sup>.

\* Do not imagine that becoming children of God is such a tremendous issue. He Who is the Son of God became the Son of man on your behalf. If He has become of a lesser stature, He Who was much more; can He not transform that which is lower - that is ourselves - so that we may become of greater stature?

He descended to us, can we not ascend to Him?

For us He accepted our death, will He not give us His life?

For your sakes, He carried your shortcomings; will He not grant you good blessings? <sup>4</sup>

\* He works in this way to allow us to contemplate on the condition of our first birth and its humiliation as it arises from the will of the flesh and blood. We then become aware of the high rank of our second birth through baptism and the honor associated with it since its source is the grace of God. Consequently, we will be greatly cautious to be worthy of the gift granted to us by Him Who gave us this birth. Moreover, we will show great jealousy in the future, as we will be terrified to stain our beautiful garment. This could happen due to negligence or sin and then we would be driven out of the inner circle of the wedding - just like the unwise virgins, or like the one who was not dressed wedding clothes (Matt 22:12).

## **2- THE WORD BECAME FLESH**

The mystery of all ages is that the divine eternal Word became incarnate. The divine united with the flesh and became one of us. Anyone who saw or touched Him saw the glory of the only begotten Son of His Father. This is according to the witness of St. John the Baptist [15] who enjoyed grace and truth [17].

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate3: 13

<sup>2</sup> *Sermon on N.T.*, 70: 4

<sup>3</sup> *Sermon on N.T. Lessons*, 69: 4

<sup>4</sup> *Sermon on N.T. Lessons*, 69:5

**‘And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,’[14].**

What a great way of presenting the Person of the Word as being in the Father and residing with Him even before all time. He is one in essence with the Father and the Creator of all things in heaven and on earth. He is the Giver of life, and the true Light that shines upon those sitting in the darkness. He lifts them up so that they may receive the blessing of by God the Father’s adoption. Now, and for the last time, the Evangelist will mention the name of **the Word** since He has become incarnate and has entered the world of mankind. The incarnation has not happened through a revelation, a dream, or the appearance of a strange guest. Rather, the Word came as a real and perfect person living among His younger brothers. He became incarnate to hide the magnificence of His divinity, which no human eye could gaze at. Yet, through that mystery, He opens the door of knowledge and perception. These allow the believer to enjoy God’s adoption and to get acquainted with His Divine mysteries. He does not wish to leave us hindered by the veil of the body and ignore His reality. That is why He says: **“...blessed is he who is not offended because of Me,”(Matt 11:6).**

**St. John Chrysostom** likens fallen mankind to an adulterous woman. Then the heavenly bridegroom comes disguised in the flesh so that she is not scared and runs away from Him. Rather, she meets Him and enjoys reconciliation with the Father. She accepts union with her heavenly bridegroom as she gets acquainted with His mysteries, and soars with Him into His heavens.

The Word became a person in order to encompass mankind within Him and consequently enable man to enjoy the divine proclamation and divine knowledge. This occurs as a result of union, closeness, and experience.

For our sakes, He dismantled Himself from any visible divine glory. According to St. Paul: **‘...who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men,’** (Phil. 2: 7,8). This dismantling did not result in a change in His divine features since the divinity that united with his humanity did not mingle together. But through the incarnation, the Word became a full and real person while He is the Divine almighty God. In this manner, He opened before us the door to the Holy of Holies: **‘ Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated to us through the veil, that is, His flesh...,’** (Heb 10:19-20).

**‘...and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth....’**

With the above words, St. John the Evangelist carries us upwards into the sphere of divinity where we feel completely incapable of comprehending the mysteries of the divine Word. However, he does not leave us in this state as he does not wish us to despair. Hence, he recapitulates to proclaim that the Word became flesh. He became very close and accessible to us. We can see, touch, and hear Him. Moreover, we can enjoy fellowship and share in His life.

As we contemplate on the Son of Man, we see Him, who is the Word of God, carrying the Cross. In this way, He condemned sin through the flesh as He offers it as a sacrificial offering for sin. It is done for the redemption of the world and for His glory. We see Him on the Cross at the hour of His invisible glory. Thus He carries us, through the Cross, to the embrace of His Father: we become the sanctified and glorified children of God. We have become partakers of the divine nature.

This amazing, crucified Body that has risen from the dead is the mystery explaining our

steadfast adherence to Him Who is our glory, and our eternal life. He offers It to us constantly through the mystery of the Eucharist: for the remission of sins and eternal life to those who partake of It.

\* Let us listen to the words of the holy Gospels and to St. John the Evangelist: **‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.’** St. John goes on to say: **‘...And the Word became flesh....’** It is not right to worship an ordinary human being or to say that the Lord Jesus Christ is God only and thereby denying His incarnation. If He is God, then this is the truth; but if we say that He did not become incarnated, then redemption would be a foreign concept to us.

Therefore let us worship Him as the God of those who believe in His incarnation. There is no gain from saying that He is a human being and not God; or what kind of redemption do we obtain if we reject admitting His humanity as well as His divinity?

Let us confess His presence for He is King and Physician. The Lord Jesus Christ, the King, became our physician as He put on the garment of our flesh and healed what had become sick.

The perfect Teacher of babes became a babe among them (Romans 2:20), so that He might give wisdom to the ignorant. The Bread of life descended to the earth so that He might feed the hungry!<sup>1</sup>

#### St. Cyril of Jerusalem

\* Having proclaimed that those who receive Him are born of God and become His children, the Evangelist explains the condition and the reason for this astonishing honor: **‘...the Word became flesh,’** [14], for the Lord took the image of a slave.

He who is the Son of God became the Son of Man so that the children of men might become children of God.

If the Almighty meets with that which is of lower rank, His honor is not degraded. Indeed, He lifts up the degraded from their utter humiliation. That is how things worked out with the Lord.

His nature was in no way degraded by His humiliation. Indeed, he lifted us up into an amazing glory- we who were constantly residing in shame and in darkness.

This is what happens when a king speaks to a poor person with concern and tenderness. This does not tarnish the king with any shame. Moreover, everyone would look upon him with concern and respect<sup>2</sup>.

When you hear that **‘...the word became flesh,’** do not be disturbed and do not fall. The Lord Jesus Christ was not transformed from His essence into a body. Such thoughts are blasphemous and atheist. He remained the same in essence and additionally took on the image of a slave.

If you were to ask: Then why has the Evangelist used the word **‘...became...’** My answer would be that it served to stop the mouths of the propagators of inventions. Since there are people who say that God’s plans were altogether figments of the imagination and an obsession, the Evangelist added these words **‘...and the Word became flesh.’** He does so in order to stop, from the early stage of writing, their blasphemous words; and to indicate that He took on a real body...

#### St. John Chrysostom

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<sup>1</sup> Essay 12:1

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, Hom.11: 1

**‘He dwelt’**, or ‘resided’ for ‘skeenoso’ in Greek, means constructing a temporary accommodation or tent for a shelter. This is relevant when speaking of the human aspect of the Lord. The Tabernacle or the Ark was symbol for that in the Old Testament. It is a lodge that could suffer death, yet it does not split away from His divinity. This term is also used in Greek to refer to a building that is used for events and celebrations. Hence, the incarnation of the Lord has transformed our lives into an everlasting celebration.

Since man’s heart has become attached to the world, he has imagined that his residence in it is eternal. As a result, he is no longer able to soar, with his heart or thoughts or feelings, beyond the limitations of the earth and of time. However, God proclaimed His yearning to live among men since early times. He wanted them to have a taste of the Creator of heaven and earth and consequently desire to fly to Him and live with Him. In the days of Moses, **‘...the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting and the glory of God filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting...’** (Ex 40 34-35). In the age of the prophets, the Lord proclaims: **“ Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst,” says the Lord** (Zech 2:10). In the land of captivity, where the people lost the promised land as a home, the Lord promised not only to bring them back to live in Canaan but also to make within them a holy dwelling place for Him. This would be better than an earthly place: **“My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people,”** (Ezekiel 37:27).

#### صفحتان لم تترجما ص 124-125

The mother of any person, whoever he may be, becomes pregnant through a physical union. Everyone is born from two human parents: from a father and a mother. As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He was born of the Holy Spirit and St. Mary, the holy virgin.

He came to us but He was not separated from His own Self (His divinity). Yes, His own Self being God will not be split but He took what belongs to our nature.

He came to something that He was not like, and He did not lose what He was like.

He became the Son of Man, and He did not cease to be the Son of God...

He did not come to us as someone who leaves the Father. He also departed from us but He has not left us. And He will come back to us again but He will not leave the Father<sup>1</sup>.

\* So that we may get to see Him, if we still cannot see God the Word, let us listen **‘ ...the Word became flesh...’** and remember that we are flesh. Therefore, let us listen to the incarnated Word who came to serve this end. Besides, it is for this reason that He bore our weaknesses: so that we might accept the powerful words of God, carrying our weakness.

It has truly been called the ‘milk’, for He gives milk to the babes in order to offer the meal of wisdom (the flesh) to those who are mature.

May you feed patiently now in order to refresh the desire of your heart that is filled with eagerness...

Since babes lack sufficient power that would enable them to eat the meat placed upon the table, what does the mother do? She transforms the meat ‘ incarnate’ to the matter of her body and transforms it into milk. She transforms it into an element that we are able to take.

In the same way, the Word became incarnated so that we, being truly like babes regarding food, can be refreshed by the milk.

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 71:5.

However, there is a difference: the mother transforms the food by turning the meat into milk, and the food into milk. As for the Word that lived by Himself, He became flesh without undergoing any change so that He might appear as one texture made up of both <sup>2</sup>.

\* Let us first comprehend the degree to which God has humbled Himself. Hence, let us degrade ourselves and become humble for our own benefit. Let us raise our eyes to the Lord Jesus Christ Who also humbly debased Himself for our sakes and not for His own benefit...

Confess your weakness, and kneel before the Physician patiently.

When you comprehend the degree to which He debased Himself you rise with Him, not raising Himself being the Word, but merely by us realizing Him more and more.

He doesn't increase, but you advance. Consequently, He seems to be elevated with you...

Behold a tree: first, its roots shoot downwards so that it might grow upwards. It establishes its roots underground so that it might stretch its trunk to the sky. Can you strive to grow except by practicing humility? Then, may the Lord Jesus Christ '**dwelt in your hearts; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be filled with all the fullness of God...**' (Eph. 3: 17-19)<sup>1</sup>.

\* Believe that in this flesh the Son of God partook fully of our nature. In other words, He possessed the same reasoning self and the mortal body like ours, except that He was without sin. He partook of our weaknesses but not of our wickedness. Thus, by sharing our weaknesses, He has power to release the bonds of our wickedness and lead us into His righteousness. He had to drink of the same cup of death as ours and so He filled it with the Life that He possessed<sup>2</sup>.

\* He existed before His body existed. He created and chose His mother out of whom He would be made. He created the one who would bring Him into the world (according to the flesh). So why are you astonished? For I am speaking to you about God: '**...and the Word was God....**'

I am speaking about the Word, that is our Lord; and he bears some resemblance to the word spoken by mankind. However, the similarity is far from being an equivalent one and there is no point of comparison. At the same time, there is something that may imply a certain degree of similarity. Indeed, the words that I pronounce were in my heart. They reached you yet they did not leave me. It begins to be with you while it was not in you. And it continues to be with me while it went out to you.

Hence, just as my word came to you while it did not get separated from my heart, so the Word has touched our senses while it has not become separated from the Father.

The word was with me and it took the form of a voice. The Word of God was with the Father and It took the form of a Body. But can I do with my voice what (GOD) can do with His Body? I am not master over my voice when it is emitted, whereas He is Master not only over His Body- to be born, live and act, - but also, when he died - to raise and glorify It in the Father. The Body is the vessel that carries Him and came to us in It <sup>3</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* The Word became flesh to allow us to cross over from the flesh into the living Word. The Word did not cease to remain in Its original state (The Word), just as human nature did not change when He put it on through birth<sup>4</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

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<sup>2</sup> Sermon on the N.T. Lessons, 67:16

<sup>1</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 67:18

<sup>2</sup> Letters, 39.

<sup>3</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 69:7

<sup>4</sup> Against Jovinianus, 2:29



**‘John bore witness of Him and cried out saying, “This is He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me,” [15].**

As St. John begins to reveal the work of the incarnated Word of God, he presents the testimony of St. John the Baptist. Although He came after him, yet He existed before him. Accordingly, Jesus says **“...before Abraham was, I AM,”**(Jn 8: 58). This is because this testimony is fundamental and of great importance. Hence the Evangelist says: **‘John bore witness of Him and cried....’** The word **‘cried’** expresses the action of shouting aloud to attract attention to his proclamation for, it has to do with the life of mankind, its redemption and glorification.

Shouting and giving witness occurred earlier when his mother, Elizabeth, recognized the incarnated Word within the womb of the virgin St. Mary. St. John the Baptist was still in his mother’s womb, when the Virgin Mary went to visit Elizabeth, and St. Luke reports the event in these words: **‘...and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke with a loud voice and said: “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb!”** (Lk 1:41-42).

The Lord Jesus Christ has been called **‘the Son of the Highest’** (Lk 1:32); while John was called **‘ the prophet of the Highest’** (Lk 1: 76). John was a servant of the ‘new covenant’, while Jesus is the Mediator of the ‘new covenant.’ John was a great person, and he had a great name and mission: it’s him who prepared the way for the Lord Jesus Christ. Like all the other prophets, he sits at the feet of God to learn and to receive revelations. As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He exists in the embrace of the Father (Eph 3:11).

St. John the Baptist is the voice crying in the wilderness to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus Christ (Is 40:30).

**‘...for He was before me,’** since He has created me and brought me to life. He is the First, and this is a title that belongs to God as He is the ‘beginning and the end’ (1 Cor 1:17;). He is the Everlasting One (Mi 5: 2).

\* St. John the Evangelist says the following about St. John the Baptist: **‘John bore witness of Him and cried out saying....’** In other words, John proclaimed boldly and loudly, as he was free of all despair.

St. John the Baptist did not proclaim that Jesus Christ is the only Son of God or the true Son. Rather, he proclaimed that: **“This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.”** This is analogous to mother birds who do not teach their young immediately or in one day the whole manner of flying. They would take their chicks out sometimes and at others just let them rest. Then on the following day, they would take them to fly for a much longer period than that of the previous day. In this manner the little ones are eventually led to fly to the desired heights. Similarly, John the Baptist led the Jews to fly and soar above the earth gradually, rather than leading them immediately to sublime concepts.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.’[16]**

**St. Cyril the Great, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Augustine** all agree that these words are not intended to complement the testimony of St. John the Baptist. Rather, they are the words of St. John the Evangelist who wishes to proclaim that He who is filled with grace and truth [14] is the secret of fulfillment of the whole Church. He is the Source of grace that never dries up, the overflowing love that bursts forth constantly. Due to His eternal and perfect fullness, He grace overflows upon His Church so that each of her members may enjoy having and partaking of the Divine nature.

He is the Source of all blessings, and He fills our treasuries (Prov 8:12). We receive from Him all grace just as the riverbeds receive water from the sources. Divine blessings are the grace or *grotius*, that means free gifts (Rom.12: 6). That is because the Father is pleased with the Son, and consequently is pleased with us in Him (Eph 1:6).

**‘...and grace for grace.’** Every gift is a talent that God gives us. We need to trade with it and gain another gift or talent (1Peter14: 10).

**‘...and grace for grace.’** This indicates that the gift of God continues to flow on us constantly for God does not give the Spirit by measure’ (Jn 3:34). It ‘pleased the Father that in Him all fullness should dwell’ (Col 1:19) since the Lord Jesus Christ, is the incarnated Word. He is, therefore the sole One with unlimited fullness; and has power to fill each one according to his own measure. That is what Paul, the apostle, conveys in his words: “ For in Him dwells all fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power,”(Col 2:9-10). Also read: “ ...the fullness of Him who fills all” (Eph 1:23); and “...that you may be filled with all the fullness of God,” (Eph 3: 19); and our terminal goal in Jesus Christ is .”..till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to the perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...”(Eph 4:13).

\* Since He is the true light that shines within each person, then He also enlightened and informed St. John who affirmed and confessed that truly **‘...of His fullness we have all received’** [16].<sup>1</sup>

\* After stating that **‘of His fullness we have all received,’** St. John adds: “ **...and grace for grace**” (Jn 1: 16). The Jews were saved through grace and according to the Lord’s words: “ I have chosen you not because you are many in number but because of your fathers.” If God chose them but not because of their good works, then it is clear that they have received this dignity through grace. We too are redeemed through grace. Yet we are redeemed in a different manner and for a different purpose: we are redeemed in a manner that is far greater and more sublime. Consequently, the grace we have received is not the same as theirs. That is because He has granted us not only redemption from sin (for we are their partners and all have sinned), but we have been granted righteousness, sanctification, adoption, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. We have received these in a more generous and glorifying manner.<sup>2</sup>

**St. Augustine**

\* I believe that He has existed before me, and that He enjoys greater honor with the Father than I do. That is because the prophets who came before me and I have received a great and prophetic divine grace proceeding from His Fullness. Truly, the gift we have received from Him is that of free will.<sup>3</sup>

**Origen**

\* What is the implication of the words: “**And of His fullness we have all received**”?... He says that He does not own this grace because He is a partner; but He owns it since He is Himself the Source and the origin of all goodness. He is Life itself, Truth itself, bearing within Himself, the richness of His righteousness, rather He overflows on others. At the same time this fullness continues and does not diminish as it reaches out to others. Indeed, He constantly keeps overflowing and grants others fellowship of His blessings. He remains as perfect as ever. What I receive is granted through fellowship (that is I receive from someone else. I receive a small share

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 17;9

<sup>2</sup> In John hom. 14:2.

<sup>3</sup> Commentar, on John, Book 6:35

of the total. To me from others, It is as a pitiable drop of water when compared to an infinite downpour or sea. This example cannot really convey fully what we intend to explain...let us imagine a source of fire, and from that source we kindle hundreds of lanterns...doesn't the fire remain the same in its power and fullness, even though it has offered what it possesses to all those lanterns? It becomes clear to everyone that this is true.<sup>4</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* He who grants us grace has also granted us the Law. However, He had delivered the Law through His servants, whereas He Himself descended to deliver grace.

What are the means used to bring mankind under the Law? Their disobedience led them to be subject to the Law; for those who obey do not become subject to it since they agree with it. As for those subjugated by the Law, they remain sentenced by it and do not get relieved.

If the Law subjugates all mankind, they become condemned by it. It hangs over their heads, and reveals their sins without showing any mercy.

The Law issues commands, and the Giver of the Law understands concerning its implications. However, mankind fails when they attempt to depend on their own power to conform to the Law and its commandments. This is due to their bold stubbornness and rashness. They have become guilty as they are not in agreement with it and therefore have become sentenced by it. As a result, they plead and pray to the Giver of the Law for help. On account of guilt feelings experienced under the law, the proud become sick. Consequently, their sickness becomes a confession before the humble ones.

Now, the sick confess their illness, so that the physician may come and heal them.

Who is the physician? He is the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

\* What does “...**grace for grace**,” mean? This involves faith; for God once more becomes our defender and seeks our benefit. As we are unworthy to be forgiven we received such a great gift and this is what is called grace. What is grace? That which is granted freely...for you receive a gift from God: a gift of life through faith; with the promise of eternity and life everlasting as a reward. That is grace!<sup>2</sup>

**St. Augustine**

**‘For the Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’[17].**

The Law in itself is a great blessing and it comes from God. It is intended to prepare the way for the gift of the Gospel. However, there is no point of comparison between the shadow and the Truth. The Truth offers a bounty of blessings: He enriches the poor with heavenly treasures, frees the slave from the power of Satan, carries believers on His Divine Hands in the midst of their sufferings, grants continuous knowledge concerning the divine mysteries, grants power to confront weaknesses, and pours His glory within us in times of humiliation. He has delivered the Law to us, with all its commandments, duties, and prophecies to function as shadows or semi-divine gifts. In contrast, the Lord Jesus Christ has brought us into the depth of the commandments in order to acquaint us with the Creator of heavens Himself hidden behind it. He has carried us so that, as we worship Him, we may experience, through the Holy Spirit, heavens itself. That is where He came from, and that is how we can live His heavenly life.

**Origen**, wonders: ‘If the Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed that He is the Truth (Jn 14:6), then how has **truth come through Him**? This is his answer: All of God’s blessings in the Old

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<sup>4</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom 14:1.*

<sup>1</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate3:2-3*

<sup>2</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. Jon, tractate 3:9*

Testament are symbols of the gift of the New Testament which is '**Truth.**' That explains why the glory of the New Testament is greater than that of the Old Testament (2 Cor3: 10). Hence the discovery of grace has become easier, and its distribution has become more generous. It is in this way that we have obtained the grace of the New Testament as a substitute for the grace of the Old Testament. This is not to say that one opposes the other, but to indicate that the New Testament fulfills the Old and perfects and affirms it within our hearts. As we are changed into the image of God and move from glory to glory, and from one rank to a higher rank (1 Cor 3:18).

The grace we receive is more like a brand that shapes and **conforms us into icons of the Lord Jesus Christ. As such, we continue to grow in a pronounced manner (Romans 8:29).** Hence we become heavenly icons (1Cor 15:49).

**As we enjoy the Lord Jesus Christ, we receive grace and truth. That is so because He is the Source of grace and the treasury of wisdom. Indeed, He who is truth and grace offers Himself to us so that we might enjoy Him**

In the Old Testament, we received the Law in an atmosphere of terror (Heb 12:18). In contrast, we receive the New Testament in an atmosphere of grace: the promises declared in the Old Testament become fulfilled in the New Testament. They are coupled with mercy and truth and according to God's promises.

Having tasted and enjoyed the grace of God, we become more thirsty and wish to receive more. This is because every grace within us calls for more and attracts it to our inner depths. Hence our depths become the target to an endless flow of coordinated divine blessings.

\* The Law was delivered through God's servants, and it sentenced mankind as sinners. Now pardon came from the Emperor, and redeemed sinners<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* In any case, truth comes to mankind through the Lord Jesus Christ. It came in this way to St. Paul and to the apostles. It is not strange to state that although the sole Truth exists, yet from Him flows, as it were, many other truths. For instance, the prophet and king, David, knew many truths; and he says: '----- (Ps 30: 24). For the Father of truth demands many truths of those who possess them and thereby are redeemed<sup>2</sup>.

**Origen**

\* Note the great difference between '**was given**' and '**came**'... the first instance implies an object to be served such as when a person receives an object and delivers it to someone according to an order to do so. In the second instance '**...grace and truth came...**' are appropriately used to convey that it is the King Himself Who has power to forgive sins and to grant grace<sup>3</sup>.

At the time of the war with Amalek in Sinai, Moses' hands were supported by Aaron and Hur, who stood beside him (Exod 17:12). But when Christ came, He stretched His hands on the cross by Himself. Don't you notice how the Law was given, but Truth came.

\* '**No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him**' [18].

We might be correct in saying that this statement is considered the conclusion of the introductory section to the Gospel of St. John. It introduces us to the Divine Word as the Divine Person Who is united and consubstantial with the Father in essence: He has become incarnated for our sakes. Therefore here the two truths are connected: He is the eternal Word and He

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine; *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 3:15.

<sup>2</sup> *Hom. 14 PG 59:83*

<sup>3</sup> *Homilies on St. John*, Hom.14:4

became a true human being for the sake of mankind.

Since He is the true Word and the only begotten Son, then He alone sees the Father for He has existed in the same essence with Him. No other being on earth or in heaven can occupy such a status. There is no point of comparison between Him and Abraham- the father of fathers, or Moses who received the commandments, or any other prophet. There is also no point of comparison between Him and any of the heavenly ranks.

Moses, who is great among the prophets saw ‘the form of the Lord...’ (Numbers 12:8) yet he was unable to see His face (Ex 33:20).

He is the only true Son Who resides within the embrace of the Father and is never separate from Him. He is the reason for His Father’s joy, and He has power to proclaim Him and reveal His divine mysteries and sublime plans. Consequently, it is the Lord Jesus Christ Who has clearly declared to us the Father, Who was never seen by anyone. This is a gift and grace and this is divine truth that we have come to possess through the Lord Jesus Christ: this is **‘knowledge.’**

God is a Spirit, and the body cannot perceive Him. That is why the Son became incarnate; in order to grant us the new spiritual birth that would enable us to perceive Him Who is invisible (Heb ...), and to live through Him. He alone will open the seals (Rev 5:9) and acquaint us with the mysteries of God.

**\* ‘No one has seen God at any time.’**

What about the proclamations in the Old Testament? What do we comment about the voice of **Isaiah the great** who proclaims: ‘...I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple’, [Isaiah 6:1]?

How do we respond to Daniel who says: “ I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame. Its wheels a burning fire,” (Daniel 7:9)?

And how do we respond to **Jacob** when he had the vision and was dubbed as Israel, which means ‘the one who has seen his God ’ (Gen 32:28)?

Furthermore, how do we respond to Moses who spoke to God saying: “Please show me your glory” (Exodus 33:18)?

Many others have seen God, so what does St. John intend by saying: **‘No one has seen God at any time’**? This is what he wishes to convey: These visions fitted His descent and appearance but did not fit His essence. Had these persons seen the actual nature of the Divine God they could not have really seen Him. For the nature of God cannot ever have a form, it cannot sit, stand, or walk: these are all attributes of bodies.

St. John states that all these were examples relevant to His descent and not a vision of the Essence Himself<sup>1</sup>.

Some may object and say: If the essence of the Divine cannot become available to the senses, then why do we speak of these matters?

Well, if I cannot drink the whole river, would that mean that I couldn’t drink of it in moderation and as much as it is convenient for me?!

If my eyes are incapable of absorbing all the fullness of the sun’s rays, will I not partake as much as I need of it?!

And upon entering a great garden, and I cannot eat all its fruit, do you desire me to leave feeling hungry?!

Therefore, allow me to worship and glorify God, our Creator, as we have been granted the divine command that says: .....

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<sup>1</sup> St. John Chrysostom

I now seek to glorify Him without describing Him. Nevertheless, I am aware of my incompetence in fulfilling that task appropriately. Yet, just preserving to achieve that is considered a good exercise and the Lord encourages me in my weakness through St. John's words that say: 'No one has seen God at any time'<sup>2</sup>.

\* It is impossible for us to see God with our human eye since what is not physical cannot come within the sphere of the physical eye. The only Son has witnessed to this- the Son of God Himself says: 'No one has seen God at any time.' Let us attempt to understand what Ezekiel writes about his vision of God (Ez 28:1)? What does the Holy Bible say? He saw '**the form of the Lord**', and not God Himself as He is but in the form of His glory. Now, if beholding the form of God's glory filled the prophets with trembling; then surely a person would die if he attempts to see God Himself. According to the words of God: "...no man shall see me and live," (Ex.33: 20). That is why in His tender mercy, He has spread the heavens as a veil so that we may not be destroyed. This is not my own interpretation, but it echoes the words of the prophet: "Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! That the mountains might shake at Your presence," (Is 64:1).

Why are you astonished to see Daniel fall to the ground upon seeing 'the form of glory'? Note that he fell upon seeing the angel Gabriel although he is only the messenger and servant of God. Yet he trembled, fell upon his face, and was unable to answer the angel although he had appeared to him in the form of a human being...read Daniel 10:9, 16, 18. If the appearance of angels frightened the prophets, then can a person see God as He is and not die?!<sup>3</sup>

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* St. John says: '**The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father.**' This indicates that the authority of the Son is equal to that of the Father. Because the eternal Father never had in His embrace any other but His own essence, then this saying reveals to us that the Son has always been consubstantial and one with Him since eternity.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The one who perceives is also the one who reports, yet his report does not convey all the grandness of what he perceives. Moreover, he is unable to report all what he knows, but as much as the receivers who are under the sentence of death (mankind), can handle <sup>1</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

## **WITNESSES FOR THE INCARNATE WORD**

After this wonderful exposition about the **Incarnate Word who is the Giver of grace**, in the rest of Chapter One St. John the Evangelist presents the witnesses for the person of the Lord Jesus Christ:

- **On the first day** [19-28] St. John the Baptist witnesses before the priests and Levites.
- **On the second day** [29-34] he witnesses upon seeing the Lord Jesus Christ.
- **On the third day** [35-39] St. John the Baptist witnesses before two of his disciples.
- **On the fourth day** [40- 42] St. Andrew witnesses before Simon, his brother.
- **On the fifth day** [43-51] St. Philip witnesses before Nathaniel.
- **On the sixth day:** the practical testimony of the water turned into wine (Chapter Two).

Note the following points related to the witnesses that occur during the first week, and which probably took place after the Lord's temptation and return from the wilderness:

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<sup>2</sup> Hom 15 PG 59: 85

<sup>3</sup>Article 9:1.

<sup>1</sup> Against the Pelagians: 3:12.

**First:** It is similar to what happened at the beginning of the creation- the world was created in six days, and God rested on the seventh day. In the same way, man's nature is renewed and the week ends with the transformation of the water into wine as the Lord fills everyone with joy and renews his life.

**Second:** The Book of Genesis begins with the words: ' In the beginning God created...' to indicate the starting point before the existence of time. A time when the sun, moon, and planets did not exist. A time when there were no ages, seasons, or days (24 hours). Rather, it was periodic batches of time, named as days however long that was. St. John's Gospel begins with the same expression: ' In the beginning', yet he refers to the Eternal Initiator Who has no beginning. Hence the reference is to eternity where the Logos is at one with the Father.

### **3- THE TESTIMONY OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST**

St. John the Baptist has been called a messenger or the angel of God (Mal 3:1). The Bible does not mention that he has performed any miracle, or that he had any visions or divine revelations. Yet he witnessed to the truth, and he led many to repent through the way he adhered to a strict and serious life marked by purity, chastity, and a clear goal- oriented vision. He desired the world to be redeemed and the growth of God's kingdom on earth; therefore he witnessed to the Redeemer, the true King.

The Light did not need anyone to witness to Him, for He witnesses to Himself by His own light. However, if a person shuts his eyes and insists on corrupting his heart with cravings and rebellion he becomes blind. Hence, he becomes needy for someone to motivate him and witness to the true Light. The Baptist was like a night guard who proclaims that daylight has come; so that those sleeping may arise and open their eyes to perceive the light.

St. John the Baptist came to proclaim that the Messiah has come indeed- the One believers have awaited for so long. He has come as the Redeemer of the whole world, and as the Giver of glory to the new Israel who are His people.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the true Light, whereas John the Baptist was the lantern carrying the light of the Lord within it. He was neither a fake, deceptive light; nor the real bridegroom. Moreover, he did not overpower the bride but, being the bridegroom's friend, he was joyful at his wedding and union with his bride.

The Baptist got to know the Lord more deeply upon His baptism and the appearance of the Holy Trinity. Hence he proclaimed that the Lord Jesus Christ is the slain Lamb of God (Jn1: 29; Ex 12; Is 53:7; 1Peter 1:19).

**Now this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, " Who are you?" [19].**

This is the third time in this chapter that the Evangelist presents the Baptist as a witness (1:19, 15, 34- 37). The Evangelist does not focus on the personality of the Baptist but rather on his testimony. Therefore the apostolic tradition documents the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and His work from the moment He is baptized by St. John the Baptist to the day of His ascension (Acts 1:21-22; 10:37-38; 13:23-24).

**'...the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem...'[19]...**Note that the term 'Jews' is mostly used in this Gospel to refer to the Council of the Sanhedrin that represents the top authority of the religious leadership. This Council had formed a committee to investigate the reality of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and to evaluate His actions and popularity. They believed that in doing so they fulfilled a central and intrinsic commandment in the law. Actually, they were not being honest or loyal in their actions; and the following saying can be correctly applied to them: 'But a prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not

commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die' (Deut 18:20).

The priests and Levites mentioned in the above verses were probably members in the Council of the Sanhedrin. They enjoyed a high degree of learning and erudition, and possessed authority and power. Since St. John the Baptist Himself was a descendant of Aaron, and since his father was a priest, therefore it was appropriate to send to him priests and Levites who would investigate his case and (the latter were also descendents of Levi, but not particularly of the tribe of Aaron).

They sent representatives to the Baptist not with the intention of verifying his message and co-operating with him; for they considered themselves to be the great leaders of their people. They were motivated to get acquainted with him out of curiosity; or out of a sense of responsibility- as people in authority- to reveal to the people the true character of a certain person if that was beneficial to them. It could be that they acted in this manner hoping to find fault with him: then they could muffle that voice that originated from a source other than the Sanhedrin that possessed the upper hand in religious matters.

St. John the Baptist was asked by the Jewish religious authority: 'Who are you?' (19,22). He clearly indicated that he was neither the Messiah nor Elijah (2 Kings2: 11), nor the redeeming prophet (Ex 15:18). He proclaimed that he was merely a 'voice' (Is 40:3) predicting the coming of the Messiah [23]. The authorities then asked: "Why then do you baptize..." since you have no official rank in the religious order? He replied that the baptism he performed was not an end in itself; but it was to prepare for a greater spiritual act. It would be performed by Someone coming after him but Who existed before him; and Whose 'sandal straps he was not worthy to loose.'

\* They sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem, and these were more dignified than others...

If you are wondering: ' Why did the Jews ask the Baptist this question: 'Who are you?', My answer is that they could not explain why the Baptist submitted to the Lord, whereas many things indicated to them that the Baptist was great and outstanding: First, they were impressed by his origin and his apparent honor and dignity since he was the son of their high priest. Second, by his food and his strict way of life especially his rejection of all mundane possessions. He was awesome in his clothes, in his food, and the living conditions which he had chosen throughout the past years and which he had spent in the desert. In contrast, what they could see in the Lord was the opposite of all that: they considered the Lord's origin contemptible and they lost no chance to show it in their words as they attacked Him on many occasions and said: " Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?" (Matt 13:55). The statement also implied the place where it was thought He had been born, and which was according to what Nathaniel had said: " Can anything good come out of Nazareth? (Jn 1; 46). Moreover, the Lord was not dressed in camel's hair and had no leather belt around His waist; neither did He eat honey and locusts. Indeed, the Lord led a life that was similar to that of those present; and He had shared meals with evil men and tax gatherers in order to draw them to Him. The Jews could not understand the Lord's behavior and they consequently mocked Him on that account, but the Lord states: " The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children" (Matt 11: 19).

**St. John Chrysostom**

\*While the shepherds guarded their sheep, they found the '**Lamb of God**' whose pure bright fleece was wet with dew from heaven while all the ground around it was dry (Judges



6:37). He is the same whose blood would be sprinkled on the doorposts and would prevent the destroyer of Egypt from striking (Ex 12: 21-23), and would pluck out the sins of the world<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

**He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed: “I am not the Christ” [20].**

From a negative perspective, St. John the Baptist confirmed that he was not that great for he was not the expected Messiah. He would not dismantle the Lord of His status or honor. The Baptist was so awesome that some believed him to be the Messiah. ‘ Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not...’ (Lk3: 15), therefore the Baptist was quick to indicate the falseness of the rumors by announcing that he was not the Messiah.

\* St. John the Baptist was so transcendent that people thought he was the Messiah; and in that respect he gave proof of humility as he denied that he was not that One<sup>2</sup>.

\* Although they were **expecting His coming**, yet when He came they opposed Him and tripped as they would over a slightly elevated stone. Truly, He was still a small stone that had been truly cut without hands from the mountain. This resonates with the vision of Daniel, the prophet, who saw a stone cut out without hands (Daniel 2:34-35)...the blinded Jew did not see the lower stone, and their blindness was so great they could not see the mountain<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**And they asked him, “What then?**

**Are you Elijah?”**

**He said: “I am not.”**

**“Are you the Prophet?”**

**And he answered: “No” [21].**

He confessed that he was not Elijah the prophet even though he possessed his fiery spirit that would prepare the way of the Messiah (Lk 1:17). That explains why the Lord Jesus Christ said that Elijah had come and they had not recognized him (Matt 17:12). Hence he was not Elijah according to the Jews who expected him to descend in the fiery chariot in which he had ascended to heaven; and who would bring to them certain material and earthly privileges. Moreover, he was neither the prophet that Moses had foretold

(Deut 18: 15, 18) nor as any of the prophets of the Old Testament who had been preoccupied with the concerns of Israel and the adjustment of their political status.

\* Had he claimed “ I am Elijah” that would have implied that the Lord will actually come in the second time for judgment, and not for the first time to be judged...he had come as a symbol (Lk 1:17). Elijah would come later on and in the appropriate guise for him; as for now; John had come in his likeness<sup>4</sup>.

\* They did not ask John: ‘ Are you a prophet?’ In other words, if he was one of the prophets; but they asked “ Are you the Prophet?” By using a definite article, they meant the prophet that Moses had foretold and proclaimed (Deut 18:15). And John denied that implication yet he did not deny that he is a prophet. Rather, he denied that he is that Prophet.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“Then they said to him: “Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us?**

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 108: 10

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 4:13.*

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 4:4.*

<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 4:6*

**What do you say about yourself?” [22].**

They asked him for an answer not in order to believe in him or to get baptized, but rather to provide an answer to those who sent them. They expected him to give them a clear answer based on his serious character and lucidity. And they got it.

\* Note how they pressured him to give an answer. They pursued him by their repeated questions; while he tactfully removed all their erroneous concepts regarding his identity in order to present them with the truth<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**He said: “ I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness:  
‘Make straight the way of the Lord” [23].**

He was clear in his answer and he pronounced the truth. He explained that he had come to fulfill what is written in the Holy Book, and that he possesses the authority of the forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ, preparing the way for Him.

St. John the Baptist spoke about himself as the voice crying out in the wilderness (Is 40: 3-4); and when he saw the Lord, he **cried out** [15]. What was his intention in crying out? It does not refer to a loud external sound or screaming. But it refers to the manner of speaking spiritually to God so that He would hear even when the tongue is silent; and by which the word would pierce the hearts of men. The Lord Himself confirmed that the testimony of the Baptist is true as He says: “ There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which he witnesses of Me is true. You have sent to John, and he has bore witness to the truth” (Jn 5; 32-33).

\* Although the rational voice of those who pray does not need to be too loud, yet it should not be weak. It is not appropriate for them to scream or shout, for God does hear all prayer. He tells Moses: “Why do you cry to Me?” (Ex 14:14) although Moses had not cried out loudly (since this is not mentioned in Exodus). However, in prayer, he cried out loud in that voice that God alone does hear.

That is also why David says: ‘ I cried out to God with my voice- and He gave ear to me” (Ps 77:1)<sup>2</sup>.

**Origen**

**Origen** finds that the desert mentioned here refers to the souls who reject God and virtue. St. John the Baptist knew how to speak to their hearts as though by a spiritual outcry.

\* This verse occurs in Proverbs 4: 27: ‘Do not turn to the right or the left’ since in doing so, a person loses uprightness. Hence he becomes unworthy of God’s protection as he has deviated from the straight way. God is just and He loves justice. He beholds the upright (Ps 11:7) and He enlightens those he beholds<sup>3</sup>.

**Origen**

\* When St. John the Baptist needed to describe the might and sublimity of the Lord Jesus Christ, he turned immediately to Isaiah the prophet. In doing so, he validated his own words and gave them credibility.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Just as the sound is a different element from words we speak, so a sound may be issued and have no meaning if it comes without words. Besides, it is possible for the mind to receive

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 16.2*

<sup>2</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 6:101*

<sup>3</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 6:103*

words without there being a sound. This happens when we have inner contemplations. From a certain perspective, John the Baptist's voice carries the same relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Word- He is distinct from the Savior Who is the Word<sup>1</sup>.

### Origen

\* The announcer called the people to stand behind the judge, and John called the Judge to come. Yes, he truly called on mankind to come and meet that humble One so that they might be spared facing Him as the glorified Judge<sup>2</sup>.

### St. Augustine

\* The bride compliments the bridegroom: 'His mouth is most sweet/ Yes, he is altogether lovely' (Sg of Sol5: 16). In other words: the mouth is located below the chin, and out of it the sound comes through the air tract where the vocal cords are moved by the air. As the words of the groom are as sweet as honey, so his voice is the member of the word. And the sound that comes from his mouth may be called the shepherd or interpreter of the Word that Jesus Christ speaks. This will enable us to understand the implication of the bridegroom's mouth. When they asked John the Baptist: 'Who are you?' He answered: ' I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness' (Jn 1:23). St. Paul presents evidence that the Lord Jesus Christ speaks within him and through Him his voice has become sweet (2 Cor 13:10). **All the prophets have presented themselves as members of the voice of the Holy Spirit, and their voices have become sweet as the holy sweetness rested on their vocal cords. Kings and common men eat honey for its many health benefits.** Yet having enjoyed it has not diminished a desire for more. That is why the bride says of her groom: 'He is all desirable always.' This expresses her reason for seeking him. How greatly blessed are the feet of the groom which make him so desirable. His feet are perfect in every good sense while all his other members are just as perfect and desirable. He is desired not only for his eyes, hands, and locks; but also for his feet, legs and voice. Each of the members have a specific importance and this is not diminished when one member has increased importance over the others<sup>3</sup>.

### St. Gregory of Nyssa

**'Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees [24].**

**And they asked him, saying:**

**" Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" [25].**

Baptism was popular among the Jews for they baptized all who became believers in their faith so that they could enjoy all the Jewish privileges. Hence the cunning implication of the question by which they sought to trap him. If he were baptizing the Jews coming to him for repentance, then he would be dealing with them as though they came from pagan nations. Hence baptizing them would be a denial of their being one of God's chosen people. It would moreover be an insult to the honor of the whole of the Jewish nation who would seem to be unable to achieve the sanctity of the people. On the other hand, they feared that his baptism was a Messianic one and related to the expected Messiah. Then, it is being done by someone who is not a member of the priesthood or the Pharisees. As such he has withdrawn authority and separated himself from them.

\* Do you not agree that this is what they were aiming at (so that he would stop baptizing or that he would claim to be the Messiah)? The reason they did not state their aim from the

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on St. John, Book 2:193.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 4:7.

<sup>3</sup> Song of Solomon: Fr Gregory of Nyssa., Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 14.

beginning is that they feared their intentions would be revealed before everyone<sup>1</sup>.

**John answered them, saying:**

**“I baptize with water,**

**But there stands One among you whom you do not know” [26].**

Armed with divine wisdom and a testimony of truth, St. John the Baptist asked them: “Why are you concerned about the baptism I carry out? It almost has no value if compared with the baptism about to take place. My baptism is a preparation for something greater: the baptism of the expected Messiah. The time has come and He is here among you, yet you do not know Him and that is how you sin. I wish you stopped being concerned with me and my baptism, and be concerned rather with the One I witness to and His baptism!” Just as Elijah was armed with a fiery spirit- he did not fear Ahab the king and the wicked Isabel: but he filled them with terror- so the new John boldly and fearlessly makes his statements before the committee that the Sanhedrin sent to him. He did not speak haughtily but with humility and truthfully at the same time.

Up to this very moment, the Lord Jesus Christ is closer to man more than we can imagine, yet we are unable to comprehend that. According to St. Augustine, the Lord lived within him in his innermost depths and above him in the highest of heights; yet he stupidly went out to search for Him while He was within him.

\* St. John the Baptist said about the Lord Jesus Christ: “ **...there stands One among you whom you do not know**” for it was appropriate that the Lord mix with the people as one of them. In this way He acquaints us, on every occasion, with his humble nature that is unblemished with pride.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* May you be worthy of having the Lord Jesus Christ within your midst.

For wherever there is peace the Lord is found; for He is peace.

Wherever there is righteousness the Lord is found for He is righteousness.

May He be in your midst so you can see Him and so that you might not be told that there “ **stands One among you whom you do not know**” [26]. The Jews who could not see Him were those who did not believe in Him. We look up to Him in love and seek Him with faith.

May He therefore stand among you so that the heavens that reveal the glory of God open up to you (Ps 19:1). Then you will learn His will and do His works. He who sees the Lord Jesus Christ finds the heavens opened up as they were opened for St. Stephen (Acts 7:56)<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

**“It is He, coming after me, is preferred before me,**

**Whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose [27].**

It is as though St. John the Baptist is stating that the Lord Jesus Christ has a more honorable authority and a more glorious status.

\* Although John was not performing a spiritual baptism yet he was spiritually inspired to preach and proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ... since they were not baptized in the name of the Lord neither through their belief in the Holy Spirit they could not receive the mystery of baptism<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* It is as though St. John the Baptist is saying: ‘ Do not begin to think that you will find

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 16:2*

<sup>2</sup> *Letters 63:4-5.*

<sup>3</sup> *Of the Holy Spirit, Book1:3:41.*

everything in my baptism. If it were complete, another One would not have come after me to offer a different baptism. I offer a baptism that is just a shadow or image; but One will come and add reality to it. Even the fact that He comes after me merely underlines His honor. If the first baptism were sufficient, there would have been no place for another one. He who comes after me possesses more honor and glory.’ To indicate how impossible it is to make a comparison, he says: “...whose sandal straps I am not worthy to loose”<sup>1</sup>.

#### St. John Chrysostom

\* To carry the shoes of the Lord Jesus Christ is a great matter, yet what is more important is to bow down to all the physical matters related to Him here below (on earth). As we do so, we are enabled to contemplate on His image and resolve all the difficulties related to the mystery of the incarnation... these difficulties are like the strings of His shoes. For one thing, He is the mysterious link and the One Key to knowledge (Lk 11: 52). **Even the greatest among those born of a woman (Lk 7: 28) could not consider himself worthy to solve or reveal these difficulties; since only the One Who has tied and closed can grant, to whom He wishes, the power to solve and open up His shoe lace and all hidden matters**<sup>2</sup>.

\* The statement about the pair of shoes has a hidden meaning and we should not pass over it. I believe that the Incarnation is one of the shoes as the Son took on flesh and bones; then the trip that the Lord took, in the spirit, to Hades and the prison is the other shoe. Referring to the descent to Hell, Psalm 16:10 says: ‘For You will not leave my soul in Sheol...’ (Ps 15:10)<sup>3</sup>.

#### Origen

\* There is no bridegroom other than the Lord Jesus Christ and according to St. John: “He who has the bride is the bridegroom” (Jn 3:29). That is the reason why Moses, Joshua, and others removed their shoes. As for His shoes, no one can loosen their straps for according to St. John: **“I am not worthy to loose (His) sandal strap” [27]**<sup>4</sup>.

#### St. Ambrose

**Pope Gregory (the Great)** borrows from Origen his concept of the shoes. He indicates that it points to the body that is subject to death since the shoe is made of animal skin after the animal has been killed. It is as though the Word, by His incarnation has put on the flesh- subject to death- and so has hidden His divinity. It was impossible for the Baptist to loosen His straps: in other words, until this time it was impossible for him to be acquainted with His mysteries through the spirit of prophecy<sup>5</sup>.

How humble he became! On that account he became so uplifted! For “... he who humbles himself will be exalted,” (Lk 14:11)... ‘He said: Not me, but Him’; whereas they said: ‘We.’ The Baptist is not worthy to loose His sandal straps. How humble would he have been had he claimed his worthiness. However, he revealed his great humility through his words: **“...He, who coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.”** When he said that he is not worthy to do this, the Holy Spirit filled him and so he knew just as a servant knows his Master. Thus he became qualified to be a friend rather than a servant<sup>6</sup>.

#### St. Augustine

**‘These things were done in Bethabbara beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing’ [28].**

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<sup>1</sup> Hom.16. PG 59:94.

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on John, Book 6:172 -173.

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on John, Book 6:174 -175.

<sup>4</sup> Of the Christian Faith:3:10:71.

<sup>5</sup> Hom. 4:7, Forty Gospel Homilies PL 76: 1099- 1103

<sup>6</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 4:9

**‘Bethabara’** or the house of crossing, for he had crossed the Jordan. Some believe that this is the same point where Israel crossed the Jordan on their way to the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua.

\* The Evangelist mentions the place to clarify the power of the Baptist’s proclamation as he announced his amazing confession. He did not witness to the Lord inside a house, or on a corner, but he directed to the Jordan and notified of Him among all those who were present that he had baptized and he announced this extraordinary confession.

\* More correct manuscripts mention **‘Bethabara’** rather than ‘Bethany’ since Bethany does not lie beyond the Jordan. Moreover, it does not lie in the desert but close to Jerusalem<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The meaning of **‘ Bethabara’** could be interpreted as the ‘ House of Preparation’ and this is appropriate for a baptism that is intended to prepare a people for God. ‘ Bethany’ means the ‘ House of Obedience.’ Which one is more appropriate for the one who has been sent as an angel before the coming of the Lord to prepare the way for Him, and to baptize than to consider him to be the ‘ House of Preparation’<sup>2</sup>.

**Origen**

**The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him,**

**And said: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!” [29].**

In this testimony by St. John the Baptist we note the following:

\* The Lord Jesus Christ is **the Lamb of God**. Mankind was in the habit of offering sacrifices to God to appease Him. In this instance, however, God the Father Himself is offering His only Son to be the sacrifice.

\* He is an offering for redemption or a guilt offering that has power indeed to remove sins: He is not a shadow or a symbol like animal offerings.

\* The effect of the offering extends to cover all mankind. This is what is foreign to Jewish thought and the following words by **Yalcut Rubeni** is an example: ‘The Messiah will carry the sins of the Israelites.’ That redemption extends to the whole world is a concept that is rejected by the Jews.

This is the second time that the Lord Jesus Christ meets with his forerunner John the Baptist. The first meeting is recorded by St. Luke the Evangelist (Lk 1:39- 41) when Jesus was still in St. Mary’s womb and John was in St. Elizabeth’s womb. Origen draws a kind of comparison between the two meetings:

First: In the first meeting, the babe Jesus, while still in His mother’s womb, spilled a kind of His glory on the babe John who also was still in Elizabeth’s womb. Moreover, this made such an impression on John’s features that many could not distinguish between the origin and the image. Hence some thought that the Baptist is the Messiah (Jn 1:20), while others thought that the Lord Jesus Christ was John risen from the dead (Lk 9:7:15; Matt 14:2; Mk 6:14).

Second: Since the Lord Jesus Christ is the Word and the Baptist is the voice, then that voice was loud within Elizabeth’s womb. Hence she was filled with the Holy Spirit upon hearing St. Mary’s salutation. That led her to cry out and proclaim her testimony (Lk 1:42). **Origen** says that [this is why the babe John leaped and his mother became like the mouthpiece and a prophetess for the Son (the Word) declaring out loud and saying: “ Blessed are you among

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<sup>1</sup> Hom.17, PG 59:96

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on John, Book 6:206.

women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Lk 1:42)]<sup>1</sup>.

**Origen** wonders why the Savior is called a Lamb although the sacrifices in the Old Testament could be of any three types of animals and two types of fowls: a bull, a sheep, a goat, two turtledoves, two pigeons (Lev 5:6-7, 18). He answers by saying that two young sheep were always offered daily: one for the morning offering, and the other for the evening. [What kind of daily offering can be spiritual and offered to a spiritual Being could be better than the Word that is in the beginning: the Word that is symbolically called ‘**the Lamb**’...He has been sent to enlighten the soul (for this is the morning offering). It is also offered at the end (in the evening) when the mind is preoccupied with heavenly matters?<sup>2</sup>]. That is how we are to start from the very beginning of our lives: by the offering of the Lamb so that we might spend our entire days meditating on His redemption. Consequently, when we near the end of our lives, we will enjoy the same offering, which will carry us into the new day, the uninterrupted eternity. Then we will see Him with St. John the beloved: “...a Lamb as though it had been slain” (Rev 5: 6).

\* What we need to understand is the greatness of the Lamb of God Who was slain to remove the sins of the whole world and not of just a few [29]. He suffered for the whole world: ‘And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world (1 Jn 2:1-2). For He is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe (1 Thess.4: 10). By His Blood He has wiped the judgment pronounced on us, and He has lifted it from our midst so that there is no trace of sins: they have been erased. They have been nailed to the Cross by Him Who ‘has disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it’ (Col 2:14-15). This is how we learn to be joyful when we undergo suffering in this world. We learn that the reason for our joy is that the world has been overcome (Jn 16:33). Certainly, the world has submitted to her conqueror. Hence all nations are freed from those who rule over them and have turned to serve Him; for He saves the poor from the oppressor through the power of His Blood and rescues the needy who have no helper (Ps 72:4-5)<sup>3</sup>.

\*The Lamb of God became a young and innocent lamb taken to be slaughtered in order **to take away the sins of the world** (Is 53:7; Jn 1:29). The One Who grants speech (The Word) to everyone became like a silent lamb standing before its shearers (Is 53:7) so that we might all be purified through His death: this is distributed to those who desire to receive the Truth as a medicine that dispels the influence of the devil and sin. For the death of the Lord Jesus Christ has erased the powers that oppose mankind, and has vanquished with such indescribable authority all sinful living from the existence of every believer<sup>4</sup>.

### **Origen**

\* Although St. John the Baptist baptized the Lord like many others who came to him, yet no one should think that He came to the Baptist for the same purpose, that is to confess sins and wash in the river to repent. To present the correct proclamation once more, God granted the Baptist the time to state: “**Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!**” All doubt would therefore be removed.

It is quite clear that He who is so pure that He has power to remove the sins of others would not come with the intention of confessing sins. Rather, He came to give the opportunity to this marvelous announcer to confirm what he had proclaimed earlier, but in a more specific

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on John, Book 6:255.

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on John, Book 6:270.

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on John, Book 6:285-286.

<sup>4</sup> Commentary on John, Book 1: 233

manner to those who have already heard Him as well as to the many others who would hear him.

St. John the Baptist used the expression “ **Behold**” because many had been looking for Him for a long time and, for the reason he states: and that is to carry their sins. Therefore, when the Lord came toward him, the Baptist pointed out to Him and said: “**Behold**’ here is the One you have been awaiting for so long, and He is **‘the Lamb.’**”

The Baptist called Him the Lamb in order to remind the Jews of Isaiah’s prophecy that says:

‘He was oppressed and He was afflicted,  
Yet He opened not His mouth;  
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter  
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,  
So He opened not His mouth’ (Is 53:7)

He reminded them of the shadow under the Law of Moses in order to lead them to that which is better, and from the symbol to the reality. The sacrifice offered by Moses did not remove the sins at once; whereas this One removes the sins of the whole world. The world was in danger of being destroyed so He descended quickly and saved it from the anger of God<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Be proud of the Lord’s Cross rather than be ashamed of It. While the Cross ‘ to the Jews is a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness’, it is salvation to us (1 Cor 1:23) ‘...the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God’ (1Cor 1:18, 23). As we have stated earlier, the One who died for us was not absolutely a man: He is the Son of God and God incarnate.

Moreover, if the lamb in the days of Moses was able to make the destroyer pass over, will not He who is the **Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world** be able to remove our sins?!

The blood of dumb sheep granted salvation, so how much more powerful is the Blood of God’s only Son to save us?!

If anyone denies the power of the One crucified, let him ask the devils!

If anyone is unable to believe words, let him believe what is tangible. Many have been crucified in this world yet the devils were not fearful. But when they just see the sign of the Cross of the Lord who was crucified for us they tremble. The other men were crucified for their sins, but the Lord was crucified for the sins of others... ‘Because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth’ (Isaiah 53:9; 1 Pet 2:22). Had the Baptist been the only one to make this statement we would have thought that he was taking his Master’s side; but Isaiah has made the same declaration. Although he was not present in the flesh yet he prophesied through the Spirit of the Lord’s coming in the flesh.

Why are we quoting only the prophet here? We also have Pilate himself who judged the Lord and said: “...I have found no fault in this Man...”(Lk 23:14). When he delivered Him, he washed his hands and said: “ I am innocent of the blood of this Person...” (Matt 27:24).

There is also another testimony to the pure Lord Jesus Christ who is without sin, and this is the one given by the thief who was the first to enter Paradise. He rebuked the other criminal and said: “ ...we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this Man has done nothing wrong” (Lk 23:41), and we are all under His authority<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom.17:1.*

<sup>2</sup> *Article 13:3.*



\* ‘The flowers appear on the earth  
The time of singing has come  
And the voice of the turtledove  
Is heard in our land.’ (Song of Sol 2:12).

The bridegroom says: behold the fields are budding with the flowers of virtue. Do you see purity in the beauty and smell of the iris? Do you see the flowers of humility and purple that represent the good smell of the Lord Jesus Christ? Then why do you not make a crown of these flowers? For now is the season for that. Use a branch to make a crown and adorn yourself. Now is the season for pruning. It is the voice of the turtledove that resembles ‘**the voice crying in the wilderness**’ (Matt 3:3). **St. John the Baptist is the turtledove.** He is the one offering us the bright spring that has brought to mankind the marvelous flowers ready to be gathered. He offers them to all who wish to reap them. It is he who has revealed to us the flower coming from the line of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1): “**The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world**” (Jn 1:29). The Baptist is the one who clarifies to us the need to repent for our sins, and to live a life of virtue. The text says: “...the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land”; and is heard calling: “. O land.” The call is for those who have been judged for their sins: the ones that the Bible calls ‘tax collectors and adulterers.’ These have heard the voice of the Baptist while the rest did not accept his teachings<sup>1</sup>.

\* “**I will go my way to the mountain of myrrh  
And to the hill of frankincense**”(Song of Sol 4:6)...<sup>2</sup>

Human nature has been saved from the brand of sin since **the Lamb of God has taken away the sins of the world and has destroyed evil (Jn 1:29)**. Therefore the Song says: ‘You are all fair, my love/ And there is no spot in you.’ Besides, the mystery of this emotion is indicated by the significance of myrrh (Song of Sol 4:6). Then there is the mention of the mixture of fragrant herbs and incense that indicate the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. A person who has fellowship with the Lord and partakes of the myrrh, will receive the sweet smelling fragrance of the herbs and frankincense. For the person who suffers with Him will receive glory with Him (Rom 8:17). Being granted divine glory, he will attain perfect beauty. He will be far removed from all ugly faults and will be separated from sin through and by the Lord Jesus Christ. He has died and has risen from the dead for our sakes and He has glory and power now and forever, Amen.

**St. Gregory of Nyssa**

\*‘**Behold! The Lamb of God**’: He is not a branch extending from Adam; and though He has put on Adam’s flesh, He did not take on his sins. Thus, He is the One who washes our sins away as He has not taken the sin inherent in the dough out of which we are made<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* Ripping (the sin) away is enacted in everyone in the world **so that sin is removed from the whole world**, and so that the Savior may offer a kingdom fit for the Father (1 Cor 15:24). A place where there is no sin and where all submit to the Father’s reign in total submission. Hence the following saying about His Kingdom is fulfilled: ‘...that God may be all in all’ (1Cor 15:28)<sup>4</sup>.

\* We believe that the Lamb is slain in the evening (Ex 12:6), just as the real Lamb, our

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<sup>1</sup> The Song of Solomon: Fr Gregory of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic: Dr George Nawar: Sermon 5.

<sup>2</sup> The Song of Solomon: Fr Gregory of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic: Dr George Nawar: Sermon 7.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 4:10.

<sup>4</sup> Commentary on John, Book 1:235.

Savior, came into the world (Jn 1:29) at the last hour (1 Jn 2:18)<sup>5</sup>.

\* Each Gospel and message brings joy due to a righteous cause<sup>1</sup>.

\* The Lord Jesus Christ is the righteousness that the nation had been expecting<sup>2</sup>.

**Origen**

\* Let us meditate on the benefits of the upright faith. It is useful for me to know that for my sake the Lord bore my weakness and submitted to my carnal emotions. I should say that it was for the sake of each one He became a sin and a curse (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13). For my sake He came in humbleness and submission, and for my sake He is the Lamb, the Vine, and the Rock (Jn 1:36, 15:1; 1Cor 10:4). Besides, He is the Slave and Servant (Mk 10:45; Jn 1:38, 13:4-5; Ps 86; 16, 116:14). He did not know the Day of Judgment, and for my sake He did not know the day and the hour (Matt 24:26)<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

**What does the Evangelist mean by his use of ‘ the world’?**

**Origen**, who believes in the salvation of all mankind, considers that the whole world will be redeemed. He bases his conviction upon the words of St. Paul: “...because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe” (1 Tim 4:10). However, the prevalent idea in the Church at his time was that the indication of the ‘world’ was to point to the world that had already accepted the Savior’s light and had become a consecrated Church through His Blood. **Origen** expresses his concept by saying: **[Some consider that the ‘world’ indicates the Church only since it is the ornament of the world. She has also been described as the light of the world and according to the Holy Book: “You are the light of the world” (Matt 5:14). The Church is the ornament of the world in which the Lord Jesus Christ is the primary Light of the world and her adornment...yet let us correctly say that the Church is the world that has been enlightened through the Savior<sup>4</sup>].**

In the praise offered by the angels in the Prime/ morning Prayers we sing: “ O lord God, Lamb of God, son of the Father, who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy on us.” Some believe that this is the oldest song of praise offered in the East and West. In the West, believers say before communion: “ O Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world have mercy on us.”

**“This is He of whom I said:**

**‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me  
For He was before me’ ”[30].**

St. John the Baptist repeats the testimony that although he came before the advent of the Incarnate Word yet the main reason for that was to prepare the way. However, from the perspective of existence, the Word preceded him and existed before all time and hence greater honor is due to Him.

\* St. John the Baptist states ‘the basic purpose of my coming is to proclaim the General Benefactor of the whole world and to baptize with water. His coming, in contrast, is planned to purify all mankind and to grant the power of the Holy Spirit. The One who comes after me will appear more gloriously for ‘ **He was before me**’<sup>5</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

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<sup>5</sup> *Peri Pascha 25 (Translated by Robert J Daly- ACW)*

<sup>1</sup> *Commentary on St. John, Book 1:28.*

<sup>2</sup> *Commentary on St. John, Book 1:29.*

<sup>3</sup> *On the Christian Faith, 2:11:93.*

<sup>4</sup> *Commentary on St. John, Book 6:301, 304*

<sup>5</sup> *Hom.17.*

**‘I did not know Him  
But that He should be revealed to Israel  
Therefore I came baptizing with water’ [31].**

The ultimate aim of St. John’s Gospel is to present the Lord Jesus Christ to the people of Israel. St. John the Baptist had not yet seen or known Him until then. Therefore he could describe Him only as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

\* Both were related according to the flesh...and in order to dispel the idea that the Baptist honors the Lord because of their kinship he states “ **I did not know Him...**”<sup>1</sup>.

\* O John, how could you qualify to be a witness worthy to be trusted and believed? How do you preach a person that you do not know yourself? However, note that John did not say ‘ I was not acquainted with Him’...he said ‘ **I did not know Him.**’ By saying these words he became more trustworthy. And when we ask the Baptist: ‘ **Then how did you know Him?**’ His response will be: I knew Him when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him...

Could The Baptist have proclaimed the Messiah and led the people easily to Him without the need to baptize? My answer to this is that this could never have happened. Had he cried out and proclaimed His coming without baptism, people would not have come out of the towns in the way these multitudes came. Moreover, they would not have realized by the comparison made between both how the stature of One of them was so sublime. The crowds had come to be baptized and to repent for their sins and not on account of what they had heard about him or about his words. But when they came, he taught them and witnessed to the Lord and explained the difference between his baptism and that which the Lord performed.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Although the Baptist had recognized the Lord while He was still in his mother’s womb (Lk 1:41-42), he certainly did not know everything about Him. Probably, he did not know that this is ‘ He who baptizes by fire and the Holy Spirit’ until he saw the Spirit descending and remaining on Him [33]<sup>2</sup>.

**Origen**

**\* And John bore witness, saying,  
“I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove,  
and He remained upon Him” [32].**

\* Do not imagine that this is an incarnation, but it is an appearance. The appearance came before him so that through it would believe the one who hasn’t seen the Spirit. This appearance was accompanied by the proclamation that the Holy Spirit is at one with the Father and the Son: They share the honor of authority, unite and act mysteriously, and constitute one gift that is granted in baptism<sup>3</sup>.

\* The Baptist appropriately says: “ **...He remained on Him**”, because the Spirit inspires the words or actions of the prophets at His will, whereas He is constantly residing in the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>4</sup>.

\* Do not doubt due to the words: ‘ **on Him**’ as they are used to indicate ‘ the Son of Man’

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<sup>1</sup> Hom.17. PG59:99.

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on John, Book 1:239

<sup>3</sup> On the Holy Spirit, Book 3:1:4.

<sup>4</sup> On the Holy Spirit, Book 3:1:5.

and this was the nature of the Lord at the time of His baptism. According to His divinity, the Spirit does not rest ‘on’ Him but rather ‘in Him’ just as the Father is in the Son and the Son in the Father<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

**Pope Athanasius the Apostolic** says that when the Holy Spirit rested on the Lord Jesus Christ [the purpose is to sanctify us so that we may have fellowship with the Spirit as well<sup>2</sup>].

\* Unless they received the Spirit of the One who, by nature, is the true Son of God, they could not have become His children since by nature, they had been created. To achieve that, ‘the Word became flesh’ so that man could receive the Divine<sup>3</sup>.

\* The Father carries out all His work through the Word and the Holy Spirit. In this way the unity of the Holy Trinity is preserved<sup>4</sup>.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic**

\* I am not speaking about the Lord Jesus Christ in whom the Spirit resides and as though He was granted energy or *energoun ouchos*. Rather, I am speaking about Him as a companion to the One who possesses the same honor<sup>5</sup>.

**St. Gregory of Nyssa**

**St. John Chrysostom** does not hesitate to proclaim that the Lord Jesus Christ was filled with the Holy Spirit. Since He is a Spirit then his very soul is in the same image (considering His incarnation): He is the Word of God as well as the soul’s energy.<sup>6</sup>

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** opposes the statement that the Spirit worked within the Lord Jesus Christ and says: ‘I wish to add to the indication that the Spirit abides in the Lord, that He dwells as a companion equal to Him in honor rather than as someone ‘giving Him power’<sup>6</sup>. It gave **St. Gregory of Nyssa** pleasure to speak about the Holy Spirit as a companion of the Incarnate Word and an informant Who revealed His works<sup>7</sup>.

**St. Cyril the Great** devotes the Anathema 9 to the teachings concerning the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Lord Jesus Christ. God the Word does not need to be filled through the Spirit for He is Holy by nature. In contrast, the body of the Incarnate Word received the Spirit as it contains the Divinity.

\* He is the second Adam who looks like one of us; and He received the Spirit from the Father in order to preserve our nature... the Spirit had departed from us due to sin. Now the One Who knew no sin became like one of us so that the Spirit might remain constantly with us<sup>8</sup>.

\* Due to sin, the Holy Spirit could not be pleased to rest in human beings. But when the Word of God became incarnated He became the new first-born for mankind. In Him alone could the Spirit rest and so rested upon us all<sup>9</sup>.

\* Having become man, He could receive the Holy Spirit. Yet being incarnate and having no sin, the Spirit desired to dwell and remain in Him as He became the first-born of mankind and

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<sup>1</sup> On the Holy Spirit, Book 3:1:6.

<sup>2</sup> Oratio Contra Arianos 1:47 PG 26:108c.

<sup>3</sup> Oratio Contra Arianos 2:59 PG 26:273 A.

<sup>4</sup> Epistola ad Serapionem 1:28-29 PG 26:596 A.

<sup>5</sup> Oratio 41, In Pentecosten, 11 PG 36: 444 B.

<sup>6</sup> In Epistolarm ad Hebroeos Homilia 15:2. PG 63:119

<sup>6</sup> Oratio 41. In Pentecosten. PG 36:444 B

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Oratio Catechetica Magna, 2. PG 45:17 B.

<sup>8</sup> In Joannis Evangelium 2:1, 32. PG 73:265D. - 267 A.

<sup>9</sup> In Isaiam 2:11 PG 70:313D.

possessed a different nature<sup>1</sup>.

\* As His entire body is filled with the invigorating living Spirit, He therefore indicated that His body is a spirit. However, He did not deny that it is a flesh <sup>2</sup>.

#### St. Cyril the Great

\* The Messiah arrives, and the Spirit prepares the way for Him. He comes in the flesh and the Spirit is never separated from Him. He does amazing acts and grants healing through the Holy Spirit. Devils are cast out by gift of the Spirit and His presence demolishes them. The forgiveness of sins is granted by the Spirit, for according to 1 Cor 6:11: 'you were washed, but you were sanctified...in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God'<sup>3</sup>.

#### St. Basil the Great

\* **'His eyes are like doves by the rivers of waters...'** (Song of Sol 5:12). This text expresses the pure spiritual life through the imagery doves. St. John the Baptist saw something similar **when the Holy Spirit descended from heaven and covered the waters** (Jn 1:32). For this reason, a person who is appointed through God is like the eyes of the church's body and it is essential that he wash away any obstacle that impedes his sight. Consequently, he would be enabled to fulfill efficiently the task of supervision and watchfulness. **The Lord tells us that there is many ways to wash our eyes** and not just one; for there are many virtues that represent sources of purification. We should use these to clean and purify our eyes. Examples of these pure sources of water are: perseverance, constant labor, humility, truthfulness, righteousness, discipline and courage, the desire to do good, and being far removed from wickedness. These and other kinds of waters flow from one Source that gathers all their riverbeds into one bed. Through that one bed all the sources are purified of all the secreted reactions<sup>4</sup>.

**'I did not know Him,**

**But He who sent me to baptize with water said to me:**

**"Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him**

**This is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" ' [33]**

\* The Lord Jesus is the Son of God and (although the Gospel's core preaches our adoption as God's children through Jesus Christ) yet the Lord did not preach the Gospel before His baptism.

Since the Lord Himself has waited for the right and appropriate time, do we have the right- as His servants - to contradict this procedure?! (From that time Jesus began to preach) when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the physical form of a dove (Matt 4:17; Lk 3:22). This did not happen so that the Lord Jesus Christ would see and recognize Him, for He knew Him before descending upon Him in that way. Rather, the Spirit descended with a physical aspect in order that John who baptized Him would see and accordingly say: "...but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me: Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit" (Jn1: 33).

If you too are wearing a strong shield, then the Holy Spirit will descend and rest in you; and the Father will speak to you from the high. He will not say: **'This is My Son'** but rather "You have now become My Son." The simple present used in the statement "This is My Son" is applicable only to the Son who from '... the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (Jn 1: 1). Hence He is the only One of whom God would say: "He

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<sup>1</sup> *Dialogus 6. PG 75:1008 C.*

<sup>2</sup> *In Joannis Evangelium 4 PG 73: 604.*

<sup>3</sup> *Liber de Spirito Sancto 19:49 PG 32:157 A*

<sup>4</sup> *The Song of Songs by Fr Gregory of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 13*

is My Son” since He is God’s Son eternally. As for you, it will be told you that “ Now you have become...” because **you are not a son by natural law but, rather, you receive that designation through God’s adoption.** He is a Son since time everlasting, whereas you have been granted that grace just recently<sup>1</sup>.

#### St. Cyril of Jerusalem

\* What is it that St. John the Baptist did not know? It is the power of the baptism granted by the Lord. It is a power that does not get conveyed from God to any other person, but it is clearly achieved in this way. Power does not pass from God to anyone whether the person serving is good or evil. The dove does not retreat from service if the servant is evil but she looks up to God’s power. Since God is righteous, what harm then what can an evil servant do to you?<sup>2</sup>

\* St. John the Baptist knew that Jesus Christ is the Lord, and he confessed that He is the Truth. He also knew that he himself is a truthful person sent by the Truth. This is what John knew. So what did he not know about the Lord Jesus Christ? **That the time had come for the Lord to retain for Himself the power of His baptism and not convey it to any other servant...**so what did he not know? That **the great authority of baptism belongs to God and that He reserves it to Himself whether He is present here on earth or when He is in heaven in His glory and absent in the flesh.** Thus St. Paul and St. Peter cannot say: ‘...my baptism.’ Give attention and listen to the words of the apostles: none of them says: ‘...my baptism’; yet although there is one Message you will find that they refer to ‘...my gospel’ ...so they do not utter the words ‘...my baptism.’ This is what the Baptist got to know, my brethren. Let us learn what he learned from the dove too. For the dove taught the Baptist as well as the Church for she is the one to whom these words refer: ‘My dove, my perfect one, is the only one...(Song of Sol 6:9). May the Dove (the Holy Spirit) teach the dove (the Church)<sup>3</sup>.

\* You tell me that this or that person has baptized you, yet it is through the Dove (the Holy Spirit) we are both told: ‘It is the (Lord) who baptizes you. Who do I believe: the Dove or the kite?’<sup>4</sup>

\* This mystery is most sacred and even if it is performed by a murderous servant it cannot be corrupted or damaged<sup>5</sup>.

\* What was the benefit when you accept baptism by a certain servant and you be unwilling to accept baptism by the Lord?

Since you have come to a servant, would you be unwilling to come to the Lord? If you have accepted to be baptized by a servant, will you be unwilling to receive baptism from the Lord?<sup>6</sup>

\* If the Baptist did not know Him at all, he would not have told the Lord - when He came to the River to be baptized: “ I need you to baptize me, so how is it that You come to me?”...He recognized the Lord through the Dove: it did not concern what he did not know but it concerned what his Informer revealed to him by some manner, and concerning the aspect of the Lord that he did not know. This was done for our sake so that we might discover the Baptist’s position, what he did not know, and what he learned from the Dove<sup>7</sup>.

#### St. Augustine

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<sup>1</sup> Article 3:14.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 5:11.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 5: 8-10

<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 5:13.

<sup>5</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 5:19

<sup>6</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 4:13

<sup>7</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 5:2

\* I believe that we cannot stop seeing that fire when we read that the Lord Jesus Christ baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire [33] according to the words of St. John in his Gospel...That is why Jeremiah, having received the Spirit, says: "...His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back..." (Jer 20:9). What does this mean- I mean that this fire becomes water, and the water requires fire- is this **the gift of the Holy Spirit that burns our sins and washes them with water**? For sin is washed and gets burned<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* He accepted to be baptized by John with this intention: because He accepted what is of lesser value from someone who is of lesser stature, then He encourages us who are lesser to accept what is more sublime<sup>2</sup>.

\* If the Lord Jesus Christ had been the only one who accepted to be baptized by the Baptist, then people would have believed that the Baptist's baptism is greater than that of the Lord. They would have said: ' This baptism is greater for only the Lord qualified for it.' However, the Lord came to be baptized to serve as a model of humility and to call us to receive redemption through baptism.

**The Lord accepted to go through something which was not necessary for Him; yet it was necessary on our account.**

Just to underline that what the Lord received through the Baptist is not to be preferred over baptism through the Lord, others were allowed to be baptized by the Baptist. However, their baptism was not sufficient since they had to go through the baptism offered by the Lord Jesus<sup>3</sup>.

\* The baptism offered by the Lord Jesus Christ is fitting to His nature: it is the baptism of God, a divine one because the Lord is God<sup>4</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**'And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God' [34].**

\* Note that John had baptized and Jesus had baptized too. The words that were pronounced at the time of Christ's baptism could have been intended for the Baptist. However, and in order to avoid any confusion in the minds of those who were present, the Spirit descended and rested on the Lord Jesus Christ.

**St. John Chrysostom**

#### **4- THE TESTIMONY OF HIS FIRST DISCIPLES**

- The testimony of the Baptist that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Messiah [35 -37] won Andrew over.

- Consequently, Andrew's testimony won Simon over and the Lord named him Cephas [42].

- The Lord called Phillip from Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee, and he won over Nathaniel [45-51] an Israelite ' in who is no guile.'

**Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples [35]**

**And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said:**

**"Behold the Lamb of God" [36].**

**'...looking at Jesus...'** We are in great need to look and see Jesus. We need to look to Him in order to see Him looking at us and concerned with our redemption.

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<sup>1</sup> *Duties of the Clergy, Book 3:18:102-103.*

<sup>2</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 5:5*

<sup>3</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 5:5*

<sup>4</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 5:6*

John the Baptist has testified that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God [34]. No one listened to his words nor questioned him as to why or to whom he was saying them. He says it again here: “ This is the Lamb of God!” Yet their mortal senses did not respond, and he found their nature as that of hard ground that would be softened by his care. He would improve their muddled discernment by his words for he toiled with one purpose in mind: to bring them to the Lord. He strove to make them adhere to Him as he knew that if they accepted his words they would no longer need someone to witness to Him.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* When the time came for God to show mercy, the Lamb came.

What kind of Lamb is it that wolves do fear?

Of what kind is that Lamb that when it is slain, a lion is slain too? Since the devil is called a lion ‘ that walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour’ (1 Peter 5:8). By the Blood of the Lamb the lion has been defeated...

This is a great matter to behold: throughout the whole world the lion has been vanquished by the blood of the Lamb, and members of the Lord are saved from the lion’s mouth and united with the Lord’s Body<sup>1</sup>.

\* The Lord wishes to own what He has bought alone. He does not wish anyone to share His possession with Him for:

He has paid a great price in order to be a sole owner.

You make Him a partner with Satan to whom you have sold yourself.

‘ Woe be to those who try to have it both ways’ (Sirach 2:12). Those who give part of their heart to God and the other to Satan.

This angers God as Satan gets a share of the heart. Hence He quits and Satan takes over the whole heart and possesses it. Therefore it is not in vain that the apostle says: ‘...nor give place to the devil’ (Eph 4:27).

Let us therefore, my brethren, know the Lamb and understand the price paid for us<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**‘The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus’ [37].**

When they heard about redemption they adhered to the Savior promptly and without any discussion. Each moment of postponement constitutes an exposure of the soul to danger. Hence it is appropriate for you to go and seek Him without delay.

The two disciples who followed Him were eager to receive and accept the words of grace from His mouth rather than from the mouth of the forerunner. The number 2 stands for love and the two disciples refer to all those who accepted to be completely His followers, and to consecrate their lives to love God and their neighbors. These are the two disciples who urge and motivate us to sincerely follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

St. John the Evangelist recounts the invitation to two of the Baptist’s disciples to follow the Lord. These are Andrew and (most probably) John the Evangelist himself. The first went to call his brother Simon Peter. These are the first three who became the Lord’s disciples. In this way, the Church started on a very small scale that included three members who enjoyed looking to the Lord and be part of His kingdom.

**Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, “ What do you seek?” They said to Him: Rabbi”(which is to say, when translated, Teacher), “ where are you staying?” [37].**

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 7:6.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 7:7.



We always need to give an answer to the Lord's question " what do you seek" in every act, word or thought we are engaged in. Do we seek the Lord in every act? Are we preoccupied to be enlightened by His Holy Spirit? Do we yearn to be in the Father's embrace? Do we seek to develop and strengthen true knowledge, and constantly sanctify ourselves and our inner glory? Do we seek that which glorifies God and the well being of the Church?

This is the constant question that the Lord Jesus Christ puts to every person: What do you seek? Are you seeking worldly possessions, pleasures, men's praise and fake honor? Or are you seeking to be with the Lord wherever He may be? The Lord had no place where He could rest for He lived as a stranger. It is the same for those who seek him for they will live with Him as strangers on earth. Hence it is insufficient to seek the Lord and follow Him from time to time but **we need to stay and remain with Him**. As we get closer to Him, we will enjoy the brilliance of His glory and the wealth of His love; and we will not desire to be ever separated from Him.

We are in need to meet Him and stay with Him. We need to sit at His feet and be refreshed from the springs of His love. We will be enlightened by His Holy Spirit and get acquainted with His hidden and unspeakable mysteries. **St. John Chrysostom** expresses this thought in these words: ' They did not say teach us about opinions and beliefs or other important matters, but they said: Where are you staying?'

When they asked to stay with Him, His immediate was to invite them to come and see so that they could come promptly and without delay: '... **now is the accepted time**' (2 Cor 6:2).

**The Lord knew exactly what was in their hearts when they asked to follow Him, so why did He ask?**

**First:** To grant them confidence so that they would state their desire, to reveal His pleasure at their zeal for redemption and desire to lead a sanctified life, and in order to give them support.

**Second:** To state that He is ready to begin with us on the journey of our souls towards the Truth and eternal glory. Yet He will not begin without our will for He cherishes the freedom that He has granted to us.

\* By granting us His gifts, we learn that He does not withhold our freedom. However, if we begin to seek Him, He will grant us real strength of will (inflammate our own desire for Him) and will offer us many means for redemption<sup>1</sup>.

\* "What do you seek?"...By this question, the Lord makes them relate to Him more. Besides, He grants them greater boldness, and demonstrates to them that they are worthy to hear Him. They were probably shy and afraid since they were unknown to Him even though they had heard their teacher's testimony concerning Him. To help them get over that He puts this question to them rather than invite them silently to the house...He asked in order to grant them serenity and confidence and to remove their anxiety and timidity<sup>2</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Third: St. John Chrysostom** explains: [He gave them great attention and indicated that they were ready and qualified to listen to Him. It is understandable that they felt embarrassed and fearsome, as they did not know Him. He removed all their illusions and fears by asking His question rather than taking them silently to the house].

**Origen** says that after St. John the Baptist had pronounced his six testimonies to the Lord Jesus Christ, it now was the turn of the Word Himself to witness to Himself before the Baptist's

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 18:3*

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 18:23.*

two disciples<sup>1</sup>.

**He said to them:**

**“Come and see.”**

**They came and saw where He was staying, and remained with Him that day (now it was about the tenth hour) [39].**

**St. John Chrysostom** believes that the Lord Jesus Christ loved the two disciples as they followed Him after hearing their teacher’s testimony. Consequently, He engaged in conversation with them on the way and this made them feel they were no longer strangers to Him. Moreover, He sought to grant them the joy of hearing the divine voice.

Oh how much we need to walk with Him along the path of our lives, and to hear His divine Voice. Let us give Him the chance to talk with us. This is similar to what happened to the two disciples after the Resurrection and who were on their way to Emmaus (Lk 24: 13).

**St. John Chrysostom** comments as follows on the conversation that took place with two of the Baptist’s disciples: [May we therefore learn to consider that all matters are secondary to hearing God’s word. We need to stop thinking that it is sometimes not convenient to do so...food, washing, and all matters related to this life may have a specific timetable; but learning the Heavenly teachings do not occur at an appointed time for it is adequate to receive them at all times. St. Paul Says: “ Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim 4:2). And the prophet says: “...in His law he meditates day and night (Ps 1:3) <sup>2</sup>].

The two disciples came to Him at ten o’clock to stay with Him wherever He stays. Those who obey His commandments (the Ten Commandments) proclaim a desire to obey and reside with their Savior each day of their lives. They do not get separated from Him until the day comes for them to meet Him face to face in the life to come.

\* They did not follow Him in a haphazard way, but they adhered to Him<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**St. Augustine** considers that the number 10 indicates the Law as there are Ten Commandments. They went to the Lord Jesus Christ as He is the One who has given the Law and fulfilled it (Matt. 5:17). They wanted to learn the Law from Him who issued it for mercy rests on His lips (Prov. 31:26). St. Augustine goes on to say: [If you are unable to fulfill the Law, then flee to mercy. If you are unable to obey the law then use the promises, the links, and the prayers that the heavenly One has set and organized for He has gone the way of the Law and experienced it]<sup>4</sup>.

**Origen** finds that the Lord invited the two disciples to experience the pleasure of being and living with Him by leading a life of service and meditation. By calling them to “ Come” He invited them to an active life; and by saying “See” He invited them in order to set up the link between work and meditation on Him at the same time<sup>1</sup>.

**‘One of the two who heard John speak,**

**And followed Him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother’ [40].**

In the Greek language the word ‘Andrew’ means ‘ manliness.’ This is an apt naming for a person who follows the Lord Jesus Christ. You need to be eager to enjoy Him and live with Him. According to the Psalmist: “Wait on the Lord, be of good courage ...” (Ps 27:14).

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<sup>1</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 2:219.*

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 18:4.*

<sup>3</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 7:9.*

<sup>4</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 7:10.*

<sup>1</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 2:219*

The Evangelist does not report the name of the other disciple, since he is the writer of the words in this Gospel.

**‘He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him:**

**“We have found the Messiah” (which is translated ‘the Christ’) [41].**

By saying ‘**He Found**’, the Evangelist indicates how Andrew cared for his brother and looked for him so that he would share the new experience he enjoyed after meeting with the Lord. He said humbly: “**We have found the Messiah.**” He did not take the entire honor to himself for he had someone else with him. Yet he speaks proudly and victoriously of the One they have found: they found a pearl of great value and a true treasure. He did not repeat the words of his teacher, St. John the Baptist, who said ‘the Lamb of God’; but he used the words recorded in the holy Bible ‘**the Messiah.**’ To meet with Him constituted the desire of every Jew.

**St. John Chrysostom** considers that the invitation of Andrew to his brother Simon, and the invitation that people extend to each other represents a clear image of friendship in the Lord and of co-operation within God’s kingdom. He says that when God created Adam He did not leave him alone, but gave him a wife to be his companion and helper. Although Eve harmed this fellowship, a wise person can enjoy many benefits of fellowship. These are not limited to relations with the wife and children, but with our brothers. Therefore the prophet says: “Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Ps 133:1). St. Paul the apostle also urges us not to abandon our meeting together (Heb 10:25)<sup>2</sup>.

\* The expression ‘**we have found Him**’ indicates someone striving in order to be with the Lord. Someone who is seeking His advent from above, rejoices for achieving the search and finding Him, and hurries away to give the joyful news to others. This is the role of brotherly love as through a natural friendship and the Lord’s planning, we are able to extend a hand to others and offer spiritual riches<sup>3</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

## **THE INVITATION OF PHILIP TO NATHANIEL**

**And he brought him to Jesus.**

**Now when Jesus looked at him, He said,**

**“ You are Simon the son of Jonah.**

**You shall be called Cephas”**

**(which is translated, A rock) [42].**

Philip received his call directly and not through the Baptist as in the case of Andrew and John. Neither was he called through Andrew in the way Simon Peter was called. Clearly, the Lord uses every possible manner to invite and call His children.

The Lord found Philip just like someone who would be looking for him and wanting to find Him. In Andrew’s case, he did not only witness for the Lord Jesus Christ but went and brought his brother to Him. He wanted his brother to come to the Source, to hear His Voice, and to see His work.

The Lord called Simon by his name and then changed it to indicate his mission as a witness to the belief in the Lord Jesus Christ.

His parents had named him ‘**Simon**’ which means ‘a hearer’ or ‘obedient.’ Actually, he met the Lord in a spirit of obedience and so the Lord called him ‘**Cephas**’ or ‘**Peter**’ since he enjoyed the Rock of faith: the Rock designates the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 10:4) whom Simon

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 19:1*

<sup>3</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 19:1*

Peter loved.

\* You might wonder: But why did the Lord Jesus Christ do that? My answer is: In order to reveal that He is the One who has given us the old Law, and the One who assigned the names and rectified them. He is the One who called Abram as Abraham, and Sarai as Sarah, and Jacob as Israel. He has designated the names of many others from their birth, such as Isaac and Samson. Moreover, He has set names for those mentioned in the prophecies of Isaiah and Hosea; besides adding names to those who had already been named by their parents.

Everyone of those has received a different name. Yet now we all have received one surname and that is the greatest of all names and that is **Christians and children of our God: His friend and His body**. This surname is better than all others for in Him we have sufficiency as He uplifts and quickens us. Thus we become the fastest in doing virtuous acts.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee,  
And He found Philip and said to him:  
“Follow Me” [43].**

The Lord went to Galilee to invite Phillip. The word ‘Galilee’ means ‘migrating’ or ‘proclaiming’ or ‘a circle.’ The Lord wanted to reveal the obligation for disciples to migrate from the sufferings of the present world in order to enjoy the delight of eternal glory. This occurs when the heart moves away from the confusion of temporal matters of this world and experiences sublime heavenly peace or the heavenly circle.

According to **St. Clement of Alexandria**, it was said that this disciple is the same one who asked the Lord permission to go and bury his father when the Lord asked him to follow Him (Matt.: 21-22). In Acts 6:5 his work as a deacon is recorded. Fr Theodorus, Bishop of Koresh believes that he preached in Phrygia (these two areas have the same name); and according to **Eusebius**, Philip is buried in Phrygia Pacatiana.

**‘Now Philip was from Bethsaida,  
The city of Andrew and Peter’ [44].**

‘Bethsaida’ or ‘the house of fishing’ was so called because most of its inhabitants were fishermen. It was an area known for its wickedness (Matt 11:21). Yet there were in it a few who remained consecrated to the Lord, and chosen according to His grace.

The Evangelist does not mention this city haphazardly but to communicate a symbolic meaning: ‘Bethsaida’ or the ‘house of fishermen’ actually indicates that those who accept the Lord’s invitation to follow Him become fishers of men (Matt. 4:19). Indeed and Philip’s first catch was Nathaniel whom he brought to the Lord.

\* According to the Gospel (Jn. 1:44) Philip the apostle came from the same city as that of Andrew and Peter. He was blessed because he was the friend of the two brothers as these were the first to be honored by the Gospel.

Andrew perceived the mystery of the Lord Jesus Christ and followed Him after hearing St. John the Baptist saying: “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Andrew learned where the Lord lived and carried the joyful news written in the prophecies a long time ago and told his brother Simon Peter. Note that a person has to have faith before he can hear. Now the person whose heart is wholly attached to the Lamb becomes sanctified through a name change: hence instead of calling him Simon, the Lord called him Peter, and his name became Peter.

A name change applies also to Abraham and Sarah who went through many spiritual stages and then received the promise of God’s blessings: they became the grandparents of many

nations through a name change.

This is similar to what happened to Jacob whose name became Israel after wrestling for long during the night with an angel.

St. Peter the great disciple developed through the same blessing. Having learned of the faith of his brother in the Lamb of God, he continued through faith and became the Stone. Due to his faith, Philip too deserved to become a friend of Andrew and Peter after the Lord found him. The Gospel says the Lord found Philip who became a follower of the Word of God: “ Follow Me” (Jn 1: 43).

Having being enlightened by the light of faith, Philip invited Nathaniel to come to the Lord, get acquainted with the mystery of faith, and be filled with His light. Therefore Philip said to him: “We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote - Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (Jn. 1:45). Nathaniel received the good news attentively and the mysterious prophecy concerning the Lord Jesus Christ sounded good to his ears. He knew that Bethlehem would be the first place where God would appear in the flesh, and that after that He would live in Nazareth and therefore He was called **the Nazarene**.

By searching the scriptures, Nathaniel learned that the Lord was to be born in the flesh from the line of David and in Bethlehem. Moreover, His mysterious birth had to occur in a stable that had swaddling cloths in which the baby would be wrapped and that there would be a man to look after them. According to the Holy Bible, many Gentiles lived in the region of Galilee (Isa. 9:1). Consequently, Nathaniel was enlightened and said: “ Can anything good come out of Nazareth? ” (Jn.1:46). At this point, Nathaniel came out from under the fig tree that had hidden the Light and he adhered to the One who had cursed the unfruitful fig tree and its leaves dried up. The Word of God testified that Nathaniel was a true Israelite in whom was no guile for he proved to be as pure as our father Abraham (Gen 25:27). The Lord Jesus Christ says accordingly: “ Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile” <sup>1</sup>.

**St. Gregory of Nyssa**

**‘Philip found Nathaniel and said to him:**

**“We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets wrote - Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” ‘ [45].**

Nathaniel and Bartholomew are considered the names for one and the same person due to the following:

A- The writers of the gospels who have mentioned Bartholomew did not mention Nathaniel, and the opposite is also true.

B- The word ‘ Bartholomew’ is not the name of a certain person for it means ‘ the son of Ptolemy’, hence his real name is Nathaniel.

C- St. John the Evangelist speaks of Nathaniel as one of the apostles who went with the others to fish when the Lord appeared to them after His resurrection (Jn. 21:2-4).

Philip’s words reveal his zeal to search the Holy Bible especially the books of the law and the prophets. This inflamed his heart with eagerness to see ‘ Jesus ’ or ‘the Messiah’ who would come from the line of David...and finally he found the One who reveals Himself to those who seek Him.

Philip says that he is ‘ **Jesus**’ or in other words ‘the redeeming Jehovah’ in order to announce to Nathaniel that He is the Savior that the law and the prophets have spoken about for so long. As to calling Him ‘**the son of Joseph**’ it is not to convey that he had implanted Him, but

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<sup>1</sup> Song of Solomon: Fr Gregory of Nyssa. Translated in Arabic by Dr Georgr Nawar: Sermon 15

to confirm that his lineage is the house of David from which Joseph is descended.

**‘And Nathaniel said to Him:**

**Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’”**

**And Philip said:**

**“Come and see” [46].**

\* These words do not come from an unbeliever, nor from someone who deserves to be blamed. He is to be praised...why? And in what manner? Because Nathaniel was interested in the writings of the prophets even more than Philip. He had learned from the Holy Scripture that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem; from the city of David...the character of Nathaniel makes him a person that cannot be deceived easily. Yet he did not dismiss the Person who came to him and he came to the Lord with that great desire that he felt towards Him. Inwardly, he felt that Philip might have been mistaken about the place (and not about the Person)<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

Fr. Bede believes that the word **‘Nazareth’** is appropriately used to refer to the mysteries of the Lord for it could be translated as ‘about purity’ or ‘his flowering’ or ‘separate.’ For the Lord is the holy Savior of the world who is wholly pure and He is apart or separate from any sin. In the Song of Solomon are these words: ‘ I am the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys ’ (Sg of Sol. 2:1); and Isaiah the prophet speaks about Him and says: ‘There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse and a branch shall grow out of his roots’ (Isa.11: 1).

**Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward Him and said of him:**

**“Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” [47].**

The Lord praised him for being an honest Israelite that conveys that he is a real descendent of Jacob who struggled for the sake of the Lord and therefore deserved to be named ‘ Israel’ (Genesis 32: 28). By saying: “ **An Israelite indeed...**” the Lord conveyed that he deserved to be a descendent of Jacob as he not only believes in his God, but also worships Him and struggles to be loyal and sincere. By saying: “ **...in whom there is no guile**” the Lord indicates that in spite of the corruption that characterized the nation at that time yet Nathaniel loyally held on to his faith and way of life, walking righteously and in godliness.

\* It is as though the Lord is telling him: “ Although you are under the shadow of sin, yet I have chosen you.” As Nathaniel realized that he was there under the fig tree and no one else was there, he knew His divinity and answered: “ You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” These words were spoken by the one sitting under the fig tree yet he had not become a dry one for he knew the Lord<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**‘Nathaniel said to Him:**

**How do you know me?**

**Jesus answered and said to him:**

**Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you “ [48].**

**What does the fig tree stand for?**

**First:** Fr. Bede sees that the fig tree sometimes refers to the sweetness of divine love. However, since our first parents made for themselves clothes from the fig leaves, it has come to indicate the tendency to sin and to cover up rather than seek divine sweetness. Hence ‘ Nathaniel’ refers to ‘God’s gift’; while this gift has become corrupted due to its tendency to sin

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 20. PG 59: 116-117.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 39:5.

and to cover it up.

**Second: St. John Chrysostom** believes the dialogue between Philip and Nathaniel occurred under the fig tree<sup>1</sup>.

\* In this instance the fig tree stands for sin...as you know , the first human being covered himself with fig leaves when he sinned. With these leaves they covered up their nakedness as they blushed on account of their sins (Genesis 3:7). What the Lord had created for them as members of their body, they turned into an object of shame. Had wickedness not been involved, nakedness would not have resulted in shame.

**St. Augustine**

\* May Jesus look at me while I am still under the fruitless fig tree, and may my fig tree give forth fruit after three years (Lk 13:6).

**St. Ambrose**

**‘Nathaniel answered and said to Him:**

**“Rabbi, You are the Son of God!**

**You are the King of Israel!” [49].**

When Nathaniel came in touch with the Lord Jesus Christ, he called Him ‘ Rabbi’, ‘Son of God’, and ‘King of Israel.’ The Lord had praised him for being an Israelite in whom there was no guile, and now Nathaniel bows down to accept Him to be King over himself and over all Israel.

According to **St. John Chrysostom**, this recognition is incomplete. Nathaniel said: “ You are the King of Israel”; and he did not comprehend that He is King and Savior of the whole world. Although he had uttered the same words of Simon Peter: “ You are the Son of God” yet the Lord did not bless him as He did Simon Peter. Nathaniel did comprehend neither the divinity of the Lord nor His reality, for he believed He was just a sublime teacher.

**‘Jesus answered and said to him:**

**“ Because I said to you ‘ I saw you under the fig tree’ do you believe?**

**You will see greater than these” [50].**

Some believe that Nathaniel was in the habit of sitting under a fig tree, and do what some Jewish teachers did: sit and read the Holy book, meditate calmly, speak with God, pray for the redemption of his soul and of all Israel. The eyes of God are upon His children especially as they sit quietly to enjoy their meditation on God and on His redeeming acts.

**‘And He said to him:**

**“Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open**

**And the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” [51].**

Some find that this imagery is taken from the procedures followed when a prince would visit a certain country: ambassadors would travel back and forth carrying messages from and to him. Similarly, the heavenly angels who are messengers will be sent to serve their King who has accepted to become incarnated and to walk on the earth as the Son of Man.

While Nathaniel testifies: **“You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel” [49]**, the Lord humbly calls Himself **“the Son of Man.”**

He may be speaking here about His second coming to judge the world.

\* Do you observe how the Lord lifts Nathaniel gradually upwards and away from the earth; leading him to discover that He is not just a mere person?! For how can He be a person when angels wait on Him and ascend and descend to serve Him. That is why the Lord tells him: “ You will see greater things than these” [50]. To confirm that meaning, He presented the service

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 20. PG 59: 117 -118.

of the angels to Him.

What the Lord intended to convey is this: 'Do you think that it is a great issue that you, Nathaniel, confess that I am the King of Israel? So what would you say about Me if you saw the angels ascending and descending for Me? By these sayings the Lord confirmed to Nathaniel that He is Lord over the angels for they descend and ascend as the servants of the Son of their true God.

The angels descended and ascended at the time of the Lord's crucifixion, at His resurrection, His ascension, and earlier when they came and served Him {Matt 4:11}. At His birth, they came to deliver the message:

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men (Lk 2:11). They also appeared to Mary, and they came to Joseph<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* If they descend and ascend to Him then he is there above and here below at the same time. They would not ascend and descend to Him if He were not in the place to which they ascended or here in the place to which they descended ...

Let us perceive the presence of the Lord above and below through Saul. The voice of the Lord Himself came to him from heaven saying: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4) What?...

From where is he speaking? From heaven, therefore He is there.

But He asking “Why are you persecuting Me?” Then He is also down below (since Paul did not ascend to heaven in order to persecute Him)<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**St. Augustine<sup>3</sup>** finds that our perception of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the angels ascending and descending to Him is far more important than our presence under the fig tree or under the shadow of death. Concerning the angels, they are messengers from the Lord and His disciples. For example, Paul ascended when he was taken up into the third heaven while he was in the body or out of it, he does not know, but he heard of matters, which cannot be uttered (2 Cor 12:2-4). He himself descended when he spoke to the people of Corinth who were not spiritual but physical and as children in the Lord who had to be fed with milk rather than with meat (1 Cor 3:1-20). **The one who ascended to the third heaven for the sake of the Lord had to descend for His sake to the people. He had to speak to them in the language of immature children in the same way as mothers would speak to their young children.** He ascended and descended and as he says: “For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you” (2 Cor 5:13).

**St. Augustine says:** [If the Lord Himself ascended and descended, then those who preach about Him ascend through coping Him and descend through preaching<sup>4</sup>.]

## **ADDENDUM TO CHAPTER ONE**

### **DIVINE GRACE (GRACE for GRACE)**

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 21.*

<sup>2</sup> *Sermon on N.T. Lessons 72:6.*

<sup>3</sup> *St. Augustine, On the Gospel of St. John, tractate*

<sup>4</sup> *St. Augustine, On the Gospel of St. John, tractate*



Throughout the whole of his Gospel, St. John the Evangelist presents to us the person of the incarnate divine Word as the **Source flowing with infinite divine grace**. That Source constantly continues to provide grace, especially the gift of creation and God's adoption of mankind plus an endless list of other blessings. The Evangelist says: “ **And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ**” (Jn 1:16- 17). Previously we have published a book in English about Divine Grace in the School of Alexandria. May the Lord enable us to translate and publish it soon. We would like to present here a simplified explanation of Divine Grace<sup>1</sup>.

### **What does Grace mean?**

The fathers of the Eastern Church do not offer any definitions for any theological terms such as grace or other terms. However, they write extensively about the action of grace and its role in the life of the believer from birth to the day he meets the Lord in the clouds.

What occupies the mind of the Church, especially the Church of Alexandria, is the living experience and union with the Lord. This is the pledge for the enjoyment of eternal life. Therefore we are not surprised to find that **Origen** uses the name of ‘ **Christ**’ to refer to His gifts or His grace<sup>2</sup>. In other instances, he calls the Lord Jesus Christ ‘ the Kingdom in one Person.’ This is because anyone who enjoys the kingdom of God is actually enjoying the Divine Word Himself: He is the Giver of grace and the Provider of all needs.

**Benjamin Drewery** has attempted to present a definition of divine grace by studying the many writings of **Origen**. He states that we could presume that had we asked Origen to provide a definition for grace he would have responded as follows: ‘ Grace is the power God grants freely; yet it is not granted unconditionally. It is offered to mankind so that through that power redemption leads us to a new life achieving sublime heights. This new life is proclaimed and mapped in the Holy Bible and through the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ: for through Him His kingdom is set up in the world’ <sup>3</sup>.

### **Grace and the Word of God**

When we are covered by divine grace we are embraced by the sublime love of God that we cannot measure in terms of height, breadth, depth, or height. We just have to read the Holy Bible in order to absorb God's wonderful promises.

God has indeed created mankind to communicate with Him face to face. Our first parents enjoyed hearing God's voice as they walked in Paradise (Gen. 3:8). However, when man turned his back to the Source of Grace, God did not abandon him but gave him the **Law** in order to raise him to attain the wealth of His grace. The **Holy Bible** is not merely some paper with printed words but behind these there exists a live meeting with the incarnate Word.

Whoever enjoys the grace of comprehending the mysteries of the Holy Bible enjoys \* It is impossible to receive any good thing when we are away from God. An above all benefit is the understanding of the Holy Book that is written by inspiration<sup>1</sup>.

**\* Not all are able to comprehend the spiritual content granted by the Law. Only those who have been granted the grace of the Holy Spirit can attain the Word of wisdom and knowledge<sup>2</sup>.**

**\* Let us pray God to open up our minds to the Lord Jesus Christ so that the Word grows within us and enable us to comprehend His holy words.**

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<sup>1</sup> Fr Tadros Y Malaty: *Divine Grace*, 1992

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Drewery, p. 109.

<sup>3</sup> Drewery: *Origen and the Doctrine of Grace*, London 1960, p. 48.

<sup>1</sup> Sel. Ps. 1:2.

<sup>2</sup> De Principiis, perf.8.

\* Many strive to interpret the Holy Bible... but not all succeed because **God has granted this grace to only a few**<sup>3</sup>.

Origen

\* **‘My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag  
Behold he stands behind a wall  
He is looking through the windows,  
Gazing through the lattice’ (Song of Sol. 2:9)...**

This verse could be interpreted as follows: From now on, do not speak to me using the symbols of the prophets and the law. So that I can see you, **appear to me so that I may come and enter into the Rock, the Holy Bible, and leave behind me the wall of the Law.** So that I may hear you, let your Voice ring in my ears. If Your voice sounds so very sweet as it flows from the windows of the prophets, seeing Your beautiful face will bring so much more love and joy!!

The bride comprehended the mystery of the Rock in the Bible for the Word led her there by various ways and means (Heb 1:11) while He was standing by the window. Now, she wants Him, the Bridegroom, to appear in the flesh so as to see God incarnated and to hear His divine promises of eternal joy for all the deserving ones.

Note how the words of Simon conform to the desire of the bride: “ Lord now you are letting Your servant depart in peace according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation” (Lk 2: 29,30). Simon saw what the bride wanted to see. Similarly, all those who have accepted the sweet Voice of the Lord have acknowledged the grace offered in the Bible and have cried: “ Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life...” (Jn. 6: 28)<sup>4</sup>.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

### **The Grace of the Creation**

In our interpretation of the expression **‘grace for grace’** we have seen how God the Father of all mankind spreads His hands to grant everyone grace out of His generosity. It is true that there are blessings that are shared by all mankind, but there is also the special blessing or grace that the people of God have enjoyed in the past through faith and through the Law of Moses. However, what the Incarnate Word of God offers through the Cross exceeds all thought: it is the treasure of blessings available to each one who accepts and responds to Him. Probably, the first blessing that mankind has enjoyed is the **‘creation.’**

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic** speaks extensively about the grace of the creation. God has not only created mankind into being out of nothing, but He created and blessed him by **the grace of being in His image and likeness.** Hence men should feel indebted to Him for all their lives. In this way men can experience a heavenly ‘paradise like’ life, and comprehend the mystery of knowing God and communicating with Him. Consequently, a person emulates Him and sees and lives eternally with Him. St. Athanasius explains the work of the Word (the Logos) the Creator who grants the grace of making us in the image and likeness of God. He has redeemed this nature by renewing it after it was corrupted.

\* As long as we preserve this divine feature **‘Tautotis’** we will never lose the feeling of God’s presence; or stop leading a life of fellowship with the saints. As we regain the grace that God grants us we come to possess the special power coming from the Word of God the Logos. We find joy as we speak with God and lead a truly blessed and eternal life where there is no pain and no death. Since no obstacle will prevent us from divine knowledge we will constantly

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<sup>3</sup> In Jer. hom.6:3.

<sup>4</sup> Sg of Sol. Fr Gregory of Nyssa, translated by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 5.

perceive, through our being pure<sup>1</sup>, the Image of God- that is God the Logos- who has created us in His image and likeness. We will be astonished constantly as we comprehend God's plan for the creation through the Logos.

Consequently, we ascend sublimely above all that is physically tangible and we get engaged in the divine truths that are real<sup>2</sup> in the heavens through the power of the mind. Only when our minds are not preoccupied by any external or other physical matters that arise out of the desires of our bodies is this possible. Indeed, our minds will have become perfectly sublimated and perfected in the same way as they had been created in the beginning.

As we put aside all tangible and human matters, we ascend to the highest heavens; and as we behold the Logos we see in Him the Father, the Father of the Logos, and experience the overwhelming joy of this revelation and our yearning for him is renewed.

This is similar to the condition of the first man created and named Adam (according to the Hebrew language). The Holy Bible tells us that at the beginning Adam's mind was focused on God and he was never turned down. He lived in fellowship with the saints as he contemplated on the real facts that he learned in that place which holy Moses named symbolically as 'Paradise.' At that time, the soul was truly pure and able to perceive God Himself and consequently see itself as in a mirror. This is according to the Lord's words as He says: "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God"<sup>3</sup>.

**Fr Athanasius the Apostolic**

### **The Grace of Freedom**

God has granted our reasoning nature the freedom of will. He has blessed mankind with the power to define his needs in order to implement goodness in our lives. There is no forcing or involuntary action but all is the result of our own free choice. The enjoyment of free will leads us to the discovery of great truths. Naturally, if we abuse this free will we become, according to the words of the apostle, like the one who has invented evil things (Romans 1: 30). Everyone who proceeds from the Father is our brother, but as for those who refuse to join in doing good deeds then he has come to that of his own free will<sup>4</sup>.

**St. Gregory of Nyssa**

### **The Grace of the Law**

The law, whether we are speaking about natural law or the Law of Moses, is in itself a great grace. It is offered by God to prepare the way for the grace of Holy Bible. Yet there is no point of comparison between the shadow and the reality.

\* The grace we have is not like the one given to them (the Jews). For we have received not just forgiveness for sins; but also righteousness, sanctification, adoption, and the Holy Spirit that overflows with brightness as well as joy and wealth. By such grace we yearn for God as we are privileged to be His children and friends and not as slaves. St. John describes this condition as having '**grace for grace.**' **Even the things that pertain to the law are considered to be a grace...since mankind have accepted the law as an expression of kindness, forgiveness, love and grace<sup>1</sup>.**

\* There was sanctification, and now there is the sanctification

There was baptism, and now there is the baptism

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to the purity of man's first condition. (refer to Dr Wahib Kozman: Grace according to St. Athanasius- Center for Studies of the Fathers, Cairo, 1993)

<sup>2</sup> That can be comprehended by the sublime mind, free from physical sensations, as that enjoyed by the heavenly ones.

<sup>3</sup> The Gospel to the Atheists: Fr Morcos Daoud, Ch.2: 2-4.

<sup>4</sup> Sg of Sol. By Fr Gregory of Nyssa; translated by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 2.

<sup>1</sup> Hom. 14 PG 59:81.

There was sacrifice and now there is the Sacrifice  
There was an altar, and now there is the altar  
In the same way, there was grace but now there is the grace.

In the first instance the words had symbolic value while in the second instance they indicate truths carried by the same Voice but not bearing the same meaning<sup>2</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

### **The Grace of Recovering What We Had Lost**

When man lost his likeness to God his life became an unbearable hell. Paradise became a prison and the earth grew thorns and thistles. However, the grace of God would not remain as a helpless onlooker whatever the cost would be. Even if that meant that the Word had to become incarnate and proclaim His love by accepting death and the crucifixion. In this manner, He would grant us the joy of the resurrection, the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and His Holy Spirit gives back God's likeness in us.

\* Therefore, how can this materialize? Who can be called upon to retrieve such grace other than the Word of God who, at the beginning, has created all things out of nothing? The truth is that He alone is involved in transforming that which is corrupted into incorruption and above all in achieving God's will. Besides, He is the Word of God the Father who is above all; He alone has power to retrieve what has been lost and to restore it to everyone; He alone can suffer for everyone's sake, and He alone can be everyone's Intercessor before God<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic**

### **The Grace of Resurrection and Victory over Death**

The Lord Jesus Christ tells Martha: **"I am the Resurrection."** The body of Lazarus had suffered corruption as he had been dead for four days. In the same manner, corruption is present in every soul and body for man reeks from corruption due to death under sin. Therefore the "Resurrection" has come to grant us Himself and thus can enjoy fellowship with Him. He can liberate us from the power of death and no corruption can befall us. Through the power and victory He grants us we sing with Paul the Apostle:

"O death where is your sting?

O Hades, where is your victory?"

The sting of death is sin...but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 15: 55-57). This is the grace of Resurrection.

\* For the incarnate Logos to restore the state of incorruption to those who fell into corruption, and in order to raise them from the state of death, the Lord Jesus Christ had to put on their body. In this manner he could vanquish death and remove it through the grace of His resurrection, like fire that devours grass<sup>1</sup>.

\* Death has truly died...it is no longer disturbing. On the contrary, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ tread on death as they have no issue with it. Indeed, they would rather die than deny their faith in the Lord. This is all because they know that they will not expire through death and that they will live through the resurrection and become incorruptible<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic.**

### **The Grace of God the Father's Adoption**

The divine Word is the Son by nature, born of the Father and Light from Light. Through

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<sup>2</sup> Hom. 14 PG 59:79.

<sup>3</sup> The Incarnation of the Word 7: 4,5.

<sup>1</sup> The Incarnation of the Word 8: 4.

<sup>2</sup> The Incarnation of the Word 27:2

Him we receive the grace of God the Father's Adoption:

\* God commanded us to be baptized 'in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit' (Matt 28:19). He did not command us to be baptized in the name of the 'Creator and the created.' Although we are one of the creatures, yet we become perfected (through baptism) and **consequently become His Children**<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Athanasius the Apostle**

\* If someone among you is enslaved to sin, let him **be totally prepared, through faith, for the new birth in freedom and adoption**. By discarding slavery to corrupt sin and resolving to be slaves to the redeeming God, we become worthy of inheriting the kingdom of heaven...

"Put off ...the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts..."(Eph 4:22) by confession, in order "to put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created Him," (Col 3: 10).

Through faith you will receive "...the Spirit ...as a pledge," (2 Cor 1:22) and you will consequently be received into the everlasting habitations (refer to Lk 16:22).

Come so that you may receive the mysterious seal whereby the Lord will clearly recognize you; and be counted as one of Christ's spiritually sanctified flock. You will be assigned to sit on His right and inherit the life He has prepared for you. As for those who are dressed in the defiled clothes of sin, they will stay on His left for they have not come through Christ to receive **God's grace by being born anew through baptism**.

By being born again I mean a new spiritual birth of the soul. Our tangible parents give us a physical birth but our spirits are born anew through faith. Since '**the Spirit blows where it wishes...**', and if your conscience is no longer smeared by the sin of deceit<sup>4</sup>, you will be found worthy to hear the Voice saying:

"Well done, good and faithful servant..." (Matt 25:21).

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

### **The Grace of the Holy Spirit**

The event of the baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ has often occupied the heart of St. Cyril the Great. He considers that the whole Church is the Body and Christ is the Head. Although the Holy Spirit belongs to the Lord and is inseparable from Him as they are of one essence, yet He descended upon the Lord at His baptism to allow the Church to enjoy the Spirit too. Hence the grace of the Holy Spirit is a gift to His Church and to each of her members from the Giver of all blessings and gifts. **He has granted us the grace of the Holy Spirit that reproofs us for sin, condemns the enemy of goodness who seeks our destruction, and grants us Christ's righteousness**. He offers us the Truth - i.e. Christ the Lord-, renews our nature, leads us in the Way - that is Jesus Christ, and unites us with God according to the rights we have received through Christ's Blood. Indeed, the Holy Spirit grants us fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ and the heavenly ones as well as with one another.

\* In the same way, the words of the Psalmist can be interpreted (Ps 44: 7-8) to indicate that had the Logos not anointed Himself with the Spirit, we could not have become partners with the Holy Spirit, nor could we be sanctified. For the incarnated Word who grants the Holy Spirit anointed Himself with the Spirit for our sakes. Therefore it is we who have received the Holy Spirit when it was reported that he had been anointed in the flesh. His Body was first sanctified when He was conceived to be man and then His Body received the Spirit. As a result, we receive

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<sup>3</sup> The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:1:42

<sup>4</sup> Essay 2:1.

the grace of the Holy Spirit as we take from Him the ‘ fullness of the Lord’<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Athanasius the Apostle**

\* The Spirit is poured upon us; whereas in the case of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was in the image of man, the Spirit settled upon Him...in our case, the generosity of the Giver provides fullness, whereas the fullness of the Holy Spirit lives in a perfect state within the Lord Jesus Christ forever. He pours within us according to our needs and what He grants is neither separated nor divided. In contrast, the Lord possesses the whole and perfect unity with the Spirit that enlightens the vision of our hearts and shines according to our ability of endurance. Ultimately, we receive as much as our progressive minds demand in order to achieve the fullness of the intangible Holy Spirit. Yet He contributes by working within us and according to the potentials of our nature<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

### **The Grace of Fellowship in the Divine Nature**

The Word of God put aside His own Self and put on the image of a slave in order to grant us the power of attaining sublime inner glory. In this manner we become the object of God’s joy as He finds His kingdom set up within us. The heavenly ones also rejoice for us as they glorify God for the richness of this sublime grace.

As we experience daily this inner glory in spite of the bitter storms of this world, we get to perceive the wondrous heights of glory that will be attained when we meet our heavenly Bridegroom upon the clouds. We will then carry His image and be received as a heavenly bride and as a queen seated at the right hand of the King of kings. This is the grace of fellowship in the divine nature and that works within our inner depths.

\* What a wondrous mystery! The Lord yeilds to descend, and man ascended!

\* The Apostle says: ‘ Know ye not that ye are the temple of God...’ (1 Cor 3:16). The Gnostic (the believer who possesses true spiritual knowledge) is, accordingly, divine since he becomes actually sanctified, and carrying God while also being carried by Him.

\* The Holy Spirit is God’s farmer as He grants us to be heirs of the great and divine Father. This task cannot be transferred to any other as He deifies us by granting us heavenly knowledge and setting His laws in our minds and inscribes them within our hearts<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Clement of Alexandria**

\* The Word of God became Man, in order to teach man how to become a god<sup>2</sup>.

\* The Lord Jesus Christ shared our humanity with us in order to grant us a wealth of His riches<sup>3</sup>.

**Pope Cyril the Great**

\* It is said that the Lord Jesus Christ as a man received what he always possessed as a God. We too could receive this grace that was granted to Him. Indeed, the Logos did not diminish by taking on the flesh and by seeking to receive grace. He not only deified that flesh that He put on but further granted that grace of the Holy Spirit to mankind<sup>4</sup>.

**St. Athanasius the Apostle**

\* David, as a renewed person, rightly screamed to God “ Then will I go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy...” (Ps 43:4). He also said that he had grown old among his

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<sup>1</sup> *The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius* 1:1:50

<sup>2</sup> *Of the Holy Spirit* 1:8:93.

<sup>1</sup> *Protr.* 11:3; *Stromata* 7:13; *Protr.* 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Pret.* 1.

<sup>3</sup> *In Luc. (Conc. The Temptation of Jesus Christ.*

<sup>4</sup> *The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius* 1:1:34.

enemies...and here he says that his youth has been renewed after experiencing old age and man's fallen state. For we have received renewal through baptism and through the Holy Spirit poured within us; and we shall also be renewed through the resurrection. As David says in another passage: "So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's..." (Ps 103:5). Therefore know the way in which we are renewed: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow..." (Ps 50: 7). And in Isaiah: "though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Is. 1:18). **Anyone who gets changed and moves away from darkness- the darkness of sin- to the light of virtue and to grace, has been renewed truly.** That is how a person who was previously smeared with foolish corruption now brightly shines whiter than snow<sup>5</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* The Lord Jesus Christ says: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets, and those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her children under her wings, and you were not willing! (Matt 23:37). These words are consistent with our assumption that the Divine Nature has wings, and this is what the holy inspired passage states for a mysterious and unknown purpose. Since we know that the first man was created in the image of God and in His Likeness in every thing (Gen 1:26), then we may deduce that the first man was created with wings in order to be like the Divine Nature. It also becomes clear that the word 'wings' could refer to God, and they represent His power, grace, incorruption and everything divine. Man possesses all these qualities as long as he is like God in every way. However, our tendency to be evil has deprived us of our wings (We were not under the protection of God's wings, and our own wings were torn away from us). Therefore the grace and blessings of God appeared to us and enlightened our minds. Hence we could grow wings by being pure and righteous and after despising worldly desires and turning to God wholeheartedly<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Gregory of Nyssa**

### **The Grace of Acquiring the Life of the Lord Jesus Christ**

\* Through the generosity of Him who grants us the greatest of all gifts: His own life<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Clement of Alexandria**

\* (When He became man) we have become enabled to acquire Him, in that way and in grandeur and with the same nature which belongs to Him, if we prepare a worthy place for Him within our souls.

\* The Lord Jesus Christ, who is all virtuous, and speaks on the principle that the kingdom of God is within His disciples and is neither here nor there<sup>3</sup>.

**Origen**

### **The Grace of the Fragrant Smell of the Lord Jesus Christ**

\* This is how St. Paul likened the bride who shares the virtues of the bridegroom. He likened His fragrance to the beauty that cannot be approached. Of the fruits of the Spirit is love, joy, peace and all the like. He made his fragrance and became worthy to be 'a sweet savor of Christ' (2 Cor 2:15). **St. Paul inhaled this incomprehensible grace that surpassed all blessings, and offered himself to others as a sweet fragrance out of which they could draw according to their capacity.** It depends upon each person's determination. St. Paul the apostle

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<sup>5</sup> Prayer of David, Book 4:9:35.

<sup>1</sup> Sg of Sg of Sol by St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 15.

<sup>2</sup> Paedagogus 1:9.

<sup>3</sup> Comm. On John, Book 10:4. Com. On Matt. Book 12:14.

became a fragrance, whether in his life or death. If we were to place the same fragrance before a beetle and a pigeon, the effect will not be the same on both: whereas the pigeon may become stronger upon inhaling it, the beetle may die on the spot. The same applies in the case of the holy fragrance and with the great apostle St. Paul who responded like the pigeon<sup>4</sup>.

**St. Gregory of Nyssa**

### **The Grace of Virtue**

\* We truly can describe the soul of St. Paul as a spiritual paradise as it bears the seeds of virtue for **grace flourished deeply within him**. Moreover, he constantly prepared his depths to enable his growth and development in grace. And when he became a chosen vessel he worked hard to purify himself. Consequently, he became worthy to have the Holy Spirit richly poured into him. In this manner, we are provided with multiple and wonderful rivers. It is not only the four rivers that sprang in Paradise, but there are many other rivers that flow every day. It is for everyone of us to drink from them- it is not only for the earth - but for the human souls too making them fertile for the growth of virtue<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* May the Lord God grant us the grace of humility that saves man from many diseases and shields him from many trials<sup>2</sup>.

**Fr. Dorteous of Gaza**

\* By the grace of God, and since I have left the world, I have not yet uttered one word that I am sorry to have said<sup>3</sup>.

**Fr. Bamboo**

\* None of God's gifts to mankind have been offered as a payment of a debt, but it has been all offered through grace<sup>4</sup>.

**Origen**

### **The Grace of the Father and the Son**

Granting Divine grace is one Divine act: it is the work of the Holy Trinity who loves mankind. The Father grants His grace generously through the divine Word that is the power and wisdom of God. He offers grace to us through the Holy Spirit who is the spirit of power and wisdom. For Divine grace is grace of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit doing the one work of the Holy Trinity.

\* It is impossible for the Father to offer grace and not to grant grace through the Son; for the Son exists in the Father. This is just like finding the rays in the sunlight. Yet this doesn't reflect a need or a weakness in God but it does indicate the Father who 'has established the earth through His wisdom' (Prov. 3: 19). He made all things through the Word that was born from Him and He brands the holy washing (by the baptism) in Jesus Christ. He has created all things through His Word- the Logos Himself – and fulfilled the holy wash in the Son. The Son is found wherever the Father is. This is just as true as finding the rays wherever the light is found.

This explains why Jesus promised the holy disciples saying: "...We will come to Him and make our home with him..." (Jn 14:23); and "that they also may be one in Us...just as We are one..." (Jn 17:21, 22). This indicates that grace is one and granted by the Father through the Son. St. Paul explains this in all his letters: " Grace to you and peace from God our Father and

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<sup>4</sup> *Sg of Sg of Sol by St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 2.*

<sup>1</sup> *Praises of St. Paul, Hom 1.*

<sup>2</sup> *Translated into Arabic from St. Kiriakos the Archmandrite: St Dorteous: Spiritual Teachings, Essay 2.*

<sup>3</sup> *Benedicta Ward, p. 197.*

<sup>4</sup> *Comm. Rom. 22 on 4: 4 f.*



the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom.1: 7; 1Cor 1:3; Eph. 1:2)<sup>5</sup>.

\* For there is one grace proceeding from the Father through the Son just as there is one light proceeding from the sun and its rays. Moreover, just as the sun shines through its rays, so does St. Paul send- in the same manner- his wishes to the people of Thessalonica and says: “Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you...” (1 Thes.3: 11). Consequently, the unity of the Father and the Son is maintained. St. Paul does not say: (God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ) “both grant” which would make it appear that the nature of grace proceeds from a dual source and granted by two entities- i.e. granted by each separately. Note that he uses the word ‘ grants *Katavtheinai*’ in order to underline **that the Father grants grace through the Son.**

Therefore this ‘one grace’ reveals the unity of the Father and the Son; and that all that is granted comes through the Son. There is nothing that the Father does without the Son and the grace that is granted in this manner is assured to those who accept it<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic**

### **The Grace of the Inheritance of the Kingdom of God**

God created us so that we may enjoy immortality with Him who is our Father, and that we may have a place in His divine embrace. This is what preoccupied the heart and thoughts of the Lord Jesus Christ as He carried the shame of the Cross on our behalf: so that we may be granted the gift of His kingdom forever. Indeed, our Lord continues today to prepare for each of us a place for He is concerned about our eternal inheritance.

\* How have we received grace ‘ before time infinite’ and while we were not even born? Yet we have been born at a time that, had grace not been deposited in the Lord, it would not have come to us. Consequently, on the Day of Judgment, when each one will receive according to his work, the Lord will say: “ Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world (Matt 25; 34). Then how and through whom has this kingdom been prepared before the time of our creation? It can only be through the Lord: through Him and for this purpose the kingdom has been created before all time. By establishing us on that kingdom as an integral stone we are enabled to participate in the life and grace that He grants us<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic**

When **St. John Chrysostom** speaks to us about **the grace of the Inheritance of the Kingdom** he underlines that in this eternal kingdom we will enjoy the grace of being incorruptible. This does not mean that we will be deprived of our body that has shared in the strife with the soul and that has been sanctified through the action of the Holy Spirit. Rather, it means that the body will be cleaned from all traces of corruption and will bear the nature of being incorruptible and so be appropriately ready for eternal life.

\* He wishes to say: I take off that which is foreign to me, and the flesh is not foreign, but it is corruption that is foreign. Consequently, he says: We do not wish to take it off (i.e. the tent of the body) but we wish to put over it - that is to wear it- that which is incorruptible. Therefore, we take off the corruptible and put on the incorruptible; for we wish to despise what came as a result of sin. At the same time, **we attain all that which the divine grace has granted to us.**

In order to understand that what we put away does not refer to the body but rather refers to corruption and to death, listen to what it latter on says immediately after that: “ For we do not

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<sup>5</sup> The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:2:41-42.

<sup>1</sup> The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:3:11-12.

<sup>2</sup> The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:2:67.

want to take it off but we want to put on over it.” He did not say: ‘ So that that which is not carnal may devour that which is carnal.’ So what did he say? “ So that that which is dead may be devoured by life.” Therefore he is actually speaking about dismantling death and corruption rather than dismantling the body or the flesh...For life which comes to the body through (the resurrection) will not destroy it. Indeed, corruption and death that are found in the body are the destructive forces.

Therefore we groan due to the corruption that exists in the body and not due to the body in itself. The body is a heavy burden. This is not the result of its inherent nature but because of the corruption that entered into it later on. Moreover, the body in itself was not created to become corrupt but rather to be incorruptible. Besides the body still retains this feature even though it has become susceptible to corruption. This explains why the shadow of the apostles pursued the ethereal spirits. Even the clothes they wore healed the sick and restored their health. Do not tell me about the diseases of the body and other matters claimed by the opponents of the body; for all these things were not part of the nature of the body: they resulted from the corruption that entered into it later on.

If you desire to know the reality and worth of the body, study carefully how each member has been created, shaped, the intricacy of their functions and how they are coordinated and work harmoniously. Then you will be assured that such a performance is more ideal than the performance of any city that respects its laws and all its citizens are wise<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

### **The Grace of Being Immortal in Him**

\* For now the Word has become Man and has taken on all that pertains to the body, yet these aspects no longer affect the body since the Logos has resided within them and they have been destroyed through Him. Therefore mankind is no longer sinful and dead according to their own inclinations for they have risen according to the power of the Logos. Thus they remained incorruptible and unvanquished by death forever.

When the Lord Jesus Christ took on a body from St. Mary the mother of God, it was said that He was born although He is the One who grants the origin of life to others. Now He Himself has come to represent our origin so that we might not return to earth as being mere dust of the earth. For once we have become united with the Logos He has transferred all the other weaknesses of the body to Himself and thus granting us to participate in eternal life not as human beings but as someone who belongs to the Logos.

We no longer die on account of Adam and according to our first creation. For our origin and the weakness of our flesh has been transferred to the Logos. We now rise from the dust since He has washed the curse of sin away who lives within us and Who has become a curse for our sakes.

For we all who are of dust die on account of Adam. However, we have been renewed from above and the origin of our nature has been restored to us through the water and the Spirit. We have been revived through the Lord Jesus Christ and our bodies are no longer earthly. Indeed, it has become deified (as it has received the feature of the Logos). This is the result of the wisdom of God who for us became flesh<sup>2</sup>.

\* For if you oppose the issue of my liberation from the corruption in my nature, then be careful not to oppose the Word of God Who has lifted up from me the image of slavery. It is He who became incarnate and became man and accordingly we have become deified by the Logos.

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<sup>1</sup> A Translation by Dr Said Hakim (The Orthodox Center for the Study of the Fathers- Cairo); PG 50:417-432.

<sup>2</sup> The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:3:33.

Therefore He has carried us in Him through the flesh and as a result we have become heirs to eternal life from now on<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic**

### **The Grace of Knowing and Enjoying the Divine Truth**

God Almighty has created man with a yearning to become acquainted with the eternal and unchanging truth. The Lord Jesus Christ presented Himself as 'The Truth' and the person who receives Him consequently enjoys knowing the truth which is a free and divine grace.

\* 'We know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life (1Jn 5:20). And God adopted us that we became His children through the Lord Jesus Christ and through grace for we share His Spirit since '...as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name' (Jn 1: 12). Thus, the Son is the Truth and He says accordingly: " I am the Truth"; and when He speaks to the Father He says: " Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (Jn 14:6; 17:17). By speaking with Him, we become righteous and we become His children<sup>1</sup>.

\* It is evident that mankind is truly ignorant. The Logos, however, being Himself God the Word knows all things even before they occur. For when He became man He did not cease to be God, and He did not stay away from the concerns of man due to His being God. On the contrary, being God He became incarnate and in this way He deified that flesh. To answer all questions He resurrected the dead revealing that He who restores life and spirit to the dead ultimately possesses the secrets of everyone. He actually knows where Lazarus lay, for He is the Logos and the totally holy God who for our sake bore all things; but He still asks so that **by partaking of our ignorance He grants us the grace of Knowledge**. It is the grace of knowing His Father, the only true one, and of knowing that He is the Son who has been sent to redeem us all: what grace can be greater than this? <sup>2</sup>

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic**

\* 'Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before you. Nevertheless I am continually with You' (Ps.73: 21-22)...That is how man appears: he is like a stray beast compared to - not Christ - but even to the angels. However, even if this is the case, we need not despair for the Lord 'preserves both man and beast' (Ps36: 6). Therefore, since I have learned through You and not through my own resources, I adhere to You constantly in order to stop being a beast. At this point You will tell me: **"But as for you, stand here by Me...!"**(Deut. 5:31). When man, due to his ignorance becomes arrogant and assuming - and that is comparable to bestiality; **he has to start anew and become a man. This occurs when he is embraced by the grace of God**. He will be enabled through reason and grace to prove that he is a human being by that very act. Consequently, he will rejoice for he has become separated from the stray beasts, and will have become one with those that God supports and protects. For what is man but he of whom the Lord is ' mindful' (Ps 8:4) <sup>3</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* The strings of ignorance can quickly be removed through human faith and divine grace.

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<sup>3</sup> The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:3:34

<sup>1</sup> The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:3:19.

<sup>2</sup> The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:3:38

<sup>3</sup> Prayer of David, Book 3.

Our sins too are erased through the medicine of God's Word. Hence all our sins are washed away and we are no longer attracted or confused when faced by sinful ways. We do not go back to the old nature we had before being washed since knowledge comes hand in hand with enlightenment: in one moment we, who are ignorant, hear that we have become the disciples of the Lord. All instruction leads to faith, and we learn faith as we get baptized by the Holy Spirit. That faith is the one and ultimate salvation for all mankind.

**St. Clement of Alexandria**

### **The Grace of Being Steadfast in the Father and the Son**

\* 'By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit' (1 Jn.4: 13). Due to the grace of the Holy Spirit that has been granted to us we abide in God and He abides in us. The indication here is that through the coming of the Spirit of God to abide within us, we too are counted to be in God and He in us for we have the Spirit.

However, we do not abide in the Father in the same manner as the Son who exists in the Father. The Son is not a partaker of the Spirit in order to abide in the Father as a result. Moreover, He does not receive the Holy Spirit in the same manner that we do. Rather, it is the Son who grants the Holy Spirit to everyone.

The Holy Spirit does not tie the entity of the Logos to the Father but, to be more precise, it is the Holy Spirit that receives from the Logos. Note that the Son abides in the Father as He is the Father's own Word and the rays issuing from Him; whereas we are strangers to God if we lack the Holy Spirit or are estranged from Him. When we partake of the Holy Spirit we become united to God. As a result, we abide in the Father, not by our own merit but through the Holy Spirit that is within us. We have to strive to keep Him through confession and St. John says accordingly: 'Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God' (1 Jn. 4:15) <sup>1</sup>.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic**

### **The Grace of Contentment and Joy**

\* 'My tears have been my food day and night while they continually say to me "Where is your God?"' (Ps 42:3). **Tears are appropriately called bread/food** here for there is a hunger for righteousness. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled" (Matt 5:6). On that account the tears become as bread since they strengthen and support a person's heart (see Ps 104:15). See also the words written in the Septuagint that are relevant to this subject: 'Cast your bread upon the waters' (Eccl 11: 1: LXX) for **this is where the bread of heaven is found: where there is the water of grace**. Truly, it is out of the hearts of those who believe in Him that living water flows (see Jn 7: 38; 10:4). They will receive help and encouragement from the divine Word as well as food of a mystical (internal) nature. Besides, this living bread (Jn 6:51) is found where tears and crying are the result of repentance: it is written: "They shall come with weeping and with supplications I will lead them" (Jer 31:9 LXX). Consequently, **blessed are those whose tears are their bread** for they deserve to laugh and according to His word "blessed are you who weep!" (Lk 6:21) <sup>2</sup>.

\* 'I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast' (Ps 42:4). Truly, He cried because he lived on this earth while the heavenly places were waiting for him He would enter into the sanctuary of the Almighty at the right time (Ps 84:2,3,10). He has truly preferred and pursued this course above all the wealth of his kingdom. He testifies to that in another place where he says: One thing I

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<sup>1</sup> The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:3:24

<sup>2</sup> Prayer of David, Book 4:2:7.

have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to behold the beauty of the Lord (Ps 27: 4). The beauty of the Lord is found in His Church.

The Church is the icon of heaven: after the shadow passes away the icon truly appears clearly (refer to Heb 10:1; Col 2:17)...and the shadow is the Jewish Council that includes the Law; whereas the truth resides in the Gospels. That is why the icon of truth shines in the light of the Gospels. This explains why the Psalmist wept as the blessings were withheld although they were abundant and perfectly available with grace and joy<sup>3</sup>.

St. Ambrose

### **The Grace of Light**

\* **The soul crosses over from falsehood to the truth, and replaces the image of her dark life by one of ultimate grace.** St. Paul the apostle and bride of our Lord Jesus Christ crossed over from such darkness and into the light. He tells his disciple Timothy, just as a bride would tell her bridesmaids, that he has become worthy to be beautiful even though he was previously a 'blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man' (1 Tim. 1:13). He also says that the Lord came into the world to give light to those sitting in darkness. The Lord did not call the righteous but sinners to repentance; and thus they shone 'as lights in the world' (Phil 2:15). This occurs through the second birth that washes away the earlier dark image<sup>1</sup>.

\* The queen of Ethiopia visited King Solomon after hearing about his wisdom. She offered him presents of gold, precious stones, and perfumes (1 Kgs. 10:1-3). The secret behind this visit is revealed through studying the wonders of the Holy Bible. It is important to know that the Church arose from a dark community and from among nations that worshipped idols. These lived without any knowledge of God and were separated from Him by an enormous gulf of ignorance. However, when **the light of the grace of God** and His wisdom shone, He sent the rays of the True Light to those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death. However, Israel shut its eyes to the Light and rejected any fellowship with goodness. In contrast, the Ethiopians, from among the heathen, hurried into the faith. Those who were far away drew close after they had washed themselves of the darkness by the holy water. The Holy Spirit led them to God and they presented gifts to the King: incense for asceticism and worship, gold for recognition of God the King, and precious stones for the commandments and acts of virtue<sup>2</sup>.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

### **The Grace of Preaching and Witnessing**

\* Why were the angels not sent to preach the Gospel? So that man would not have an excuse for his laziness and carelessness. He would have justified himself by claiming that human nature is different than that of angels for that is a great difference.

It is truly strange that the word pronounced by an earthly tongue has the power to uproot death, forgive sins, restore sight to the blind, and transform the earth into a heaven. This leads me to wonder about God's power. Besides, **my wonder and respect increase for Paul's zeal to attain this grace and to orient and prepare himself in order to be worthy to receive it.**

I encourage you to follow this high example of virtue rather than simply be amazed. In this manner you will also become worthy to share with him his crown. Do not be surprised to know that it is possible for anyone to become a servant like St. Paul if he follows his example and leadership. Then that person will repeat in his heart St. Paul's words: "**I have fought the**

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<sup>3</sup> Prayer of David, Book 4:2:9.

<sup>1</sup> Sg of Sol by St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 2.

<sup>2</sup> Sg of Sol by St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 7.

**good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing (2 Tim 4:7,8).**

Notice how he invites everyone to join him in his achievements and consequently in the reward that is also offered and extended to all.

Let us all strive so as to prove ourselves worthy of receiving the blessings promised to us. Let us look at the greatness and glory of a virtuous life as well as meditate upon the fixed goal through which this grace will be attained. **Let us be aware that Paul did not possess a nature that is different from ours in any way, for he was like us. This illustrates that what seems to be hard and impossible to us has become easy and light.** For after a short time of struggle and work we too will wear the eternal crown of incorruption by the grace and goodness of the Lord Jesus Christ to whom is the glory and the power now and forever and to the end of all ages. Amen<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* We now find him revealing an ecclesiastical role as he says that **those who have been led by grace and have become witnesses for the Word do not conceal the truth or keep it to themselves. Rather, they preach it to those who have followed them.** That is why the virgins tell the bride, who has met the truth face to face at first and enjoyed goodness and who has now deserved to become acquainted with the hidden mysteries: “ We will be glad and rejoice in you, we will remember your love more than wine” (Song of Sol 1:4)<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Gregory of Nyssa**

### **A Dynamic Grace**

For our benefit, the following is said of the Lord Jesus Christ: ‘ And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him’ (Lk 2:40). Also this verse: ‘And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men’ (Lk. 2:40). Origen comments: [He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant (Phil. 2: 7)...by the same power used to empty Himself He also grew]. In this manner He brings us to the path of constant growth in grace. For the grace within us is the result of God’s constant and uninterrupted dynamic work.

\*The use of growth here refers to the growth of the body for through the growth of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ God is proclaimed all the more (through the humanity of the Savior) to those who see Him. And as His divinity becomes more apparent, the grace of His humanity increases as He stands as a person before all peoples. Thus as a child He was carried to the Temple, then as a young boy He remained there and discussed the Law with the priests so that ‘they were astonished at His understanding and answers’ (Lk 2:47)<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic**

\* The Child Jesus grows in various ways within the hearts of those who receive and want Him to live in them: in wisdom, in stature, and in grace (Lk 2:52).

The Lord lives within every pure heart yet in a different way and according to the stature of the person in whom He Lives. He reveals Himself according to the capacity of each one. He therefore appears as a Child or a youth or a mature person just as fruit appears on a branch.

The Lord does not appear in the same way on the Vine for He changes His aspect as time goes by: first as a bud, then taking root, then maturing, blossoming, and finally turning into wine.

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<sup>1</sup> Praises of St. Paul, Hom. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Sg of Sol by St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 1

<sup>3</sup> The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:3:52.

When the vine bears fruit it brings with it the promise: it is true that it is not yet ripe enough to give wine but He waits until it reaches the stage of ripeness. **At the same time we are not deprived of joy for we are gladdened the sense of smell as an alternative to taste giving hints of what will be. Through the perfume of hope He grants sweetness to the senses of the soul.**

Steadfast faith in the **hope for grace becomes a source of joy to us** who are waiting patiently. Similarly, our energy and struggle bears the promise of wine. There is no wine but the seed of hope will take root and awaits grace which has not been granted as yet<sup>1</sup>.

\* Although the stage a person has reached now is really higher than where he was before yet this stage does not limit his progress: it becomes the beginning of discovering a higher grace.

A person who ascends never stops for he constantly moves from one new point to the following one; and the starting points for higher grace are infinite. Therefore the desire of the ascending soul to find knowledge and to go to higher levels keeps increasing and continues to develop. This promotes progress towards the Infinite<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Gregory of Nyssa**

### **An All- Embracing Grace**

\* “I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some”(1 Cor 9:22). Divine grace is poured on both the righteous and the wicked (Matt.5: 45).

Is He the God of the Jews only or is He also the God of the Gentiles? Indeed, He is the God of the Gentiles as well, and He is truly the One and only God (Rom. 3:29-30). This is what the sublime apostle proclaims<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Clement of Alexandria**

\* Thanks be to God for although the grace of adoption had been limited to Israel it has now become a greater grace than all what was allocated for them. Now it has been poured over the Gentiles through the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>4</sup>.

**Origen**

\* Here is another point to contemplate on: ‘Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart’ (Ps 73:1). Does this mean that God is not good to everyone else? He is truly good to all for He is the Savior of all mankind and particularly of believers. That is why the Lord Jesus Christ came: in order to save those who were lost (Lk 19:10).

He has truly come to carry the sins of the world (Jn 1:29), and to heal our wounds, yet not all wish to be healed!

Many avoid Him! Lest the leprosy be injected with medicine and so lose its power? He therefore heals those who wish to be healed and who do not reject Him.

Those who wish to be treated regain their health. As for those who resist the Doctor and do not call Him, they will not enjoy His goodness since they have not tried Him!

A person who has been healed regains health and the Doctor is good to those to whom health has been restored. Accordingly, God is good to those whose sins have been forgiven. Nevertheless, if a person has an incurable sin in his soul, how can he/she evaluate that the Doctor is good while at the same time he is avoiding Him?

To reiterate what we have said earlier, the apostle explains, therefore, that God ‘ desires all men to be saved ...’ (1 Tim 2:4), and that He is good to all men. **Concerning the grace of**

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<sup>1</sup> *Sg of Sol by St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 1*

<sup>2</sup> *Sg of Sol by St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 8*

<sup>3</sup> *Stromata 5:3.*

<sup>4</sup> *Comm. Matt. 10:22.*

**the goodness of God Himself, it is guaranteed to all believers.** These receive assistance by His goodwill and grace. However, when the psalmist says: ‘ Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart...’ he is expressing the feelings of those who do not know how to enjoy what belongs to God specifically other than that He is good to all and abides in all<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

**The Giver of Grace Prays for on our Account**

\* When the Savior says “All authority has been given to Me...”(Matt 28: 18); and “...glorify Your Son...”(Jn 17:1); and when Peter says: “...angels and authorities and subjects having been made subject to Him” (1 Peter 3:22), we need to understand all these passages in the same light. By that I mean that the Savior utters all these as a human being due to the flesh He has put on. Although He has no need for anything yet He has received everything as a human being and the words are reported as ones spoken by the Lord as one of mankind.

Consequently, as much as the Lord has received, and as much as grace has rested on Him, it is preserved for us. When someone takes for himself alone there is the chance of his losing that which he has received. This occurred in the case of Adam for he lost what he had received.

In order to make grace final - and never confiscated- and preserved for mankind, the Savior received it for Himself and stated that He received authority as a human being. This is the same authority He has always owned as a God.

Hence He who grants glory to others prays: “ Glorify Me...” to indicate that He has a body that needs authority and glory. We conclude from this that when He put on the flesh it became the flesh of the Savior who became man in particular. That is why it is reported that it is the Savior who received what was granted to Him<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic**

\* The Logos appeared among us to redeem mankind. He became incarnate in order to sanctify and deify us (that is why He became flesh). It therefore becomes clear to everyone that when he became flesh He received the gifts of the Holy Spirit for our sake and not for His own. For the gifts of the Holy Spirit that are granted by the Father through the Son are given for the benefit of that body that He put on all the while He spoke and dwelled among men.

Let us meditate on the instructions that God demanded; and on what were these gifts that we are told He had been granted. Hopefully the heretics would regain their reason through such an exercise. We wonder that He prayed to be glorified (Jn 17: 1), yet He said: “All things have been delivered Me by My Father...” (Lk 10:22). After the Resurrection, the Lord says that He has received all authority on earth and in heaven (see Matt 28:18). Even before that He actually said: “All things were given to Me” for He is Lord of all for all things were made through Him” (Jn I: 3). We also find in! Cor 8:6 that there is ‘ one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things, and through whom we live.” When He prayed for glory, He was the Lord of glory as He always has been. St. Paul comments: “For had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory,”(1 Cor 2: 8). Also when He prays for glory, He says: “ ...glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was”; He refers to the glory that He originally had before<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic**

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<sup>1</sup> Prayer of David, Book 3.

<sup>2</sup> The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1:3:38.

<sup>1</sup> The Letter Opposing Followers of Arius 1 :3:39



## **Inspirations drawn from The Gospel of John Chapter One**

### **My Heart Thirsts For You, O Giver of all Grace**

\*How do I see You coming to our world  
While it is impossible for me to ascend to your heavens!  
It is Your love that made You come to Me, You who are the Word and Creator.  
You descended to earth to accompany me on my journey!

\*Your incarnation proclaimed your amazing love for me,  
My heart is moved and I thirst for You O giver of grace.  
You are my life and without You I do not exist.  
You are my light and without You I remain in the darkness of my corruption.  
You have counted me as one of yours, and have descended so that I may adhere to You!

\*By your sublime grace You have lifted me up  
Every grace from You draws me to enjoy a new flow of graces.  
You have created me into being from nothingness,  
You have granted me to be in Your image and likeness,  
You have offered me the law to assist me and it leads me to realize that I need You.  
And finally You have offered Yourself to me, O giver of all grace!  
You opened my eyes to behold the grandeur of Your glory!  
Your brilliance proclaims that You are the only Son of God!

\*My ears have been opened to hear the call, the voice crying in the wilderness!  
That voice that echoes as though in a vast wild desert,  
Yet it is a sweet voice that is a forerunner to You O divine Word.  
His voice proclaims the Truth,  
For You are eternal and One with Your Father.  
His voice proclaims his unworthiness to loosen Your sandal straps,  
For the mystery of Your incarnation remained until You completed the task of  
redemption on the Cross.  
Allow me to come and loosen the stings of Your shoes,  
So that Your Holy Spirit may reveal to me the mystery of Your salvation!

\* The unborn child John recognized You and shouted joyfully.  
Elizabeth heard his voice within her and her tongue sang in praise!  
Yet he did not consider this recognition of any value when he experienced Your baptism!  
He introduced You as the One who baptizes with the Fiery Holy Spirit.  
You alone are the One who washes the soul with a unique water,  
And inflames the heart with the fire of the Holy Spirit.

\*Your counterpart draw the eyes of all to You as he cried:  
Behold! The Lamb of God of whom the prophets wrote and yearned to see!  
This is the Lamb of God and the source of the Father's joy!

\*John was happy when his disciples were drawn to You to live with You.  
His soul rejoiced to see each one witness to You.  
Their hearts were moved to call one another to come to You.  
As with Nathaniel, they all left the shade of the dying fig tree,  
And came to see the angels ascending and descending around You!  
They saw the heavens opened and the heavenly hosts yearning to serve You!  
Indeed, my heart thirsts for You,  
I will not be satisfied by any other but You, O Source of all grace!  
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## CHAPTER 2

### THE BRIDEGROOM The Giver of Joy to the Soul

#### The Wedding in Cana

In Chapter One, St. John the Evangelist introduces the first disciples. Now, in Chapter two, he presents the first miracle, which is the changing of water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. The Lord had just begun His service in a new Messianic era in which the waters of purification according to the old Law are turned into wine of a new order.

The Jews were anxiously waiting for the Messianic era that would be marked by a bounty of blessings and ultimate joy. Baruch 2:29 expresses this concept: ‘ On every vine there are one thousand branches, every branch bears a thousand bunches, every bunch carries one thousand grapes, and every grape includes a *cor* of wine (about 120 gallons)...this will be enjoyed by those who will be living when the world comes to an end.’ Pappias borrowed this view when he wished to imagine the time of the Lord’s coming in order to rule for a thousand years, and what His kingdom will include in the nature of imaginary vines<sup>1</sup>.

In the Gospel according to St. Mark the Lord Jesus Christ begins His ministry as He ‘ came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God...’ (Mk 1:14). In the Gospel of St. John, the evangelist tells us about the beginning of this joyful message by the Lord’s attendance at the wedding in Cana of Galilee and changing the water into wine. He preached through His presence and by restoring joy to the newly wedded and their families and friends. For the kingdom of God is like ten virgins who ‘ went out to meet the bridegroom...’ (Matt 25:1); or ‘ like a king who arranged a wedding for his son’ (Matt 22:1). In the case of Jesus Christ, His presence among His disciples changed their lives into a wedding. When He was asked:

“Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” Jesus said to them: “...As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the day will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days” (Mk 2:18-20). St. Paul the apostle says: “ ...old things have passed away; behold all things have become new” (2 Cor 5:17).

Inviting the Lord and His disciples to the wedding was not meaningless for if the Lord Jesus Christ is the bridegroom then the disciples are the first born of the Church of the New Testament: they are the spiritual bride. It is as though the wedding in Cana has been performed according to the Jewish Law and tradition. In its center there is a hidden wedding of which no one was aware: the wedding of the Lord Jesus Christ to His Church which would last forever and until its proclamation on the great Day of the Lord (Rev 21:2) and not for just one week according to the Jewish custom (Gen 29:27; Judges 14:12).

#### **In this Chapter, the Evangelist confirms the following truths:**

**1-** The Lord started His ministry with the wedding in order to reveal His love for mankind. He wishes to carry all peoples to heaven as to the bridegroom’s chamber. We will consequently partake of the heavenly joy, and shine as we reflect the brilliance of His glory. The Lord affirms that He has come to the world in order to transform our lives into a joyful wedding: the transformation of the waters of our lives into wine is an indication of our eternal spiritual joy (Is.55:1; Eph. 5:18-20).

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<sup>1</sup> Fr Tadros Y Malaty: *The Apostolic Fathers*, 1993,p 137.

\* The Word of God descended from heaven to earth in order to become the Bridegroom of our human nature. He has made our nature His dwelling place so as to engage and lead her. Ultimately this would result in the birth of spiritual wisdom within us.

#### **St. Cyril the Great**

\* He who made wine at the wedding in Cana and changed the water in the six pots is He Himself who does the same thing every year in the vineyards... such an act no longer arouses wonder due to its continual repetition<sup>1</sup>.

\* Is it not amazing that He came to that house for the wedding, and He came to this world for a wedding? Actually, if He has come to a wedding then there is certainly a bride there. Yet, what does the apostle say? “For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ (2 Cor 11:2)... That is how He has a bride here whom He has redeemed with His blood, has granted her the Holy Spirit as a pledge, and has liberated her from the chains of Satan. He has died for her sins and rose again to grant her justification (Rom 4:25). Who would offer such matters to his bride?”<sup>2</sup>

\* The bridegroom who was told: “...you have kept the good wine until now” [2:10] is the Lord Jesus Christ who has preserved the new wine- that is the Gospel- until now<sup>3</sup>.

#### **St. Augustine**

2- The Lord transformed the water of purification into wine as his first task is to transfer us from the literal understanding of the Law - where it speaks of purification- to the joy of the Spirit. Hence we would live in a new age with a new beginning. The Lord began His work with the two young wedded persons to underline His interest in youth. He requested to be their friend in order to grant them unending joy.

3- As the Lord brings us into His eternal wedding, He holds it in His holy Temple. Therefore, He cleansed the Temple [2:13-17]. The Jews requested a miracle [18], but He offered the miracle of His death and resurrection [19]. His enemies did not understand His words and even tried to distort them. However, His friends perceived its meaning after His resurrection (Matt 26:62; 27:40; Jn 10:18). The Evangelist takes us from the wedding to the Passover to show us our Lord as He purges the Temple from the sellers and moneychangers. He affirms that the new Temple will be built in three days [19] and so guides our eyes away from the stone temple to the temple in the inner soul where God will build His Kingdom. That is how we have come to possess a new Temple in a new age: a temple that neither grows old nor aged.

##### **1- The Water Turned into Wine [1-12]**

##### **2- Purification of the Temple [13-17]**

##### **3- Requesting a Miracle [18- 25]**

##### **1- The Water Turned into Wine**

**‘On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there’ [1].**

**‘On the third day...’** This is how the Evangelist indicates that with every new day the Lord Jesus went about doing a new service and a new act. Not a single day of His life on earth passed away without His doing services. In the same manner the lives of all those who are close to the Lord are spent in work and not a single day is lost in idleness.

The statement ‘On the third day...’ carries a symbolic significance since the Lord Jesus Christ Himself came to His Church to celebrate His wedding to her in the third age. The first age

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 8:1

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 8:4

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 8:4

was that of the Fathers before the Law was given. The second age is that of the Fathers who lived under the Law. And the third is the age of grace in which the true Light shone on the world to dissipate its darkness.

\* The wedding is celebrated on the third day- that is in the last age of the world- for the number three indicates the beginning, the middle, and the end<sup>1</sup>.

\* The wedding takes place on the third day- that is at the end of all ages (in the fullness of time). The number three denotes the beginning, middle, and end: these are the three perspectives of all time. This agrees with the saying of one of the prophets: “ He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us: On the third day He will raise us up...that we may live in His sight” (Hosea 6:1- 3).

**St. Cyril the Great**

By saying ‘Cana of Galilee’ the Evangelist wishes to distinguish it from the one with the same name found in Ephraim in the region of Samaria (Joshua 16:8; 17:9).

The Lord began His Ministry in **Cana of Galilee** the place of the tribe of Asher (Joshua 19:28). Jacob had foretold this, when he blessed the tribes, saying: “ Bread from Asher will be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties...” (Genesis 49:20). Hence the Lord comes to Asher and offers rich bread to the soul and spiritual dainties to the spiritual kings. The Lord began His work in a small corner of the kingdom, isolated from the capital ‘Jerusalem’ in order to proclaim that He has come to serve rather than seek glory from people. He came to serve the simple who do not resist like the Scribes, Pharisees, chief priests, and other religious leaders.

**Bede** considers that **Cana of Galilee** means ‘ zeal to immigrate.’ It is as though the spiritual wedding is fulfilled with those who have zeal for the race to immigrate away from imperfection to virtues, from the earthy to the heavenly based on hope and love.

\* By attending to detail we notice that the celebration did not take place in Jerusalem but rather outside Judea. The meeting for the event took place in the country of the Gentiles (Matt 4: 15). It is very clear that the Council of the Jews rejected the heavenly King. Yet, the Church of the Gentiles received Him with a rejoicing heart<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Cyril the Great**

This is the first Christian wedding to ever take place in the world. It happened according to God’s will otherwise the friends of the groom would not have invited the Lord and His disciples. Besides, the presence of the holy virgin Mary indicated her concern for the wedded for she was a living example of the pure bride who opens her heart with love for everyone.

‘...the mother of Jesus was there...’[1] probably not as one of the guests but as one of the family. This would explain why she realized that they had run out of wine. The guest would not have known that for only those hosting the wedding would be concerned. This is important since in this wedding the Lord performs His first miracle in which He links the Old with the New Testament. Since the Virgin Mary descends from the tribe of Judah - one of the families in the Old Testament- she intercedes to her Son in order to restore the lost salvation. The wine of joy had run out, the prophets had been absent for a long time, and sadness and bitterness prevailed among the people.

**‘Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding’ [2].**

The indication that Jesus and His disciples came to the wedding and stayed for the

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<sup>1</sup> Exposition of St. John, PG 73:223-226.

<sup>2</sup> Exposition of St. John, , PG 73:223-226

celebration reveals the spirit of the newly weds, their families, and their friends. They all walked in the path of the Lord. They did not plan for Jesus to come and leave after a short while so that they could switch their behavior and rejoice in an immoral and inappropriate manner.

\* The Lord attended a wedding once only. This teaches us that a woman should marry once only (as long as her husband is alive. This fact would seem to oppose virginity if we were to fail in giving marriage its rightful significance...the heretics are the only ones who despise marriage and by doing so they step over the Lord's commandments. As for us, we listen joyfully to the Lord's words as He praises marriage. The Church does not condemn marriage but rather regulates it by a clause of submission<sup>1</sup>.

#### ST Jerome

\* The Lord attended the wedding with the main intention of achieving a miracle and not just merely to share in the celebration. Indeed, He wished to sanctify the beginning of a new physical birth for mankind. This is appropriately done by Him who has come to renew the nature of men and bring it into a totally better state. He carries this blessing not only to those who have been born already but also promises it to all who will be born in the future and therefore sanctifying their arrival into this world...through the sanctification of marriage He has put an end to the old sadness and regret of being born<sup>2</sup>.

\* He came (to the wedding) to sanctify the beginning of His birth - I mean His birth according to the flesh...with the purpose of providing grace and offering it to those to be born. Consequently, He ensures a sanctified birth for them too...

\* Women have been informed by God "In pain you shall bring forth children" (Gen 3:16). Was it not of greater urgency to abolish this curse? Otherwise, how do we prevent a fatal marriage? Yet, because our Savior loves mankind, **He is the One who can remove this curse since He is at the core of our joy and happiness. He honored the marriage celebration by attending and so eliminated the shame previously associated with pregnancy.** If anyone lives in the Lord then he is a new creature, and the "old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor 5:17).

\* The Savior did not attend the wedding due to His will alone but because He had been invited. That is He was urged and begged by saintly voices. However, the wine ran out and the partakers had none left: this is a reference to the law that does not achieve perfection, and to the Law of Moses that did not give joy. Besides, the laws of nature ingrained within us were incapable of redeeming us.

#### St. Cyril the Great

\* We have stated earlier that the Lord was known in Galilee and therefore was invited to the wedding. He responded to the invitation for He did not think of His honor but rather His goodness to us. It is He who did not reject to take the form of a slave (Phil 2:7), therefore it seems logical and befitting that He would not resent attending the wedding of His slaves. He is the same who sat with tax collectors and sinners (Matt 9:10) and so it is befitting that He would not reject to be present at the wedding.

Those who invited the Lord were unable to show appropriate acknowledgement to Him. They did not extend an invitation fit for a great One for they invited Him as a simple person and as one of many that they knew. The Evangelist presents this meaning indirectly as he says: '...the mother of Jesus was there...'; so they had invited Him just as they had invited her<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 48:11.

<sup>2</sup> Exposition on St. John PG 73:276

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St. John, Hom.21:1.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, “ They have no wine”[3]**

The Evangelist does not mention that St. Mary had been invited to the wedding. Until that point he just says that the Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples- five of them- had been invited. However, she was there probably because she was one of the members of the family.

When the Lord Jesus Christ is invited through prayer, He comes and brings His saints (disciples) with Him. This transforms the wedding into a sanctified Church, and He blesses generously the newly wedded and all those present from the springs of His heavenly joy.

Some may wonder: Since the Lord had not yet performed any miracles, how did the holy mother Mary know that He could provide wine at the wedding in a miraculous manner?

Although the Lord Jesus Christ had not made any miracle publicly so far, yet St. Mary knew of His divine power, righteousness, and gentleness. She was certain He would do something to fulfill all the needs of the wedding. She was sure that He would step in when necessary to respond to and satisfy any need.

\* It is appropriate to wonder how the mother got the notion that there is an element of greatness in her Son. He had not done any miracle yet and the Evangelist states: ‘ This is the beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee...’[11]...indeed, the pregnancy itself and the events around it inspired in her great thoughts concerning Him. Significantly, St. Luke comments: “...His mother kept all these things in her heart...” as she heard all these things about the Child (refer to Lk 2:51).

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“ They have no wine”[3]:** This is the condition of Israel ever since they have lost the joy of salvation. The prophet Joel tells them: “Awake, you drunkards, and weep and wail, all you drinkers of wine, for it has been cut off from your mouth...”(Joel 1:5). The mother of the Lord, the daughter of Israel, discovered what had happened to her people and therefore shouted out to the heavenly bridegroom. He alone could provide an endless flow of wine and oil (Jn 2:7). On behalf of all mankind, she echoes what her father David says in Psalm 51: ‘ Restore to me the joy of Your salvation...’

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What the holy Virgin proclaims is the result of her own experience of the new heavenly wedding. She had realized it when she bent her head down and accepted the incarnation of the Word in her womb. Her depths had then become an unspeakable wedding celebration and she sang : “ My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior...: (Lk1:46).This is the wine of God that brings joy to the spirit, and restores glory and brilliance. Consequently, believers enjoy a constant wedding: “ And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you” (Is. 62:5).

The way the holy Virgin Mary acted reveals the motherhood of a believer and the concern to respond to the needs of others rather than one’s own needs. A believer **turns first to the Source** to receive abundantly and in greater measure than from any other. Moreover, the request is made in a spirit of humbleness as a person presents the situation without offering the solution to God and as though claiming to be more knowledgeable or more loving to others than the almighty Lord.

\* God is exceedingly generous and He does not despise us as we struggle and hunger for His riches<sup>1</sup>.

### **St. Cyril the Great**

**‘Jesus said to her: “ Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.” [4]**

The Lord did not blame the newly wedded or their parents for not having bought enough wine; neither did He blame His Mother for being concerned. He simply underlined that for every action there is an appropriate and convenient time.

Some wonder why the Lord called His mother ‘ woman.’ However, this vanishes when we find Him on the Cross and He repeats these words: “ Woman, behold your son!” He speaks to her at the beginning of His miraculous deeds to indicate that the process of carrying His Cross has started. As His Person is increasingly revealed, the powers of darkness are enraged and plot for His death. He is not addressing her as His mother since it is not for her to define the hour of His crucifixion. Indeed, it is in the hands of the Father who has sent Him; for the Lord Jesus Christ came to fulfill the Father’s will that He sacrifice Himself to redeem and save the world.

It is true that the holy Virgin Mary was there for His first miracle, yet she was unaware that it was the opening hour of the crucifixion. She remained with Him until the last moment of the crucifixion as she is the representative of the Church. She is the new Eve who accompanies the Second Adam along the path of pain and so He pours His glory over her. After she became pregnant and carried the Lord in her womb, she was told: “...a sword will pierce through your own soul also...”...it started to pierce her soul at the wedding in Cana of Galilee to carry the wounds inflicted by love!

He Lord did not say “ O mother” but rather “ O woman..”, because what He was doing as He transformed the water into wine is not enacted of a man who has taken flesh from her but occurs as a result of His divinity. It is true that there is no separation between His divinity and His humanity, and that his actions result from His being the word of God incarnates, yet some acts result specifically from Him as the only Son of God while others proceed from Him as the Son of Man.

Why did He say: “ **My hour has not yet come**” yet He did do a miracle at that same time? He wished to clarify to her that the time to publicly enact miracles before the crowds had not yet come even though His work is continuous. He performed the miracle so quietly after the servants brought the water pots to Him that the master of the feast and the bridegroom did not get to know. The servants were the only ones who knew about it [9].

\* In order to be convinced that the Lord respected His mother, listen to the words of St. Luke as he states that He ‘...was subject to them’ (Lk 2:51); while St. John reveals how He was

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<sup>1</sup> *Exposition on St. John, PG 73:278.*



providing for her in the actual moments of His crucifixion. When the parents do not present obstacles in matters concerning God yet they need to prepare the way for them and it would become a serious danger if that were not so. Nevertheless, if they were to demand an impossible request that would form an obstacle in any spiritual matter then it would be dangerous to obey! The Lord's answer is a result of that situation, and He replies in another incident by saying: "Who is My mother and who are My brothers...?" (Matt 12:48). This is because they did not think of Him as they should have. As the virgin Mary had given birth to Him, she wanted to direct Him in all things just as other mothers do. However, she needed to honor and worship Him. That explains His response in such situations<sup>1</sup>.

\* The Lord was concerned for others and He used every means to inculcate the right idea concerning Himself. Therefore how much more concerned would He be with informing His mother of such matters<sup>2</sup>.

### **St. John Chrysostom**

**St. John Chrysostom** believes that the Lord would have wished that the request came from those who had the need rather than from His mother. If what the Lord did was in response to the request of a friend, even though it was a great deed, yet some would be suspicious. Whereas if those in need had asked, then there would be no doubts concerning the miraculous act and hence it would have greater benefit. **St. John Chrysostom** likens the Lord to a skillful physician who enters a house full of sick people and although he does not speak to any of the sick or their relatives; yet He speaks only to his mother. This would annoy every body and arouse suspicions.

\* The Lord wished to indicate that he did everything at the appropriate time and does not do everything instantaneously...He is not obligated necessarily by the times for He has set the order of the seasons and has created them. Consequently, He says "**My hour has not yet come.**" By this He indicates that He has neither been revealed to many nor does He have a body of followers as yet...

Besides, it is as though the Lord is telling her that He should be informed by others rather than by His mother otherwise they would be suspicious of the miracle. It is appropriate that those who need the wine to come and speak to Him- although He is already aware of their need and does not need to be informed of it-but this would make them unanimously welcome and recognize the miraculous deed fully

When a person is needy, he becomes thankful upon receiving help, whereas someone who does not feel needy will not have any clear feelings towards a benefit he receives<sup>1</sup>.

\* While He is being respectful to His mother yet He is more concerned with the salvation of her soul. He performs that which is beneficial to many and to accomplish that He came in the flesh. Therefore His words proceed from Someone who is stern with His mother but rather from

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, Hom.21:2

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, Hom.21:2

<sup>1</sup> Hom. 22. PG 59: 126-127

Him who is wise in His plans. He leads her to think correctly, and wishes to ensure that His miracle is accepted with the honor due to it<sup>2</sup>.

### **St. John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord does not wish to rush into any action as He does not desire to appear as a miracle maker to someone who has not requested anything. Indeed, He waits until the needy invite Him rather than satisfy those who are merely curious. He grants grace to the needy and not to mere spectators seeking to enjoy some sight.

### **St. Cyril the Great**

\* The Lord of the angels is not subject to time for He has created the times and hours as part of His creation. However, the holy Virgin desired that He would do a miracle when the wine expired. That explains why the Lord immediately answered and as though to tell her clearly: ‘I can do a miracle through my Father and not through My mother.’ For He who has the same nature as the Father worked miracles that issued from the mother, and this enabled Him to die which He did when He died on the Cross. He knew His mother and He entrusted her to His disciple with these words: “Behold your mother!”(Jn 19:27). Therefore, by saying: “ Woman, what does you concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come”, He wished to convey that ‘ the miracle is not a natural part of you and I do not recognize you in it. When the hour of My death comes, then I will know that you are My mother since having accepted that in you I know that I can die’<sup>3</sup>.

### **Pope Gregory the Great**

Saint Bede adopted the same opinion when he stated that the Lord appears to say: ‘ there is nothing in common between what I have always possessed through the Father and the body which I took from you in the flesh. The hour has not come when I will prove the human weakness which I have taken from you. First let Me underline My divine and everlasting power.’ Nevertheless the hour will come when that which He shares with His mother will be revealed and that occurs when He dies on the Cross as well as when He entrusts His chaste disciple to look after the holy Virgin. When the Lord suffers human weakness He recognizes His mother from whom He inherited this weakness; but when He performs divine acts He appears as One who does not know her. This is due to His knowledge that she is not the source of His divine birth.

### **His mother said to the servants “ Whatever He says to you, do it ”[9]**

She did not reprimand her Son for His words to her for she understood the mystery at least to a certain extent. She also sensed some signs of acknowledgement so she asked the servants to obey the instructions of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 21:3*

<sup>3</sup> *N & PN Frs. , Series 2, Vol 13:48.*

The Evangelist uses the Greek word ‘ diaconis’ to reveal that they are the servants fulfilling the divine mysteries and which the Lord adopts to serve His people and bring them joy. The Church of the New Testament uses the term ‘diaconin’ for the deacons who serve at the altar and at the tables (being concerned with the needs of the poor and the sick...).

Being confident in the love of the Lord to serve and in His tenderness, she was sure that He would definitely act and satisfy every shortage. The Holy Virgin asked the servants to turn to Him and obey Him. This is the role of the holy Saint Mary and all the saints: to draw our attention to our Lord and obey Him completely.

\* She began to work by orienting the servants so that would readily obey Him always.

### **St. Cyril the Great**

\* She knew that He abstained out of humility and not out of weakness. In order to avoid the assumption that He is imposing Himself and voluntarily rushing to work a miracle, she brought the servants to Him<sup>1</sup>.

### **St. John Chrysostom**

**St. John Chrysostom** finds that St. Mary gives us a practical lesson in perseverance through her act. For in spite of the Lord’s response to her, she did not stop working, called the servants, and asked them to obey Him.

**‘ Now there were set there six water pots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons a piece.’[6]**

Six pots were used to correspond to the days of the week from Sunday to Friday, each pot consecrated for a specific day for purification. As for Saturday, it was a day for worship and rest—no one did any work that required purification.

It is not strange that the Lord transforms the water into wine, for it is He who extracts wine from the earth

(Ps 104:14 -15) as He grants the soil to produce vines whose grapes are then pressed and made into wine.

Moses started his miracles during the ten plagues by changing the water into blood that carried bitterness and death. All had broken the Law and were therefore subject to a curse and death. As for the Lord Jesus Christ , He turned the water into wine for He offers the joyful message of salvation. Indeed, He came to save the world and not to condemn it. He came to grant inner fullness and joy. His evangelical invitation is : “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters...come buy and eat...buy wine and milk” (Is 55:1).

These water pots were used for purification since it was not acceptable for a Jew to eat unless he washed first (Mk 7:3). This water was also used for other rituals relating to purification. A popular saying among the Jews was: ‘The one who uses water the most to wash himself

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Homilies on St. John*, Hom. 21:1

benefits better health in this world.'

These water pots were used solely for water, and wine was not put in them. They were made of stone so that no trace would be left if they had been used for wine before. This is different in the case of clay water pots as they would absorb the old liquids and lend their taste to the new. The water pots were made of stone: Zechariah had seen the stone placed before the face of the Lord and it had seven eyes (Zech. 3:9). This indicates that he had spiritual knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. St. Peter the apostle also saw Him as a living stone that would be used to build the altar of the Lord (1Peter2:4,5).

**St. John Chrysostom** notes that the Evangelist stresses that this is '**according to the manner of purification of the Jews**' so that all may be aware that they were never used for wine but only for water for purification. He also notes that Palestine is a country known for scarcity of water- there are no canals or sources available every where. Therefore people used to fill water pots with water so that they would not have to rush to the river when they got desecrated at any time. In this way they had instant access to the means of purification<sup>1</sup>.

Some believe that the six water pots refer to the six periods of the world that humanity has traversed until the advent of the Lord that will occur in the seventh period (the seventh seal in the Book of the Revelation). It seems to point to believers across the years and generations who have been purified from their sins and drink the joyful spiritual wine. According to **St. Augustine** are:

- A. From Adam to Noah
- B. From Noah to Abraham
- C. From Abraham to David
- D. From David to the Babylonian Exile
- E. From the Babylonian Exile to John the Baptist
- F. From John the Baptist to the end of the world

**St. Augustine** goes on to say: [ Add to that the fact that God created man in His image on the sixth day; and in the sixth period He proclaimed the renewal of our minds through the Gospel so that we might become in the image of our Creator. Moreover the water was transformed into wine so that we might taste the Lord. This is proclaimed in the Law and by the prophets. That is why there were six water pots and He ordered that they be filled with water. These water pots now indicate the six periods that were not without prophecies; and they were divided and were separated, as it were, from the joints...and they will remain empty if the Lord does not fill them up...it is necessary to comprehend and find the Lord in each of these prophecies<sup>2</sup>].

What do these words convey: '...containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece'[6]? St. Augustine explains that the word 'rain' in the Greek language 'metpou' refer to a certain unit of measure and that the number 'two' refers to the Father and the Son, while 'three' refers to the Holy Trinity. Note that the Evangelist does not say 'some water pots containing two and others three gallons of rain' but said that 'each one had the capacity to contain two or three gallons of

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Homilies on St. John*, Hom. 22:2.

<sup>2</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 9:6

rain.’ In the Books of the Old Testament, the prophecies speak about the Father and the Son (the Lord Jesus Christ) and this included references to the Holy Spirit since He is the Spirit of the Father and the Son at the same time. **St. Augustine** finds that [ the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of love that binds the Father and the Son together. When allusion is made to two the reference is the Holy Trinity even though this is not expressed. When the allusion to three occurs then the reference is to the Holy Trinity and it is clearly expressed<sup>1</sup>].

We stated earlier that the six water pots refer to the six periods that would transpire and lead to the wedding of the Lord Jesus Christ **with the Church that is made up of all nations**<sup>2</sup>.

1- The first water pot starts with **Adam** who carries a union with Eve and so become one body (Gen.2:24). This is similar to the union between the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church (Eph. 3:31). They are the parents of all mankind and not of the Jews only.

2- The second water pot starts with **Noah** the representative of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he placed in his ark **animals and birds from all over the world**.

3- The third water pot refers to **Abraham**, who through his seed , all nations were blessed.

4- The fourth water pot is **David** who sang : “ Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all nations” (Ps 82:8). The tune was set by Asaph the singer.

5- The fifth water pot is the **Babylonian exile** when Daniel the prophet sees the Lord Jesus Christ as a small stone cut out without human hands and **it filled the whole earth**(Daniel 2:34).

6- The sixth water pot relates to **John the Baptist** the greatest born of women. It is said of him that he is greater than a prophet (Matt 11:11). He prophesied about the Lord Jesus Christ and that the Lord is sent for all nations as he says: “...God is **able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones**” (Matt 3:9). This is how St. Augustine sees that the sixth water pot has witnessed the marriage of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church that is formed of all nations. [ Because we come from these nations, yet we could not have come from her if God had not raised from the stones children to Abraham. We have become Abraham’s children as we have emulated his faith and not by being born of him according to the flesh<sup>3</sup>].

**‘ Jesus said to them: “ Fill the pots with water.” And they filled them up to the brim’[7].**

The Lord could have created wine from nothing, yet He transformed the water into wine to stress that He did not come to ignore or abolish the Law. Rather He came to perfect it. Hence the Gospel is a spiritual extension to the Law without being literal. Besides, He intended that

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 9:7-8.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 9:10-11.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 9:16.

those who brought and drank of the water to become themselves witnesses to the actual miracle and testify that it was not mere fantasy.

**St. Augustine** finds that the water here refers to the Old Testament and ‘ the Law, the prophets, and the Psalms.’ The whole of the Old Testament had the taste of water to those who could not comprehend it spiritually and discover the mystery of the Lord Jesus Christ within it. Now the Lord has come to transform the water into joyful wine that has a new taste and effect. [ How did He change the water into wine? When He opened their minds and interpreted the Holy Books to them: starting from Adam and all the prophets and until they became as drunk men and said: “Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us ?” (Lk 24:32). They therefore comprehended the Lord Jesus Christ in these Books whereas they had not recognized Him before. That is how the Lord transformed the water into wine and it had a taste it did not have before then. Now it was overwhelmingly intoxicating...a matter that did not exist before... He revealed that the Old Testament was issued from Him just as the water pots were filled with water at His command. They have been truly granted by the Lord in the same way as the Old Testament. However, they had no taste as long as the Lord Jesus Christ was not comprehended through them<sup>1</sup>].

In obedience to the Lord’s command, the servants filled the water pots to the brim. In the same way, it is not appropriate for a servant to rest before he /she completes the command and seeks to fulfill, by service, the work of the Lord ‘ the fullness of Him who fills all in all’(Eph.1:23)...‘for God does not give the Spirit by measure’ (Jn 3:34). Nothing could occupy a godly person other than the concern that every soul would enjoy fully the glory of the Lord Who is ever near. Consequently he/she would sing: “And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace” (Jn 1:16).

The One who transformed the water into wine, and Who sends rain could fill the water pots with water and then transform them into wine. However, due to His love for mankind, He does not disregard our obligation to work with Him. Since we are capable of filling the water pots, we need to do our best while He completes what is impossible for us to achieve. In the same way, and in many tasks, **He grants us the honor of working with Him and for His Kingdom that lies within us.** He therefore asks of those present to lift the stone from over the grave, and orders Lazarus to come out. He grants life and resurrection. He commands the disciples to free the dead from his grave clothes. We therefore sing joyfully with the Apostle: “...those who work with God...”!

**‘ And He said to them: “Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast.” And they took it.”[8]**

We do not hear that the Lord called upon the name of God or that He prayed to bless the water, but that He issued an order to fill the water pots and then instantly ordered to present them. He did not even ask them to give Him some in order to taste it.

The Lord did not perform this miracle in order to publicly reveal Himself. He did it to fulfill a need and so ordered the servants to offer it immediately. He has not granted the talent in

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 9:5

order that we bury it but so that we might labor constantly and seize every chance to serve.

The Lord Jesus Christ was not 'the master of the feast' but rather the friend of the bridegroom and a Servant to everyone. This is the true seat of leadership and it evident when a person sacrifices himself lovingly and humbly for the sake of others.

**'When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew) the master of the feast called the bridegroom.'**[9]

The Greek word used to translate the term 'drank' corresponds to the colloquial Arabic word 'draw' which is used to indicate extracting from a deep source. Note that the water pots are very deep and have wide openings through which the wine is poured. So it is impossible to do so except by using a serving spoon with a long hand. This is true of a minister presenting the holy mysteries and a preacher of the Gospel as it is appropriate for them to reach far into the depths and draw from the wealth of God's great blessings. They are like someone drawing from the eternal and divine springs.

**'And he said to him: "Every man at the begnig sets out the good wine, and wen the guests are drunk, then that which is inferior; but you have kept the good wine until now."'**[10]

**St. Chrysostom** explains that the testimony comes from the master of the feast so that on one would say that the testimony comes from drunk men who, therefore, do not distinguish water from wine. Moreover, the master of the feast is careful not to get drunk since he is responsible for providing all the matters that concern the wedding in a dignified and wise manner<sup>1</sup>.

**The Evangelist** is specific when he says: **'When the master of the feast has tasted...'** to indicate that he had not taken any drink, not even of this wine. He just tasted it.

In Cana of Galilee, the Lord Jesus Christ transformed the water into wine and by doing so He created a spiritual joy that spread throughout the celebration. In the New Testament, the Lord - by His Holy Spirit - transforms the wine into His Blood that is sacrificed for our sake, and this results in the creation of a heavenly joy that fills the life of those who partake of It.

\* The Lord did not just transform the water into wine, but He also turned it into a wine of supreme quality. This is because the miracles of the Lord possess this distinction as they become more brilliant and far better than the quality of things existing in nature. In that respect, when He healed a crooked member in a person's body, that member appeared better than the other healthy parts. The proof is in that water turned into wine and becoming of supreme quality. This is not only the testimony of the servants, but to which the master of the feast witnessed as well.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**'This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana Of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and**

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom.22:2*

## His disciples believed in Him.’[11]

Here the meaning of ‘glory’ begins to be uncovered in this Book and it signifies the ‘Divine presence.’ **God glorifies us when He proclaims His presence within us; while we glorify Him when we proclaim His presence in the world.** In this verse the presence of the Father in His Son - consubstantial with the Father- is proclaimed and the Son reports about Him.

\* The One who has made wine from water is able to make bread out of stone for authority arises from the same Source. Satan tempted the Lord by making a similar challenge, but the Lord rejected him, for as you know, when the Lord was tempted the devil suggested this to Him as He was hungry. But it sounded as though Satan could grant Him such power. However, the Lord practiced this (to be hungry) to demonstrate humility. The Bread (the Lord Jesus Christ) was hungry, the path was rough, the Giver of life was wounded, and life was dead...He did not make bread out of the stones. The One who could do so easily- just as He turned the water into wine... yet nothing could defeat the tempter as much as despising him. When the Lord overcame Satan’s temptations, the ‘angels came and ministered to Him’ (Matt 4:11)...

Why did He do this act and not the other?...When He turned the water into wine, what does the Evangelist go on to add? ‘...and His disciples believed in Him’ (Jn 2:11). Was it given to Satan to believe in Him?<sup>2</sup>

## St. Augustine

\* If someone states: there is not sufficient evidence to show that this miracle is the beginning of the miracles of the Lord and to specify Cana of Galilee where it all started; for it is possible that He could have done other miracles in other places.

Our answer would be as follows: John the Baptist had previously said of the Lord: “ **I did not know Him, but that He should be revealed to Israel , therefore I came baptizing with water**”(Jn 1:31).If the Lord had done wonders at an early stage of His life, the Jews would not have been in need for someone else to proclaim Him. Moreover, His previous fame would have spread every where and it would not have been necessary for Him (the Lord) to come among the people and to become known through his miracles. He did so for only three years and He needed this period to reveal Himself not only to the Jews but also to those in Syria and beyond (Matt. 4: 24).

I state that the One, Who in a short period shone upon you with wonders and therefore making His Name known to all, would not have achieved less than that if He had performed miracles at an earlier age. Moreover, He would not have remained unknown all that time (until He became thirty years old). Had he not remained unknown, it would have appeared strange for a child to do miracles...

Actually, He did not do anything when He was a child other than one incident that St. Luke reports as a witness (Lk. 2:46). He was twelve years old when He sat and listened to the

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<sup>2</sup> Sermon on N.T.Lessons, 73:2.



teachers and they were astonished by His questions. Other than that, it is more probable and logical that He did not begin to do miracles at an early age otherwise things would have appeared suspicious. Many doubted in Him when He was of a mature age; so how much more would that have been if He had performed miracles as a young boy? This would have expedited His crucifixion before the designated time, and through the poison of hatred the facts of God's Plan would not have been accepted<sup>1</sup>.

### **St. John Chrysostom**

**‘ After this He went down to Capernaum, He, His mother, His brothers, and His disciples; and they did not stay there many days’ [12]**

**Origen**<sup>2</sup> notes that the word ‘**Capernaum**’ means ‘ field of action.’ He says that the Lord and those with Him went to Capernaum but did not stay there for long. This is because those who are fallen or wavering do not have a place where the Lord and His saints could stay for many days. They represent the incline in the ‘field of action’ that has no potential to be receptive to much teaching, and is satisfied with very little movement. In contrast, souls that are spiritually sublime look upwards and enjoy the divine promise: “...lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” and are not satisfied with just a few days.

When we are crucified with the Lord, He lives with us and within us so that we can join the Apostle and say: “ ...it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...” (Gal. 2:20). In this way He abides, lives, and speaks with us to the end of time.

\* After the joy provided by the wine, it was necessary for the Savior, together with His Mother and the disciples to enter ‘the field of action’ in order to motivate the disciples that fruit is found in a fertile field. It is the Holy Spirit that makes the soul pregnant and fruit bearing. Besides, they wanted to motivate those who were present and were willing to benefit<sup>3</sup>.

### **Origen the Scholar**

**What does the Evangelist mean when he uses the expression ‘His brothers’? St. Augustine** explains that it would include all those who have blood ties with St. Mary and therefore considered His brothers. St. Augustine supports this by quoting the Holy Bible: Lot, Abraham's nephew is called his brother (Genesis 13:8; 14:14); Laban, Jacob's uncle, was called his brother (Gen.29:12,15). Moreover, the Lord speaks about His disciples and calls them His brothers (Matt.12:46-50)<sup>4</sup>.

## **2- The Purification of the Temple**

**‘ Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.’[13]**

This is the first Passover that occurs after the Baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ. The

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 21:2.*

<sup>2</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 10:41-42.*

<sup>3</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 10:38*

<sup>4</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 10:2-3.*

second is mentioned in Luke 6:1; the third in John 6:4; and the fourth falls on the day the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified (Jn 11:55).

**‘ And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business.’[14]**

**Origen** wonders about the addition of ‘Jews’ to ‘Passover’ ...is there another Passover that is celebrated besides the Passover of the Jews? He responds by saying that there were probably some who celebrated the Passover based on their own human understanding rather than following the Divine thought of the Holy Bible. That is why the Evangelist uses the expression ‘**the Passover of the Jews.**’ In the Book of Exodus, the expression used is: ‘**It is the Lord’s Passover**’(Ex.12:11). It does not say ‘It is your Passover’ in any place. When God announces His rejection of the people, He associates the feasts and fasts to them and not to Himself, and says in Isaiah 1:14: “Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them.”

\* This is what happens when God’s people sin- they do not forget God. Similarly, God rejects feasts that are celebrated by sinners. Those that are set by the Lord are considered feasts of the Lord and the Passover is one of them. Although in the Gospel here, the wording indicates that the feast is not of Lord but of the Jews; yet in another part of the Holy Bible the Lord says the following : “The feasts of the Lord which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts” (Lev 23:2)<sup>1</sup>.

## **Origen**

Some thinkers believe that this incident occurred in the last week in the Life of the Lord on earth and that it helped to accelerate the events leading to His judgment and crucifixion. The leaders at the Temple considered the Lord’s act humiliating to them and to the holy building. However, St. John the evangelist puts this incident at the beginning of the Lord’s mission among the public in order to stress that He is the new Temple which replaces the old one. Besides, He is the unique Sacrifice that replaces the role of the bloody animal sacrifice. That is why the Lord chases the cattle and sheep with their sellers<sup>2</sup>. Many scholars believe that the Lord purified the temple on two occasions: once during the first Passover which took place at the beginning of His service and as it is mentioned in St. John’s Gospel; and again a second time during the fourth and last Passover which was at the time of the Lord’s crucifixion (Matt 21:12; Mk 11:15; Lk 19:45). It is as though the cleaning of the House of God is the Lord’s first and last task: He begins His service at the Temple and ends it there too. The prophet Malachi had foretold that task (Mal.3:2-4).

The Lord Jesus Christ found that there was a market in one of the buildings of the temple known as the People’s House. There people to sell bulls, sheep, and pigeons which they would use for offering sacrifice. This place was close to the pool known as Bethesda (Jn 5:2) and the head priests and those with them therefore used it to get material profit: in return for a certain fee they gave certificates stating that the sacrifice has no blemishes. That is how greed for money

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<sup>1</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 10:80-81.*

<sup>2</sup> *El Khoury Paul Elfaghali: The Gospel of St. John, The Writing Syndicate, 1992, pg 15.*

damaged the purity of worship (1 Tim. 6:5, 10). Besides, there were moneychangers who sold shekels of gold specifically indicated as offerings for the temple.

There is no doubt that the Lord had seen that sight before when He visited the temple. One instance was when He had gone to listen to the teachers and questioned them, but He was only thirteen years old at that time. But He only purified the temple when He began His ministry publicly. Besides, He did not complain or report about it to the head priests for He knew that they approved and encouraged what was going on.

The sellers of the sheep are those who transfer the salvation provided by the Lord , the Lamb of God, into a commercial business. They acquire a material possession at the expense of losing eternal salvation and seek that which is earthly rather than a heavenly reward.

\* The Lord has justly said about such people: “ Many rulers have destroyed My vineyard, they have trodden My portion under foot, they have made My pleasant portion a desolate wilderness, they have made it desolate...” (Jer. 12:10). For truly the vineyard of the Lord has become corrupt for they have learned to crush divine worship. Through the greed of those appointed as guardians, the vine has been left barren and unfruitful for all the uninformed.

### **St. Cyril the Great**

\* Who are they who sell the sheep and the pigeons?

They are those who seek to satisfy themselves rather than serve the Lord. They are those who believe that all that matters is what sells and do not think of salvation. They do not ask to be bought but rather want to sell. Indeed, it would have been better for them to be saved by the Blood of the Lord and to possess His peace. Now however, what benefit do they get when they seek in this world a transient object? No matter what it is - be it money or pleasure of food, or honor that stems from people's praise- these are all certainly transient. Are not all these things as a cloud or steam? Do not all these pass away and vanish?...those who seek these things, my dear brothers, are only selling<sup>1</sup>.

### **St. Augustine**

**St. Augustine** considers that the bulls to refer to the apostles (I Cor 9:9-10). And that those who trade in bulls are like those who adhere to the apostle and not to his Friend (the Lord Jesus Christ). Therefore St. Paul reprimands the Corinthians and says: “...Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?...” (1Cor1:13); also “ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase,” (1 Cor 3:6-7). [ May those who pray for the peace of His servants say: May the Lord be glorified!<sup>2</sup>]

Those who participate in the bull trade are those who engage in teaching the Word and they are like those who plough in the Lord's field. Yet they do so as they seek a transient benefit rather than the joy of the Fruit of the Spirit. St. Paul says that these “...preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely...” (Phil 1:16).

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 10:6.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 10:7

Those who sell the sheep are those who perform acts of mercy (woolen clothes and meat) in order to win human praise. They therefore receive their reward in this world (Matt 6:5).

Those who sell pigeons are those who misuse the gift of the Holy Spirit that appeared in the form of a dove. An example of this is the Simonist movement practiced in the ordination of priests: Simon wanted to buy with silver the power of the Holy Spirit. He then wanted to sell it and get material profit or temporary honor rather than receive the spiritual benefit (Acts 8: 19-20).

\* The Lord does not allow those who are slaves to money as well as those who sell seats to enter His temple. For what do these seats represent but favors and honors? What are the pigeons other than the simple - minded and those souls that follow a clear faith? Has the Lord shut the door in the face of anyone that has been brought to His temple...yet those who sell honors and posts must necessarily be ordered to leave. It is vital to command the eviction of those who sell the simple- minded believers<sup>3</sup>.

### **St. Ambrose**

\* The cattle refer to transient matters since cattle are engaged in plowing the earth. The sheep symbolize unreasoning beastly matters as sheep are the most remote and unreasoning animals. Pigeons represent unsteady thoughts and their annulment ; while the coins represent what we think are good matters<sup>1</sup>.

\* It is necessary to tear away these beastly and commercial matters from the temple which is the Body of Christ so that it does not become a house of trade<sup>2</sup>.

\* It is also necessary that the temple be destroyed by those who devise plots against the Word of God; and that it would be back (risen) on the third day after its destruction...similarly, every person is purified when the Lord Jesus Christ tears and removes from him all manner of bestiality and commercial confusion. These are destroyed on account of the zeal of the Word within that person, and he will arise on the third day through the Lord...the temple is built on the first day following its destruction, and on the second day, and finally completed on the third when the resurrection is achieved. It will be a resurrection since having been buried with Christ, we arise with Him too (Rom. 6:4)<sup>3</sup>.

### **Origen**

**‘When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changer’s money and overturned the tables.’ [15]**

It seems as though He did not chase the sellers or the moneychangers but only the cattle,

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<sup>3</sup> *Sermon Against Auxentius, 21.*

<sup>1</sup> *Commentary on St. John, Book 10:142.*

<sup>2</sup> *Commentary on St. John, Book 10:240.*

<sup>3</sup> *Commentary on St. John, Book 10:243.*

sheep and pigeons. He overturned the money and the tables. He came not to judge but to purify and sanctify. He came to mend the corrupt. In His eyes, one soul is more precious than all these animals and gold and money.

\* He reveals His feelings not only by words but by using cords. He chases them out with a whip from the holy places. He Justly applies the appropriate punishment for slaves for they have rejected the Son. It is He who grants freedom to man through faith.

\* It is important that those who honor obedience to the law and proclaim the truth to realize that they deserve to submit to the stripes and sufferings of slavery when they revert to the spirit of slavery and reject to rejoice in freedom<sup>4</sup>.

\* The rebellious Jews will be chased out of the holy places, and they will be ousted from the sanctified gathering of the saints. Even when they will present offerings , He will reject them. Moreover, He will subjugate them to punishment and the whip as they hold on to the cords of their sins (refer to Prov. 5:22).

### **St. Cyril the Great**

**‘And He said to those who sold doves: “ Take these away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!”[16]**

The Lord went up to Jerusalem in order to purify His Father’s temple and which had become a house of trade. Now He constantly goes up to the inner Jerusalem , to our depths, to build within us a heavenly temple sanctified to the Father. He purifies it from all trading and corruption.

\* He says: “ **Do not make My Father’s house a house of trade...**” and He does not say “ our Father’s house.” This is appropriate for according to these words...the Word is understood to be of the essence of God the Father. The Word is not one of those who are children by grace. Therefore He separates Himself from the rest and calls God His Father.**St. Cyril the Great**

\* Yet do not keep our silence towards heretics who separate the Old fro the New Testament. We believe the words of the Lord Jesus Christ concerning the temple: “ Did you not know that I must be in My Father’s house?<sup>1</sup>” Also: “ Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise.” Here He affirms more clearly that the previous temple in Jerusalem is His Father’s house <sup>2</sup>.

### **St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* The Lord did not say: “ Do not make the holy house...” but He said: “ **Do not make My Father’s House....**” So here He calls God His Father. They were not angered because they believed Him to be using that expression in a simplistic way and did not understand these words except after He explained that He spoke these words to equate Himself with God. They then got

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<sup>4</sup> Comm. On John, hom. 132.

<sup>1</sup> Luke 2:49: “ Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?!”

<sup>2</sup> Article 7: 6.

angered against Him.

### **St. John Chrysostom**

**‘ Then His disciples remembered that it is written: ‘ Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.’ [17]**

The disciples began to comprehend what lay behind the acts of the Lord as they began to remember that what is written in the Holy Book. Indeed, within the Word of God every word explains the other and clarifies it. Now they remembered that which is written in Psalm 69:9.

\* The zeal for the house of the Father- that is the Church- burned in the heart of the Lord for He loved Her and delivered Himself for Her sake. He did so in order to grant Her eternal life and fellowship in His glory.

\* **‘ Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up’[17]**...everyone of you knows what to do in your home, with friends in their homes, at work, with those who are greater or lesser than you; and as much as God allows you to enter, when He opens the door for His Word - that never ceases to win someone for the Lord - for you have been won yourself through the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>3</sup>.

### **St. Augustine**

\* The Lord Himself says: **‘ Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up’**: May we have true zeal for the Lord. I do not mean an earthly kind of zeal as this arouses envy. For peace to exist among you, the kind that surpasses understanding, may you love one another. Nothing is sweeter than love, and nothing is more blessed than peace. You know that I love you always, and now I love you above all else and as children of one Father: for you have become unified by the bond of brotherly love<sup>4</sup>.

### **St. Ambrose**

#### **3 - Requesting a Miracle**

#### **3 - Requesting a Miracle**

**So the Jews answered and said to Him, “What sign do you show to us, since You do these things?”[18]**

When the Lord chased the sellers and purified the Temple He did so with such authority that the leaders could not display any resistance or opposition to Him before the public. They needed to underline their great respect and concern towards the Temple, as well as everything that happened there. So instead of admitting the corruption that had taken place as a result of the

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<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 10:9.

<sup>4</sup> *Duties of the Clergy*, Book 2:30:154.

of trade transactions carried on within its walls, they asked Him: **“What sign do you show to us, since You do these things?”** Moreover, they were really hurt as they would lose their dishonest money as a result. By asking this question, they therefore hoped to prevent Him from interfering with their business

When Moses appeared to save the people of God from slavery, he performed clear miracles. So what are the miracles that Jesus did that would make them accept and acknowledge Him? The leaders could not comprehend how He could purify the Temple without meeting any opposition, and even though He was not vested with any human power or official religious status or divine weapon. Indeed, His Divine Presence dissolved all darkness.

\* If that matter was hidden from the Jews, it was because they stood outside. As for ourselves, it has been revealed to us since we know in whom we should place our faith. Soon, we will celebrate the destruction of the Temple in an awesome annual celebration. We urge you to be prepared for that since you will receive grace as believers<sup>1</sup>.

### **St. Augustine**

\* The Jewish leaders could not reprimand the Lord Jesus Christ...but they invented the means that would allow the dealers to escape. At the same time they found a way to excuse themselves for their unbelief and their inability to submit to Him immediately or unquestioningly. Therefore they could not receive Him as the Son of God if they were not given a miracle.

### **St. Cyril the Great**

\* Their utter insanity is so regrettable! Is there a need for a miracle before they could stop from their evil acts and liberate the House of God from such shameful transactions? Is not the greatest miracle evident in His jealousy towards that House? The disciples appropriately distinguished themselves as they remembered that it was written: **“Zeal for Your house has eaten me up,”** [17]. In contrast, the Jews did not remember this prophecy, and said: **“What sign do you show to us?”** They hoped that in this manner they would be able to stop Him and further embarrass Him so that He would perform a miracle. This would have given them the opportunity to find Him guilty<sup>2</sup>.

### **St. John Chrysostom**

**“Jesus answered and said to them: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,”[19].**

The miracle that the Lord Jesus Christ did is that He came to our earth as the all-powerful Divine Presence. He alone could break the lock of Hades and destroy death that is the last enemy of mankind. By this, He granted those who believe in Him the power of the resurrection. This is the last miracle the Lord Himself has performed by His resurrection and before His ascension into the heavens. It was necessary for Him to die yet corruption could not affect Him (Ps. 16:10).

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 10:10.

<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on St. John*, Hom.23:2.

He asked them to destroy the temple of His Body indicating that they would lift Him up on the Cross; whereas they understood that He was speaking about the temple made of stone.

\* Those who have described Him as the free One have well-said for He has the power to raise Himself...furthermore He is free who descended in order to set others free<sup>1</sup>.

### **St. Ambrose**

**‘ Then the Jews said: “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” [20.**

The temple was built in forty-six years. Some believe that building began in the days of Herodus in the year 19/20 B.C. and so it was finished by the year 28 B.C. approximately. Others believe that Herodus the Great began rebuilding it in the eighteenth year of his reign<sup>2</sup> and ended the main work in nine and a half years. However, repairs and additions went on for many more years. Herodus began the work in the year 16 B.C. and the reference here is to the time the Lord was thirty years old. In this way the temple was forty six years old and it was not yet finished. This indicates that the reference made here is to the last temple because the first one had been completed in twenty years. It therefore becomes clear that the beginning of the Lord’s ministry coincided with the time the Jews experienced the peak of their pride in their newly achieved temple. Therefore it was not easy for them to accept the words of the Lord concerning destroying it in three days.

It took the same time to build the temple when Zerbabel laid the foundations of the temple from the second year in the reign of Koresh to its completion in the year 32 in the reign of Artaxerxes.

\* They belittled the miracle as they did not comprehend the depth of the mystery. Indeed, they held on tenaciously as they suffered from the disease of ignorance. This is their excuse and self-vindication for disobeying Him...How could He be incapable of doing anything however hard while He is the One who has mightily created the whole world in six days; while to Him belongs transcendental and inexpressible power: He just has to will something and it gets powerfully fulfilled?

### **St. Cyril the Great**

**St. Augustine** presents a symbolic interpretation to the **number 42**: The four letters for the name of Adam represent the first letters for the four global points: Anatole for the east, Dysis for the West, Arctos for the North, and Mesembria for the South. It is as though Adam has been fragmented and scattered in all directions in the world. These are the Greek letters for Adam and they are equivalent to the number 42, as the (A) or Alpha is equivalent to the number (1), Delta (D) to number (4), and May (M) to number (40). So ADAM is equal to 1+4+1+40= 46. This is the Temple or the Body that the Word has taken from Adam and which He destroyed in order to

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<sup>1</sup> *On the Decease of His Brother Saytrus, Book 2:103*

<sup>2</sup> *Josephus: Antiq.b.15c.11 s.l.;b.20c.9s.5,7.*



raise him in three days and grant him eternal joy. Man has been raised by the will of the Father, the power of the Son, and by the Holy Spirit Who is the Spirit of the Resurrection<sup>3</sup>.

**‘But He was speaking of the temple of His body...’[21].**

They revealed their ignorance as they misinterpreted the Lord’s words. He was referring to the temple of His body. Even so, would it have been beyond the Creator’s power to build a stone temple in three days?

Just as the new Messianic wine replaced the Water of Purification used according to tradition, so the temple of the resurrected body of the Lord replaces the temple of the Old Testament and which the army of Titus the Roman destroyed in the year 70 A.D. The Lord Jesus Christ has established a new temple within us and no army in the world can ever destroy it (1 Cor 6:19).

This saying has been fulfilled by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and His resurrection on the third day. Moreover, this continues to be fulfilled in the Church which is His Body; as well as within every believer who is a member in the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

\*Some may say: What was the purpose of the Lord for not explaining His puzzling words since He was referring to the building of His body and not to the stone temple. Rather, He kept silent and did not explain, because He knew that they would still not accept His words. If even some His disciples did not fully understand and did not know how to interpret what had been said to them, then it was logical that the people and the crowds could not understand the meaning of His words.

### **St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them;, and they believed the Scripture and the word which the Lord had said.’[22].**

Many of the prophecies are hard to comprehend except after they have been fulfilled. Similarly, the disciples could not comprehend His words at that time for they were still like children in their concepts. When the Lord arose, He opened their mind so that they might understand the Scriptures. He also inflamed their hearts with the real understanding of the prophecies (Lk 24:45). Although their hearts were slow to believe yet they were fully convinced that His words are true.

\* The Holy Spirit reminded the disciples of all what the Lord had told them previously. Indeed, they held onto the grace and talents granted to them, and displayed an enlightened existence, much wisdom, and plenty of conscientious work. They did not care at all for earthly blessings but transcended them so that they seemed like eagles in flight towards the heights. This was because they depended on the grace granted to them so that they reached the heavens themselves and ultimately possessed the grace of the Spirit.

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<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 10:12.

### **St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Now when He was in Jerusalemat the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, when they saw the signs which He did.[23]**

**But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men.’[24]**

They believed that He was the awaited Messiah, but they did not comprehend that He was the Savior of the world. Rather, they imagined that He was the King of Israel who would liberate them from being occupied and grant them a worldly power. They did not understand that He is the Savior of their spirits therefore their hearts were not changed and consequently the Lord did not place His trust in them.

**Origen the Scholar** makes a distinction between those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and those who believe in His name (only). The Lord did not commit Himself to those who believed in His name only but He trusted those who believed in Him.

\* The disciples were truly profound in their faith. Unlike the others who were attracted to the Lord because of the miracles He performed, they believed because they were attracted by His teachings. Those who were drawn to Him on account of the miracles revealed a dense frame of mind, whereas those drawn by His teachings were more determined and steadfast so that the Lord called them ‘blessed’ and said: “ Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (Jn 20:19).

As for those mentioned in this passage, they were not real disciples. This is what the following expression reveals: **‘But Jesus did not commit Himself to them...’[24]. Why Not? ‘Because He knew all men’<sup>1</sup>.**

### **St. John Chrysostom**

\* It is appropriate that we adhere to Him more than our adherence to His name. When we do miracles through His name we do not wish to hear the words that have been said about those who take pride in His name only (Matt. 7: 22-23). Indeed, we should follow St. Paul’s example and have the courage to say: “ I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13)<sup>1</sup>.

### **Origen**

\* He did not entrust Himself to those who had newly accepted the faith...those who administer the sacraments of our Lord need to learn from this that they should not allow someone suddenly to enter into the holy sanctuary. Neither should they allow beginners, who have recently been baptized before being mature enough and have not come to the faith at the right time, to approach the divine altar.

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 24:1.*

<sup>1</sup> *Commentary on St. John, Book 10:310.*

\*Just as God alone always sees our inner depths, so does our Lord Jesus Christ too. So how can He not be God by nature ?

### **St. Cyril the Great**

The Lord Jesus Christ knows man for He is the Creator of all things (Jn 1:3), He is altogether wise () and the Discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb 4:12).

**‘ ...and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.’ [25].**

\* Recognizing God is a characteristic of man’s heart and it proceeds from Him who has created the hearts with perfection. Solomon, in wisdom, prayed to God saying: “...then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and act, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart You know (for You only, only You, know the hearts of all the sons of men) (I Kgs. 8:39). That is why the Lord did not need witnesses in order to know the plan of His creation for He knew all their their secrets.

### **St. John Chrysostom**

\* The expression : ‘ **...for He knew what was in man**’ could betaken to refer to the powers of good and evil that work within man. So if a person makes a place for Satan (Eph 4: 27) allows him to come in. This is what Judas did when he allowed Satan to have a place in his heart and so betrayed the Lord...a person becomes blessed when he/she gives God a place within; for ‘ Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage’ (read Ps. 84:6). The Son of God who knows all things, knows what is within man<sup>2</sup>.

### **Origen**

## **Inspirations drawn from The Gospel of John Chapter Two**

### **Your Presence Transforms My Life into a Perpetual Wedding Celebration**

\* Your presence transforms my life into a constant wedding.

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<sup>2</sup> Commentary on St. John, Book 10:321

Your Presence brings with You Your Mother, Your disciples, and those who love  
Come, the wedding is ready!  
Come, no one other than You brings joy to my heart!

\* You have transformed the water into new wine  
Instead of the literal commands of tradition which burden my frame,  
You have granted me the Gospel that gladdens my heart!  
Let me get drunk with Your love and let me adore Your heavens,  
Then the world will no more have no place within me!

\*Grant me, through Your fiery Spirit, to listen more to that voice saying:  
Whatever He says to you, do it!  
My obedience to you makes her heart and the hearts of all those who love you to rejoice.  
Her prayers and intercession support me,  
So I pray with an obedient spirit that I may observe Your commands.

\* May You enter into my depths and consecrate them to be an altar for You:  
May You chase away all the cattle and sheep from there,  
Then there would not be any place for ugly profit within me.  
May You grant me, through Your Holy Spirit,  
To Possess the eyes of a humble dove.  
May You remove all love for money from the table of my heart!

\* Grant me the spirit of zeal for Your house,  
Then my heart will be enflamed with inner purity rather than being preoccupied with  
judging others.

\* The Jews constructed the old temple in forty six years  
And now You have resurrected the temple of Your Body from the grave in three days  
In three days You have established Your Church as a heavenly Bride.  
The darkness of the grave is no longer our place,  
For we now live in the ultimate beauty of Your heavens!

+++

## CHAPTER THREE

### NICODEMUS AND THE NEW BIRTH

#### THE TEACHER AND GIVER OF THE NEW BIRTH!

None of the chapters of the New Testament is as difficult as chapter three in the Gospel according to St. John. In spite of that, it has attracted many unbelievers to convert into the Christian faith. Those who are serious in their search for salvation find themselves reading the words of this chapter and standing with Nicodemus seeking to hold a secret conversation with the Lord Jesus Christ. When they learn of the new possibilities granted to them, they worship the Lord and pray to be united with Him as they desire to enjoy His Holy Spirit, and get renewed and born a second time through baptism.

Within the same framework of teachings that assure a new Messianic life and together with the revelation of: a new wine and a new temple, it now becomes necessary to reveal the **new birth**.

So this is presented in the unique meeting between a Pharisee, who has a wonderful personality, and the Lord Jesus Christ who is the living spiritual Source that flows into every soul seriously concerned about salvation. As a Pharisee, Nicodemus was thoroughly versed in the Torah and Jewish traditions. Being a moral man, he believed that it is in man's power to obey willingly the righteous traditions. This, he believed depended upon personal struggle and human will, as well as adhering strictly and literally to the Law based on his own study and observation. He found that the Lord Jesus Christ was a Jewish Teacher deeply concerned with the Law. This is probably why the Evangelist mentions Nicodemus as one of those most attracted to the Lord. In this context, St. John says: 'Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did...' (Jn. 2:23), and Nicodemus believed that He came from God (Jn.3:2). He might have been hoping that the Lord was a social reformer who based His teachings on the literal interpretation of the Law and consequently improve the condition of the Jewish people.

The mentality and experience of Nicodemus did not qualify or help him to accept the new life in the Lord Jesus Christ. He could not comprehend the grace of a new birth and the benefits of a new spiritual Law. He needed the Lord to help him lift up his thoughts, heart, and all his senses and potentials towards heaven. Only by doing so, Nicodemus could come to comprehend his need for a new birth through the One who "came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven...." He alone ascends into heaven and carries all those who believe in Him to enjoy adoption through Him and be the children of God.

The meeting between Nicodemus and the Lord Jesus Christ draws our hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ as we get to realize His concern over every human soul as well as His gentleness as He converses frankly with each one.

We have seen the Word coming and dwelling among us to make us children of God (Ch. 1), and now He proclaims the manner of the new birth in His conversation with Nicodemus, a Jewish leader. Nicodemus yearned to see the Kingdom so the Lord stressed that he needed to be baptized by the water and the Spirit. This is necessary as it enables the believer to live permanently as a child of God and live according to His Spirit. In the passage of this Chapter, the Lord lifts us up from the earthly concerns and makes us preoccupied with heavenly matters. He tells that we can do so through our union with the heavenly One who descended to raise us up with Him to the heavens where He reigns [13].

The Lord links Baptism with the Cross as the Father proclaims His love for all mankind by sending His Son so that the whole world may enjoy eternal life [16].

By indicating the new birth, the Lord leads us away from the fear of condemnation and into the enjoyment of the **Divine Light** [21].

When St. John the Baptist saw what happened at the time the Lord was baptized, and what this implied concerning the blessing of adoption to those who believe in Him, his joy was complete. He heard the voice of the Bridegroom engaging His Bride so that She may live in the glorious heavens with Him [29].

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#### **1- A Discussion about the New Birth**

**‘There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews’ [1].**

**Nicodemus:** This is a Jewish name that means ‘the conqueror of the people.’ He was a ruler of the Jews that is he was a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest council for the Jewish nation.

The Divine invitation is addressed to the whole human race including all classes. However, few of those who occupied leadership, religious, or temporary positions could respond to that invitation. Indeed, a minimal number from among the Pharisees, less than the fingers of one hand, responded to it and one of these was Nicodemus. He came to meet with the Lord alone or He might have been accompanied by one or more of His disciples. Yet the Lord did not belittle that one soul for He has suffered death on the Cross for the sake of each human soul.

The Pharisees truly displayed a hostile and rebellious spirit towards the Divine truth. However, there were some among the learned and scholars who yearned to meet with the Lord and they found His door opened. The grace of God works in scholars as well as in illiterate people, in the common man as well as in leaders, in the simple as well as in the rebellious. Nicodemus came to the Lord yet his status remained to be among the rebellious; and he set his heart to act as much as he could and when the opportunity would come. And the time came when he could act while the

disciples could not. Then he took permission from Pilate to bury the Body of the Lord in his new private tomb.

We are referring here to Nicodemus Ben Gorion mentioned in Jewish writings and said to be so wealthy that he could support all the people of Jerusalem for many decades. Yet some find some exaggeration in this report.

**‘ This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him: “ Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with Him” [2].**

Every time St. John the Evangelist mentions the person of Nicodemus, he presents him in connection with his visit to the Lord at night. This is repeated three times in this Gospel: (3:2; 7:50; 19:39). **Why did he come to the Lord at night?**

A- Because hearing the Lord’s public talks were not enough for him. Moreover, he did not enjoy seeing the miracles the Lord did openly. He actually felt that he needed to sit quietly and talk with the Lord about matters related to the salvation of his soul. He wanted to have a personal conversation with Him (Malachi 2:7). Even the Son of Man often withdrew from the crowds and His own disciples as He felt the need to spend the whole night carrying a most enjoyable conversation with the Father. How much more does each one of us need to abandon everything and sit, especially at night, with His Lord, and to engage in a personal conversation with Him, and so experience the new life and fellowship with Him?

B- It could be a choice based on wisdom since he knew the Lord was busy all day serving the people. Therefore Nicodemus waited until night time in order to meet with the Lord and have a friendly conversation during His time of repose.

C- It could be that he seized the first chance to meet personally with the Lord after he had seen some amazing miracles. When everyone would be asleep, he wanted to spend a spiritual evening with the Lord Jesus Christ. Besides he might have been worried that he would not get such a chance in the future. He was an opportunist! He seems to have followed David’s example as he seized night time as an opportunity for meditation (Ps 36:6; 119:148).

D-There is a possibility that what motivated him to go at night was his fear that this would be reported to the chief priests. It would increase their anger against the Lord Jesus Christ. It might also drive them, as well as the other rulers and Pharisees, to hurt Nicodemus himself. It could be that he lacked the light of faith for even though he was attracted to the Lord as a person, yet he had not yet become well acquainted with Him. Moreover, He had not become aware of the reality of His being the Light of the world. Nicodemus was a Jewish ruler [1], a teacher of Israel [10] and he needed a new birth in order to enjoy the new implications of a Messianic and heavenly kingdom. He came at night with a faith that was weak and he found the door of the Lord’s heart opened. The Lord did not hurt his feelings with any reproach. All things considered, his faith was like a mustard seed that grew and became a great tree by the time the Lord was crucified. Therefore he courageously went to ask for the body of the Lord.

\* Nicodemus met with the Lord yet in a manner and that was not appropriate or distinguished. He still suffered from a certain Jewish weakness. That is why he came to the Lord at night as he feared visiting Him in the day time. In spite of that the merciful God did not reject or reproach him. Neither did He deprive him of His teachings. On the contrary, the Lord talked with him very tenderly, and revealed to him sublime teachings. These were surely vague or unknown to Nicodemus but the Lord clarified them to him. He deserved to be excused when compared with others who behave in the same way but with evil intentions. Such people have no excuse whatsoever, whereas Nicodemus could be condemned to a lesser degree<sup>1</sup>.

\* Although Nicodemus was different, yet he regarded the Lord in a human manner. He spoke about Him as a prophet and pronounced Him to be great due to His miracles, so he says: “Rabbi, **we know that You are a teacher come from God...**” [2]. So why did you come secretly at night to the One who speaks the things of God and who has come from Him? Why did you not discuss things with Him openly? The Lord Jesus Christ did not ask Nicodemus any such questions and did not even rebuke Him, for the prophet says: “A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoking flax He will not quench” (Is. 42:3, Matt. 12:19,20). The Lord Himself once said: “I did not come to judge the world but to save the world” (Jn. 12:47)<sup>2</sup>.

**“...for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him “[2]**

Note the ever-increasing humility of the Lord Jesus Christ. He abstained from saying: ‘I do not need help from others for I have the power to do all things as I am the Son of God Himself and I possess the power of My Father.’ That would have been hard on His hearers...

Consequently the Lord seemed to put constraints upon Himself in many instances. However, He did not do the same thing concerning His actions. So when He made a miracle He did it with authority, and therefore says: “I am willing; be cleansed” (Matt.8:3); Talitha, cumi” (Mk 5:41); “Stretch out your hand” (Mk3:5); “Your sins are forgiven” (Matt.9:2); “Peace be still!” (Mk 4:39); “Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house” (Matt 9:6); “Come out of the man, unclean spirit!” (Mk 5:8), “And if anyone says to you: ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘the Lord has need of it.’”(Mk 11:3); “...today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Mk 23:43)... “You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not murder...but I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment (Matt 5:21,22). “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt 1:17). In every situation we notice His great authority so that as He works no one can find any fault or mistake in Him...however, through His speeches they could, in their own insanity, accuse Him of insanity.

That is why, in the case of Nicodemus, the Lord did speak openly. Rather, He led him with ambiguous words that indicate that He possesses an intrinsic authority to do miracles. This was because He was born of the Father as perfect and fully sufficient with not a single shortfall<sup>3</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 24:1.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, 24:2.

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St. John, 24:2.



\* Nicodemus was one of those who (believed in His name yet He did not commit Himself to them [2:23-24]. Nicodemus came to the Lord, but he came at night. He came in the darkness even though he came to the Light<sup>4</sup>.

\*Although Nicodemus came to the Lord, yet he came at night and he continued to think and speak through the darkness of his soul. Therefore he could not understand what he heard from the Light that shines to every person living in the world<sup>5</sup>.

\* Nicodemus was accustomed to being a teacher and this is probably the problem underlying the fact that he came to the real Lord at night. Now that he had to learn made him feel embarrassed. Personally, my greatest joy is to listen to a teacher rather than having people listen to me as a teacher. For I remember the Lord's words to those whom He had chosen at first: "But you, do not be called Rabbi: for One is your Teacher, the Christ..." (read Mattt.23:8)<sup>6</sup>.

### St. Augustine

In any case, Nicodemus did not come at night to be baptized. Neither did he come to learn and be the Lord's disciple or student. According to Jewish tradition, one cannot enter the Jewish faith or be circumcised or baptized at night. That would be unlawful. He just came to be informed of the Lord's views and to be acquainted with His path but not to sit at His feet and be a learner.

**'Rabbi':** It was not easy for a Pharisee who is considered a scholar in the Holy Book and a leader of the people to submit to someone and speak humbly saying: **"Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God"** [2]. Nicodemus discussed neither politics nor matters concerning the country although he was a leader of the Jews. He was only concerned about the salvation of his soul.

Nicodemus admitted that the Lord had neither been taught by a Jewish scholar nor had attended a religious school; but that His teachings had been inspired by the divine and heavenly Power. He realized that the Lord carried the power of truth and not the power of the sword, and that He acted with an ultimate wisdom that transcends human wisdom. He acknowledges that the miracles the Lord did could were brought about by divine Power.

The astonishing thing is that he uses the plural **'we know.'** It could be that he came with another person or more of his students, or that he came to speak on behalf of some Pharisees who had no other preoccupation except 'Jesus.' Among themselves they had admitted what Nicodemus confesses in this passage. However, none of them dared to speak openly or to meet with the Lord secretly.

**Jesus answered and said to him: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born (again), he cannot see the kingdom of God" [3]**

Nicodemus considered the act of doing miracles to be a proof that the Lord Jesus Christ

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<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 11:4.

<sup>5</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 11:5.

<sup>6</sup> *Letters*, 166:9.

came from God since all Rabbi associated piety with working miracle. He could not cross these limited concepts in order to comprehend the reality of the person of Jesus. Therefore he saw Him as a virtuous teacher and a man of God who enjoyed having the Divine One living with and in him always, just like Isaac to whom God said: "...do not fear, for I am with you..." (Gen.26:24); and like God said to Joshua, the son of Nun, "...as I was with Moses, so I will be with you..." (Joshua 1:5). Many other fathers and prophets had lived with the same experienced; but Nicodemus in spite of his piety had a certain set of mind that prevented him from stepping outside the limitations of the Pharisees. This is what he had learned, and this was how he lived within the Jewish environment.

The conversation between the Lord Jesus Christ and Nicodemus emphasizes the following points:

A- The desperate need for a new birth that would grant a vision of a new inner world, i.e. **'the kingdom of God.'** This is correctly called a new or second birth. This expression has been used by various translators writing in Coptic Syrian, and Latin; as well as many fathers of the First Church such as **St. Justin, St. Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, St. Augustine and St. Jerome.** Nicodemus understood that the words of the Lord were an invitation to a 'new birth', and this baffled and crippled. How could a fully grown adult enter into his mother's womb and be born again?

B- The new **birth comes from above**, meaning that it is heavenly [3]. It is an act that is done exclusively by the holy and heavenly Spirit of God. By it He grants heavenly potentials that surpass human thought.

C- The new birth is achieved through baptism by **water and the Spirit** [5].

D- It is a birth that possesses **surpassing power and so it is likened to the wind**, so that no one knows its mystery [8].

In Jewish writings, the repetition of the word **'truth'** was considered synonymous with an oath that was deeply holy. The Lord Jesus Christ used it whenever He wished to indicate that a matter is extremely significant and serious.

The Lord Jesus Christ gently reprimands Nicodemus and reveals to him that it is not enough for a person to believe that Jesus Christ is a divine teacher; neither is it enough to admire His miracles and consider them real and unique. Indeed, what is needed is a birth from **'above' that** is a heavenly birth that would allow him to see heavenly matters. A fetus in its mother's womb can neither see the world nor have any experience in it unless it is born and comes out of its mother's body. In the same way, a person can neither see the kingdom of God nor experience the blessings of heaven unless he is born again from above. Only then will it be possible for him to see the Light of the new world and live within it.

By using the verb to **'see'** the Lord stresses that it is appropriate for a real believer, who enjoys the new heavenly birth, not to boast about that birth unless **he sees the kingdom of God within him and lives accordingly.** This means that he needs to achieve a heavenly state of mind, follow principles consistent with the heavenly law, and to have new goals, new hope, and new

potentials.

With the new birth, a believer starts a totally new life that is not established on correcting or reforming a person's being; but rather on demolishing the old and constructing a new building. It involves the elimination of the old person and the resurrection of the new person who is made in the image of his Creator.

The first time we were born sin corrupted our nature and formed our depths according to its ways so that we became corporal and dominated by the law of carnal desires and ruled by the enemy of goodness. Therefore a new birth became an unavoidable and vital necessity. That explains the Lord's words: **"Most assuredly, I say to you...."**

What is the kingdom of God and that we should always see other than the kingdom of the heavenly Messiah? He lives and establishes His kingdom within us; and we see, live, and share features with Him. Therefore we become holy as He is holy. This is the kingdom of God that dwells in us and within our reach and as the Lord Himself proclaims: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 4:17); and also "...the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt 12:28). He assures us by saying: "...the kingdom of heaven is within you" (Lk17:21). Concerning our status in that kingdom, the Lord "...has made us kings and priests to His God and Father..." (Rev 1:6, 9; 5:10). This kingdom marks us with the features of our Lord Jesus Christ as we enjoy fellowship with Him "...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

This kingdom is the promise and warranty for an eternal kingdom. It will transport us to heaven and make us eager to share the amazing glory when the Lord will come. Moreover, it lifts our thoughts and focuses our inner vision towards the final day when the Lord will come and we will enjoy the heavenly crowns.

\* It is possible to rephrase the Lord's words as follows: 'If you are not born again and if you do not receive fellowship with the Spirit within the baptismal font of renewal then you cannot possess the right thoughts concerning Me. This is because your concept about my body is not spiritual (Titus 3:5) ...the word 'again' (or from above) is interpreted by some to mean 'from heaven' while others find it to convey the meaning of 'from the beginning.' The Lord explains that a person not born in this way can possibly see the kingdom of heaven. Here the Lord is pointing to Himself (the Messiah) and proclaims that we need other eyes besides our normal eyes in order to see the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>7</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Nicodemus answered: "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" [4].**

The inquiry of Nicodemus reveals the weakness of his knowledge. While the Lord speaks spiritually, the heart of Nicodemus relates to material matters. He had to get rid of all ties with

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<sup>7</sup> *Homilies on St. John, 24:2*

materialism from his heart and mind; otherwise it would be impossible for him to comprehend the heavenly birth that is from above. Only then would he comprehend through the Spirit of God the new spiritual potentials.

Nicodemus was shocked by the Lord's words about the new birth. Like all other Jews, he took pride in his lineage from Abraham his father. They all felt they were God's chosen people and that they were blessed by the prophets and the divine promises. Moreover, God had made a covenant with them and they had the unique temple with all the rites associated with it. So Nicodemus is not only an Israelite but a Pharisee as well. What better birth could the Lord wish to give him? The Jews expected that when the Messiah would come, the nations would accept the faith and be born again, but as for them this did not apply. For they felt there could be no other birth more honorable for them than their current status. They boasted of their lineage and birth and it was impossible for them to hear of another birth.

In spite of all that, Nicodemus did not turn his back on the Lord. He hoped he could learn of something new that was lacking in his knowledge. He revealed that he, who was a teacher and leader, was humble and ready to receive any truthful information or divine revelation that he lacked. Yet this seemed an impossibility according to his own concepts. An amazing person! In spite of his long experience for many years, his position as a revered leader, and the environment created by the Pharisees around him, he bowed down to receive a new teaching. This is a formidable example for every true leader: not to boast of all his learning but to remain a learner until his last breath. **St. Ambrose, the Bishop**, says in this context, that God is the only One who does not need to learn.

\* Nicodemus came to the Lord Jesus Christ as though he were coming to an ordinary person. He then heard of sublime matters that could not come from any person. Indeed, and no one else had ever heard of them. In moments, Nicodemus tried to rise quickly to such heights but his understanding was darkened. He became unsteady and failed in his faith constantly as he leaned on his own potentials. As a result, he insisted on confirming the impossibility of the Lord's words. It is as though he challenged the Lord to clarify His teaching by saying to Him: **"Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"**... Nicodemus had heard about spiritual birth but had not experienced it spiritually. Indeed, he had given these words an utterly low and physical significance. Indeed, he depended on physical evidence to interpret such great teaching.

By doing so, Nicodemus created petty and unpleasant obstacles. In this context, St. Paul comments: "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God..." (1 Cor.2:14). In spite of all that, Nicodemus observed respect and courtesy and did not scorn what the Lord said to him. Yet he kept silent as he believed this was an impossibility. He doubted in two matters: the kind of birth this could be, and the kingdom. The Jews had never heard mention of the kingdom at any time, neither had they heard of any such birth. Yet he stood there thinking about the first matter which involves a birth from above and which greatly astonished him<sup>8</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* This man knew about the birth from Adam and Eve, but he did not know about the birth that is from God and the Church. He only knew of the parents who give a birth subjected to death, but he was ignorant of those who give a birth with a promise to life. He knew of parents who give birth to have heirs for themselves, but he was ignorant of immortal parents who granted a birth to

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<sup>8</sup> *Homilies on St. John*, 24:3.

those they could constantly revive. There are two births: one that is enacted on earth, and the other is enacted in heaven: one proceeds from the flesh, and the other from the Spirit; one that is susceptible to death, and the other is eternal; one proceeds from a male and female, and the other from God and the Church. As for Nicodemus, he could comprehend one birth only<sup>9</sup>.

\* Just as there can be no repetition of the birth from the womb, so there can be none other from Baptism<sup>10</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“Jesus answered: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” [5].**

The Lord repeats again what He had said earlier in order to proclaim that this truth cannot be overlooked or taken lightly. Indeed, the word of God requires a response that is more than a mere yes or no: it requires a ‘Yes, Amen’ response. The Lord insists on the need for a new birth in spite of the inability of Nicodemus to comprehend it. For there is no other way to **see and enter** the kingdom of God except by going through a second birth.

Why is water used? To indicate the act of washing the spirit internally (Titus3:5; 1 Cor.6:11; Ezekiel 36:25). This cleansing is achieved by the Holy Spirit for He alone can wash, purify, and renew the inner depths. Just as the Lord turned the water into wine and granted joy to the wedding and to all the guests there, so the Lord offers us the water in order to purify our depths through the Spirit- and not for just cleaning our outward body. This is the water that the Lord promised as He spoke to the Samaritan woman and said that anyone who drinks of it shall never be thirsty. It is not like the water found in Jacob’s well and out of which he and his children and cattle drank. Indeed, the Lord offers living water.

Water is essential in the new birth since baptism is carried out through immersion. This is a sign of accepting death and burial with the Lord Jesus Christ in order to enjoy the new and resurrected life. Accordingly St. Paul says: “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Rom.6:4). Consequently, the birth through water and the Spirit involves a death to physical life and the burial of the actions of the old man while accepting fellowship with the Lord in His resurrected life. It is the acceptance of a new life created by the Holy Spirit Who is the Spirit of the resurrection. It is a process that involves the creation of a new inner man and that leads us to die to all corruption in order to bear a new nature born in the image and likeness of the Creator.

\* Now even the new comers who believe in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and carry His sign can neither receive absolution nor the gift of spiritual grace, unless they become baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 11:6

<sup>10</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 11:6.

<sup>11</sup> *On the Mysteries*, 4:20.

## St. Ambrose

\* They can finally be completely sanctified and become children of God if they are born through the mystery and according to what is written: **“unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”<sup>12</sup>**.

## St. Cyprian, the Martyr

\* If you were to ask: ‘What is the meaning of the Lord’s words to Nicodemus? I would answer: ‘The Lord wished to draw him away from thinking in terms of a birth through the flesh.’ It is as though the Lord is telling him: ‘Nicodemus, I am speaking about another birth so why are you drawing My words to an earthly level? Why do you submit that act as being necessarily governed by nature? This birth is ultimately higher than the pains of labor imposed by natural law. Withdraw your soul from all that is general and common, for I enter into a world that holds another kind of birth and I desire people to be born again through another manner. I have come to bring a new method of being created. I have created man from the earth and water. However, what was formed turned out to be useless for the vessel has deviated from its purpose. Therefore I will not repeat forming it of dust and water, but rather will shape it by water and the Spirit.

If someone asked: **‘How does God create man from water?’** I will ask: ‘And how has He created man from earth? And how can you split mud in different parts? From where have the bones, nerves, veins and arteries been formed? From where have the skin, blood, liver, and bile been made? Out of where have His great works been accomplished...and the variety of colors...all these elements are neither part of the earth nor of the mud.

Furthermore, when the earth receives the seeds, how do they take root, whereas if they were placed in our bodies they would rot?

How does the earth feed the seeds, which in turn give fruit? Then how does our body get nourished by these seeds? The earth receives the water and turns it into wine; whereas our bodies receive wine and turn it into water. I am unable to verify mentally that these varieties are the product of the earth since the earth amazes our bodies with all its products. It is only my faith and belief in God that lead me to accept that these are the product of the earth.

Now, if all these varieties that are tangible as they take shape each day require belief and faith, then spiritual matters will occupy an adequate priority and demand belief and faith. And just as the immobile earth responds to the will of God and all these numerous wonders were formed out of it; similarly, **extreme and multiple wonders, far beyond our comprehension, occur when the Holy Spirit is present in the water ...**

If someone were to ask: ‘Why is water needed in this birth?’ My answer would be: ‘This birth acts and achieves a Divine significance: a grave, burial, faith, life, and resurrection. These all take shape within the act of baptism. For as our head is immersed in the water, it is as though we immerse them in the grave where we bury entirely the old man and drown him down below. Then, as we lift our heads the new man comes out as well.

## St. John Chrysostom

\* Who is he who is born of the Spirit and becomes a spirit other than the one who becomes renewed in his mind through the Spirit (Eph. 4:23). This is certainly the person who is born again by

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<sup>12</sup> Letter 72 to Stephen: 1.

the water and the Holy Spirit: it is the result of having received the hope in eternal life through the font of the new birth and of being renewed through the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). In another passage, St. Peter the apostle says: "...you shall be baptized by the Holy Spirit" (Acts 11:16). Therefore, who is the one who is baptized by the Holy Spirit other than he who is born again with water and the Spirit? That explains the Lord's word's concerning the Holy Spirit: **"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"**<sup>13</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* The Book of the Acts of the Apostles speaks about the proclamation of the Holy Spirit Who lives in a baptized person. The water prepares the way for those who come and are sincere in their request. Baptism is called 'the washing of regeneration' (Titus 3:5) that is achieved through the renewing of the Holy Spirit<sup>14</sup>.

\* The corruption of sin is removed through the mystery of Baptism. That is why even babies are baptized. for **"...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"** (Jn. 3:5)<sup>15</sup>.

**Origen**

\* Baptism washes all our faults away. It makes us become the holy temple of God and restores to us fellowship with the divine nature through the Holy Spirit<sup>16</sup>.

**St. Clement of Alexandria**

\*Through the holy baptism man is liberated from the power of Satan and becomes a spotless child in the likeness of Christ in the flesh. This is due to the work of the Holy Spirit that sanctifies and resurrects the baptized person as a spotless being. Therefore Satan can not have any power over him/her since the Spirit of the Lord is within<sup>17</sup>.

**Fr Sawiris, Bishop of Ashmonin**

\*When a person receives the Lord in baptism, he actually puts on or wears the Lord Jesus Christ besides being born of God (Gal.3:27). We do not understand this in a literary sense and as though it were the expression of love. Rather, we consider this reflects the truth since the incarnation has made our union with the Lord Jesus Christ and our fellowship in His divinity an actual fact and reality<sup>18</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**St. Jerome**<sup>19</sup> associates poisonous snakes and scorpions with thirst when there is no water. He refers to this in his letter to Oceanus, a Roman noble and fervent believer. St. Jerome writes in this message about the blessings granted by the water and baptism and says:

\* In the beginning and during the creation, the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters like a ship commander (Gen.1:2). He brought out of it a small world- a symbol of the Christian child who is immersed in the baptismal waters.

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<sup>13</sup> On the Holy Spirit, Book 3:10:64.

<sup>14</sup> Fr Tadros Yacoub Malaty: *The Holy Spirit in the Writings of Origen*. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Boutros

<sup>15</sup> Fr Tadros Yacoub Malaty: *The Holy Spirit in the Writings of Origen*. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Boutros

<sup>16</sup> In Lucam 22:8.

<sup>17</sup> *Precious Gems in interpreting the Scriptures*, 1952, pg.121.

<sup>18</sup> *The Author: God is my Sanctity*, pg.52.

<sup>19</sup> St. Jerome: Letter 65:6.

\* The word heaven in the Hebrew language 'Shamyim' means 'the one coming out of the water.'

\* The living creatures that Ezekial the prophet saw in his vision had the heavens stretched out over their heads, 'the color of awesome crystal' (Ez.1:27), and he heard 'the noise of many waters.'

\*In the Garden of Eden there was a river with four sources that watered the Paradise (Gen. 2:1).

\*In the vision of Ezekial of the new house of the Lord, he saw the waters flow out of the threshold towards the East. Water heals and grants life to dead souls (Ez.47:1-9).

\*When the world committed sin it was impossible to purify it by any means other than through a flood. Then when the unclean bird flew out, the dove of the Holy Spirit returned to Noah. After that, it came to the Lord Jesus Christ at the Jordan River. It held in its beak the branch proclaiming peace to the whole world.

\*Pharaoh and his army drowned in the Red Sea as they refused to allow the people of God to leave Egypt. Consequently, the water has become a symbol of our baptism. The fate of Pharaoh is described in the Psalms: 'You divided the sea by Your strength; You broke the heads of the sea serpents in the waters, You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces' (Ps.74:13; LXX 14).

\* Moreover, the wood turned the bitter waters of Marah into sweet waters and so it could water seventy palm trees. In the same manner, the Cross has turned the waters of the Law into a source of life to the seventy apostles of the Lord (Ex.15:23-27; Lk.10:1).

\*Abraham and Isaac dug wells while the Philistines attempted to prevent them (Gen.26:15, 18).

\*Both Beersheba, the city of the oath (Gen.21:31); and Gihon, the city where Solomon was crowned as king, carried names that belonged to sources of water (1 Kgs 1:38; 2Chron.32:30).

\* Abraham's servant found Rebekah near a well (Gen.24:15, 16).

\* When Rachel went to draw water from the well, Jacob met and kissed her there (Gen.29:11).

\*As the daughters of the priest of Midian were on their way to the well they were stopped by the shepherds. However, Moses helped and saved them (Ex.2:16, 17).

\*The forerunner of the Lord- John the Baptist- at Salim (or Peace) prepared the people to receive the Lord by using a source of water (Jn.3:23).

\*The Lord Himself did not begin to preach except after He had purified the Jordan through His baptism and immersion in it (Matt.3:13, 14).

\*The Lord told Nicodemus privately that: "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn.3:5).

\*Just as the Lord's ministry began with water, it ended with it as His side was struck with a sword and water and blood flowed out. These are two symbols for baptism and martyrdom (Jn 19:34).

\*After His resurrection, when the Lord sent His disciples to the nations, He commanded them to baptize the people in the sacrament of the Holy Trinity (Matt. 28:19).

\* When the Jews repented for their sins, St. Peter sent them to be baptized (Acts 2:38).

\*Paul the persecutor of the Church, the roaring wolf coming from Benjamin (Gen.49:27) bowed his head before Ananias- one of the Lord's fold- and his sight was restored only when he accepted the medicine of baptism (Acts 9:17, 18).

\*Through reading the Book of Isaiah the Prophet, the eunuch of Candace became ready to be receive the baptism of the Lord (Acts 8:27,38).



\*The voice of the Lord is over the waters...the Lord is over many waters...’ (Ps.29:3, 10). ‘Your teeth are like a flock of shorn sheep which have come up from the washing, everyone of which bears twins and none is barren among them’ (Sg of Sol. 4:2).

\*Micah refers to the grace granted by baptism as he says: “He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:19).

**“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” [6].**

This verse underlines the mystery or sacrament of baptism. Through baptism, we have been granted adoption. Hence, we have become sons of God and rightful heirs to His kingdom (Rom.8:15). Through this sacrament we are torn away from the wild olive tree and grafted into the new one (Rom.11:24) by the power of the Holy Spirit. Being baptized we put on the new ‘robe’ (Lk.15:22) and the ‘wedding garment’ (Matt.22:11-23) without which no one can enjoy the kingdom. The prophecy of Ezekial is fulfilled in this manner as he says: ‘I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you, I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you....’ (Ez.36:26).

When Nicodemus expressed his desire to comprehend what appeared impossible to him, the Lord revealed to him the meaning of a new birth: it did not involve a physical birth achieved by re-entering into the mother’s womb. Rather, it meant a spiritual birth achieved by the power of God’s Holy Spirit. Through His Spirit sanctification of the spirit is fulfilled (1Peter1:2); and inner washing of the soul by the Spirit is completed (Titus 3:5).

We are flesh not only because of this physical component but also in the sense that our bodies have become corrupted (Gen.3:5). Since our souls become one with the body, the soul consequently becomes enslaved to the dictates of the lustful body. It finds pleasure in immorality to the extent that man seems to have become wholly flesh. Now how can union be achieved between that which is wholly flesh and God Who is a Spirit? This is what demanded a new birth so that the entire human being might carry the feature of the Spirit. Consequently, the flesh would find its pleasure and joy in the Spirit rather than in the lusts of the flesh.

This is the natural cure for the human being who has been corrupted by the lusts of the body. It is a cure that the Son of God offers for He is the great Benefactor and Lawgiver. He is the Mediator of the New Testament and the Physician of our souls...He alone knows the real therapy.

He is the divine Vinedresser who knows that every tree brings fruit according to its seed. Therefore a person born of the Spirit will carry a spiritual and holy kingdom appropriate for God.

\* Water is used to give birth to the new born. It plays the same role that a womb plays for a fetus. In the same manner, water is vital for a believer for in the water the believer gets formed and takes shape. At the beginning of the Creation, God said: “Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures...” (Gen1:20). However, since the Lord entered the River Jordan, the waters produce reasoning souls that bear the Spirit rather than mere ‘living creatures.’ The baptized person is ‘as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber’ (Ps.19:5). We are now speaking about the believers as they are clothed by Him in greater glory (than those born of the flesh). When a person is formed in the womb some time is needed. This is not the case when it comes to water for everything happens in one moment. In the first case, our life is susceptible to death and originates in the corruption of other flesh so that birth occurs slowly. This is not so in spiritual matters. Why?

Because in the water things are wholly shaped from the beginning.

\* When Nicodemus heard the Lord's words, he was disturbed. Notice how the Lord gradually opened before him the hidden matters of this mystery. Things that seemed vague a few moments earlier became clearer. He said: **"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"** [6]. He led Nicodemus away from everything that is tangible and did not allow him to examine the revealed mystery erroneously through his physical sight. It is as though the Lord is telling him: 'We are not speaking about the flesh, but about the spirit, O Nicodemus; (and with these words He led him towards heavenly matters for a while); so do not ask for things related to the flesh for the Spirit will never be revealed to its eyes. Moreover, do not imagine that the spirit can produce a physical offspring. Someone may ask: Then how was the body of the Lord Jesus Christ produced? It was not the work of the spirit alone for the body was involved as well, and St. Paul confirms that in his words: "...of a woman, born under the law..." (Gal.4:4). It is true that the spirit formed Him but this was not out of a void (otherwise why was a womb needed then?). However, He was shaped from a chaste body...

**"...that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"** implies that 'the one born out of the Spiritual is spiritual'; since the birth that the Lord is speaking about in this context is relevant according to honor and grace and not according to the essence of the being<sup>20</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* That which is powerful will definitely dominate that which is weak. Therefore the power of the spirit will devour the weakness of the flesh. In such a case, that person is no more a mere physical vessel for he/she has become spiritual due to the fellowship with the Spirit.

That is how martyrs represent a testimony of despite to death. They do so not depending on the weakness of the flesh but strengthened by spiritual preparedness. This is what devours the weakness of the flesh; and so making room for the power of the Spirit to shine.

In turn the Spirit, by absorbing the weakness of the flesh, reigns over it as a rightful inheritance. Through these two measures the living person is formed: being alive due to fellowship with the Spirit, yet being a human being due to the physical element of the flesh<sup>21</sup>.

**St. Irenaeus**

**"Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again' [7].**

**The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from or where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit" [8].**

Man has no authority over the wind which blows and which we feel, yet we neither know its exact source nor where it will end. This is similar to birth by the Spirit which possesses power and influence. It is a free gift granted by God: He directs the Spirit Who in turn fulfills His word (Ps.148:8). Clearly we have no authority over the Spirit.

The action of the Spirit in Baptism is like that of a strong wind whose force is evident in its effect and the traces it leaves as a result. The Spirit works secretly and mysteriously yet its influence is clear in the life of the believer who experiences His presence each day.....GA..????

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<sup>20</sup> *Homilies on St. John*, 26:1.

<sup>21</sup> *Adv. Haer.*5:9:2.

\*When the Lord spoke to His disciples about the temple, He said: “Arise and let us depart from here....” He also told the Jews: “See! Your house is left to you desolate“(Matt.23:38). If heaven and earth will pass away (Lk.21:33), then, clearly, all earthly things will definitely pass away as well<sup>22</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

\* By saying: “Do not marvel...”, the Lord reveals the troubled state of Nicodemus. He leads him to something easier to understand. Indeed, the Lord moves away from all that relates to the flesh when He says: “...**that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.**” As Nicodemus could not comprehend that which is born of the Spirit though He is a spirit, the Lord presents to him another example. He does not speak of things that possess physical density nor are they totally free from physical aspects (otherwise, on hearing of them, he would not have accepted His words). Rather, the Lord spoke of something that was in between things which possess a body and those which have none: the movement of the wind, and He says: “**The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from or where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit**” [8]. By saying that the wind blows where it wishes, the Lord is not implying that the wind had the power of making a choice. He is only indicating that it is impossible to resist its natural power. With that same power...it spreads all over and no one can oppose or deter its path in any way. Indeed, it blows with great power and no one can stand before its violence, and “**you hear the sound of it**” [8]. That is, you hear its murmuring and its noise **but cannot tell where it comes from or where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit**” [8]. This is the ultimate conclusion of every matter. The Lord is asking why, if you cannot explain the movement of the wind and its course and this is something you comprehend through your sense of touch and hearing, then why are you so troubled by the work of the divine Spirit? Your inability to comprehend that is similar to your inability to understand the wind even though you hear its sound?!<sup>23</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Nicodemus answered and said to Him: “How can these things be?” [9].**

The teacher of the Jews is agitated and asks: “**How can these things be?**” With his materialistic capacity he was unable to comprehend spiritual matters as they are inconceivable to the ordinary man. Nicodemus was unable to understand divine matters by depending on human wisdom. The Lord clarified sufficiently that this new birth is a spiritual and divine one and that it submits entirely to the Holy Spirit of God. It neither obeys the laws of nature or of sheer human logic. The new birth is solely authorized and directed by the Almighty God.

**Jesus answered and said to him: “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?” [10].**

It is as though the Lord is reprimanding him and saying: ‘How have you taken the responsibility to lead the blind to the truth while you yourself are ignorant? You call upon the Jews who accept Judaism to be baptized with water as a symbol of the new birth and you yourself have not enjoyed it or even recognized it?’ Has Nicodemus not read about the work of the Holy Spirit in

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<sup>22</sup> Letter 58:2.

<sup>23</sup> Homilies on St. John 26:1.

the lives of men like what happened when Saul was anointed to be king? “Then the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you, and you will prophecy with them and be turned into another man...And so it was, when he had turned his back from Samuel, that God gave him another heart; and all these signs came to pass that day” (1 Sam.10:6,9). This is also seen in the divine promise to the prophets: “...I will put a new spirit within them, and take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh” (Eze.11:19), and “I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live...” (Ezek. 37:14). “Shall I bring the time of birth and not deliver?” says the Lord (Is.66:9); “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh...” (Joel 2:28).

\* What do you think, my brothers? Do you believe that the Lord wishes to reprimand the teacher of the Jews to ridicule him? The Lord knew exactly what He was doing for He desired that this man would be born of the Spirit, and no one can receive this blessing unless he becomes humble. Humility in itself qualifies us to be born of the Spirit for “the Lord is near to those who have a broken heart...” (Ps.34:18). Being a teacher made Nicodemus extremely self confident and this is obvious from the manner he felt his importance as a teacher of the Jews. The Lord diminished his pride in order to offer him the new birth. He reprimanded him as though he were an ignorant man. By this the Lord was not seeking to underline that He is the Master for where is the point of comparison between God and man, or between the truth and falsehood?<sup>24</sup>

**St. Augustine**

\*The Lord speaks to him and reproves him...notice that He does not accuse him of anything evil but of weakness and naïveté.

Someone might ask: What is the relationship between (spiritual) birth and Judaism?

This birth had been proclaimed in the past through symbols, and this occurs in the source where Elisha made the metal rod to float; at the Red Sea where the Jews crossed over; in the pool where the angel of the Lord came and stirred the waters; and in the purification of Namaan the Syrian from leprosy in the River Jordan.

Moreover, the words of the prophet refer to the manner of this birth. For example: ‘A posterity shall serve Him, it will be recounted of the Lord to the next generation, they will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has done this’ (Ps.22:30, 31). ‘...so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s (Ps.103:5).

Isaac was also a symbol for that birth.

Tell me, Nicodemus how was Isaac born? Was he born according to natural Law? Impossible. The manner of his birth was something in between the birth we are speaking about and a natural birth.

It was a natural birth for it was the fruit of two couples living together; and it was another manner of birth as he was not born through the blood (since the mother was barren and the father was aged and old) and yet he was born but according to the Will of God<sup>25</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak of what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness” [11].**

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<sup>24</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 12:6.*

<sup>25</sup> *Homilies on St. John, 26:2.*

Here the Lord uses the plural probably to indicate that He is speaking in the name of the Holy Trinity Who yearns for the new birth of mankind. He desires every believer to enjoy fellowship with the Trinity. Because it is hard for a normal person to comprehend the new spiritual birth, the Lord Jesus Christ presents His testimony and that of the Father. He explains their heavenly concept of that astonishing birth granted from above through the work and action of the Holy Spirit within the waters of baptism.

**“If I have told you of earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?” [12]**

The Lord speaks of ‘earthly **things**’ when He mentions ‘the wind that blows where it wishes and we hear the sound of **it** but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes’ [8]. He is also referring to the ‘destruction of the temple of His Body’ (2:19). The ‘heavenly things’ are spiritual birth and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and His ascension into the heavens.

Baptism is a spiritual birth that takes place on earth so that believers can begin their journey to heaven. They are enabled to do so through their union with the Lord Jesus Christ Who has ascended into heaven. How can someone who is unable to accept the spiritual birth be able to ascend with the heart to heaven?

This is the how a person begins to soar with the heart and mind and all his/her inner depths towards the heavens. The inability to accept spiritual birth makes them part of those physically oriented ones who have not yet accepted to begin this heavenly journey. For how can they ascend with the Lord to His heavens unless they receive His Body and Blood, acknowledge the mystery of the Holy Trinity and His work within the believer, and enjoy fellowship with the heavenly ones?

\* Some consider that the expression ‘**earthly things**’ refers to the wind to imply that ‘if I have given you an example of earthly things and yet you have not believed even that, then how can you learn of heavenly matters?’

Do not be astonished that He called Baptism an earthly matter for it is accomplished on earth or could stand to comparison with His awesome birth. For although this birth is heavenly, yet compared to the real birth that comes from the same Father, it is still considered an earthly one. The Lord does not say: ‘You do not understand’ but rather ‘**You do not believe.**’ This happens when a person is inclined to misinterpret certain matters that are logically conceivable and is truly unwilling to accept them. In this case it is possible to accuse him of lack of understanding. However, when that person refuses to accept matters that cannot be comprehended with the mind but by faith only, then the accusation against him would be that he lacks belief rather than understanding<sup>26</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“No one has ascended into heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is the Son of Man who is in heaven.” [13]**

The Lord may be referring to a mistaken understanding that some Jews have concerning Moses. They believe that Moses ascended to heaven to receive the commandments and then descended to Israel. The Lord corrects that by confirming that no one has ascended to heaven except the Son of Man who descended from heaven and remained in His Divinity filling the heavens. He alone can reveal the heavenly mysteries, carry believers into heaven, and offer them the will of God.

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<sup>26</sup> *Homilies on St. John, 27:1.*

Nicodemus spoke with the Lord as he perceived Him to be a prophet from God. It would have been fitting for him to perceive that the Lord is greater than a prophet. By His incarnation He descended from heaven, and by His Divinity He reigns in heaven. He is Lord come from heaven (1 Cor.15:47).

\* If you asked: ‘What is the link between these words and what was said?’ My answer would be: ‘They are closely linked because when Nicodemus told the Lord: **“Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God...”**’; the Lord wanted to dismiss that same statement and said something that would communicate the following: ‘Do not think that I have come to fit the role of a teacher like many other prophets who are here on earth. Rather I have come from heaven while I live there as well.’

Have you grasped how the Lord Jesus Christ is not in heaven only but that He is present everywhere and fills all His creatures?

**St. John Chrysostom**

\*He descended for our sake, therefore let us ascend for His sake. He alone has descended and ascended, for He says: **“No one has ascended into heaven but He who came down from heaven...”** Do not those whom He has made children of God ascend to heaven? They definitely do ascend, and this is the promise offered to us: **“...for they are equal to the angels...”** Then how is it that no one ascends except He who descended? Because only One has descended and He is the One who has ascended. Then what about the others?... This is the hope of the others: **that He has descended so that through and in Him they may become one; these are the ones who will ultimately ascend through Him...** it is this that indicates the unity of the Church. Woe to them who hate unity and make themselves leaders of human factions<sup>27</sup>.

\* It is time we traveled. However, this journey does not require us to rub our feet with ointment (to help us walk), or to have an animal (to ride upon), or even a ship.

May you be able to run with heart-felt feelings so that you may travel in the companionship of love and ascend with love.

Why do you search for the path? Adhere to the Lord who through His descent has made Himself to be the ‘Way.’

Do you want to ascend? Then adhere to Him who has ascended. Alone, you will be unable to ascend...since no one can ascend except He who has descended, that is the Son of Man, our Lord Jesus Christ. So, do you want to ascend too?

Become a member in the Body of the sole One who ascends. Only those who are members of His Body can ascend and so His words are fulfilled when He says: **“No one has ascended into heaven but He who came down from heaven...”**

‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh (Eph. 5:31). The Lord had not left His Father with the intention of appearing equal to Him, but in order to make Himself ‘of no reputation, taking the form of a servant...’(Phil.2:7).

Moreover, He also left His mother and the union that led to His birth according to the flesh. Ultimately, He adhered to His wife who is the Church.

Here, in this passage, the Lord is in that situation where He testifies and reveals that the

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<sup>27</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 12:8-9.

marriage bond cannot be released (Matt.19:4) ...for ‘they are no longer two but one flesh’ and similarly **“No one has ascended into heaven but He who came down from heaven....”**

So that you may know that the bride and the bridegroom are one in relation to the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ, and not in relation to His Divinity...So that you may know that this complete whole is one Jesus Christ, therefore Isaiah spoke these words: “He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with adornments...” (Is.61:10, LXX)<sup>28</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

## **2- The New Birth and the Offering on the Cross**

**“An as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up...” [14].**

Here the Lord states the purpose for which He has descended from the heavens: so that He might be lifted up on the Cross and grant mankind redemption.

The last miracle that Moses performed before his death was the lifting up of the bronze serpent in the desert and healing the nation from the bites of the serpents (Ex.21:6-9). In the same manner, it is through the Cross that our Lord redeems us from the curse of the Law which we have broken and which consequently became as the fiery and deadly snake bites. The Lord’s offering on the Cross is the balm in Gilead which heals from deadly diseases (Jer.8:22, 46:11).

The bronze snake is a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ. It looks like the fiery and deadly serpent. However, it has a healing power over poison and does not carry its sting. In the same manner, our Lord carried the likeness of the corrupt sinful body yet there was no sin in Him. Since He carried sin for our sakes, He could break the sting of sin on our behalf.

When the serpent became cursed, the Lord became cursed on our behalf in order to liberate us from the circle of the curse and carry us into the light of His glorious Throne. Moses the prophet raised the bronze serpent, and he testified for the Lord Jesus Christ who became subject to the Law.

**Origen the Scholar** has a wonderful commentary about the Cross for he conceives two realities: the first is a phenomenon as the Lord Jesus Christ loves mankind and obeys God so much that He willingly goes to His crucifixion. The other is a less obvious fact as the one who got really crucified and paralyzed is Satan. The Lord actually nailed the sentence against us for ‘having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it’ (Col 2:14, 15). On one hand, the raised serpent represents the Lord Jesus Christ bearing our sins; and on the other hand, it represents the old serpent that the Lord has nailed by His Cross and degraded from his authority over believers.

\* This is the original symbol of the serpent that Moses raised on the Cross so that all those that the serpent had harmed would be healed. Similarly, by looking to the bronze serpent, the believer is healed through faith (Num. 21:19; Jn 3:14, 15). So does the bronze serpent heal when it is crucified while the incarnated Son of God does not save?!

Note how wood often carried the promise of life: at the time of Noah, life was preserved in the wooden ark; and in the days of Moses, the wooden staff of Moses was used to strike the Sea and so enabled the people of God to cross over. So does the staff of Moses have power while the Cross of the Lord lack it?! In the days of Moses, the water became sweet by means of a piece of wood;

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<sup>28</sup> *Sermon on New Testament Lessons, 41:7-8.*

while when Christ was on the wooden Cross, the water 'flowed out of His side'<sup>29</sup>.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* You might wonder: what was the purpose of the Lord Jesus Christ in not stating clearly that He will be crucified and just hinted to His hearers by mentioning an old symbol (the serpent)? My answer is as follows: First in order to let us know that the sayings of the Old Testament agree with the New Testament, the first is not in contradiction to the second; Secondly: so that we may know that the Lord did not come unwilling into the world. Besides, so that we may know that He was unharmed by the actual sufferings He went through; and that these sufferings constitute for many a source of salvation. Indeed, no one should say: How can those who believe in the Crucified be saved if He Himself was caught by death? That is why the Lord reminds us of the old story. Moreover, if the Jews have escaped death by looking at a bronze serpent then how much more will believers in the Crucified enjoy greater benefits with good reason? The crucifixion was not achieved due to the weakness of the Crucified or due the overruling power of the Jews but because **“God loved the world” [16]**. Therefore His living tabernacle (His Body) hurried towards the Cross<sup>30</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\*What are the serpents that sting? These are sins issuing from the corruption and death of the flesh.

What does the serpent that was lifted up stand for? It is the Lord who died on the Cross: Just as death came through the serpent, its figure became the symbol for it.

The sting of the serpent is deadly, but the Lord's death is life- giving. Indeed, when the Lord looks at the serpent it loses its power. How is that so? When He looks at death, it loses its power. But whose death is it? The death of life...by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ (Life), death dies.

The death of Life has terminated death since the Fullness of life has devoured death.

Death has been become extinct in the Body of the Lord.

Therefore we sing together with the vanquishers about the resurrection and say: “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?”(1 Cor.15:54)...

There's a vast difference between a symbol and the Reality: the symbol lends a temporary existence, whereas the Reality that is represented by the symbol provides eternal life<sup>31</sup>.

\*In order to present a symbol for His Cross, the merciful God ordered Moses to lift up the image of a serpent on a post in the desert. It was necessary to have a symbol of the crucified Lord who took the form of a corrupt body (Jn.3:14). The Psalmist intentionally looks at the Cross and says: **“My eyes fail from seeking Your salvation and Your righteous word** (Ps 119:123), for God made the Lord Jesus Christ 'who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him' (Rom.8:3; 2Cor.5:21).

In order to express the righteousness of God, the Psalmist says that his eyes fail to look jealously and with fervor as he knows human weakness. However, he depends on the Lord Jesus Christ for divine grace and help.

**St. Augustine**

\* My serpent is a beneficial one. Healing medicine proceeds from his mouth and there is no

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<sup>29</sup> Essay 13:20.

<sup>30</sup> Homilies on St. John, 27:2).

<sup>31</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 12:11.



poison there.

St. Ambrose

\*The Savior was not the serpent, but He was a symbol of it.

Origen

\*The Law indicates that the One who appeared on the Cross had the likeness of the serpent. Yet He was not the serpent but as St. Paul explains He had ‘the likeness of sinful flesh’ (Rom.8:3). Therefore the real serpent is sin, and anyone who commits sin takes on the nature of the serpent. In this manner man has become released from sin by Him who took the form of sin<sup>32</sup>.

St. Gregory, Bishop of Nicea

\* The serpent represented the Lord Jesus Christ because, when the Jews treated Him as though He were a serpent, they were affected by the serpent’s poison- that is by Satan. At the same time, those who had been stung by the serpent were healed when it was lifted up.

St. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis

**“...that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” [15]**

\*Do you comprehend the purpose of the Cross and the salvation that proceeds from it? Do you comprehend the relevance of the symbol to the Truth? This is how the Jews were saved from death, and how believers are saved from eternal death through the Lord Jesus Christ. In the case of the Jews, there was a serpent lifted up and which healed the stings of the serpent. Now, the crucified Lord heals the wounds inflicted by the monster of the mind. In the first case, the beholder of the serpent was saved through his **sense of sight**. But in the second case, the beholder lays all sin on the Crucified. There the lifted one was a bronze object in the form of a serpent, but now the Crucified is the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

St. John Chrysostom

**“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” [16]**

In this chapter, the focus is on the glory of the Cross. On it the Son of Man is lifted up in order to attract and deliver all mankind. This is repeated four times (8:28; 12:32-34). Divine love is the dynamic element constantly working to offer the world the joy of salvation.

In his article on repentance, St. Ambrose draws our attention to significance of faith which enables a person to enjoy eternal life. Therefore how can we stop praying for unbelievers so that they may receive the divine gift of faith and so attain eternal life<sup>33</sup>?

\* It is as though the Lord is saying: ‘Do not be amazed that I should be lifted up on the Cross so that you might be saved for this is God’s decision. He has loved you so much that He has sacrificed His Son for His slaves. Clearly none of you would do that for a friend or for any righteous person.’ This is what St. Paul clarifies when he says: “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone will even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that we were still sinful, Christ died for us” (Rom.5:7, 8).

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<sup>32</sup> Vita Moysis. PG 44:413,315.

<sup>33</sup> Concerning Repentance, 1:10:48.

If you asked: For what reason did God love the world? My answer would be: He loved it out of His own goodness solely and for no other reason.

**St. John Chrysostom**

The expressions ‘...**God so ...**’ and ‘...**loved the world...**’ underline the great extent of His love. The distinction between the two is great and infinite for He is the eternal who is without beginning and the Almighty without end; whereas those of the world are dust and ashes and are charged with heaps of sin and ingratitude. They rebel against Him continuously yet they are the ones He has loved! The words that follow bear a similar meaning, for He says: “...**He gave His only begotten Son...**” He did not sacrifice a servant or an angel or archangel. No one shows concern for his child as much as the Lord shows towards His ungrateful slaves.

**“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved [17].**

On the Cross the Loved offered salvation openly and before the whole world: “The Lord has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earths shall see the salvation of our God” (Is.52:10).

Earlier on the Lord had stated a negative aspect that those who believe will not die. Now He follows with the positive statement that they will be granted ‘everlasting life.’ Here too there is the negative ‘...**not...to condemn**’ and the positive ‘...**be saved...**’ The Lord’s words “...**that the world through Him might be saved**” were not only new to the ears of the Jewish leaders and people, but they were a stumbling block as well. This was because the teachers had interpreted the prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the awaited Messiah in the sense that He would rebuild the tabernacle of David, restore the kingdom to the people of Israel with all its glory and greatness, and condemn and wipe out the other nations. No matter how it was presented, the idea that He would redeem and save the world could never be acceptable or conceivable to the Jewish mentality.

\* Before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ we had countless guide posts to show us the good path: there were the laws of nature, the prophets, the written Law and teachings, numerous promises and revelations of the fathers, the punishments and corrective measures as well as numerous other commandments. As a result there was accountability. However, because of His love, He is forgiving to a great extent rather than judging; and He does so for the sake of those who are hastening towards destruction<sup>34</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord does not condemn, so do you condemn?

He says: “...**whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness**” (Jn 12:46). That means that if a person is in the darkness, he does not remain there. Rather, he corrects his faults and imperfections, and obeys My commands, for I have said: ??????????????

(read .....)

I have said that he who believes in Me will not be condemned and I fulfill this for I have not

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<sup>34</sup> Hom. 26 PG 29:195.

come to condemn but that the world might be saved by Me [17]. I desire to pardon and forgive quickly “for I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6) ...and “For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Sacrifice is the order of the law while mercy comes in the gospel: “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (read Jn 1:17)<sup>35</sup>

**St. Ambrose**

### **3- Enlightenment and Faith**

**“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” [18].**

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is not a mere theoretical belief. It is a practical union and fellowship with Him. A person who disappears in Him and remains steadfast will definitely be released from the circle of condemnation for “there is no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1). And once more, the Lord confirms: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (Jn. 5:24).

\* You might say: ‘Since the Lord did not come with the purpose of condemning the world, then how is it that He has already passed judgment on those who do not believe and while the day of judgment has not come yet?’ The answer is: ‘The Lord could be declaring what will happen in the future. It is like the case of the murderer who is not judged according to the nature of the judge but according to his crime. Similarly, an unbeliever is condemned by the nature of his denial and blasphemy. Adam died the day he ate of the tree, for the pronouncement on that issue has already been pronounced: “...but of the tree of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17). Yet Adam continued to live so how did he die? We answer: ‘He died due to the case ruling over him and by the nature of his rebellious act: anyone who exposes himself to punishment becomes subject to it and even if no action is taken to punish him swiftly yet his punishment has already have been pronounced.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” [19].**

The reference here is to thieves and highway robbers who usually do evil in the darkness of the night. God has granted the sun to give light to men and so that they might work by day and rest by night. As for those who choose to sleep during the daytime in order to do evil at night, then they deserve to be punished as ones who have broken the law of God.

The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is light: He has come and shone into the world in order to grant mankind the joy of working for the kingdom of God. At the same time He has set the just pronouncement on those who walk in darkness and are haters of the true light. In other words, the incarnation and dwelling of the true Word among us has separated the lovers of the light from those who love darkness and the Spirit of judgment has begun to work. Therefore He says: “...the ruler of

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<sup>35</sup> Concerning Repentance, Book 1:12:54.

this world is judged..." (Jn. 15:11); "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out (Jn, 12:31).

**"...because their deeds were evil"** since they insist on walking in darkness and adhering to Satan while they reject **"the Light"** and Savior of the world.

\* It is as though the Lord is saying: 'If I had come to the world to punish and demand reasons for their wrong doing, people rightly would have used this as an excuse to explain why they have moved away and sought to escape. However, I have come to help them out of the darkness. Therefore they are condemned since they did not abandon the darkness and come to the Light. They can no longer present any other excuse.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**"For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds be exposed" [20].**

The wicked love darkness when it is more convenient to do their evil acts. They hate the light as it exposes them. The Bible is frightful for the wicked world which considers It an enemy that rebukes and condemns. A person who practices bad habits cannot stand the light and immerses himself into the darkness rather than facing it and praying for the light: "For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatsoever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead. And Christ will give you light" (Eph 5:12-14).

There is a difference between those who comprehend the Logos (the Word of God) for some conceive Him as a lamp while others see Him as light itself...the ignorant virgins had unlit lamps (Matt. 25:2) **"For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds be exposed"** (Jn 3:20). The Lord also rebukes those who do not benefit constantly of the light which is with them for an hour or a little while (Jn 5:35) and as they use that lamp. The Lord says: "He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a while to rejoice in his light (Jn 5:35).

\* Hurry, my brothers, so that the darkness might not overtake you. Awake to your need of salvation. Awake while there is time...Awake while the day is here and it is shining. The Lord is the Day and He is ready to forgive sins but only to those who admit them. He is ready to punish those who defend themselves and those who boast of their righteousness and believe they are worthy while they are nothing<sup>36</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* For the Lord came to perfect the law and not to criticize It (Matt 5:17). He revealed to us the true offering, the 'Passover' from Egypt. It marks the beginning of the months and occurs in the month when the crossing over took place. It also marks the beginning of a new birth as a new way of life starts for those who abandon darkness behind them and come to the light (Jn 3:20-21). They therefore speak in a style that conforms with the holy mystery and through the power of the water granted to those who hope in the Lord. This is what is known as 'the washing of renewal' (Jn 3:5). Therefore what does the second birth convey other than the beginning of another birth?<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 12:14.*

<sup>37</sup> *Peri Pascha 4 (Translated by Robert J. Daly-ACW).*

**“But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God” [21].**

The words ‘...he who does the truth....’ occurs to counter he who does evil and whose ‘deeds are wicked.’ The singular is used for there is one life in the Lord Jesus Christ and adhering to Him. In contrast the plural is used to refer to evil acts and deeds as they occur in an uninterrupted chain of dark actions. The amazing observation is that when we perform truthful acts, meaning that when we adhere to the Lord, we come to the light- that is to the person of the Lord- and it seems as though the more we adhere to Him the more the fervor of our heart increases. As a result we yearn to really enter and unite intensely with the Lord. Consequently, we, as believers, becomes increasingly attracted day after day in the hope of attaining ‘the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’ (Eph. 4:13).

When we practice the truth, we receive the light so that our deeds occur in the presence of the Lord and by His help and grace. This is the conclusion of our Lord’s conversation with Nicodemus. Since we have become adopted to be His sons, it is appropriate that we, the believers, enjoy the possibilities God provides through Him and in Him.

The light of truth that fills the believer with joy is in itself hateful to the wicked. He cannot tolerate the light and considers it an enemy that resents and opposes him.

The Lord’s words **“...they have been done by God”** express His affirmation that the righteousness of the believer is based on the work of God within him, “...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” (Phil. 2:13).

\* Being considered a person is the result of God’s work. However, being considered a sinner is the result of man’s own work or deeds.

Therefore erase what you have done so that God might redeem what He has done.

It is appropriate for you to hate what you have done to yourself, and to love the work of God in you.

When you are displeased with your own actions, you would have begun to do God’s good work since you have found fault with your wicked actions.

The confession of wicked deeds is the beginning of doing that which is good.

You do what is true and you come to the light. How do you do what is true? You do not spoil, release, or flatter yourself. Moreover, you do not say: ‘I am righteous’ while you are not. That is how you start to do what is true.

You come to the light to declare that your actions are done only through God and His help. Otherwise, it will be impossible for you to recognize your sin, the very thing you hate, and to despise it. You can do this only when God shines within you and reveals the truth to you.

As for a person who loves wickedness even after he has received advice, he clearly hates the light that guides him and evades it. This is because the actions he loves to take do not appear to be wicked to him. Whereas a person who loves to do what is true condemns his own evil actions and does not provides justification or forgives himself until God forgives him.

He who desires God’s forgiveness needs to recognize his own faults, come to the light, and give thanks for revealing what he needs to hate in himself. He prays God “...to hide (His) face from (his) sins...” Yet how can he dare to say this unless he adds: “For I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is ever before me...” (Ps.51:3, 9).

**May your sins remain before you if you do not want to put them before the Lord.**

**However, if you put them behind you, God will push them and put them before your eyes. This occurs at a time when the fruit of repentance is no longer found within<sup>38</sup>.**

**St. Augustine**

\* The Lord spoke these words to describe those who have chosen to remain in their wickedness for ever. He came for that purpose and in order to grant forgiveness for previous sins. Besides, He came to safeguard us from future trespasses since there are those who are careless and perverted. These are so far removed from virtue that they wish to remain in their wickedness until their very last breath. Indeed, they are unable to distance themselves from evil at any moment of their lives.

**St. John Chrysostom**

#### **4- The Stance of John the Baptist on the Baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ**

**‘After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He remained with them and baptized’ [22].**

The Lord left Jerusalem **‘in the land of Judea’** where He had met and spoken with Nicodemus, and visited other areas of Judea. The Bible often makes the distinction between Jerusalem and Judea (Acts 1:8, 10:30; 1Kgs3:34; 2Kgs 1:1, 10)

The Lord Jesus Christ did not baptize but His disciples did so through His authority and command (Jn 4:2). That is why they considered it as though He was baptizing.

\*The Lord used to go up to Jerusalem during the feasts as He wanted people to benefit from His teachings and miracles. When the celebrations were over, He would go to Jordan as many would travel and go there. He always went to places where there would be crowds in order to offer the many the blessings inherent in Him. Indeed, He did not do so in order to reveal Himself or to seek Honor. Therefore St. John the Evangelist clarifies this and says: **‘(though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples)’ (Jn.4:2).**

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Now John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salem, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized’ [23].**

The Lord Jesus Christ began to baptize through His disciples before John the Baptist is put in prison in order to draw the disciples of the Baptist towards Himself. In this way they would not get scattered after his martyrdom. Besides, this would insure that the cycle of work would not end with the Baptist’s death. In fact St. John the Baptist continued to collaborate harmoniously, preaching and seriously preparing for the Kingdom of God until his very last breath.

**Aenon:** is about eight miles south of Scythopolis, and lies between Salem and Jordan.

It is clear that the Baptist always baptized by immersion as the Evangelist says: **“...because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized’ [23].**

\* **‘...Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples’...why?** Note the Baptist’s words:

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<sup>38</sup>St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 12:13.*

“...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire...” (Matt 3:11; Lk 3:16). Until that moment, the Holy Spirit had not been granted and therefore it was valid that He did not baptize. However, His disciples did baptize in order to attract many to the faithful teachings... Then why did the Baptist not stop baptizing if that would have added awe to the stature of the disciples? In order to avoid arousing any competition among his disciples and which would have been worse than any hostility... besides, while the Baptist was baptizing he did not cease to underline to them the greatness and awesome nature of the Lord’s acts...

Was the baptism performed by the disciples better than the one done by the Baptist? No, it was not better in any way. Both were done without the gift of the Holy Spirit. So they were similar and shared the same objective which was to lead those who got baptized to the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>39</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘For John had not yet been thrown into prison’ [24].**

**‘The there arose a dispute between some of John’s disciples and the Jews about purification’ [25].**

\*The disciples of the Baptist were always jealous of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and of His disciples who were baptizing. They began to argue with those who had been baptized and so they appeared to believe that their baptism were better than the one done by the Lord’s disciples. They caught some who had been baptized and tried to convince them of that but they failed. Note how the Evangelist implies that they began, at first, to attack (the Lord) ...he does not say that a Jew asked them but that they aroused the doubt, and that the questioning was raised by the Baptist’s disciples and directed to the Jews<sup>40</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\*The Baptist was baptizing and so was the Lord...the disciples of the Baptist were moving and running towards the Lord...the Baptist delivered those who went to him to the Lord so that He would baptize them; whereas those who went to the Lord were not sent to the Baptist.

The disciples of the Baptist were disturbed, and according to custom, they began to discuss these matters with the Jews.

Let us remember that the Jews admitted that the Lord Jesus Christ was greater, and that the people would necessarily turn to His baptism. The Baptist’s disciples understood that as well; yet they defended John’s baptism and came to him personally to solve the matter.

Remember, dear ones, we have been granted the grace to learn how to apply humility. When the people were wrong in their discussion of this matter, it was a chance to reveal if the Baptist was seeking honor for himself...

He wisely knew before whom to be humble: before the One he knew had come after him by birth; yet he willingly admitted His primacy and acknowledged Him. The Baptist understood that his own salvation is in the Lord Jesus Christ. Long before that incident, John had said: “And of His fullness we have all received...” In this statement, the Baptist confesses that the Lord is God; for how can we all receive of His fullness if He were not God?...

He is the Source and they are the partakers of Him. Those who drink from a source get thirsty later on. The Source never thirsts and does not turn to Himself. However, mankind need the

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<sup>39</sup> Hom. 29 PG 59:165

<sup>40</sup> Hom. 29 PG 59:165-166.

Source and run to Him to quench their thirsty stomach and their dry lips. And the Source flows in order to revive: this is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>41</sup>.

St. Augustine

**‘And they came to John and said to him: “Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified- behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!”[25].**

The disciples of the Baptist revealed their respect for him they addressed him as ‘Rabbi’; and yet, on account of their love and jealousy for him, they showed disrespect to the Lord. They did not even mention the name of the Lord but spoke lightly and referred to Him as **‘He who was with you.’** They believed that what the Lord was doing was an act of ingratitude towards the Baptist who had baptized and witnessed for Him. They did not realize that the Lord had no need for the testimony of John or for men’s praise. Indeed, the Father Himself witnessed for Him and the Holy Spirit appeared and rested on Him. They believed that baptism by the Lord’s disciples was degrading for the baptism done by John and as though there was rivalry among the two parties.

\* **‘He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified’** conveys the meaning of ‘that one who has the rank of a disciple, and who is no more than us...that person has separated himself and is baptizing.’ John’s disciples believed that this would make the Baptist envious. To underline that they stressed that their popularity was on the decline by saying: **“and all are coming to Him!”[25].** Their behavior revealed them to be no better than the Jews who had argued with Him. They spoke these words because they were torn in their inclinations and they had not dismissed the sense of competition which filled them<sup>42</sup>.

St. John Chrysostom

**‘John answered and said: “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven” [27].**

The Baptist was neither disturbed nor embarrassed; but proclaimed joyfully and with a glad spirit that what the Lord was doing is authorized by heaven. He found this a good opportunity to confirm and clarify for a second time his witness for the Lord.

Listen to what John the Baptist tells his disciples. Rather than reprove them harshly and risking that they would forsake him and commit some other bad behavior, he told them that **‘A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven’**...for a while he wished to strike them with fear and terror and to reveal to them that they were actually fighting God when they fought the Lord Jesus Christ. In this context, the Baptist established this reality indirectly and it is the same truth that Gamaliel confirmed: “...but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it –lest you even be found to fight against God” (Acts 5:39). Therefore the saying that **‘A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven’** is a pronouncement that they are fighters against God and so attempting the impossible. Notice also that when they said: **‘to whom you have testified’ [26]** the Baptist opposed them as they seemed to degrade the power of the Lord and silenced them by his words **‘A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven’ [27].** If you hold on to my testimony and consider it to be true, then acknowledge this and

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<sup>41</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 13:8.*

<sup>42</sup> *Homilies on St. John, 27:1*



do not prefer me over Him. You have to prefer Him over me otherwise why have I testified? ‘I pray you yourselves to bear to my witnesses [28]<sup>43</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**St. Augustine** believes that John the Baptist is speaking here about himself as being a person who has been granted heavenly insight but that he is not the Messiah. It is as though he is saying: [‘Why do you deceive yourselves? Look at how you put this problem to me and at what you are saying?... Because I have received something from heaven in order to fulfill certain task, do you want me to empty myself of that by saying things that oppose the truth?... I am the news reporter and He is Judge]<sup>44</sup>.

**“You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ’ but ‘I have been sent before Him’ [28].**

It is as though John is saying here: “I am the servant carrying the words of Him who has sent me.” The expression **‘I have been sent before Him’** in the Greek language implies continuity in the action and giving fruit as a result of it.

\* ‘Do adhere to my testimony... If you consider me trustworthy, then one of the things I told you is that: **“I have been sent before Him” [28]** ...for He is not diminished by my witness for Him. On the contrary, I am elevated by it. After a while it will become evident that this Voice is a divine one, and therefore the testimony does not proceed from me but it comes from God.’ The words of the Baptist convey the following meaning: ‘I am a servant and I speak the words of Him who has sent me. I do so to serve His Father who has sent me and not in order to flatter the Lord Jesus Christ for any personal interest. Moreover, I do not testify through a gift inherent in me but speak as I have been commissioned to do. Therefore do not consider that I am great, but rather that He is great... for He is Lord above all things<sup>45</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“He who has the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled” [29].**

In Jewish culture, the friend of the bridegroom is called *showshabiyn*; and in the Greek culture *paranymphos*. Usually there was a friend for the bridegroom and one for the bride and most often the brother would be the bridegroom’s friend.

Sometimes, however, there would not be a specific person who is the friend of either the bride or the bridegroom. In contrast, there had to be a friend of the bridegroom when the wedding was that of a king or nobleman or other very highly ranked person. The Jews believed that this custom has been instituted by God as He Himself was the *showshabiyn* at Adam’s wedding. **Bereshith Rabba**, however, writes that Adam had two friends at his wedding: Michael and Gabriel.

The friend of the bridegroom played a vital and unique role: he would be relieved of his religious obligations in order to help the newly wed couple throughout the first seven days. Before the wedding, he had to protect the bride, attend to her, and report to the bridegroom as well as act as

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<sup>43</sup>Homilies on St. John 29:2

<sup>44</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate13:9

<sup>45</sup> Homilies on St. John 29:2

a liaison or link between them. He would carry letters they wished to exchange as the engaged female was not allowed to leave the home of her parents.

After the wedding, the friend would help to strengthen the personality of the bride. He would live close by to ensure that no harm would touch her and that neither party would deceive the other. Moreover, it was his duty to examine her purity and once he was assured, he would rejoice. This is probably what St. John means when he says: **“Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled”** [29]. The friend also brings the presents offered to the couple and ultimately shares in the joyful wedding celebrations that last for seven days.

After this celebration that extends for a week, the friend of the bridegroom becomes more like a defender for him (2 Cor 11:2). Therefore he solves any marital problems that may arise and restores harmony.

The bridegroom’s friend keeps the wedding contract with him. If he finds that the bride is unfaithful, he has the authority to tear up the contract and so the wedding would be considered as annulled. However, if the bridegroom abandons and divorces her, the friend fills in the role of her legal brother (the husband’s brother)<sup>46</sup>.

St. John the Baptist proclaims his joy because the divine Bride has come. He joins the men of God in the Old Testament who expressed that joy towards the Bride. **St. Gregory, Bishop of Nicea**, expresses that thought in his interpretation of The Song of Solomon as he says: **‘Those who serve the virgin bride and accompany her are the patriarchs, the prophets, and teachers of the law.** They offer to the Bride the wedding presents (such as the remission of sins, the resolution to stop wicked acts, the purification from sin, a change in nature in the sense that the corrupt nature will become pure, the enjoyment of Paradise, and infinite joy).

When the Bride receives all these presents from the nobility and from all those who carry these gifts through their prophetic teachings, she proclaims her eagerness and hurries to enjoy the privilege and the beauty of the One she has desired for so long.

The servants and the companions of the Bride listen to her and encourage Her to be more desirous. Then the Bridegroom arrives and leads a crowd of singers that includes His friends and well wishers. These represent the spirits of the pure prophets or those who serve and rescue mankind.

When they hear the voice of the Bridegroom, they rejoice (Jn3:29) as the pure union is fulfilled and the soul that adheres to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him. This is also proclaimed by the St. Paul, the apostle (1 Cor.6:17)<sup>47</sup>.

\*Those who expect that the Lord will come again stand eagerly and attentively at the gates of heaven and wait for the time when the King of glory enters into His grace. This will exceed all imagination and according to Psalm 19:5 ‘which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber.’

In spite of our sins and our worship of idols and God’s consequent removal; we have been granted the new birth and have become as a first born after being washed of our inner corruption. Therefore all the wedding celebrations have been fulfilled and the Word of God has been united to the Church, and as St. John says: **“He who has the bride is the bridegroom,”** (Jn.3:29).

And the Church has received the Bride in the wedding bridal room. And the angels have expected the return of the King as He leads the Church as His Bride. Through His leadership, He has made Her nature ready to receive grace. He has therefore said that our lives have to be cleaned of all evil and deceit so that we too are ready to receive the Lord when He comes again.

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<sup>46</sup> Adam Clark Comm.

<sup>47</sup> Song of Solomon by St. Gregory of Nicea, translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, 1993, Sermon 1.

When we watch the doors of our homes, we prepare ourselves for the arrival of the Bridegroom and for the time when He will call and knock at the door for: “Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching” (Lk 12:37). For he is blessed who obeys the One who is knocking.

The soul is eager for this blessing of welcoming her Bridegroom who stands at the door.

She watches the door of her home alertly and says: “It is the voice of my beloved! He knocks... (Sg of Sol.5:3). How would the bridegroom deny her the privilege when she has reached up to Him who is ultimately most holy?<sup>48</sup>

**St. Gregory of Nicea**

\* It is as though the Baptist is saying: ‘I would have suffered greatly if this had not happened. It would have given me so much pain and grief if the bride had not come to her bridegroom. However, I am no longer sad since my hopes have been fulfilled and everything we have longed for has taken place: for the bride has recognized her bridegroom and you are witnesses of that. Therefore I am glad and rejoice now that this prayer has been answered.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Listen to what is even much stronger and to a clearer testimony. Notice the matter we are concerned with: for it an adulterous act if someone loves a person and allows him/her to take the place of the Lord Jesus Christ...for “**He who has the bride is the bridegroom**”...so be pure, and love the Bridegroom...

Presently, I see many adulterers who wish to possess the bride, who has been bought for such a great price. She was loved when she was disfigured so that she might become beautiful. She has been bought and received redemption and now she is adorned by that One who has saved her.

As for these adulterers, they struggle with words in order to love someone other than the bridegroom...

Let us therefore listen to the friends of the bridegroom rather than to the adulterers who oppose him...

Let us listen to that one who is jealous and fervent, yet it is not on his own account<sup>49</sup>.

\* He says ‘I rejoice not on account of my voice but on account of the voice of the bridegroom. I fill in the position of the hearer, while He is the Speaker. As a person, I need to be enlightened, whereas He is the Light. I am like the ear, while He is the Word. That is why the bridegroom’s friend stands and listens to him.

Why does he stand? So that he might not fail.

What would prevent him from failing? His humility.

Remember that he is standing on firm ground: “I am not worthy to loosen His sandal straps.” You do well to be humble and so you are prepared not to fall. Rather, you are prepared to stand and to hear Him, and to rejoice greatly upon hearing the voice of the bridegroom<sup>50</sup>.

\* Peter is an eye in this Body; and although that other person is a finger yet he is a member in that same Body to which Peter belongs. Even if the finger has a lesser power than the eye, yet it is not amputated from the Body.

It is better to be a finger in the Body than to be an eye that has been amputated from the

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<sup>48</sup> Song of Solomon by St. Gregory of Nicea, translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, 1993, Sermon 11.

<sup>49</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 13:10

<sup>50</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 13:12

Body.

Therefore do not be deceived, my brothers, and let no one impress you. Love the peace that the Lord grants as He, who is God, has been crucified for your sakes. St. Paul says: "So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase" (1Cor 3:7)...

May all the members love one another, and may all live subject to the Head.

In my sadness I have been obliged to speak to you for a long period. However, I have not said enough and so find myself unable to stop<sup>51</sup>.

\* What brings him joy? He rejoices to hear the voice of his Bridegroom.

This has been fulfilled for me and I have received this blessing. I do not assume a role that is not mine otherwise I would lose my actual status...

People need to understand that they should not rejoice because of their own wisdom, but rather, they should rejoice on account of the wisdom that God has granted them.

No one should ask for more (than what he has) so that he does not lose what he has found; for many people who have claimed wisdom have turned out to be foolish and dull. The apostle rebukes such people and tells them: "...because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them" (Romans 1:19)...

People should not claim for themselves what they have not obtained as a result of their own effort. They need to explain it as the gift that they have received freely from God; otherwise He will withdraw such blessings from the ungrateful. The Baptist did not want that to happen to him for he wanted to be thankful. He confessed he had been blessed, and proclaimed that he rejoiced on hearing the voice of the Bridegroom by saying: **"Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled"** [29]<sup>52</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**"Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled"** [29] indicates that 'the task I had to do has been achieved and there is nothing more I can do in the future.' The Baptist tells them what would take place in the future to prevent arousing intense physical emotions in the present as well as in the future. Therefore he affirms that events are proceeding in agreement with what he had said and done earlier on<sup>53</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**"He must increase, but I must decrease"** [30].

St. John the Baptist understands that the Lord increases and he decreases and this becomes obvious in the manner each has died. The first became a martyr silently when he died in prison; and only very few learned about it. The Lord, however, died in public and on the Cross: He lifted up His Head towards heaven, and spread out His arms to embrace lovingly all mankind. The first died and was buried after he was beheaded; whereas the Lord Jesus Christ died, was buried, and arose in order to resurrect the dead with Him.

The words of St. John the Baptist have relevance to the life of every true believer who is growing in his relationship with the Lord. In each moment of his life, the believer dismisses all that is materialistic and indeed gets to feel that he/she discards that which is human. This is done not with the object of living without a human will or without human feelings, but in order to proclaim the will of God in one's life. As a result, one's emotions are sanctified and he acts according to the

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<sup>51</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 13:17-18*

<sup>52</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 14:3*

<sup>53</sup> *Homilies on St. John, 29:2*

Lord. In this manner the believer experiences sweetness in his failings as he makes way for the Lord to increase and be glorified in him.

The Lord's successful ministry marks the starting point for the proclamation of His glorious righteousness, peace, and truth among mankind.

The Baptist rejoices that the number of people coming to him for baptism has diminished. By going to the Lord Jesus Christ, they fulfill the goal of his own service and baptism.

**\*“He must increase, but I must decrease” [30]...**What does this mean: He should be glorified, and I should be humbled?

How might the Lord Jesus Christ increase? How does God increase? God neither increases nor decreases. If He were to increase then He is not perfect; and if He were to decrease then He is not God...

Could that be a result of His willingness to become man when He became incarnate? He was a child, and although He is the wisdom of God, He lay in a manger as a newly born. Moreover, He sucked milk from his mother in spite of the fact that He is her Creator. Then the Lord Jesus Christ grew up physically and maybe that is why the Baptist said: **“He must increase, but I must decrease.”** But why is that? Physically, the Baptist and the Lord were of the same age with just six months' difference between them. Besides, they had grown together...so what is the meaning of **“He must increase, but I must decrease”**?

That is a great mystery!

Before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, men used to glorify themselves.

He came as a person to reduce man's glory and to increase the glory of God. He came without sin and found all men had fallen into sin. In the form of a man He came to tear sin away and as God grants freely so man has to confess. It is this confession that degrades man, yet it is the tenderness of God that is sublime.

Therefore since the Lord has come to forgive the sins of man, then man has to admit his immorality and may God reveal His tenderness.

**“He must increase, but I must decrease”** or in other words ‘He will grant me good things and I will receive; He will be glorified and I will confess.’ May every person become aware of his own condition and confess to God. Let us listen to what the apostle has to say to the proud and mighty person who praises himself: “And what do you have that you have not received? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?” (1Cor 4:7)<sup>54</sup>.

\*May God who is always perfect grow and increase in you for the more you comprehend Him the more He will appear to increase in you. As for Himself, He does not increase since He is the everlasting Perfection...This is also true of the inner depths of a person for he truly grows in the Lord God who appears increasingly in Him. However, the person himself seems to diminish when he falls away from his own arrogance and establishes the glory of God<sup>55</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\*This means that we have stopped and ceased our wrong doings; whereas the works of the Lord will increase. What you are afraid of will happen not only now but later on and to a greater extent. This specifically increases the brilliance of my situation for I have come for this task. Therefore I rejoice that His objectives are advancing rapidly and that this is the result of my actions.

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<sup>54</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 14:4*

<sup>55</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 14:5*

Can you not see that He has gently and wisely soothed their sufferings, calmed their bodies, revealed to them that they had spoken of impossible matters, and that evil had to be controlled? <sup>56</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from the heaven is above all” [31]**

The Bridegroom descending from heaven (Jn 3:13) is above all: He is greater than Moses, the prophets, and is even greater than John the Baptist himself.

The Baptist speaks about himself as ‘...**he who is of the earth...**’ because he was born in the same way as all other human beings. Consequently, he is unable to speak of matters proclaimed by the heavenly Messiah. He just prepares the way for Him. There is no point of comparison between the prophets (and the Baptist is one of them) and the Lord Jesus Christ. When they witness for the Truth, they are still human vessels on earth through whom God speaks. However, when the Lord Jesus Christ speaks, His words come from heaven for He is heavenly.

\* He wishes to indicate that the Lord does not need anyone for He is self sufficient and greater than all...so the Baptist says: “...**he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth**” to point to himself...do you see how he has nothing else to say of himself other than that he is of lesser stature and came from the earth and was born of it? As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He had come to them from heaven. With all these words, the Baptist is able to satisfy their jealousy.

\* It is as though he is saying: ‘If I were to compare my concerns with His, they would appear few, mean, and poor just as all other things which have an earthly nature’<sup>57</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* When the Baptist speaks about the human aspect of himself (that is in John the Baptist) he is indicating an earthly being who is enlightened by God.

If he had not been enlightened, he would have remained earthly and speaking with earthly wisdom...

May the grace of God come and lighten up his darkness according to the words: “For You will light my lamp; the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness” (Ps18:28).

May God take the thoughts of man and transform them to be his light. Then man will immediately join the apostle and say: “...not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1Cor15:10); and “...it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20)...

This is the condition of the Baptist since he is of the earth and speaks from the earth. However, the heavenly words you hear from him are inspired by the One who enlightens him and not from the person (the Baptist) who receives them<sup>58</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony” [32].**

The words spoken by the prophets are simply the testimony of what God has delivered to

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<sup>56</sup> *Homilies on St. John, 29:3*

<sup>57</sup> *Hom. 30 PG 59:170*

<sup>58</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate14:6*

them through different means. As for the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, they are proclamations of what He has seen and heard for He is never separated from the Father and He is the Truth Itself.

\* **“He who comes from above is above all... And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony”** [31-32]...He has the Father since He is the Son of God: He has the Father and hears Him...He is the Word of God<sup>59</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true”** [33].

\*When he was in prison, the Baptist sent his disciples to the Lord so that they would get attached to Him...now that the Lord starts to speak the words of God there will be believers and non- believers, those who will believe in God and those who will not...note the words **‘...has certified...’** mean ‘has proclaimed.’ In order to disturb them deeply, he tells them **‘that God is true’** for he wishes to clarify that no one can reject the belief in the Lord Jesus Christ without rejecting God at the same time, and by doing so commits a sin<sup>60</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure”** [34].

Human beings receive the Spirit of God in the measure of their own potential and weakness. As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He receives the Spirit without measure since the Spirit is One with Him and resides in Him.

\* St. John the Baptist says the following about the Lord: **“For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God”** because the Lord says nothing other than the words of His Father and says only the words of God. Therefore anyone who opposes the Son is also opposing His Father who has sent Him. Do you see how he disturbed them deeply by his words?

He then says: **“... for God does not give the Spirit by measure”** In other words we have all received the work of the Spirit with measure and proportion but the Lord possesses the Spirit entirely and completely and without measure.

\* St. John the Baptist says about the Son: **“for God does not give the Spirit by measure”** (Jn3:34) to those who deserve. Therefore there is no measure for the Son as it is impossible to measure Him. He exceeds all measure as He is God. How could you measure the One Who cannot be measured or describe Him as lacking?

**St. Cyril the Great**

\* **St. John Chrysostom** writes the following: ‘He is speaking about capacity when he mentions the Spirit.’ We all receive the capacity of the Spirit by measure. As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He possesses full capacity and that cannot be measured as it is His in its entirety. Therefore since His capacity is without measure then how much greater is His essence? He refers to the capacity, the Spirit or more adequately the Spirit of God according to the words of the Baptist. By

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<sup>59</sup>St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate*14

<sup>60</sup> Hom. 30 Pg 59:172

stating that the capacity has no measure he indicates that the nature of the Spirit is not a created one. When he says that we receive the Spirit with measure, he is referring to the different nature of the uncreated capacity that resides in the Essence and that is also not created...now, if the capacity of the Spirit is without measure, then how much more immeasurable is the Essence<sup>61</sup>.

**Fr Gregory Palamas**

St. John the Baptist draws a distinction between his mission and the Lord's mission. The mission of John the Baptist is a mission of God ordained to a human apostle who speaks and testifies within the capacity and grace he receives. As for the mission of the Lord, it is the mission of the Son of God and His Word Who is one with Him. He alone sees the Father as He is and can witness for Him. The Spirit of the Son of God is the Spirit of the Holy Father and therefore, unlike the prophets, apostles, or believers in general, He does not receive the Spirit by measure.

**\* “for God does not give the Spirit by measure” [34].** Listen to the words of the apostle: “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gifts” (Eph4:7). With reference to human beings, the Spirit is given by measure, but with reference to the Only Son it is given without measure. How does He give to human beings with measure? “...for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing ....to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy...” (1 Cor 12:8...etc)...as for the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Giver, He receives without measure<sup>62</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hands.” [35]**

John the Baptist clarifies that the Lord Jesus Christ is far greater than any teacher, prophet, or apostle. Some prophets have received certain talents, others have received certain revelations or visions, others have received dreams, some have received the talent of teaching, while others got the gift of giving comfort, etc...As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He is the only One who possesses everything and holds all in His hands.

**\* “The Father loves the Son...” [35],** yet He loves as a father loves and not as a lord who loves his slave. Indeed, He loves Him as His only begotten Son rather than an adopted son...That is why when He willingly gave up His Son for our sakes, we should not imagine that the One sent to us is less than the Father. For when the Father sends the Son it is similar to someone sending his other self (as He is One with Him, and is equal to Him)<sup>63</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” [36]**

**\* Jesus says: “I am the door...”** (Jn 14:6; 10:9); “No one comes to the Father except through Me...”; “...no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (Matt 11:27). Therefore if you deny

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<sup>61</sup> *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters, Ch 95. St Chry 505, tom. hom. 30:2 Pg 59:173*

<sup>62</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate14:10*

<sup>63</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate14:11*



the One revealed to you, you will remain ignorant.

In the Gospel of St. John there is the following statement: ‘...**he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him**’ (Jn 3:36) because the Father gets angry when His only Son is disrespected. A king would be grieved if just one of his soldiers is humiliated, so how would it be if this happens to his only son? Who would be able to appease the anger of the Father on account of His only Son?!<sup>64</sup>

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* Someone may ask: ‘So is any person assured of eternal life if he just believes in the Son? The answer is : He certainly is not assured in any way for the Lord Himself said: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matt 7:21). For if a person firmly believes in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and yet does not lead a pure life, he will gain nothing from his faith and will not have a single advantage that would help him attain salvation. Therefore do not think that faith is sufficient for our salvation. To ensure our salvation, we need to lead a straight and correct life and follow a chaste path besides faith.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* When someone believes, the wrath of God passes away and life reigns. Therefore in believing in the Lord Jesus Christ you are possessing life since a person who believes in Him will not be condemned (Jn3:15). However, many insist that this statement has a condition attached to it which is that the believer needs to keep the Lord’s commandments. They claim that these are the words of the Lord Himself who has said: “I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness. And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him (Jn 12:47)<sup>65</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* The Baptist does not say: ‘The wrath of God will descend on him’ but rather ‘**the wrath of God abides on him.**’ All those who have been born vulnerable to death and subject to the wrath of God. And what is the wrath of God other than the wrath first caused by Adam...from this genealogy the Son has come, without sin, and was covered with the flesh that is subject to death. If He has shared with us the wrath of God when He bore our sins, then why are we reluctant and slow to share with Him the grace of God? Therefore he who does not believe, the wrath of God abides on him. Why is God angry? According to the apostle, we ‘...were by nature children of wrath, just as others’ (Eph 2:3). All are children of wrath, since they are the outcome of the curse of death.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, for he became vulnerable to death for your sakes.

He lived while you were dead.

He died so that you may live.

He has brought the grace of God, and torn away His wrath.

God has conquered death so that death would not conquer man<sup>66</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

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<sup>64</sup> Article 10:1

<sup>65</sup> Concerning Repentance, Book 1:12:53-54

<sup>66</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 14:13

## **Inspirations drawn from The Gospel of John, Chapter Three**

### **May Your Fiery Spirit Carry Me to the New World!**

\*My depths groan, my body and whole being have swerved towards corporal things,  
Greed had governed my depths  
But Your grace has rescued me.  
You have granted me a birth from the Water and the Spirit!  
You have become a heavenly Father for me, and Your Church an immortal Mother. I  
have no longer an excuse or a justification,  
May Your fiery Spirit carry me to the new world!

\*You were born in the flesh for my sake,  
In order to grant me a heavenly birth by Your Holy Spirit!  
You have cleaned me thoroughly in the baptismal water,  
And You have granted me victory over the old dragon.  
You watered me with the Living Water, so how can I thirst after that?  
You have thrown me into the grave with You,  
And have resurrected me to enjoy Your resurrected life!  
You have granted me a new life, a new spirit, and a new heart.

\*You have drawn my whole being to Your heavenly heights,  
So I find nothing on earth which attracts my heart and thoughts!  
I find that you have ascended alone into the heavens, O Resident of heaven!  
Accept me as a member of Your Body, for the earth cannot contain me any longer!  
You have descended to earth and hidden me in You,  
And you have ascended to heaven so that I may live with You where You reside!

\* The snake killed me with its poison and deceit,  
She killed my soul as listened to it.  
There You are as the bronze snake raised on the Cross.  
I perceive You with the eyes of my heart as You have destroyed the debt I owe!  
By Your Cross You have raised me, and drawn me into the Father's embrace!  
I rise with You in defiance of the powers of darkness,  
Your death has killed my death, and destroyed all its power!  
Your Cross has crucified the world to me, and crucified me to the world!  
The world has no place in me, and I have no place in it!

\*Your Cross proclaims the glory of Your sublime love!  
Your Cross has opened my heart to embrace all mankind as much as possible!  
Your Cross has removed my fear of judgment,  
And has filled my heart with yearning for the day of Your coming!

\*O Sun of Righteousness, You have shone on me from the Cross,  
And You have removed all darkness within me.  
I run to You O light of my heart!

The Light of Truth has shone within me,  
So I realized that you are He brings fills my life with righteousness!

\*With John the Baptist-Your forerunner and angel-I rejoice and offer praise to you:

I must decrease and You must increase,  
May I always realize my weaknesses and faults  
And may Your grace constantly grow!  
I decrease as I discover more and more my ignorance,  
And You increase as you reign fully in my depths,  
And as You are more fully revealed within me,  
Take complete dominion of all aspects of my life...

Amen

## CHAPTER FOUR

### MEETING WITH THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

#### THE AMAZING WINNER OF SOULS

The Jews took pride in their land for it was ‘**the promised land**’ that God had granted to Abraham, the father of believers, as an inheritance for him and his children. At the time of the Lord Jesus Christ this land had become divided into three parts: **Judea** in the South where the city of God, Jerusalem, stands and where there is the Temple that is considered the holiest place in the world; **Galilee** or the Galilee of the Gentiles in the North and many in this area had accepted the Jewish faith; and **Samaria** in the central part of the land. There was a deep and reciprocal hatred between the Samaritans and the Jews. In this chapter, we find the Lord visiting these three parts of the land.

The Lord came to Judea after He had spent the feast in Jerusalem (Jn3:22); and now He was leaving after having spent there four months of harvesting [35]. So He had stayed there for a total time of approximately six months.

On His way to Galilee, the Lord passed through Samaria. At the well, He met a Samaritan woman who had been married five times and now lived with a man who was not hers. In spite of the enmity that existed between the Jews and the Samaritans, the Lord engaged her in a conversation and so drew her to her salvation. Moreover, He turned her into a witness who would preach salvation. He appealed to her so much that she enjoyed the knowledge He offered. She realized that He is the Messiah who informs us of everything. After spending a few minutes with Him, she left her water pot and ran to draw the whole city; and many believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, when someone meets with the amazing Winner of souls he/she gets to share His features and also becomes a winner of souls.

Throughout this meeting, the Lord encourages us to worship in a new manner. He offers the woman and the people of her city living Water whose source springs from within them. He proclaims that He has come instead of Jacob’s well, and He offers Water that whoever drinks of it shall never thirst again since it grants eternal life [14]. He also proclaims that the hour has come when worship will reach a sublime height that is greater than any offered on Mount Gerizim or in the temple. For people will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth [23]. Besides, He has a new food, which is to do the will of the One who has sent Him [24]. He says that the fields are white and ready for the new harvest [35]. The four Evangelists have focused on four important personalities in this conversation: the Lord, the Samaritan woman, the disciples, and the people of the city, besides the narrator. The conclusion of the meeting is that: “**Now we believe...and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world**” [42].

The Evangelist follows the report of this meeting by narrating another one between the Lord and the king’s servant. That person prays the Lord to hurry to his house in order to heal his son and save him from death. The nobleman hears the living words: “Go your way, your son lives.” He believes and his son is healed. In the first meeting, the Samaritan woman and many people of the city of Sychar rejoiced at receiving the new resurrected life; in spite of the fact that they were mostly Gentiles, or half of them, and were the fruit of intermarriages among the Chaldeans and the Jews. In the second meeting, the king’s servant and his household rejoiced at receiving the living faith through the physical healing of the son; and in that case the family was probably of the Gentiles as well.

## **Main points in Chapter Four**

**1-The Lord's Departure from Judea1-3**

**2-His Stay in Samaria4-6**

**3-Conversation with the Samaritan woman7-26**

**4-Her Successful Testimony27-30**

**5-The Samaritans Believe in Him 39-42**

**6-His Journey to Galilee43-46**

**7-The Healing of the Son of the King's Servant47-54**

### **1-THE LORD'S DEPARTURE FROM JUDEA**

**'Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John [1] (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples)' [2]**

Although so many had been baptized by John the Baptist, yet the Lord had His own power of attraction. Therefore huge numbers came to be baptized not by the servant (John) but by his Master (the Lord Jesus Christ). The Pharisees had imagined that matters would calm down once they got rid of the Baptist by putting him in prison. However, they find that the Lord has attracted large crowds and they are filled with jealousy.

The Lord was involved in preaching and in attracting people to believe in Him. He would then hand them over to His disciples who would baptize them. It could be that the Lord did not baptize Himself in order to prevent those baptized from boasting over others and claiming the honor of having been baptized by the Lord Himself. Other apostles, like St. Paul, left the act of baptism to others so that they could dedicate themselves to preaching (1Cor1:17). This does not indicate that they took baptism lightly, but that it was an easier task to do than that of preaching the Word and winning souls. Having said that, we need to be aware that every baptism performed in the name of the Holy Trinity is not an act done by the priest but it is the act of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself: the Lord sends His Holy Spirit to grant the baptized person the Spirit of an adopted son. The power of baptism does not depend on the righteousness of the minister performing the mystery of baptism, because the Lord alone is the One who grants the hidden mystery.

\*Actually, it is the Lord who performs the baptism since He is the One who cleanses. He does not baptize in the sense that He is not the one who touches the bodies of those coming for baptism. The disciples performed the service of the body, while He supported them with His glory...and the Lord continues to baptize to this day, and will continue to do so as long as there is baptism. May ministers come to perform the service on earth below without fear for they have a Master in heaven. Someone may say: 'The Lord truly baptizes by the Spirit and not by the flesh...remove the water and there would not be a baptismal font; remove the Word and there would not be baptism (Eph 5:25-27)<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**'He left Judea and departed again to Galilee' [3].**

Galilee was under the rule of Herod who had imprisoned John the Baptist. He imagined

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 15:3

that he could hide the light in a secure pit. He did not understand that light is more powerful than darkness, and that even though he could kill the Baptist yet the Baptist's mission would not be crushed. By the coming of the Lord, the true Light himself had come.

When the rage of the Pharisees and their desire to kill Him was aroused, the Lord left Judea and went towards the Galilee of the Gentiles because the time of His death had not yet come (Jn 7:30). Besides, probably His disciples were not ready to bear hard trials yet. Therefore He took them with Him to Galilee. At the same time, the Lord wishes to teach us that when we are persecuted we should leave and go to another city. He went to Galilee because many people there were ready to believe in Him. They needed to meet Him and enjoy His words and acts.

If you wonder: 'Why did the Lord go to Galilee?' My answer is: 'He did not leave out of fear, but rather to dismiss their jealousy. He could have controlled them if they had come to Him, but He did not want to be doing that constantly as that would have been a denial of the plan for His incarnation. If He had been caught many times and then had disappeared, many would have been suspicious of His case (as a human being). That is why He planned most of His acts to resemble to those of mankind as closely as possible. He wants us all to believe that He is God and to believe and also that He is God in the flesh. That explains why after His resurrection He told His disciples: "...Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have," (Lk24:39). Moreover, it is for this reason that He rebuked Peter when he told Him: "Far be it from You, Lord, this shall not happen to You!" (Matt 16:22). That is how much this matter was a great concern to the Lord. Indeed, this is not a simple matter in the teachings of the Church for it represents a principal point in the salvation offered to us. Through His incarnation all matters were achieved successfully: for it is through the incarnation that the ties of death have been abolished and our lives have been granted thousands of blessings. Specifically, He wishes us to believe in the plan (of His incarnation) as the endless source and spring of blessings to us. However, while He was concerned to underline His incarnation, He did not allow His divinity to be hidden'<sup>2</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

The Lord gives an example to those who will believe in Him. A servant of the Lord would not be wrong if he withdraws from a situation where his opponents or persecutors are enraged or seeking to harm or kill him...for our good Lord behaved in that manner in order to teach us and not because He was afraid<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

## **2-THE LORD'S STAY IN SAMARIA**

### **'But He needed to go through Samaria' [4]**

He needed to go through Samaria because it lies in the North of Judea between the Great Sea, the Galilee and the Jordan. Therefore it is impossible to cross from Jerusalem (Judea) to Galilee without going through Samaria. This journey involved three days of travel.

The **Samaritans** were of Jewish origin whether from the perspective of blood ties or of religion. When Assyria captured Israel, the poor were left in the land, so those of Jewish origin intermixed with other nationalities, and especially with those of Assyrian origin. This was planned by some Assyrian kings such as Shalmaneser (2 Kgs 17). There was also intermixing between the Jewish religion and strange and idolatry elements. The Samaritans read only the

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<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on St. John*,31:1-2

<sup>3</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 15:2

Five Books by Moses. They built a temple on Mount Gerizim to oppose the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, and considered Shechem and not Zion to be the house of God or the house of God. Moreover, they celebrated the big Jewish feasts: the Passover, the Pentecost, the Tabernacles, and the Day of Atonement. Until now, they offer a lamb or more on Mount Gerizim on the feast of the Passover.

Samaria was a fundamental part of the land of Palestine. Edraz Heim reports that this part stretched for about forty-seven miles from the North to the South, and forty miles from the East to the West. Its boundaries were marked by those of Judea in the South, by Jordan in the East, by the Valley of Charden to the West and the Valley of Jezreel (the Galilee) to the North. The tribes of Menasseh and Ephraim had captured that land; and it was one of the most beautiful and fertile areas in the region. It included the capital city of Samaria (the capital of Israel) and a few other cities.

The Lord Jesus came to plant the seed of living faith in the earth of Samaria. Its people accepted the Word as a result of their faith and not because they had seen miracles. They believed the Samaritan woman whose story the Evangelist recounts to us. It is a unique story, for the Lord meets this woman who is a Gentile in many ways, and carries on a conversation with her. He leads her away from the shameful particulars of her life and grants her the mission of evangelism. As a result, she attracts a whole city, in a very short period of time, and leads its entire people to the Savior of the world.

The Lord underlines His interest in Samaria and its people. He praises the strangely deformed Samaritan leper. In contrast to nine Jews who had been healed, he was the only one to return and thank the Lord for purifying him (Lk 17:15-18). The Lord also presented the parable of the good Samaritan whose heart was moved with practical love and so showed concern for the wounded Jew on the roadside more than the Jewish priest or the Levite (Lk 10:33-36). Just before His resurrection, the Lord charged His disciples with the responsibility to minister in Samaria: "...and you shall be witnesses for Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The Lord opened the door to Samaria and to all the Gentiles. Therefore when 'a great persecution arose against the church which was in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, ...' (Acts 8:1). This indicates that there were in Samaria some believers in the early apostolic period. St. Luke reports the ministry of Philip the apostle in the city of Samaria and says: 'And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did...And there was great joy in that city' (Acts 8:5-8).

The apostles who were in Jerusalem also sent Peter and John to the believers in Samaria in order to pray for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. 'Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit' (Acts 8:14-17).

\*The Lord did not go to Galilee without a certain intention. Rather, He went to achieve specific important matters among the Samaritans...and according to His wisdom...He made it seem as though things had happened by coincidence during His journey. The apostles did the same thing too; for when the Jews persecuted them, they immediately left and went to the Gentiles. Similarly, when the Jews rejected the Lord, He went and met with the Samaritans and the woman from Phoenicia. It all happened so that the Jews would have no excuse and would be unable to say: 'He has abandoned us and has gone to the uncircumcised.' However, the disciples were able to find a reason for that and said: "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life,

behold, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46). When they drove Him out, they opened the door to the Gentiles. He did not go immediately to the Gentiles, but He went as He was passing by<sup>4</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph’ [5].**

**Sychar:** this is probably Shechem situated on the Mount of Gerizim and which is often mentioned in the Old Testament. Hoping to get united and become one nation with the children of Jacob, the inhabitants of this area had become circumcised. However, Simeon and Levi had killed them after all the males were circumcised to take revenge as Shechem had raped their sister Dinah (Gen 34:24...). In Shechem, Abimelek had reigned, and it is there that Jeroboam had set up his throne. Some believe that it was a ‘military’ area situated about half a mile North of Jacob’s well, about ten miles from Shiloh, forty miles from Jerusalem, and Fifty three miles from Jericho. **St. Jerome** believes that the Lord went to Shechem and not Sychar. In his days, it was called Neapolis<sup>5</sup>. Currently, the name of the city is Naplouse.

It was called **Sychar** which means ‘drunken’ as the inhabitants liked drinking. Isaiah the prophet accuses the people of Ephraim of this crime (Is 38:1,3.7-8) as this city was situated within their borders.

This is the information reported about this city:

1-It is the first city where Abraham stopped when he journeyed from Haran to Canaan.

2-There God appeared to Abraham for the first time and promised to give him the land as an inheritance to his descendants

3-There Abraham built the first altar for God and called it by His name (Gen 12:7).

Jacob bought this field from the children of Hamor, Shechem’s father, for one hundred pieces of silver or money (Gen 33:19). Then he built an altar and called it El Elohe Israel. Jacob specifically left this field as an inheritance for Joseph and his children (Gen 48:31-32; Joshua 24:32).

\* You might wonder: ‘Why does the Evangelist present so many details about the place?’ So that you do not get astonished at the words of the Samaritan woman; for it was here that the anger of Levi and Simeon was kindled on account of Dinah. They engaged in a violent slaughter...The Samaritans did not read all the Old Testament and accepted only the Books written by Moses and a small number of Books written by the prophets. Nevertheless, they were eager to inject and impose themselves into the honorable Jewish ancestry. In this way, they could boast and claim Abraham to be their father especially since they were of Chaldean origin too. They also called Jacob their father since he was Abraham’s descent. As for the Jews, they despised the Samaritans as much as they despised the rest of the Gentiles. That is why they reproached the Lord and told Him: “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?” (Jn 8:48)<sup>6</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

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<sup>4</sup> Homilies on St. John, 31:2

<sup>5</sup> Letter 108:13

<sup>6</sup> Homilies on St. John, 31:2



**‘Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied, from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.’ [6]**

The Old Testament makes no mention of this well. But according to tradition handed down to the Samaritans, this well had been dug or used by Jacob and therefore got named as Jacob’s well. Later on it became open for public use.

The Greek word *houtoos* is used to indicate that the act of sitting did not take place on a throne or a couch but on the ground, and on the stones scattered near the well.

About the sixth hour- that is around noon time, the Lord felt tired because He had walked in the heat of the day. Just like a normal human being, He was subject to physical weakness and got tired. He humbly traveled on foot, and He did not own a boat or an animal that He could ride. Because He had a fragile body, He could not tolerate walking in the heat; whereas his disciples did not have any problem. They went into the city and bought food. It is not strange to know that the Lord got tired and thirsty at noon time. The disciples had left Him- this brings to mind the scene of the Lord on Mount Calvary or Golgotha where He hung on the Cross at noontime. He was carrying our burdens and revealed His thirst for every human soul. There, too, His disciples forsook Him and ran away, and left Him to pass through the wine press alone.

\*The Lord came to that place by avoiding the life of comfort. He took the wearisome path and struggled as He did not use any donkey on this journey. Indeed, He walked so much that He got tired during His journey. On every occasion, the Lord teaches us this lesson: to struggle in our effort to get our necessities without searching for luxuries. That is why He says: “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (Matt 8:20). Besides, He spent most of His time in the mountains and desert at night as well as during the day for that same reason. David speaks about that when he says: ‘He shall drink of the brook by the wayside; therefore he shall lift up the head’ (Ps 110:7). This foretells the hard way of life that the Lord would lead<sup>7</sup>.

#### **St. John Chrysostom**

\*If you wish to find the Lord, abandon the broken basins, for the Lord usually sits by a well rather than by a pool.

The Samaritan woman found Him there. She is the one who wanted to believe. Because she needed to draw water, she had to go in the early morning. But she did not go until the sixth hour when she found the Lord tired from His journey.

He is tired because of you for He has been looking for you for so long. Your lack of faith has worn Him out. Yet, in spite of that, when you come He will not say one word of reproach.

He asks you to give Him to drink while He is the Giver of all things. Yet He is nourished (and drinks) by Your redemption and not from an overflowing stream. He drinks from your good deeds, and He drinks the cup of the suffering through which He will redeem your sins. Consequently, we quench the thirst of this world when we drink of His holy Blood.

It is in this manner that Abraham enjoyed God after he had dug a well (Gen 21:30). Isaac met his wife as he walked by a well (Gen. 24:64) and she walked towards him as a symbol of the Church...Rebekah found the one looking for her at the well; and the harlots washed themselves in the water of the pool from the blood (1 Kgs 22:38)<sup>8</sup>.

#### **St. Ambrose**

\*The power of the Lord Jesus Christ created you and His weakness (or fatigue) renews

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<sup>7</sup> *Homilies on St. John, 31:3*

<sup>8</sup> *Of the Holy Spirit 1:16:184-185*

your being. The power of the Lord brought you into being out of nothing and His weakness reversed the sentence on that which was expedient to destroy so that it would not be annihilated. He has created us by His power and He has restored us by His weakness<sup>9</sup>.

\*In the form of a weak person, He feeds and satisfies the weak in the same manner that a hen does with her chicken. Indeed, He likens Himself to a hen when He speaks of Jerusalem and says: “O Jerusalem...how often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Matt 23:37). Dear fellow men, you are aware how weak the mother hen becomes with her chicks. None other among the birds know how to do that when they become mothers...for her wings droop, her feathers shed, her voice breaks, and all her members become weak and thin. You can tell that she is a mother even if her chicks are not around her.

**In the same manner, the Lord Jesus Christ is weak and fatigued from His journey. His body represents the journey that He had taken for our sakes.** How could it be otherwise as He journeyed everywhere, while He is never absent and (omnipresent) in every place?...

The Lord is physically weak so that you would not become weak. Indeed, you become strong through His weakness for the ‘weakness of God is stronger than men’<sup>10</sup>.

\*The woman was created from the rib and so seemed to be strong, while Adam seemed weak as he was created from dust. This is the Lord and His Church: His weakness is our strength<sup>11</sup>.

\*Why is the sixth hour so meaningful? It is because in the Bible every period is viewed as an hour. So the first period covers from Adam to Noah, the second from Noah to Abraham, the third from Abraham to David, the fourth from David to the exile in Babylon, the fifth from the exile in Babylon to the baptism of John, and from that time the sixth period begins<sup>12</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* ‘Jesus...sat thus’, what does the Evangelist mean by ‘thus’? That is He did not sit on a throne, or a pillow; but that He simply sat on the ground<sup>13</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

### **3-THE CONVERSATION WITH THE SAMARITAN WOMAN**

**‘A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her: “Give Me a drink” [7].**

That the woman came at noon after the men and women had drawn water and had returned to their homes reveals the way her people regarded her. She could not bring herself to face any of them. So she came alone and in the heat of the day to draw water. Our Lord is the God of those who are banished and forsaken. He fashions and transforms them into children of His kingdom and preachers of the truth.

It is clear that this Samaritan woman was poor since she did not have a servant to draw water from the well for her. She was a fighter who went herself to the well to draw water.

This meeting reminds us of Rebecca, Rachel, and the daughter of Jethro. Through meetings at the well, they were blessed in their marriages to Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. In the same

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<sup>9</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 15:4

<sup>10</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 15:7

<sup>11</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 15:8

<sup>12</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 15:9

<sup>13</sup> *Homilies on St. John*, 31:3

way, the Samaritan woman found the Bridegroom of her soul at Jacob's well. We too find our Messiah and Bridegroom in the baptismal font.

The Lord began His conversation with her by a humble request: to have a drink of water. The One who had become poor for our sake has now become a beggar, for our sake too. He asks for a glass of water not out of His personal need but in order to reveal her own need for Him. Then she would drink and be satisfied from the springs of His rich blessings and grace.

\* What does 'Give Me a drink' imply? It implies: 'I am yearning for you to believe'<sup>14</sup>.

\*The One who asked for a drink was thirsty and sought to offer faith and salvation to the woman herself<sup>15</sup>.

### **St. Augustine**

\*Here we learn about the Lord's struggle during His journey and His disregard for food which He considered of little importance. His disciples learned to behave in the same manner for they were to take no provisions when they traveled. Another evangelist reveals the same principal when he reports the Lord's words to His disciples about the 'leaven of the Pharisees' (Matt 6:16). They thought He was saying these words because they had no bread. Another instance is when the disciples are reported to be in the fields cutting and eating the corn ears (Matt 12:1). The Gospel also tells that when the Lord came to the fig tree He was hungry (Matt 21:18). All this is mentioned just to teach us not to worry or be anxious about matters belonging to the stomach and its needs<sup>16</sup>.

### **St. John Chrysostom**

#### **'For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food' [8].**

\*In this situation, not only is the Lord's fatigue revealed but also His lack of pride. This is evident not only as He is tired and sits on the side of the road; but also as He is left alone and the disciples abandon Him while - if He had wanted- He could have kept a few to serve Him and sent only a some away into the city. But He did not want that as He intended to teach His disciples to get accustomed to trampling their pride.

Is there any wonder that they were moderate in their needs since they were fishermen and tent makers? It is true that these were their occupations; yet in a moment they had been raised to the highest heaven and they were invested with greater honor than all earthly kings. They had been found worthy to have fellowship with the Lord of the world, and to follow the One to whom all look and tremble. However, you know well that specifically those who come from low origins become puffed up when they are easily granted a privilege. They are stupid for they do not know how to contain the honor they have suddenly received. Therefore to preserve their actual humility, the Lord constantly taught them to be moderate and not to expect that anyone would welcome them (with honor)<sup>17</sup>.

### **St. John Chrysostom**

While the disciples were in the city buying food, the Lord seized the opportunity to speak with the Samaritan woman and to draw her, and the people of the city to their salvation. To do the will of the Father is His true food (bread) which consists of the redemption of souls.

Our Messiah who is concerned with speaking with the crowds is also concerned with meeting one individual, a poor woman who is of a strange origin and a Samaritan who bears

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<sup>14</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 49:3

<sup>15</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:11

<sup>16</sup> Homilies on St. John, 31:3

<sup>17</sup> Homilies on St. John, 31:3

enmity towards the Jews.

\*They went to buy food as they acted differently from us. When we wake up, we devote our attention to food before all other concerns. Therefore we call on the cooks, food experts, or servers and recommend carefully that they upgrade and prepare our food. After that we go about our daily occupations and these have priority over our spiritual concerns. But we should really do the opposite of that: first we ought to give priority and handle our spiritual duties as they should be of greater importance. Next, we would be ready to handle our daily tasks.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Then the woman of Samaria said to Him: “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans’ [9].**

The Samaritan woman recognizes that the Lord is a Jew either from His clothes which are different from the Samaritans’ or from His accent. What preoccupies her is not to answer His request or reject it, but the tone of His voice. He did not sound like a Jew with hostile feelings. The Samaritans too were known to be hostile to the Jews (Ezra 4:1). She knows how much the Jews hate and resent the Samaritans. The Jews believed that Samaritans have no right to the resurrection from the dead, they are cursed, and are denied to be one with God’s people. It was not right for a Jew to eat of a Samaritan’s food or that would defile him/her and the same applied for those who would eat pigs. However, the Lord Jesus Christ disregards this enmity since His primary concern is to attract the soul and therefore enjoy His salvation.

The Samaritan woman is astonished at the Lord’s attitude for it was unthinkable for a Jew to ask anything whatsoever from a Samaritan; and there was no exception- no matter the degree of need or hardship. She was also astonished that He would expect her to respond to His request due to the fact that Samaritans were hostile to the Jews.

No transactions took place between the Jews and the Samaritans therefore they had no dealings in the domains of worship or commerce. It was forbidden to borrow vessels from a Samaritan or to share the same meal together.

\* What signs led her to suspect that He is a Jew? Probably from His clothes as well as from the accent of His speech.

Notice how courteous the Samaritan woman is. She does not say that Samaritans do not deal with the Jews; but she wonders **‘For the Jews have no dealings with Samaritans’<sup>18</sup>.**

**St. John Chrysostom**

She got to know the Lord gradually through His conversation and His gradual revelations:

- At the beginning of His conversation, she thought Him to be a Jew who would not deal with Samaritans [9]
- She called Him ‘Sir’ [11]
- She conceived Him to be greater than Jacob the father of all the tribes [12]
- She believed that He is the Giver of the living water [15]
- She believed that He is a prophet [19]
- She expected Him to be the awaited Messiah [25], therefore He said to her: I who speak to you am He” [26]

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<sup>18</sup> Homilies on St. John, 31:4

**‘Jesus answered and said to her: “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that says to you, ‘Give Me a drink’, you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water” [10]**

The Lord Jesus Christ draws that woman to the path of salvation. He does so by attracting her thoughts away from the preoccupation with the hostility existing between the two parties and leading her to the depths of her soul. Consequently, she thirsts for the living water, and realizes her need for the Savior. In this way, he does not attack the manner of worship in Samaria which is a divided and distorted concept of faith and worship. It is not a time for conflict; but a time for a calm meeting with the soul and the enjoyment of God’s free blessings. For the time has come for God to visit the whole world by sending the redeeming Messiah. The Lord yearns that we know Him, call Him, and attain Him and ultimately satisfy our thirst from Him forever!

What she needs is true knowledge: **“If you knew the gift of God”, “...and who it is that says to you....”** She needs to know the gift of God to her, and to realize who is the One speaking to her for He is the greatest Gift! He is the treasure of God’s sublime love, the One who quenches the thirsty soul. This is not a loan and a debt we need to repay; but it is a free gift that the Father is glad to offer to mankind.

She does not comprehend the Gift of God or that He has sent His only Son to offer Himself on behalf of the world (Jn 3:16). She also does not know about the gift of the Holy Spirit that flows into the soul as a river satisfying it and overflowing to others. Neither does she know that the Spirit offers other unlimited spiritual talents sanctified for the redemption of the world. These are free divine gifts that God offers to initiate His love towards us even while we were still enemies. These gifts will continue to be a source granting us divine knowledge even in eternal life: ‘And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb...’ (Rev 22:1).

\*The gift of God is the Holy Spirit. However, until this moment, the Lord is speaking to the woman cautiously and entering (winning) her heart gradually<sup>19</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**‘Living water’** is a common expression to indicate the sources of water that flow continuously. This is the opposite of ‘dead water’ that refers to stagnant water found in ponds, marches, and water tanks where it is exposed to pollution. Living water refers to the Holy Spirit that waters the soul and transforms its bareness into a fruitful paradise. At the same time the Spirit washes the soul from her corruption.

\*The Lord here reveals that the woman deserves to hear the Word rather than someone to be rejected. Having revealed Himself to her, she instantly listens to Him for she learns who He is. This is something that cannot be said about the Jews; for when they learned they no longer asked Him or even wished to benefit in any way from Him. Moreover, they insulted and expelled Him<sup>20</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\*This is the water that David thirsted for, just as the deer ‘pants for the water brooks’ (Ps 42:1) rather than thirsting for the poison of snakes. This is because the water granted by the grace of the Holy Spirit is living water. It purifies the inner parts of the mind and washes away every sin of the soul while removing the resistance of hidden sins<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:12*

<sup>20</sup> *Homilies on St. John, 31:4*

<sup>21</sup> *Of the Holy Spirit 1:16:175*

**St. Ambrose**

**“...you would have asked...”:** true knowledge would motivate us to pray and ask. On His part, God is ready to respond by granting our request. However, He waits until we reveal our desire to receive, and to ask so that we can receive.

**“The woman said to Him, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water?”[11]**

**Maundiell** notes that the depth of the well is approximately 35 yards<sup>22</sup>. To draw water one would need a bucket and a long rope. Neither the Lord nor His disciples had any of these. It seemed to the woman that the Lord’s words were illogical. That is because He spoke of spiritual matters, whereas she was thinking in materialistic terms. In spite of that, she felt obliged to respect and honor Him due to the tone of His words. As a result she started to address him as ‘Sir.’

The Samaritan woman took pride in the well that had been dug by a human hand; yet she was not aware that she stood before the divine and living Source. In the past, God had reproached His people saying: “For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn for themselves cisterns- broken cisterns that can hold no water.” (Jer. 2:13).

\* Note how the woman answers the Lord elaborately and says: **“Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water?”** Clearly, she must have had a reason for addressing Him in this manner and for greatly honoring Him. The proof is that she did not laugh, but was surprisingly confused. Do not be astonished that she could not understand immediately what she should have grasped concerning the Lord, for even Nicodemus did not understand the words of the Lord.

Contemplate the words of Nicodemus: “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter into his mother’s womb and be born?” In contrast, this woman is more respectful than Nicodemus. She could have said something antagonistic such as: ‘If You possessed living water, You would not have asked water from me. You would first give it to Yourself. Now, you are just boasting.’ Actually she said: **“Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water?”** So she did not say a single objectionable word but rather answered very humbly from the beginning of the conversation.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?” [12]**

The Samaritans considered themselves to be Jacob’s children since they were one of the ten tribes who had been separated in the days of Jeroboam. However, as we know, they carried foreign blood as they mixed with different Gentile nations.

\*It is as though the Samaritan woman is saying to the Lord: ‘Our father Jacob has given us this well and he has not used any other. He and all his descendants drank out of it. They would not have done so if they had a better one. Therefore You cannot provide a better well or better water, and You cannot possess a better well than this one. So from where do You possess the water that You promise to give us unless You proclaim that you are greater than Jacob our father?’

**St. John Chrysostom**

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<sup>22</sup> Adam Clarke Comm.

It is right for the Samaritan woman to take pride in the well of her father Jacob. However, she does not know how to pass through it to the God of Jacob who is the Giver of the living water. It was necessary for her to soar with her father Jacob to have a vision of Jacob's ladder that ascended from his head into the heavens. She would then have rejoiced because of the Cross that opens the gates of heaven to the whole world! It is also good that she discusses the subject of worship to God: will it be on the Mount at Jerusalem or at Gerizim? Together with the saints of the Old Testament, she needed to cross over to that which is beyond the mountains in order to enjoy worshipping God in spirit and in truth. She appears to be really great when she senses that He is the Messiah that generations have been awaiting and Who would tell them all things. Therefore she becomes qualified to hear Him proclaim to her: **"I who speak to you am He."** She has reached the summit of divine proclamation from the Savior Himself and so has surpassed many others.

**"Jesus answered and said to her: 'Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again'"**  
[13]

\*He did not answer: 'Yes, I am greater than Jacob', but rather achieved His purpose through His conversation with her...He wished to clarify matters to her, and explain the degree of difference and lack of correspondence between the two persons<sup>23</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\*The water in the dark depths of the well represents worldly pleasures. Mankind draws out of this using the utensils of lust...consider lust as the bucket, and worldly pleasures as the water drawn from the depth of the well. When a person gets to taste worldly pleasures which take the form of food, clothes, grandeur, and weapons, how can he possibly not thirst again?<sup>24</sup>

**St. Ambrose**

**"...but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into eternal life" [14]**

The Lord does not reproach her for thinking that Jacob was greater than Him, or that the water of the well is better than living water. On the contrary, He begins, most gently, to inform her about the living water. He compares it with the water in Jacob's well; and He underlines that there can be no comparison between water that satisfies the body for a while and water that satisfies and supports the soul forever, leaving it to want nothing else.

The water that the Lord offers has distinct benefits:

- It is a divine gift: **'I shall give him...'** and so it grants divine joy: 'Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation' (Is. 12:3).
- It grants eternal life that cancels all other needs for he **'will never thirst'**, and 'He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst' (Jn. 6:35).
- It is inner water for the soul that **'will become in him a fountain.'** Therefore the Giver of the living water woos the soul and says: 'A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed' (Sg. of Sol. 4: 12).
- The depths are transformed into **a source that overflows onto others:** "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers

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<sup>23</sup> Hom. On John, 32:1

<sup>24</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:16

of living water' (Jn 7:38).

The Lord calls the Spirit 'fire' to indicate the grace that energizes and purifies; for the Spirit is able to obliterate sins and purge the soul. Besides, when He speaks of the Spirit as 'water', He proclaims that the Spirit has the power to clean and remove dirt; and indicates the great refreshment He promotes in the minds of those who accept Him.

The prophets yearned for this living water when they heard the invitation extended to all: "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters..." (Is. 55:1). And also: "They shall neither hunger nor thirst, neither heat nor sun shall strike them, for He who has mercy on them will lead them, even by the springs of water He will guide them..." (Is. 49:10). Also according to the saying in the Book of the Revelation: "They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters" (Rev. 7: 16-17).

\* This is a reference to the redeeming water of baptism which has been truly offered once and will not be repeated again<sup>25</sup>.

### St. Cyprian

\* The Holy Bible refers to the Holy Spirit sometimes as 'fire' and at other times as 'water.' This is to indicate that these words describe the work of the Holy Spirit rather than His essence; for He is intangible and cannot be seen as a combination or a composition of different elements. John (the Baptist) declares that: "...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire..." (Lk 2:16). As for the other John (the Evangelist), he reports the words of the Lord Jesus Christ as follows: "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water' (Jn 7:38). He says this about the Holy Spirit who would be received by believers. In His conversation with the Samaritan woman, the Lord calls the Spirit 'water' for **"whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst"**<sup>26</sup>.

The woman had heard this expression before: **'the living water'** but had not understood its meaning. Therefore the Lord explains the meaning in the best way by saying: **"...but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst..."** since this water is far more sublime than any water. It is like someone who possesses a well in his own house and therefore would not suffer of thirst at any time. Similarly the person who possesses this water will not thirst at any moment of life with Him.

### St. John Chrysostom

\*The Lord clarifies that this well is the gift of the Holy Spirit, a spring that flows from a living Source. The Holy Spirit is a Source of eternal life as well...

This living water is great, for it is the gift of the Holy Spirit...may it flow within me, may this that gives eternal life flow in and over me.

May the Source flow on us and not far away from us; for wisdom says: "Drink water from your own cisterns, and running water from your own well. Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets?" (read Prov. 5:16-17). How can I protect my pots from suffering the cracks caused by sin, and avoid the leaking of the waters of eternal life?

Teach us, O Lord, teach us as You have taught Your apostles saying: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal" (Matt, 6: 19-20)<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> EP. 62 to Coecilius.

<sup>26</sup> Hom. On John, 32:1

<sup>27</sup> Of the Holy Spirit 1:16:181-182



## St. Ambrose

\*When the promise is fulfilled to a blessed person because he hungers and thirsts for righteousness (Matt 5:6); he drinks of the water that the Lord gives to him and he possesses a source of water within him that flows into everlasting life<sup>28</sup>.

\*It is worthy to note that the promise of water was not given to the Samaritan woman when she asked for it. It seems that the Lord wished to offer it in no other way but from the Source, so He tells her: "Go, call your husband, and come here" [16]<sup>29</sup>

## Origen

**Origen** devoted his energy and skills to study, interpret, and enjoy the Holy Bible from a very early age. He made a distinction between the waters of the Holy Bible and those which the Lord of glory offers. The Bible provides a wealth of divine mysteries that flow into the soul so we may enjoy fellowship with the Holy Trinity. However, the Lord Jesus Christ retains some mysteries which He offers secretly to the soul that is united to Him. He is the heavenly Bridegroom who overflows onto His bride with His mysteries within the wedding circle.

\*Indeed, the Holy Bible does not contain some aspects of the divine mysteries. These aspects most probably have to do with His Lordship and divinity; and are not communicated through a human voice or tongue. This is implied by the following words: 'And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written' (Jn 21:25).

St. John was forbidden to write when he started to record what the seven thunders said (Rev 10:4). St. Paul also tells us that he heard words that were impossible to utter (2Cor. 12:4). No one has been allowed to pronounce these words or messages...

I think that all the holy Books, even when fully comprehended, are just a preface to the principles and a brief introduction to all knowledge ...the waters offered by the Lord Jesus Christ are those that surpass all that which is written (1Cor. 4:6).

At the present time, it is not allowed to examine the matters that are beyond what is written (1Cor 4:6)... 'Don't try to understand things that are too hard for you, or investigate matters that are beyond your power to know' (read Sirach 3:21)...

Moreover, matters that have not entered the heart of man are greater than Jacob's well. These matters are revealed from the Source of water that flows into eternal life for those who do not possess any longer a human heart, but rather are able to proclaim: "...we have the mind of Christ" (1Cor 2:16); for "...we know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches" (1Cor. 2:12-13)...

In this light, the holy Books are just introductions and can be called Jacob's well. Once they are comprehended, a person should speedily ascend out of them and go to the Lord Jesus Christ. Then he would enjoy the wealth of the Source that flows into eternal life.

Not everyone draws water from Jacob's well in the same manner Jacob, his children, and his livestock drank out of it (Jn. 4:12). That explains why the Samaritan woman come to it and drank but was thirsty. Probably Jacob and his children drank in a certain way and with full knowledge, whereas his livestock drank in a different manner and in the simplicity of such animals. The Samaritan woman drank too but in a different manner other than Jacob or his sons and livestock. Similarly, some are wise and drink out of the holy Books in the same manner as Jacob and his children. Others are more simple and innocent and are known as Christ's 'sheep'

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<sup>28</sup> Commentary on John, Book 13:20

<sup>29</sup> Commentary on John, Book 13:25

(Jn. 10:26).and they drink in the same manner as Jacob's livestock. While there are others who misunderstand the holy Books and use inappropriate means to interpret them in the light of texts they have understood out of them. These drink in the same manner as the Samaritan woman before she came to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>30</sup>.

**Origen**

\*There is living water that says within me: "Come to the Father"<sup>31</sup>.

**St. Ignatius of Antioch**

\*Since our nature has deteriorated and become as hard as stone due to the worship of idols, and has become frozen in the cold of atheism and unable to progress; therefore the Sun of Righteousness arose (Mal. 4:2).In this bitter cold, the coming of the spring appeared, and the warm southern winds erased all traces of the cold; while the shining rays of the Sun brought warmth to the whole world. Consequently, the human race that had turned into stone on account of the cold, became embraced by the warmth through the Holy Spirit who is the rays of the word of God. It is in this manner that the Holy Spirit once more becomes like the water that grants eternal life (Jn, 4:14)... 'Who turned the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a fountain of waters (Ps 114:8)<sup>32</sup>.

**St. Gregory of Nicea**

**'The woman said to Him: "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw" [15]**

\*When the Lord tells the woman: **"...the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into eternal life"**, the woman responds immediately: **"Sir, give me this water."** Do you see how the woman ascends gradually to higher knowledge? At first she thinks the Lord is a Jewish person who has deviated from his tradition...When she hears Him speak of **'living water'** [14], she thinks that He is referring to tangible water and believes that this water could dismiss thirst. So far she has no concept of the nature of this water. Besides, she is confused as she thought it had more potential than the water she was familiar with. That is why she says **"...give me this water; that I may not thirst again, nor come here to draw."**

Have you noticed how the woman prefers the Lord over the leader of the fathers? Having indicated her opinion of Jacob and the degree of his greatness, she has come to know the One who is better than him.

\*At this point she gets to possess a clearer insight. However, she has not yet comprehended the whole picture; for she says: **"...give me this water; that I may not thirst again, nor come here to draw" [15]**. Here she reveals that she prefers Him over Jacob...for it is as though her inner self is saying: 'I will no longer need this well since I will receive water from You....'After she had revealed her respect for Jacob, she has now met the One better than Him... her former thoughts, in this manner, did not impede her...and there was no rebellious argument<sup>33</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

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<sup>30</sup> Commentary on John, Book 13:27-39

<sup>31</sup> Romans 7:2

<sup>32</sup> Sg of Solomon : St. Gregory of Nicea: translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, Sermon 5

<sup>33</sup> Hom. On John,32

\*Indeed, it now becomes clearly apparent that the Lord's words are sincere: **"...you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water"** [10]. For when she says **"...give me this water..."** [15], she receives the living water. From now on she will never have a sense of loss when she gets thirsty; just as she will not need to come to Jacob's well to draw water.

She can now meditate on the Truth while she is away from Jacob's water. She will do so in a manner that transcends mankind and is angelic since angels do not need to drink out of Jacob's well.

Every angel possesses an internal source of water flowing into eternal life. This source is provided by the Word and proclaimed by it and by Wisdom herself.

There is no hope for a person who is not preoccupied with struggling to come to Jacob's well and draw water out due to his thirst. Such a person cannot receive the water granted by the Word and which differs from Jacob's well. That explains why many people are extremely handicapped since they are unable to train themselves for long periods in drawing water out of Jacob's well<sup>34</sup>.

**Origen**

**'Jesus said to her: "Go, call your husband, and come here" [16]**

In His conversation with the Samaritan woman, the Lord Jesus Christ moves on from the topic of the water to that of the woman's marital life. Now that she has learned that she was in need of a new kind of water that could refresh and grant her eternal life, she feels the need for a bridegroom for her soul. To do that, she needs to re-evaluate her marital life.

Without hurting her feelings, the Lord reveals his insight into her heart and His knowledge of her all her family secrets. His intention is to encourage her to recognize her sins and her need to repent.

**'The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband'..." [17]**

What a skilful divine healer! He uncovers the infirmity in the woman, and with His divine blade, begins to attack the body with skill, power and love. This leads her to confess what no other woman would pronounce: 'I have no husband.' Her confession is not the result of hurtful reproaching or of facing her with her shameful self. It is the result of His love. This arouses her conscience, and reveals to her the reality of the Lord. Consequently, she becomes trustful and admits the truth about her personal life as she gets to realize that He can heal her wounds and restore her spiritual health.

\* We have mentioned earlier that the law controls the soul; that everyone one submits himself to it; and that in the case of marriage the husband represents the law. To support this, we will quote from the apostle who writes to the Romans and says: "Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives..." (Romans 7:1-2). So the husband impersonates the law as long as he lives. However, once he dies, she no longer is obligated to fulfill the duties a wife has towards her husband. The apostle, in this context says: "But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband..." Now that the law is dead in its literal sense, the soul is no longer considered adulterous if it gives itself to another man: in other words, the soul can now associate itself with

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<sup>34</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 13:41-42*

the law according to the spirit. It is possible to say that the wife has died also since she leaves her dead husband- once a man dies and leaves his wife. We understand this statement through logical deduction as follows: “Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another, even to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God” (Romans 7:4).

Therefore if the husband represents the law, and the Samaritan woman has a husband, then she has subjugated herself to some strange law based on a misunderstanding of the correct law. It is a fabricated law that is embraced by those who wish to live by it. In such a situation the divine Word requires the fabricating soul to uncover its shame by confessing the law that controls it. As the woman faces and despises herself because she does not belong legally to any husband, she looks for another bridegroom. The Lord wishes her to belong to another one: to the Word who has been raised from the dead, who will not be conquered or destroyed, but will endure for ever (Is. 40:8; 1Peter 1:25); and who controls and dominates all His enemies (Ps 8:7; Eph.1:22). This is because ‘...Christ having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death has no longer dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all, but the life that He lives He lives to God’ (Romans 6:9-10). He sits at the right hand of God (Heb 10:12), and all His enemies are subjugated under His feet (Ps110:1). That is why the Lord tells her: **“Go, call your husband....”** By replying: “I have no husband” [17], she convicts herself on account of her wrongful association with a man who is not her husband in such a manner<sup>35</sup>.

**Origen**

**“...for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly” [18]**

In an amazingly gentle way, the Lord does not hurt her feelings on account of the fact that she had married five times previously and now lives with a man who is not her husband. Besides, He changes the conversation from being an argument about disagreements between the Jews and the Samaritans to a discussion about the new worship that would embrace the whole world. This would offer joy to the believer wherever he may be living.

**St. Jerome** comments that in order to meet the Savior of the world our Lord Jesus Christ, it is appropriate to abandon the five men- who stand for the Books written by Moses; as well as the sixth man- who stands for inventors or heretics<sup>36</sup>.

**St. Augustine** makes the following comment about this woman who has married five men and is living with a man who is not her husband: The five husbands represent the five senses since she has surrendered her soul to her physical senses. These could not satisfy her as they do not lead her soul to eternal life. They just satisfy temporary and short lived feelings. The one with whom she is living now, and who is not her husband, represents the mind (that is not sanctified) and that does not lead her to the Word and the Truth. Rather, it leads her to sin, and offers her incorrect knowledge. She needs the Bridegroom of her soul who will lead her to wisdom, truth, and fulfillment.

\*How great is this woman’s wisdom, and how humbly does she accept the Lord’s reproach...it is noteworthy to mention two points about this reproach: the Lord mentions the number of her previous husbands, and reproaches her about the one with whom she now lives although she tried to conceal this matter. So how does she react? She shows no sign of annoyance, she does not leave and run away, nor does she consider His words humiliating. On

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<sup>35</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 13:43-50*

<sup>36</sup> *Letter 108:13*

the contrary, she expresses her admiration and her respect for Him increased as she says: **“Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.”** Notice her composure for she does not rush hastily, but she reveals respect and admiration as she says: **“I perceive...”**- that is ‘I see...’ **“...that You are a prophet”<sup>37</sup>**.

#### St. John Chrysostom

\*I think that every soul that embraces the Christian religion does so through the reading of the Holy Books. She begins by taking in matters that can be comprehended through the senses and are known as physical matters. These have five husbands- one for every sense. However, after the soul keeps company with matters that are comprehended by the senses, it desires later on to transcend above them and rush towards matters comprehended by the spirit. At this point, the soul collides with corrupt teachings based on symbolic spiritual meanings. Consequently, she draws near to another husband, other than the five to whom she sends divorce documents. It is as though she has decided to live with that sixth one....’ We too live with that sixth husband until the Lord Jesus Christ arrives and enables us to discover the character of such a husband. When the Word of the Lord arrives and enters into a conversation with us, we reject that husband and say: **“I have no husband”**; and then the Lord will respond saying: **“You have well said, ‘I have no husband’ [17]<sup>38</sup>**

#### Origen

\*When the Samaritan woman mentioned in the Gospel admits that the man living with her is the sixth one, the Lord reproaches her as he was not her husband. As far as I am concerned, I feel free to announce once more that the second marriage is ‘digamy’ and is not encouraged by the Church, and even the third marriage ‘trigamy’ is rejected. A woman may marry for a fourth time...or for more times as long as it is a legal marriage...yet although a second marriage is not forbidden, it is not recommended... for “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful” (1 Cor 6:12)<sup>39</sup>.

#### St. Jerome

#### **“The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet” [19]**

As the Lord reveals Himself gradually to her, the woman discovers that He knows all her hidden secrets. According to her understanding, this means that He is a prophet and so she trusts in His ability to answer truthfully the question that puzzles so many: ‘Will true worship take place in Jerusalem as the Jews claim, or will it be on Mount Gerizim according to the Samaritans and which had been blessed?’ Some believe it is the same mountain upon which Abraham and later Jacob had built the altar (Genesis 12:6-7; 33:18-20).

The Samaritans had handed the altar over that was built by Sanballat (332BC) to Antiochus Epiphanus and asked him to dedicate it to Jupiter Olympius. They had also denied they had any relationship with the Jews in order to escape the bitter sufferings that Antiochus poured imposed upon them.

That is how the conversation took a turn and became about the subject of worship: ‘will it be in Jerusalem or on Mount Gerizim?’

\*What an amazing situation, and what great philosophy this woman appears to possess! Note how she accepts the Lord’s reproach in a most pure manner when He uncovers her hidden act. She has no problem with that and she neither leaves nor runs away. Indeed, her amazement

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<sup>37</sup> Hom. on John, 32. To read: the Samaritan Woman by St. John the Beloved’s Publishing House, Cairo

<sup>38</sup> Commentary on St. John, Book 13:51

<sup>39</sup> Commentary on St. John, Book 13:52

increases as she says to Him: **“I perceive that You are a prophet.”**

\*Reflect on the fair judgment of this woman who bases her decision on the actual facts, whether these have to do with our father Jacob or with the Lord Jesus Christ. The Jews did not react in this manner, for when they saw Him drive out devils they said ‘He has a devil’; and they did not conclude that He is greater than Jacob, the father of all tribes<sup>40</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\*The husband is on His way, but he has not come completely...she has begun to invite the husband and to dismiss her illicit lover<sup>41</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship: [20]**

According to the Samaritans, Mount Gerizim is sacred and people should worship God there. It is the mountain with the well right on top of its slope. It is said that Abraham built an altar here, and also where he met Melchizedek who blessed him. On this mountain, Moses the prophet was commanded to bless the people when they crossed the Jordan. This is where Simeon, Levi, Judah, Isaachar, Joseph and Benjamin had stood; while Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali stood on Mount Ebal when the curse on idol worship was pronounced to all the men of Israel (Deut 27:11-13). From a different perspective, the Jews considered Zion to be the place where God resides and that it was chosen by the father of all people. Therefore they built the Temple there and the Levite priests and people worshipped in this place.

\*When she believed the Lord to be a prophet, she did not make a worldly request; or ask for physical health, possessions, or wealth. She was concerned with religious matters [20]<sup>42</sup>.

\* Do you note how the woman becomes more insistent in her search for understanding? She is the same person as the one who was concerned about her thirst. She did not want this to trouble her anymore; and now she asks Him about religious matters.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* If God were flesh, it would be correct to worship Him on a mountain which is a material substance. It would also be correct to worship him in a temple<sup>43</sup>.

\* What an amazing matter! He lives on high and He is close to the humble. He sees the humble, but ‘the proud He knows from afar’ (Ps 138:6)...

Therefore do you ask for a mountain? Come down so that you may draw close to Him.

Should you ascend? Yes, ascend, but do not ask for a mountain. It is said: “Whose heart is set on pilgrimage as they pass through the valley of Baca (84:6). The valley represents humility. May you apply all that within your heart.

Even when you wish to seek for an elevated place, a holy place, have an altar within you for ‘the temple of God is holy, which temple you are’ (1Cor 3:17).

Do you wish to pray in a temple? If you begin by being the temple of God, then the mountain is within you; for He listens to those who pray in His temple<sup>44</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

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<sup>40</sup> Hom. On John, 32.

<sup>41</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:23

<sup>42</sup> Hom. on John, 32:2. To read: the Samaritan Woman by St. John the Beloved's Publishing House, Cairo

<sup>43</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:24

<sup>44</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:25

**‘Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father...” [21]**

The hour has come when the Son of Man has descended in order to lift mankind away from the letter to the spirit. What should preoccupy believers is not the place but their status as children of the heavenly Father.

\* The sincere and dedicated person is able to overcome even such an obstacle of location since he worships the Lord in a deeper meditative and divine manner. Just as the angels do not worship God in Jerusalem (even the Jews agree about that), so it is for those who are equal to the angels; for they worship Him in a better manner than those who worship in Jerusalem (Lk 20:36). They intend on worshipping the Father in a better manner and not in Jerusalem<sup>45</sup>.

**Origen**

\* He does not show preference to any place, but focuses on one’s intentions<sup>46</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* This saying was true about the Jews. However, it did not apply to all of them. It did not apply to the Jews who had rejected the faith; but it applied to those who had acted like the apostles and the prophets. It applied to all of those saints who had sold their possessions, and had placed the money at the feet of the disciples; for “God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew” (Romans 11:2)<sup>47</sup>.

\* It is as though she is saying: ‘The Jews struggle on account of the temple, and we on account of this mountain, but when the (Messiah) will come, He will despise the mountain and discard the temple. He will teach us everything so we will learn how to worship in the spirit and in truth.’ She has recognized the One who is able to teach her; but she has not realized as yet that He is teaching her at this very moment. Now she has become qualified to enjoy discovering Him<sup>48</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation comes of the Jews...” [22]**

By saying: “...what you do not know...” the Lord indicates the Prophetic Books which the Samaritans had rejected. These Books prepare the way of knowledge and establish the person of the redeeming Messiah. The words: “...we worship what we know...” refer to the divine Books as a safe path to true knowledge and worship. The Lord Jesus Christ includes Himself among the crowd of worshippers since He has humbly become the Son of Man.

The only Son of Man is not ashamed to proclaim His obedience, genuflection, and worship to the Father; while there are many human beings who arrogantly belittle worship and consider it a waste of time.

**“...for salvation comes of the Jews...”**: eternal salvation came from the Jews (Rom. 9:5) and it was first offered to them. The divine teachings were delivered to them (Rom. 3:2); as well as the ministry to God (Rom 9:4). The Messiah was born of them and they were the ones who began to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles.

\* **“...for salvation comes of the Jews...”**: The Lord’s words are intended to convey the

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<sup>45</sup> Commentary on John, Book 13:98-99

<sup>46</sup> Hom. On John, 33:1

<sup>47</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:26

<sup>48</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:27

following: ‘The blessings granted to this world proceeds from the Jews (since the knowledge about God and the rejection of idols proceeded from them. In the case of your people- the Samaritans, you have received the teachings about worship from the Jews although you do not fulfill them correctly)...Accordingly, St. Paul indicates His coming in these words: “...of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came who is over all, the eternally blessed God” (Rom. 9:5). Note how He praises the Old Testament and clarifies that It is the basis of all blessings<sup>49</sup>.

\* The Lord does not explain to the Samaritan woman why the fathers worshipped on this mountain, or why the Jews worship in Jerusalem. By being silent about this, He dismisses and cancels any further importance to both places. The Lord awakens her soul as He leads her to understand that neither the Samaritans nor the Jews could offer any act as great as the one foretold and that will be offered to us. Then He points to a distinctive point between them and concludes that in this respect the Jews are more honorable. Yet He does not show a preference for either place; in spite of the clarification the Lord gives concerning the Jews. It is as though He is saying: ‘No one should argue any more about worship in a certain place, yet the Jews have instinctively obtained that honor more than You Samaritans’; for He says: **“You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know ....”**

If you wonder: How is it that the Samaritans did not know who they worshipped? My answer is: ‘They worshipped God because they believed that He could be confined to a specific place and be on their side. Their messenger told the king of Assyria: “.....” (2 Kgs 26??). They believed that there is a god with limited powers and they accordingly worshipped and sought to gain his favor. As a result, they continued to worship idols besides worshipping the God of the whole world. The Lord said: **“You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know ...”** because most of the Jews- even though some differed- did not follow this kind of thinking since they knew that God is the God of the whole world<sup>50</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Since this woman addresses the Lord as she would address a Jewish person and believes Him to be a prophet, the Lord answers her as a Jewish person who is spiritually acquainted with the mysteries of the Law: “You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know ....” He uses the plural pronoun ‘we’ as He includes Himself with other human beings. But how can He do so except by reference to His body; and in order to reveal that He is responding as an incarnated person; then He adds the words: “...salvation is of the Jews<sup>51</sup>.”

**St. Ambrose**

**“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.”**  
[23]

Instead of being preoccupied with the place of worship it is essential to be concerned with the condition of inner thought, with God’s altar within the soul, and the manner of offering worship to God who is a spirit. Indeed, God the Father seeks those who worship Him with their hearts. Those are rare to find and Jeremiah reports this concerning them: “For who is this who pledged his heart to approach Me?” says the Lord (Jer.30:21). The path to worship in the spirit is narrow for in following that path a person seeks the glory of God and not of men.

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<sup>49</sup> Hom. On John, 33:1

<sup>50</sup> Hom. On John, 33:1

<sup>51</sup> Of the Christian Faith, Book 5, Ch 4 (50)



Worshipping in the spirit transforms the heart into the real Zion for which the Lord yearns and which the Psalmist speaks about saying: ‘For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation: “This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it”’ (Ps 132:13-14).

\* All the Jews and Samaritans were greatly concerned about their bodies and they purified themselves in so many different ways. For this reason the Lord explains that purity is not achieved by the purification of the hands but through the purification of the mind which is that intangible part of our being. With our minds we worship God who is ethereal. In the same manner, offerings cannot take the form of slaughtered bulls or sheep, but by the sanctification of one’s being to God. Exhaust your soul and in this way offer a living sacrifice<sup>52</sup>

\* As the Lord states the truth, He discards the Samaritans and the Jews; for although the Jews are better than the Samaritans, yet they are lesser than those coming into the faith-this indicates how much the symbol is lesser than the reality. He is speaking about the Church who knows how to worship in a manner that is correct and appropriate to God<sup>53</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* It is important for a person to observe that true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and in truth. They should do so not only in the future but as of the present time as well<sup>54</sup>.

\* The Father asks of those He prepares to become true worshippers. They need to be purified and to be taught the right teachings through the Word. Moreover, He seeks them through His Son who has come to look for the lost (Lk 19:10; Ezek. 34:16)

**Origen**

**“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth” [24]**

\* By saying ‘**in truth**’ the Lord writes off the Jews and the Samaritans. The reason for this is that those Jews, even though they were better than the Samaritans, yet they were far behind those who would be called to worship ‘**in spirit and in truth**’....It is true that God had sought those people in the past...yet He had done so out of His tenderness and compassion and in order to gather them into the fold of the faithful.

You might ask: ‘Who are those who worship in truth?’ My answer is: ‘They are those who do not associate their worship with a specific location for they are attracted and led by the spirit. St. Paul accordingly says: ‘...whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son...’ (Rom. 1:9); and in another passage he says: ‘I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service’ (Rom. 12:1).

The Lord’s words to the Samaritan woman: “**God is Spirit ...**” has no other meaning except that He does not have a body. Consequently, worship dedicated to the Incorporeal should be free from a body too. We should offer worship with that which is incorporeal within us. In other words, worship should proceed from our spirit and with the purity of our mind. This is why the Lord says: “**...those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth**”<sup>55</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* I cannot be so bold as to confine the infinite power of God or bind it to a narrow section of the earth since heaven and earth are incapable of containing the One who is the Infinite. Every

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<sup>52</sup> Hom. On John, 33:2

<sup>53</sup> Hom. 33 PG 59:191

<sup>54</sup> Hom. 33 PG 59:191

<sup>55</sup> Hom. On John, 33

believer will be judged according to the extent of his faith and not according to his habitation in one place or the other. True worshippers worship the Father, neither in Jerusalem nor in Gerizim<sup>56</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

\* Being the son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ submits to time, to the plan of God, and to relative humility. However, from the aspect of His divinity, he is not subject to time or place, for ‘who will declare His generation?’ (Is. 53:8).

**“...God is Spirit...”** for He who is Spirit has been born of the Spirit, being incorporeal and descendent of the Incomprehensible and Mysterious One.

The Son Himself speaks to the Father saying: “The Lord has said to Me ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.’” This ‘day’ is not a temporal one but an eternal one. The ‘today’ used here refers to an age before the world began and not to a temporal time: ‘I have begotten You from the womb before the morning star’<sup>57,58</sup>.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* It should not amaze us that the Father and the Son are considered ‘Spirit.’ We will elaborate on that when we deal with the topic ‘One in the Name’...

Let them read that the Father is called the ‘**Spirit**’ and according to the Lord who says in the Bible: **“...For God is Spirit...”** [24]. The Lord Jesus Christ is called ‘**the Spirit**’ according to Jeremiah who says: “.....”<sup>59</sup>

**St. Ambrose**

\* The words **“God is Spirit...”** do not change the facts that the Holy Spirit has a name of His own and that He is the great gift that is offered to us. As the Samaritan woman has placed boundaries for God confining Him in the mountain or in the temple, she is told that God embraces all things and is All- inclusive in Himself. Besides, He is intangible and incomprehensible; and therefore should be worshipped through intangible channels. Therefore the Lord teaches that God who is a Spirit must be worshipped in spirit. He reveals the limitless freedom, knowledge, and space opened up when we worship in spirit God the Spirit<sup>60</sup>.

**St. Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers**

**“The woman said to Him: “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When He comes, He will tell us all things”** [25]

Finally the conversation turns to the subject of the Messiah. When the woman no longer opposes the Lord’s words; but rather senses the power within her, she poses the question that has preoccupied all the Jews and Samaritans: When will the Messiah come? All were awaiting that event, for in spite of the enmity that existed between them, yet they shared in this expectation. It could be that many teachers at that time were discussing this matter concerning the fulfillment of the divine promise and specifically the coming of the Messiah and His reign.

Even though she was corrupt on account of her sin, she still yearned to know the truth and humbly looked forward to the advent of the Savior. This yearning prepared her to the meeting with the Lord, getting to know Him, and witnessing for Him.

\* Someone may ask: ‘How did the Samaritans get to expect the advent of the Messiah while they accepted Moses only?’ We respond as follows: ‘They get that out of the Books written by Moses, for he says: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from

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<sup>56</sup> Letter 58:3

<sup>57</sup> Ps. 11:3 “.....”

<sup>58</sup> Essay 11:5

<sup>59</sup> *Of the Holy Spirit, Book 1:9:105*

<sup>60</sup> *On the Trinity, Book 2 (31)*

your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear.’ (Deut 18:15).

\* She was just a poor woman who had no prior knowledge of the Holy Books, therefore the Lord does not discuss what is written in them. He leads her to faith by taking her through the path of the water<sup>61</sup>.

\* For the Jews who were constantly asking the question: ‘How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly’ (Jn10:24), the Lord did not give them a satisfying answer. However, He clearly informs the woman, saying: **“I...am He”** because, unlike the Jews, she was not biased and possessed a fair mind and conscience. They did not ask in order to learn and were constantly mocking Him...in contrast, she listened and believed and called others, as well, to the faith. On the whole, she is remarkable in her timing, control, and faith<sup>62</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Jesus said to her: “I who speak to you am He” [26]**

The Lord has not used such direct expressions as: **“I who speak to you am He”** when He spoke to the Jews or even with His own disciples.

\*The harvest was ready for the prophets had laid the seeds to grow. Now they had become fully grown and waiting for the apostles to harvest them...The name ‘Messiah’ was not new to the Samaritan woman and she truly was awaiting His coming. She actually believed that He would come. From where did she possess such faith unless Moses had sowed it?<sup>63</sup>

**St. Augustine**

\* Indeed, the Lord did not give the Jews a clear answer while they constantly said to Him: “How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly” (Jn. 10:24); whereas He clearly informs the Samaritan woman: **“I ... am He.”**

**St. John Chrysostom**

## **12- THE SUCCESSFUL TESTIMONY OF THE SAMARITAN WOMAN**

**‘And At this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said: “What do You seek?” or “Why are You talking with her?” [27]**

It did not occur to the disciples that their Teacher, whose great kingdom they awaited, would speak to a poor Samaritan woman. She did not belong to the lost flock of Israel, and in their minds she could not possibly have a role in His kingdom. So why was He talking to her?

Besides, it was not usual for men to speak with women in the streets, even if they were their wives. There were numerous laws laid by the Jewish leaders concerning this matter.

\* The Lord Jesus Christ allowed Himself to talk with a poor Samaritan woman. However, the disciples were so astonished that they did not question Him as to why He talked with her. As disciples they were politely observant and aware of their ranking as His disciples; and in this light they paid Him respect, felt embarrassed, and honored Him as they would behave towards an amazing friend.

\* What caused the disciples to be astonished? It is due to His great humility and lack of any conceit that He engaged in a conversation with a woman who was not only poor, but a

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<sup>61</sup> *Hom. on John, 33:2*

<sup>62</sup> *Hom. on John, 33:2*

<sup>63</sup> *Sermon on N. T. Lessons, 51:2*

Samaritan as well<sup>64</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men...’ [28]**

When the Samaritan woman received the divine truth she abandoned her waterpot and forgot the reason that had brought her to the well. So she returned without getting water. However she returned to offer the water of truth to the people of the city. She left her waterpot because she did not want it to impede her from running to the city and giving testimony to the truth. She informed everyone in the streets that she had found the treasure she has been looking for, and that she has found the Source of her inner joy.

Earlier on the Lord had asked her to call her husband [16], and here she is calling all the men of the city and succeeded in her task.

She does not inform them that He discussed with her serious religious matters concerning worship and the manner it should be conducted. Instead, she informs them of how He has touched her heart truly because He knows her secrets, how He attracted her to Him by His powerful words, and consequently how this led her to recognize His person and that He is the Messiah.

\* She could have abandoned her waterpot which was in a deep well. She took pride in its depth, in other words she took pride in the teachings. However, she has come to despise the thoughts she had accepted previously. Now she accepts a better pot than the earlier waterpot for it contains water ‘springing up into everlasting life’ [14]<sup>65</sup>.

\* Here is a woman who proclaims the Messiah to the Samaritans. At the end of the Gospels there is also another woman who is the first one to see Him and who informs the disciples about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ {Jn 20:18}<sup>66</sup>.

\* This is all what this Samaritan woman had done: she had a relationship with five husbands, then she got involved with a sixth man who was not her legal husband, and finally she renounced that last man, abandoned her waterpot, and rested reverently on a Saturday.

Besides, she brought great benefits to those who lived with her in the same city. Based on her old beliefs, they shared incorrect teachings with her. This was the fault that led them to leave the city and come to the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>67</sup>.

**Origen**

\* Having received the Lord Jesus Christ into her heart, what else could she do but abandon her waterpot and run to preach the Gospel? She banished lust and hurried to proclaim the truth. May those who wish to preach the Gospel learn to abandon their waterpot at the well<sup>68</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* She had come to drink water but once she got to know the true Source she immediately despised the material source. In this simple incident she teaches us to surpass the tangible matters of life when we hear about spiritual matters...she abandoned her waterpot without receiving an order from anyone; and she hurried, being carried on wings of joy and delight, to do what the evangelists have done. She called a whole city, and not just one or two as Andrew and Philip had

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<sup>64</sup> Hom. on John, 33:3

<sup>65</sup> Commentary on John, Book 13:175

<sup>66</sup> Commentary on John, Book 13:179

<sup>67</sup> Commentary on John, Book 13:181

<sup>68</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:30

done. And she brought them to the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>69</sup>.

\* The Samaritan woman believed immediately and so she appears to be wiser than Nicodemus. Moreover, she is more courageous and steadfast than him since he did not go and call others to hear the words of the Lord. Nicodemus had listened to thousands of many more words from the Lord, yet he did not speak publicly or frankly to anyone. This woman did what the apostles had not done; for she preached to everyone and invited them to come to the Lord. In this manner, she led an entire city to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>70</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“Come see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?”[29]**

The words of the woman reveal her inner joy: she has met the Messiah, the Savior of the world and so she came to enjoy the One who satisfies her depths. The six men did not give her any joy. However, her meeting with her Savior created in her the spirit of joy and inspired her to work in order to bring others to salvation.

The invitation was not for them to come and see something strange; or that they might engage into a conversation with Him. Rather, they were invited to enjoy the Discerner of hearts, the Messiah and Savior of the world. This is one of the most important features that the Jews expected to find in the Messiah: that He knows what is in men’s hearts.

Towards the end of the First Century and at the beginning of the Second Century Barchochab proclaimed that he is the Messiah. As he deceived many, they brought to him people that he did not know- some were criminals and some were innocent- and they asked him to signal out the first from the latter. When he was unable to do so, they killed him.

The Samaritan woman was wise in her manner of preaching. She did not dictate to them her own belief in Him, but wisely asked them to come, see, and verify for themselves concerning the person of the Lord: **“Could this be the Christ?”[29]**

\* Notice once more the great wisdom of the woman as she neither proclaims the truth clearly nor does she remain silent or seek to attract them through her own convincing words. Rather, she invites them to listen to Him so that they might come to share the same opinion she had. That is why, in fact, they accepted her words<sup>71</sup>.

\* She is not embarrassed to say that He had told her everything that she had done...for material matters did not matter any longer. Besides, she is determined to disregard worldly glory or shame. Indeed, she had become devoted to one thing only and that was this holy torch ignited within her and which filled her being<sup>72</sup>.

\* **“Could this be the Christ?”[29]** She did not want to draw them based on her own determination and conviction. Rather, she wanted them to draw their own conclusion after hearing Him. This is what made her words more acceptable to them...she did not say ‘Come and believe’ but said **“Come see...”** and this expression sounded more gentle and appealing to them<sup>73</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* There is no person who is happier than a Christian person for such a person has the promise of the kingdom of God. No one struggles with more power than a Christian as he/she

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<sup>69</sup> Hom. on St. John, 34:1

<sup>70</sup> Hom on John, 32

<sup>71</sup> Hom. 34, PG 59:195

<sup>72</sup> Hom on John, 34:1

<sup>73</sup> Hom on John, 34:1

daily encounters dangers. No one is more powerful since a Christian is capable of conquering Satan...can anyone be found who is more sinful than the Samaritan woman? Yet she is not the only one who believed...and after her six men, she finds the one Lord. She not only gets acquainted with the Lord at the well- that same One whom the Jews failed to recognize in the temple- but she brings salvation to many. She does so while the disciples were busy buying food that would satisfy the Lord who was hungry and tired<sup>74</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

\* The words spoken to the Samaritan woman affect her so much that she abandons her waterpot and neglects her purpose for coming to the well. She returns to her city to draw all the people there to the Lord. Just contemplate her caution and understanding: she had come to drink and when she finds the true Source, she despises the tangible one. She therefore becomes our teacher since she undertakes, as much as she can, to do the work which the Lord's apostle have done. They too had abandoned their nets when they responded to the Lord's call. On her own, she decides to leave her waterpot and undertakes the task of a preacher. She does not call just one or two persons but she invites a whole city; and it is difficult to report the exact figure or the huge numbers who came to the Lord Jesus Christ through her.

Notice the woman's understanding as she leads the people of the city to the Lord. She does not tell them: 'Come, see the Christ'; but rather uses the same strategy the Lord used to appeal to her: **"Come see a Man who told me all things that I ever did."**

The woman said: **"Come see a Man who told me all things that I ever did."** She is not embarrassed to say this, even though she could have said something else, such as: 'Come and see someone who is prophesying.' However, when the divine fire touches any of us, no earthly consideration- such as honor or shame- occupies our minds.

Notice the woman's wisdom as she does not confirm that He is the Messiah for a clear reason. At the same time, she is not silent since she desires to draw them to Him. She seeks to do so by drawing them to hear Him; rather than by convincing them of her own belief.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The Jews rejected the Lord Jesus Christ when He came, whereas the devils recognized Him.

David, the Lord's grandfather, is not ignorant about Him when he says: "I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed...(Ps. 132:17). This light is the brilliance of Sonship according to some interpreters (2 Peter 1:19); or according to others, the body which the Lord took from the holy Virgin Mary ...

Moreover, the prophet is not ignorant about the subject of the Lord Jesus Christ as he says: 'He has proclaimed His Anointed among mankind' (.....4:13-Septuagint Translation).

None of the prophets are ignorant about Him: Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, as well as all the other prophets perceived Him. Even the devils recognized Him so that He rebuked them...

The chief priest did not recognize Him, whereas the devils acknowledged Him.

The chief priest did not perceive Him, whereas the Samaritan woman proclaimed Him, saying: **"Come see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"[4:29]**<sup>75</sup>.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

**'Then they went out of the city and came to Him.' [30]**

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<sup>74</sup> Letter 125:1

<sup>75</sup> Essay 10:15

The time had come when the lepers would preach the great salvation to the people of Samaritan origin (2Kgs. 7:3). Now here is a Samaritan woman, who in spite of her painful past, becomes the first one to preach the good news to Samaria. Consequently, she wins the whole city to the credit of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying “Rabbi, eat”[31]**

While the Samaritan women hurried to preach with all her strength, the disciples were busy offering food to the Lord, for He was hungry and tired.

**‘But He said to them, “I have food to eat of which you do not know” [31]**

**Origen** comments: ‘The body requires food that is different from that of the spirit. And just as the bodies themselves have different needs regarding the kind and quantity of food, so too do the spirits and souls have different requirements.

The Lord Jesus Christ seizes every chance to lift the minds and hearts of the disciples to matters beyond time and to the heavens themselves. He reveals to them the extent of His joy that arises from the redemption of souls. This represents His delicious food. He finds his satisfaction and comfort in toiling for every soul and in fulfilling His Father’s plan. He will not rest and will persevere in the task until He leaves this world.

\* Indeed, the same nourishing words and meditative thoughts and the actions relevant and accompanying them are not suitable for all souls.

Truly, there are vegetables and there is food for the strong (Rom. 14:2; Heb. 5:2) which may not promote progress to the needy souls if they are offered at the same time.

In this context, St. Peter says: ‘...as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the world, that you may grow thereby’ (1Peter 2:2). The same thing applies to some who are like children as in the case of the Corinthians and to whom St. Paul says: ‘I fed you with milk and not solid food...’ (1 Cor.3:2).

May those who are weak eat vegetables since they do not believe (Rom.14:2). This is what St. Paul is teaching when he says: “For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables” (Rom.14:2).

Truly, there is a time when ‘better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fatted calf with hatred’ (read Prov.15:17). ‘But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil’ (Heb. 5:14). However, there is also food that is hateful as we learn in the Book of Kings when the men told Elisha: “O man of God, there is death in the pot” (2Kgs.4:40)...

It is appropriate to lift our thoughts from the level of unreasoning creatures and mankind to that of the angels who are refreshed by food. They are not completely self-sufficient and as the Psalmist says: ‘Men ate angels’ food...’ (Ps. 78:25).

Now we need to go back to the statement before us concerning the food of the Lord Jesus Christ and with which the disciples were not familiar until that moment. The Lord truly says: **“I have food to eat of which you do not know” [4:31]** because the disciples are not aware of what the Lord was doing: He was obeying the will of He who has sent Him and fulfilling His perfect work [34]. He performs the will of God which is one and the same as His own will<sup>76</sup>.

**Origen**

**St. Augustine** comments that the food of the Lord is found in the accomplishment of the

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<sup>76</sup> Commentary on John, Book 13:206-217

Father's will and in drinking of the woman's faith in Him. In this manner, the Lord feeds her of His body which is the Church- in other words- she becomes a member in His body. **Origen** considers that every reasoning creature, and not just man alone, will enjoy perfection through the Lord Jesus Christ since they all are God's creation<sup>77</sup>.

\* When each one of us becomes perfect through the Lord Jesus Christ, and since he is the work of God, then he/she can say: ' I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness...' (2 Tim. 4:7-8)<sup>78</sup>.

**Origen**

\* The Lord was sitting and felt hungry and thirsty; then he got nourished and filled by the faith of the Samaritan woman.

**St. Jerome**

\* Would it have been amazing if this woman had not understood the Lord's words about the water? Notice how the disciples could not understand His words about the food<sup>79</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**Therefore the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?"[33]**

The disciples do not understand that the divine Word had supported Elijah in the wilderness near the Brook of Cherith, where He sent him daily food through a raven (1 Kgs.17:4-6). Moreover, angels had come to serve the Lord Jesus Christ when He was in the desert (Matt.4:11).

**Jesus said to them, "I have food to eat of which you do not know," [34]**

**St. Ambrose** notes that the Lord's words here refer to the effect of the Lord in men's lives. This leads them to do God's will and achieve His work. Consequently, the work which men do because they are members in the body of the Lord Jesus Christ is considered work done by the Lord Himself<sup>80</sup>.

What we eat, drink, read, our manner of service, and our worship are all devoted to the service of souls and their salvation. This is the will of our heavenly Father, and this is the delicious food for our souls.

Souls have been ruined due to ignorance. However, God has granted us the keys to the Kingdom- and that is His holy Bible- and the knowledge of His Word.

\*The banquet which Solomon speaks about is not achieved simply through regular food. Indeed, this has to mean that it can be achieved through good works. For how can the soul enjoy a banquet more wisely than through good works; or what can preoccupy the minds of the righteous more easily than knowing how to achieve good works? What other food can bring more joy than that of doing God's will? The Lord informs us that He alone richly possesses that food, and as He says in the Bible: **"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me" [34]**. It is with this food that people rejoice as they get equipped with the amazing knowledge, and which teaches them to climb up to the heavenly pleasures. Then they are able to comprehend the extent of such joy, the purity it implies and which the mind can understand. Therefore may we eat the bread of wisdom and get filled and satiated with the Word of God. For the life of man, which has been created in the image of God, is not fulfilled by bread alone "but by every word that

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<sup>77</sup> Commentary on John, Book 13:245

<sup>78</sup> Commentary on John, Book 13: 242

<sup>79</sup> Letter 108:13

<sup>80</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 15:31



proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt.4:4). The saintly Job says: “They waited for me as for the rain, and they opened their mouth wide as for the spring rain...” (Job 29:23)<sup>81</sup>.

\* Since He finds His food in doing His Father’s will, then He also finds it in sharing our sufferings<sup>82</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* “Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its pleasant fruits’ (Sg. Of Sol. 4:16). This is a bold expression coming from a soul filled with fervor. It arises magnificently and surpasses all expression.

Who is the one that the bride invites to her banquet which consists of her own fruit?

For whom does she prepare her banquet which she has filled out of her own sources?

Who is the one that the bride invites to eat from what she has provided? He is the One who “...of Him and through Him and to Him are all things...” (Rom. 11:36). He gives everyone his food in due season...; He opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing (Ps. 145:15,16); He is ‘the bread which came down from heaven...’ (Jn. 6:41). He is the One who gives life to the world and makes the waters flow from His own source of life.

He is the One for Whom the bride prepares her table and she is the garden in which living trees grow.

The trees are symbols for us and our loyal spirits represent the food that is presented to Him. For the Lord says to His disciples: **“I have food to eat of which you do not know,”** (Jn 4:32,34). His food is to achieve the will of God for He “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Tim 2:4)

This salvation is the food that is prepared for Him. Our free will gives the fruit to God, that is our souls so that He may pluck its small branch. At the beginning, the bride enjoyed the sweet apple and said, “his fruit was sweet to my taste.” (Sg. Of Sol. 2:3) then she herself became the beautiful sweet fruit that is offered to the shepherd so that He may enjoy it.<sup>83</sup> Saint Gregory of Nyssa

“Do not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’?

Behold, I say to you,

Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest.” [35]

The Lord Jesus Christ hid the spiritual secret meaning behind His talk about the harvest. For, He means the harvest of the kingdom of heaven that shall be achieved after four periods of time. In the first period man was in the Garden of Eden where he did not offer the suitable fruit. Then there was the period of the natural law (the father patriarchs) followed by the era of Moses’ Law, and finally, the fourth period is that of grace. The harvest of each era is for the kingdom of heaven. The harvest is complete with the coming of Christ on the clouds. This is the end of the fourth era.

The Lord Jesus Christ desires the harvest that will not be achieved without serious work with joy and perseverance. Work is definitely necessary and urgent in order that the harvest may be enjoyable.

He sees the coming harvest when many Samaritans come to Him through the service of the Samaritan woman. They will believe in Him and will be qualified for wearing the white

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<sup>81</sup> *Duties of the Clergy 1:31:163-164*

<sup>82</sup> *Sermon Against Auxentius, 14*

<sup>83</sup> *Song of Solomon by Saint Gregory of Nyssa, translated into Arabic by Dr. George Nawar, Sermon 10.*

clothes.

+ “Lift up your eyes.” This expression occurs in many places in the Holy Bible for the divine Word urges us to raise our thoughts and vision upwards. It is written in Isaiah, “Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who has created these things” (Is 40:26).

+ When the Savior began to speak about the blessings, He ‘lifted up His eyes’ toward His disciples and said, “Blessed” are these and those (see Luke 6:20). That is because below there is no real disciple of Jesus nor is there anyone reposing in Abraham’s bosom. The rich man who suffered ‘lifted up his eyes’ to see Abraham and Lazarus in his bosom (Lk 16:23).<sup>84</sup>

+ No one lifts up his eyes if he continues in doing the works of the flesh.<sup>85</sup>

+ The Word who is present with the disciples urges His listeners to lift up their eyes to the fields of the Holy Bible and to the fields of the aim of everything existing so that they may see the brilliant light of the truth and His splendor everywhere. For according to Solomon, “they are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge.” (Prov. 8:9)<sup>86</sup>  
Origen

Saint Jerome wrote to Abigaus, the priest of Baetica in Spain, to console him because of his physical blindness and to revive in him the spirit of joy because of the inner perception that he enjoyed.

+ Saint Jerome wrote, “it befits you that you do not grieve. You are deprived of those two physical eyes that the ants, insects and reptiles have. You should rather be happy that you have the eyes mentioned in the Song of Solomon: ‘Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes’ (Sg. Of Sol. 4:9). This is the eye that sees God, and that Moses mentions when he says, ‘I will now turn aside, and see this great sight’ (Ex 3:3). Jeremiah wrote, ‘for death is come up into our windows’ (Jer 9:21 LXX). Furthermore, Christ told His disciples to lift up their eyes and behold His word ‘for they are already white for harvest’ [35].”<sup>87</sup> Saint Jerome

“And he who reaps receives wages,  
and gathers fruit for eternal life,  
that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.” [36]

Now the LORD Christ approaches as the sower who sows the word in the heart of the Samaritan woman and in very few hours He takes the role of the reaper. He is full of joy because of the fruit that has saved all the residents of that town, for they say, “this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.” [42]

+ Christ means the spiritual reaper because the fruit of the material harvest does not extend to eternal life; it has only temporary life. On the other hand, the fruit of the spiritual

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<sup>84</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 13:274-276.*

<sup>85</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 13:278.*

<sup>86</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 13:284.s)*

<sup>87</sup> *Letter 76:2.*

harvest reaches a life without senility or death. Do you see how His words are sensitive and have spiritual meaning? Saint John Chrysostom

+ Take into consideration that if Moses and the prophets had sown, since they wrote those things “for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor 10:11), they announced Christ’s journey. Behold also if those who reaped were the apostles who accepted Christ and saw His glory that conforms to the mental seeds of the prophets concerning Him, the fruit they reaped was “the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden” and “was manifest in these last times” (Eph 3:9; 1 Pet 1:20). “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.” (Eph 3:5)

Now, the entire design concerning the announcement of the mystery that was hidden in secrecy for eternal times is revealed in the books of the prophets and in the coming of our LORD Jesus Christ. This happened at the time when the true light caused the fields to be white for harvest, for He radiated as being the Seed.

In accordance to this interpretation, the fields in which the seeds were sown are the writings of the Law and the prophets that did not become white for those who did not accept the coming of the Word. But they became white for those who believed in the Son of God and obeyed Him when He said, “lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest.” [35]<sup>88</sup>

+ As true disciples of Jesus, let us lift up our eyes and look at the fields that Moses and the prophets sowed so that we may see their whiteness and how they were made ready for the harvest of their fruits that will be gathered for eternal life. Let us look in hope of also obtaining a reward from the LORD of the fields and giver of the seeds.<sup>89</sup>

+ Any man, whoever he may be, who reads “many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 8:11) will agree that the sower and the reaper will rejoice together where all moaning, sadness and pain will “flee away” (Is 35:10).

If anyone hesitates in accepting the fact that until now the sower rejoices with all those who reap, let him remember what happened in the Transfiguration of Jesus as a kind of harvest. Jesus appeared in glory not only to the reapers, Peter, James and John, who went up with Him on the mountain, but also to the sowers Moses and Elijah who had sown before and were so enlightened by the Father and enlightened those who saw Him. Thus now Moses and Elijah are seen together with the holy apostles.<sup>90</sup> Origen

“For in this the saying is true,  
One sows  
And another reaps.” [37]

Now the LORD Christ sends His disciples to the harvest in the fields where the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament labored for such a long time.

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<sup>88</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 13:305-307.*

<sup>89</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 13:308.*

<sup>90</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 13:309-310.*

+ We can say that one belongs to the Law and the other to the Gospel, but they rejoice together [36] as they have one aim. This was given to them by the One God in Jesus Christ the One who is stored for them in the One Holy Spirit.<sup>91</sup> Origen

+ The prophets are those who sowed and did not reap. Those who reap are the apostles. However, those who only sowed were not deprived of the joy of the reward for their labor. They rejoiced and were happy even though they did not reap.<sup>92</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

“I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored;  
others have labored, and you have entered into their labors.” [38]

+ Why did Christ say these words to His disciples? So that when He sends them to preach, they may not be troubled as though they were sent to do a very difficult work, for the work of the prophets was more full of hardship. The disciples came to do easier tasks than others, for just as the fruit is gathered in the harvest easily, likewise is the effort of the disciples now. In this way Christ encouraged His disciples very much because this work, if it is thought to be difficult, since they will travel the world to preach repentance, it is indeed, Christ explains to them, an easy work. The work that was very difficult was the work done by those who sowed the seeds to let a distant soul enter into the knowledge of God.<sup>93</sup>

+ Now, harvesting is different from planting. You have been reserved for a work that is less difficult and more pleasing. You will not sow because this needs greater effort and pain.

In harvesting we obtain a great crop but the effort and pain are not as great. Indeed, harvesting is easier... The toilsome work that requires much labor is sowing the seeds and introducing into the knowledge of God the soul that has not obtained the membership in the church....The desire of the prophets was to bring all humanity to Me. This was the design of the Law. For this reason they sowed in order that they may produce fruit. In all this it is evident that He sent them also and the relation between the new and the old is great. He revealed all this in this parable.<sup>94</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

+ The Word always shows the work of the ancient people more clearly to the true disciples in order that they may practice the same effort and face the same trouble faced by the sowers.<sup>95</sup> Origen

## 5—The Samaritans Believe in Him

“And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him  
because of the word of the woman who testified, ‘He told me all that I ever did.’” [39]

The people of Sychar did not see any miracle but the person and divine speech of the LORD Christ attracted them to Him. They exulted in Christ’s word that grants life. The

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<sup>91</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 13:322.*

<sup>92</sup> *Hom on John, 34:2.*

<sup>93</sup> *Hom. On John, 34:2.*

<sup>94</sup> *Hom 34. PG 59:197-198.*

<sup>95</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 13:326.*

evangelist stresses this point in the next section.

Earlier, in His previous dialogue with Nicodemus, the religious leader, the LORD concentrates on the new birth through baptism. Here, the LORD draws attention to His person in order that the gentiles may accept Him and enjoy His work of salvation.

+ If we contemplate what is said about Samaria, the Samaritan woman, and Jacob's well, it is not difficult for us to see that those who were surrounded by false teachings left the town of their ideas so that they may enjoy the true teaching. When they left that town they believed truly in the teaching of redemption because one woman had accepted the preaching of salvation at Jacob's well. She had left her water-pot mentioned previously so that she may call the others to benefit in the same way.<sup>96</sup> Origen

“So when the Samaritans had come to Him,  
they urged Him to stay with them,  
and He stayed there two days.” [40]

In Origen's opinion, Jesus stayed with them but not in their city, for they had gone out of their city and had come to Him Scripture does not say that He performed miracles among them. For they were simple people in need of, and ready for listening to the Word. They were attached to the LORD Christ for the truth. They did not want miracles to ascertain Him as did many leaders of Judea.

In the gospel according to Saint Luke, the Samaritans refused to receive Christ in their village (Lk 9:53). However, here, we find the Samaritans urging Him to stay with them. Thus, in every nation we find those who accept the truth and those who cannot tolerate it.

Although the LORD Christ was on His way from Judea to Galilee, and He only passed through Samaria, yet, finding an opportunity for service, and acceptance of the word, He did not refuse the wish of the Samaritans but stayed with them two days.

+ Jesus stays with those who ask Him, especially those who leave their city and come to Him following the example of Abraham when he obeyed God who said to him, “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred and from thy father's house” (Genesis 12:1).<sup>97</sup>

+ Jesus stays two days with those who request Him because they cannot yet reach His third day. They are unable to comprehend any miraculous deed. They are unlike those who ate with Jesus on the third day of the wedding in Cana of Galilee (Jn 2:1).<sup>98</sup> Origen

“And many more believed because of His own word.” [41]

Their meeting with the LORD granted them growth in faith and an increase in the number of believers.

+ The Jews obtained more knowledge than the Samaritans; they always recognized the prophets and ate with them. However, they now appear lagging behind the Samaritans who

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<sup>96</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 13:340.*

<sup>97</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 13:246.*

<sup>98</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 13:347.*

believe in Christ on the strength of a woman's testimony and without seeing even one miracle. The Samaritans went out quickly and urged Christ to stay with them. As for the Jews, they saw Christ's miracles with their own eyes, yet they did not ask Him to stay with them, and they even drove Him away and used every means to chase Him away from their cities, though He had come originally for their sake.<sup>99</sup>

+ These Samaritans will judge the Jews and their judgment will be their faith in Christ and acceptance of Him. For, those Jews opposed Christ continuously in spite of His works and miracles. But the Samaritans, without miracles, declared their belief in Him. Saint John Chrysostom

“And they said to the woman,  
‘Now we believe, not because of what you said,  
for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.’” [42]

Seeing the LORD Christ and hearing Him consolidated their belief that they got through the woman. Therefore, many were attracted to that faith. They also recognized Jesus as the Savior, not only of the Jews or with them the Samaritans, but also He is indeed the Savior of the world. He is He about whom Isaiah the prophet says, “I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth” (Is 49:6).

Their faith is the certainty that ‘indeed [He] is the Christ, the Savior of the world.’ It is as the queen of Sheba said to the king Solomon, “It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it; and, behold, the half was not told me” (1 Kings 10:6-7).

These are the seeds that the LORD Christ sowed in Samaria in two days. We read that after four or five years Philip preached in Samaria where he found good seeds in the field (Acts 8:5-6,8). He also found evil people like Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:9-10).

+ The students surpassed their teachers and by their belief in Him and acceptance of Him they obtained the right to judge the Jews. They realized at once that He will attract the world to Himself and that He came to give us perfect salvation. His care is not limited to the Jews alone. He is the true Savior who grants the true eternal salvation, not a temporary one.<sup>100</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

+ They did not describe Christ as savior as a simple characteristic, but they said, “we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.” He grants the true redemption, not only the temporary deliverance. This they said out of pure faith. The evidence is in that their belief was not because of miracles they saw. Secondly, though they heard the woman say doubtfully, ‘Could this be the Christ?’ they did not say we think He is the Christ, but they said, “we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.” They did not acknowledge Christ as one of many. They affirmed that He is indeed the Savior and though they did not see Him saving but only heard His words, they made that statement. If they had seen His miracles they would have made many great declarations. Moreover, as they said that Christ is the Savior

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<sup>99</sup> *Hom. On John, 35:1.*

<sup>100</sup> *Hom. On John, 35:1.*

of the world, they made it clear that He is the Savior of the false or lost world. Saint John Chrysostom

+ They denied that their belief was based on the woman's words because when they heard the Savior Himself they discovered that hearing Him was better, for they also knew that "He is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world" [42].

In fact it is better to be an eyewitness of the Word and listen to Him without using the physical members or allowing the interference of teachers. He teaches and presents images to the mind to reveal the truth more clearly. It is better for a person to hear Him than to listen to a report about Him through the servants who saw Him, for the person who does not hear Him personally or see Him is not covered by His power.<sup>101</sup>

+ It is not an amazing thing, in reality, that it is said about some that they behave in accordance to their faith, not according to their discernment, and about others that their conduct follows their discernment (insight) that is greater than conduct in faith (without the experience of insight).<sup>102</sup> Origen

#### 6-- He Goes to Galilee

"Now after the two days He departed from there and went to Galilee." [43]

+ He spent two days in Samaria and the Samaritans believed in Him. He spent many days in Galilee but the Galileans did not believe in Him. The Samaritans did not expect a miracle; they believed His word. When they heard Him talk many Samaritans believed. On the other hand, when He performed a miracle in Galilee, no one in that place believed except the household of the nobleman whose son was healed [53].<sup>103</sup> Saint Augustine

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"For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country." [44]

Some commentators observe that the evangelist, here, means that Jesus went to Galilee, not to Nazareth, though the LORD usually mentioned this proverb with reference to His country "Nazareth" (Matt 13:57; Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24).

The LORD Christ did not go to His country, but to Galilee. He did not desire temporary honor; He rather did not wish to intrude on people who rejected Him. Even when He appeared to His disciples during the storm, He, according to the evangelist, entered the boat only when the disciples "willingly received Him." The LORD longs to cross over to us, to enter our city and guide the ship of our life, but not by force, but only when we request Him to do so. Moreover, to those who want Him and honor Him, He says, "I honor those who honor Me; those who despise Me are disparaged." (Prov.) He went to Galilee after He had given every possible chance for His people and country. For He says, "I have spread out My hands all the day unto a rebellious people" (Is 65:2; Romans 10:21).

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<sup>101</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 13:352.*

<sup>102</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 13:363.*

<sup>103</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 16:3.*

+ Why did He add that proverb? That is because He did not go to Capernaum, but to Galilee, then to Cana. And so that you may not ask why did He not stay with His people but stayed with the Samaritans, the evangelist mentions the reason which is that His people had no interest in Him. He did not go there so that they may not have greater judgment. For, I think that here He speaks of Capernaum as His “country.” Besides, to show that He was not honored there, He says, “And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades” (Matt 11:23). He called it His country because it was there that He achieved the provision of the Word (the divine Incarnation) and He lived in particular there.<sup>104</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

“So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him,  
having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem at the feast;  
for they also had gone to the feast.” [45]

The Galileans received Him as being the Promised Messiah because they had seen the signs and miracles He did in Jerusalem at the Passover (John 2:23).

+ Look! The Samaritans and the Galileans believed in Christ to shame the Jews and to embarrass them. The Samaritans were better than the Galileans because the Samaritans received Him when they heard the words of the woman, but the Galileans received Him when they saw His miracles. The evangelist mentions the man who heard about the miracle (changing water into wine at Cana of Galilee) to exalt the praise of the Samaritans. For, the men of Cana received Christ because of the miracle performed in Jerusalem; but in the case of the Samaritans, they received Him only because of His doctrine.<sup>105</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

“So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine.  
And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum.”[46]

Cana was on the way from Nazareth to Capernaum and the Sea of Tiberias.

The learned Origen thinks that Jesus’ two visits to Cana of Galilee denote His first and last coming. At His first visit He changed water into wine; during the second visit He gave life to the nobleman’s son who was at the point of death. Origen writes, “The Word also visits the spirit twice. During the first visit He grants the spirit wine from water for the joy of those who celebrate the feast together. During the second visit He removes all sickness from the spirit for a long time and takes away all threats of death.”<sup>106</sup>

+ During the first trip after our baptism He makes us abide joyfully with Him. He grants us to drink the wine of His power. That water that they drew at first Jesus changed into wine. For, indeed, the holy Bible was water before Jesus came; but after His First Coming the Bible became wine for us. In His Second Coming, God gives Him the judgment and He liberates us from the fever of the time of judgment. He heals the nobleman’s son from fever. He heals him completely; this son may be considered the son of Abraham, or the son of a ruler called a

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<sup>104</sup> *Homilies on St. John*, 35:1.

<sup>105</sup> *Homilies on St. John*, 35:2.

<sup>106</sup> *Commentary on John*, Book 13:392.



nobleman.<sup>107</sup> Origen

+ He came to Galilee because of the envy of the Jews. But why did He come to Cana? He came the first time as one invited to a wedding. But why does He come now? I think, so that by His visit He may consolidate the faith that He planted with His miracle, and so that He may attract them to Himself even more when He comes having invited Himself, leaving His city and favoring them.<sup>108</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

## 7-- A Nobleman's Son Is Healed

“When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.” [47]

The LORD Christ did nothing but only spoke and His words granted life to a person who was at the point of death [47].

The nobleman, Basilibos, was the guard of the royal palace. Many scholars conjecture that the king that Basilibos served was Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee whom the people called “king.” Saint Jerome believes the man’s name was Palantinus, but others think his name was Chuza (Luke 8:3) the husband of Joanna who followed the LORD Christ with the women who provided for Him from their possessions. Still other writers say that the man was Manaen (Acts 13:1).

The account here is accurate, for it is said, he “implored Him to come down.” The reason is that the LORD was in Cana of Galilee that is on a very high hill while Capernaum is on the shore of the Sea of Galilee at the sea level. This shows that the writer knows very well the nature of that region.

The king’s steward (the nobleman) came from Capernaum to Cana, a distance of about 16 miles.

Saint John Chrysostom says that that person was either a member of the royal family, or was highly honored because of his office. He was, therefore, called a nobleman. Some commentators consider him the person mentioned in Matt 8:5, but the Saint disagrees because the difference between those two men is not only in the degree of honor, but also in faith. The man mentioned in the Gospel according to Saint Mathew had greater faith, for even when Jesus desired to go to him, he begged Him not to leave. On the other hand, this nobleman entreated the LORD to go to his house although the LORD did not ask that. The first man said, “I am not worthy that You should come under my roof.” The second man urged the LORD to go, for he said, “Sir, come down before my child dies!” In the first case, the LORD had come down from the mountain and had entered Capernaum. But here He came from Samaria and did not enter Capernaum but went to Cana where this man met Him. The first man’s servant was paralyzed, but this man’s son was feverish.<sup>109</sup>

“Then Jesus said to him,

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<sup>107</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 13:438-439.*

<sup>108</sup> *Homilies on St. John, 35:2..*

<sup>109</sup> *Homilies on St. John, 35:2.*

Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.” [48]

The LORD did not say to him that he had no faith, but that he was weak in his faith. He was unable to believe that the LORD could heal the child without going in person from Cana to Capernaum. This is the weak faith that is built on miracles. It is a faith that is often only mental and is therefore subject to weakness and doubt. This is contrary to the faith through God’s revelation to the spirit and the consequent exultation at the mysteries of the divine word.

Saint John Chrysostom asks why did the LORD Christ say this although it is clear that that man was a believer and as soon as he heard the LORD Christ’s word, he believed [50]? Saint John Chrysostom then answers his own question. He says, “The LORD’s motive was either to bear witness to the Samaritans who believed without seeing wonders, or to influence Capernaum that is thought to be His country and where that person came from. Besides, consider the saying of another man, “LORD, I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24) and you will understand that though this nobleman believed, his belief was not complete or sound. This becomes evident when he inquires about the hour when his child got better [52] to know whether his son was healed normally or as a result of Christ’s order.” <sup>110</sup>

“The nobleman said to Him,  
“Sir, come down before my child dies!”[49]

In spite of his faith that caused him to travel all that distance and leave his son on his deathbed to meet the LORD Christ, yet in weakness he did not realize that he talked to the conqueror of death and giver of resurrection. In bitterness he urged the LORD Christ to go to his house before his son dies. Terror filled the heart of this father who was about to lose his son. The LORD showed reluctance, not because He did not share the feelings of this father who was alarmed, but rather to edify the spirit of this man and many other spirits. The LORD desires to direct the attention of this father and of those around him toward the mystery of life and resurrection, to Himself as the Savior of the world. The miracle is given as an additional blessing to one who seeks the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Saint Augustine has often spoken about our weak relationship with God and our deviation when we are attentive only to the worldly pleasures and blessings granted by God who does all good things instead of being preoccupied with God Himself and having Him inside us.

In this same spirit, Saint Paul asks us not to have a relationship with the saints based on the benefit of their help especially in solving material, moral or social problems. Our relationship with them should be, in the first degree, a relationship of love as a foundation for taking them as our guides in the LORD Jesus. Saint Paul writes, “Remember those who lead you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.”

+ Contemplate the words of the nobleman and how they reveal his weakness. He should have imagined in our LORD greatness for the sake of his son. For, in saying to Christ, “Sir, come down before my child dies”, he brought Christ down to the level of one who cannot raise the child after his death and also one who did not know the boy’s condition. For this reason Christ blamed him touching his conscience and showing him that His miracles are performed for the benefit of the spirit. Here He heals the father’s sick reasoning and urges us to be interested not in His wonders, but in His doctrine. For the signs are not for the believers, but for the

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<sup>110</sup> *Homilies on St. John*, 35:2.

unbelieving.<sup>111</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

+ He had a weak faith in this because he assumed that Christ could not heal except when He is personally present. If he had believed perfectly he would have known that there is no place where God is not present...He who has created all things with His will can heal with a mere command.<sup>112</sup> Pope Gregory (the Great)

“Jesus said to him,  
‘Go your way; your son lives.’  
So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him; and he went his way.” [50]

The LORD Christ’s interest in directing the nobleman to the living, mighty faith does not mean that Christ ignored the effort this man made in his trip to come to Jesus. For, our Christ does not forget the labor of love or the cup of cold water given in His name. Indeed, He is all love and does not ignore the feelings of a father who watches his son on his deathbed. The agony of this father’s heart and, lastly, this man’s perseverance are recognized. Christ desires us to pray and not lose heart. He praised the widow whom the unjust judge answered because of her persistent pleading.

In saying, “Go your way; your son lives” He revealed His absolute authority. He is King of kings and LORD of lords. He “has life in Himself” He has authority; He rebukes affliction and it leaves, death and it goes away. The nobleman knows the authority and power of royal orders that allow no reluctance or negligence. He accepted the word of Jesus as a royal command and went away full of trust, without argument or dialogue, to enjoy this precious treasure that is the divine active order!

The officer believed, but his faith was on condition that he made sure that his son was healed. Therefore, it is later said that “he himself believed, and his whole household” [53]

“And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying,  
‘Your son lives’ [51]  
Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better.  
And they said to him ‘Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.’” [52]

With this question the nobleman revealed his weak faith. However, it has been said about the LORD, “A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench” (Matt 12:20). He is the shepherd who takes care of His sheep to support them and take them into the enclosure of faith.

“So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, ‘Your son lives.’

And he believed, and his whole household.” [53]

This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.” [54]

The evangelist had previously mentioned the miracle of changing water into wine when

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<sup>111</sup> Hom 35, PG 59:204.

<sup>112</sup> Hom 28, Forty Gospel Homilies. PL 76:1211.

he said that Jesus came to Cana of Galilee [46]. Here, he refers to it by saying, “This again is the second sign Jesus did...” as though he wishes to link the two signs. The first sign the LORD Christ did at the beginning of His service is that He made the world an eternal wedding where everybody enjoys the wine of God’s love and the heavenly continuous joy. The second sign when the nobleman’s son was at the point of death – and most probably he was a Gentile – Christ granted him health. Here Christ declared that He desired the security of His people or of His bride. The LORD Christ was glorified in the first miracle in front of the Jewish master of the wedding; now He is glorified before the entire multitude that came to the house of the Gentile nobleman.

Saint John Chrysostom observes that the evangelist mentions this to reveal the eminence of the Samaritans who believed in the LORD Christ without seeing the first or second miracle, but received Him through His doctrine.

+ This saying implies also praise for the Samaritans. It shows that the Jews, after the second sign did not reach the loftiness of the Samaritans who did not see even one sign.

+ The evangelist did not write the words ‘the second’ without aim. He wanted to increase our astonishment at the Samaritans by indicating that even when the second sign was accomplished, those who saw it did not reach the elevation of those who did not see it.<sup>113</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

Inspired by John Chapter Four

The Spring of Your Love Waters the Depth of My Spirit

+ Your wonderful love defies all rules  
No difficulty or obstacle stands in its way.  
For the sake of a poor, disreputable Samaritan woman  
You went to Samaria on foot and fasting!  
You whom the heavenly beings long to carry.  
Your tender body was exhausted  
But Your spirit was thirsty for the woman’s salvation.

+ The Samaritan woman was ashamed to go in the morning fearing she would meet anyone.

She had no servant or maid to fetch water for her.  
She found You alone at noon seeking her  
Bringing to her the spring of living water  
Whoever drinks of it will never thirst..

+ Your modesty, love and gentleness made her forget the hostility between the Samaritans and the Jews.

Seeing You kindled her heart to worship God.

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<sup>113</sup> Hom 36. PG 59:206.

She trusted You and talked at length about worship!  
She recognized You and gradually knew You  
For she searched for You faithfully and You declared Yourself to her!

+ O how wonderful, she never saw a miracle or sign,  
But Your words attracted her wholly to enjoy redemption.  
She confessed her personal secrets, because she found her spirit's bridegroom.  
The five men she once had and the man she still has did not satisfy her.  
She realized that the five Books of Moses  
And the teachings she had  
Will not quench her thirst.  
You alone are the bridegroom of her spirit.

+ She possessed You within herself  
So her heart expanded with love for all mankind.  
She left her waterpot and without permission ran to her city.  
With her heart on fire she was not ashamed to announce with great wisdom  
"A man told me all things that I ever did.  
Could this be the Christ?"  
The whole city went out toward the wonderful bridegroom.

+ She was not ordered to preach.  
She was not trained in witnessing  
But she did what no apostle or disciple did!  
With her love she attracted the whole city  
And when they met You they refused to learn from any other but You.  
They announced firmly what Your disciples did not  
We know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.

+ You are truly the Savior of the world.  
You grant healing and life.  
O You who have raised the nobleman's son as from death!  
Raise my poor spirit  
To enjoy You who are the source of life and joy.

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## Chapter 5

### Healing of the Bethesda Sick Man

#### The Divine Physician

In this chapter we find the meeting between the Lord Jesus Christ, the Heavenly Physician, and the man of Bethesda who had suffered from paralysis for 38 years. Christ is a Unique Physician who seeks the sick person without his asking but does not heal him forcibly. He rather asks him, "Do you want to be made well?" Christ met the man at Bethesda that had five porches which indicate the five Books of Moses, or the Law. The Law reveals sin and affirms to us sickness and our need for a Heavenly Physician who can heal.

The Physician discloses the good characteristics in the sick man. He is modest: for when the Lord asked him "Do you want to be made well?", he was not angry but in wonderful docility, he answered "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me." (5:7) When a person suffers from an infirmity for a long time, he is usually afflicted by strange difficulties that grow with time. However, in this case we see an extremely calm man. Besides, when the Lord said to him "Rise, take up your bed and walk" (5:8) this man believed and immediately got up, walked, and carried his bed. He had lain by the pool since before the Nativity of Jesus Christ the Lord. He probably had not heard of Christ because he was almost deprived of seeing his relatives and friends after all that time of illness. Yet, he did not argue with the Lord. He did not ask how he could rise, how he could at once walk and carry his bed.

The human arm was incapable of healing this paralytic cast by the pool for 38 years. Jesus Christ the Lord intervened asking him, "Do you want to be made well?" Christ gave him a new life at Bethesda which means "The house of mercy."

This miracle is not mentioned in the other three Gospels because St. John was interested in the miracles that occurred in Jerusalem while the other Evangelists were more concerned with those that took place in Galilee.

1. The Bethesda Paralytic Is Healed 1-9
2. Resistance of the Jews 10-16
3. Christ's Comment about the Sabbath 17-18 Christ's Talk about the Sabbath
4. Discourse about Eternal Life 19-30
5. John the Baptist Bears Witness to Christ 31-35
6. The Testimony of Christ's Miracles and Works 36
7. The Father Testifies of Him 37
8. The Holy Bible Testifies of Him 38-47

#### 1. The Bethesda Paralytic Is Healed

"After this there was a feast of the Jews  
and Jesus went up to Jerusalem" [1]

Several Fathers of the Church and contemporary scholars see that the circumstances

mentioned in this chapter show that this was the Passover. The interest of the other three Evangelists in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ in Judea is very brief. They do not refer to the Passover feasts which occurred after the Lord's baptism and until His crucifixion. Whereas St. John refers to all those feasts: the first in 2:13, the second here 5:1, the third 6:4 and the fourth 13:1. However, he does not say here explicitly that it was the Passover; he says "a feast of the Jews."

When the feast took place, the Lord Jesus Christ went up to Jerusalem although He lived in Galilee. The Law decrees that men should go up to Jerusalem for the feast. Therefore, Christ did not want to exempt Himself since He accepted to be the Son of Man who is under the Law. In doing that He offers to us Himself as a model concerned in community worship, even though many practice it as a formality lacking in spirit.

If wisdom cries in public places (Proverbs 1:21), here Wisdom goes up to Jerusalem where many Jews from many parts of the world come and also where strangers come, so that He may announce to them the Truth, especially that they came for worship and are ready to accept and understand the truth.

As the word "feast" is mentioned without the definite article (the), some scholars say that it was not the Passover, but rather the Pentecost which commemorates receiving the Law. Both St. Cyril the Great and St. John Chrysostom are of this opinion. The reason some think this was the Feast of Pentecost is that the Lord Jesus Christ talked about the meaning of Sabbath and blamed them for not believing Moses, for if they did they would have believed Him because the Law testifies of Him (45-47)

St. John Chrysostom comments on the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ went up to Jerusalem saying: [In most cases He went up to the city, on the one hand to appear among them during the feast, and on the other hand, to attract to Him those who were without malice, because the simple people gathered during those days more than any other time.]<sup>1</sup>

It seems that the Lord Jesus Christ went up to Jerusalem alone. His disciples were not with Him, so that He may enter without being seen. This is clear because the paralytic did not know Him for as soon as He healed the man, Christ withdrew from the multitude. [13]

Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool  
Which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda  
Having five porches [2]

He speaks of the pool and the five porches as existing at the time he was writing this Gospel. Some people opine that the pool and its porches were not destroyed along with the temple and the destruction of Jerusalem. Some others deduce in many versions of the narration that the pool did not exist. The pool has been discovered recently and it is beside the church of St. Hannah. The excavations have shown that the pool is surrounded by a rectangle in which are four porches and a fifth channel dividing the pool in half.

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<sup>1</sup> *Homilies on St. John, 36:1*

Bethesda is not Bethsaida as it is written in some versions. The Hebrew word for it is Bethchasaday which means "the house of mercy." It may have taken its name from God's mercies that were revealed in the healing of those who stepped down into it.

"The Sheep Gate": this gate was probably called so because the priests used to wash down the sacrificial lambs there then take them into the temple.

The pool indicates the baptismal font where the believers enjoy a new birth and a healing from sin.

The five porches indicate the law recorded in the five Books of Moses. The sick enter through them to the pool so that those who enter realize that they are in need of a Heavenly Physician.

The angel coming down from heaven indicates the Word of God Incarnated, the Heavenly Physician.

The healing of one person indicates the One Church that enjoys healing from sin.

The stirring up of the water indicates the suffering of Christ when the crowd rose against Him. Moreover, the stirring up of the water means that the water in the pool became a flowing living water, similar to the water of baptism in which the Spirit works and the baptized is born spiritually as the Lord Jesus Christ declares to Nicodemus [John 3]. Again it indicates the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Lord says to the Samaritan woman that whoever drinks of that water will never thirst.

- ❖ That water was the Jewish nation. The five porches were the law because Moses wrote five Books. Therefore the water was enclosed with five porches, just as the Jews were controlled by the law. The agitation of the water is the suffering of the Lord among the people. The person who stepped down into the water and was healed is one person because this is the oneness.

Those who refuse Christ's suffering are proud. They do not step down, so they are not healed. They say "far be it from me that I believe that God was incarnate, born of a woman, and that He was crucified, and scourged, that He died, was wounded, and was buried. Far be it from me that I believe that this is of God; this does not befit God." Let the heart speak, and not the stiffneck: For the proud, the Lord's meekness seems unsuitable to Him. Therefore, enjoying health is far from them. If you want to be healed you must step down.<sup>2</sup>

- ❖ Be alert, beloved, because the Law was given for this aim: to reveal sickness, not to heal it. Thus, this sick flock could have been sick at home in great secrecy if the five porches did not exist. By entering through the five porches they became known to human eyes, but the porches did not heal them.
- ❖ So the Law is useful in revealing sins, because a person becomes much more guilty when he transgresses the Law. In that case, his pride is restrained, and he seeks the help of Him

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<sup>2</sup> *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 74:3*



Who is merciful. Listen to the apostle: "the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more." (Romans 5:20) And in another place, "where there is no law there is no transgression." (Romans 4:15) A person may be called a sinner before the Law is known, but it is impossible to call him a transgressor. However, if he sins after he receives the Law, he will be not only a sinner, but also a transgressor. And if transgression is added to sin "sin abounds." When sin abounds, human pride learns at last to submit and to confess to God saying, "I am weak." Saint Augustine<sup>3</sup>

- ❖ The time of offering baptism was near. Baptism conveys great strength and is the greatest of the blessings. It appears like an image through the pool and the accompanying circumstances... for God wants to take us closer to the faith by baptism. Therefore baptism does not only wash dirt but also heals sickness. St. John Chrysostom.<sup>4</sup>

"In these lay a great multitude of sick people,  
Blind, lame, paralyzed,  
Waiting for the moving of the water." [3]

He mentions, among the sick, only three groups: the blind, the lame and the paralyzed. Those are the disabled who cannot step down into the water. For this reason a great number of those people gathered in the five porches round the pool.

"For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool  
and stirred up the water,  
then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had." [4]

Some writers believe that the angel did not go down into the pool every day, but rather during certain seasons, especially the three great feasts. This, God allowed so that the people may be sure that, though they were deprived of prophets and miracles, God did not forget them but cared for them.

Some observe that this event began after Eliashib, the high priest, built a wall in the direction of Jerusalem and sanctified it with prayer. Consequently God gave evidence of His acceptance of that by the miraculous works at the pool. Others believe that those miracles began with the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Still others say they began with His baptism. Dr. Lightfoot states that the historian Josephus reports that in the seventh year of Herod, that is thirty years before the Lord Jesus Christ, there was a great earthquake. Seeing that the descent of angels is sometimes accompanied by an earthquake, this may have been the first year when the angel began to go down into the pool. And some writers believe that that stopped with the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

St. John writes "went down" in the past tense. This makes it clear that that occurrence had stopped at the time the Gospel according to St. John was being written. Whereas he speaks of the pool as still existing at his time.

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<sup>3</sup> *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 75:2*

<sup>4</sup> *Homilies on St. John, 36:1*

The fact that there is not explicit mention of the miracles at the pool either in Josephus, Philo or any other Jewish writer, indicates that those happenings did not occur for a long time, or that they did not occur at the time of those writers.

Bathing a person, especially at a public place, by quickly casting him into the water, would generally cause that person harm. However, in this case, the person is sick, and yet no matter what his disease was, he was made well if he was the first to step down into the water.

- ❖ For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water [4]. And he granted with him power of healing so that the Jews learn that the God of angels can, moreover, heal the sickness of the spirit.

And just as the nature of the water, here, did not heal of itself (because if it did it would have healed at all times) but healed through the work of the angel, similarly, our purification is not by means of the water simply, but through the grace of the Spirit that is accepted and absolves us from all our sins. St. John Chrysostom<sup>5</sup>.

- ❖ One person only was healed. This shows unity: whoever came after that was not cured, because no one outside that unity is made well. St. Augustine<sup>6</sup>.

"Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years." [5]

This sick man spent more than half his life beside the pool suffering from paralysis and unable to live in a habitual daily way. Good health is a talent that we must use as long as we have it and we must offer our thanks to God for it.

Someone may ask, why did not Christ heal all the sick in Bethesda with just a word from His mouth? He is the Physician of the souls and bodies but what preoccupies Him most is the Eternal healing where the bodies along with the souls are glorified. This sick man was usually among many sick people at the pool; they knew him and many of their relatives and friends also knew him; and may be the whole city knew him. Therefore, his healing opened the eyes of all to see the person of the Messiah, so that all may enjoy the faith and be glorified eternally.

The healing of this sick man was, and still is, at the bottom of the healing of many broken, desperate souls. If the Lord had made all the sick people there well with one word, this would have seemed a show of divine miraculous work. However, the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ was preoccupied with the faith of all and their spiritual healing first.

- ❖ He entered a place where a huge number of the sick flock lay: the blind, lame and paralyzed. And as He is the Physician of the souls and bodies and He came to make the souls of all believers well, He chose from that flock one person to heal him to indicate oneness... in spite of the fact that He could have raised all.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Homilies on St. John*, 36:1

<sup>6</sup> *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 17:3

<sup>7</sup> *St. Augustine: One the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 17:1

- ❖ This pool and that water seem to denote the Jewish population (Revelation 17:15) That water, that is to say the Jewish people, was shut into the five Books of Moses, or the five porches. These Books bring in the sick but do not make them well. The Law judges the sinners but does not make them well. That is why the letter without grace makes men sinners and those sinners, if they confess, they are saved.

This is what the apostle says: "For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law." (Galatians 3:21) He completes, "But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." (Galatians 3:22) What promise is greater than this? Do not those words explain the five porches and the sick flock?<sup>8</sup>

- ❖ In the number 40 there is an implication of perfection of righteousness: a life of struggle, trouble, self control, fasts and tribulation. This is the practice of righteousness: that you endure and reject this world, and not only abstain from food for the body. This is what we seldom do. As for refraining from loving this world, this is what we must always practice. Thus the law saves those who forbear this world because they cannot love the eternal unless they stop loving the temporal... The concern is man's love; consider it the soul's hand, if it holds something it cannot hold another thing and so that it may be able to hold what it is given, it must leave what it actually holds.

The perfection of righteousness (according to the law) is shown in the number 40. What completes the number 40? That man controls his love of this world. He must control his love of temporal matter which may destroy him... For this reason the Lord fasted forty days, and so did Moses and Elijah. He Who gave His two servants the power to fast for forty days, could He not fast 80 days or a hundred? Then why did He not fast more than He granted His servants to do, except that in that number 40 is the mystery of fasting and renunciation of this world?... What does the apostle say: "the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Galatians 6:14) The number 40 is complete.

Why is there perfection of righteousness in the number 40?

It is said in the Psalms "I will sing a new song to You, O God;

On a harp of ten strings I will sing praises to You." (Psalm 144:9) The harp indicates the ten commandments which are the law which the Lord came, not to destroy but to fulfill. And it is clear that the law itself throughout the world has four directions, east, west, south and north as the Scripture says... Therefore, the number 40 is renunciation of the world; it is the implementation of the law. Now love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:10; Galatians 5:14) However the commandment of love is double "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart... and the second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself" Whoever fails to achieve these two commandments has the weakness of the number 38. St. Augustine<sup>9</sup>.

- ❖ Number 40 attracts our attention as a sacred number of perfection. What I suggest is well known to you, beloved, because the Holy Bible testifies often to this truth. IN that fasting

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<sup>8</sup> St. Augustine: *ON the Gospel of St. John, tractate 17:2*

<sup>9</sup> *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 75:7-10*

this number of days is, as you know, good. Moses fasted forty days, and so did Elijah and many others. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ Himself completed this number infast. Moses represents the law; Elijah represents the prophets, and the Lord the Gospel. For this reason all three appeared on the mountain: The Lord manifested Himself to His disciples in the glory of His shining face and clothes. He appeared in the middle between Moses and Elijah as testimony of the law, the prophets and the Gospel<sup>10</sup>.

- ❖ The patience of the paralytic is amazing because he remained thirty-eight years waiting every year to be freed from his sickness. He stood fast and did not leave the place. Contemplate this man who remained paralytic for thirty-eight years seeing, every year, other people healed of their diseases and looking at himself tied down by his paralysis, and yet not despairing. St. John Chrysostom
- ❖ What does the angel announce by this symbol, except that he declares the descent of the Holy Spirit who in our days passes and sanctifies the water when He is called upon through the prayers of the priest? This angel was the ambassador of the Holy Spirit since it is through the grace of the Spirit that the medicine acts in the weaknesses of the soul and mind. Thus, like God the Father and Christ, the Spirit also has the same servants. He fills all; all things; all acts in all in the same way as the acting God the Father and the Son. St. Ambrose<sup>11</sup>.

Bede observes that 38 is 40 minus 2. If 40 indicates the perfection of virtues and it is 10x4, that is to say the perfection of the law (10) and the four Gospels (4), then the absence of 2 which are concerned with the love of God and of the neighbor reveals a man in fact being sick for a long time. Such people can correct their depravity through the gift of the Holy Spirit when the Spirit shakes their lethargy so they hurry and carry the burden of brotherly love so that they may see their Creator.

When Jesus saw him lying there,  
And knew that he already had been in that condition a long time,  
He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?"

When the Lord Jesus Christ went up to Jerusalem, He did not visit the castles of the rich. He visited the hospitals to offer His love and mercy to the sick. For He came to the world for the sake of the needy and the sick. The Lord may have concentrated on this particular sick man because he had been at that place sick and deprived for a longer time than the others. The Lord rejoices in serving those who have no hope or support.

"Do you want to be made well?!" with that question Christ wanted to arouse in the man faith, hope, and the strong desire to be made well. The Lord Jesus Christ addresses the same question to every soul that may be longing for healing through the heavenly Physician of souls.

- ❖ The Lord Jesus Christ did not say to the paralytic, "Do you want Me to make you well?" That is because the man did not yet see the great figure of Christ. So Christ's question was "Do you want to be made well?"
- ❖ He asked him this question, not because He wanted to know (that the man wanted to be

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<sup>10</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 17:4-8

<sup>11</sup> *Of the Holy Spirit Book I: 7:88*

cured). The Lord did not need that; He rather wanted to point out the man's perseverance and that it was for this reason that He left the others and came to this man.

The perseverance of the paralytic is amazing. He hoped for every year of the thirty-eight years, to be healed of his disease. He continued lying down and did not withdraw from the pool...

We should be ashamed, beloved, we should be ashamed and sigh over our extreme languor.

He kept waiting for thirty-eight years without getting what he hoped; yet in spite of that he did not retreat. He did not fail because of negligence on his part. He failed, rather, because of the jostling, the violence and the trouble of the others. All that did not cause him to be apathetic. Whereas, we, if we persevered in prayer for ten days for a certain request and did not obtain it, our zeal declines. St. John Chrysostom<sup>12</sup>.

"The sick man answered Him,  
'Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up;  
but while I am coming, another steps down before me.'" [7]

In what he says about the paralyzed (Matthew 9:2) who was healed by the Lord Jesus Christ, St. John Chrysostom stresses the meekness of this paralytic. Usually, when a person lies in his bed for all those years, he is furious and suffers from psychological and nervous trouble. Nevertheless, when this man heard the question of the Lord Jesus Christ, he did not angrily say, "Don't you see me watching for the angel to come down to stir the water? How can you ask me if I wanted to be made well?" Instead, he answered the Lord Jesus Christ with amazing docility.

The sick man complained that he had no friends to help him. Even those who were healed went away in good health and met their relatives and friends. Not one of them was concerned about this poor man. He also complained that he was unable to compete with the others so that he may be the first to throw himself into the pool, for many stepped down into the water before him.

In the past when interest was in human beings instead of in the Messiah as the Physician and the Medicine for cure, it was said "is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" (Jeremiah 8:22) This is the complaint of the paralytic: he does not find anybody who would heal him or give him medicine. And yet, here is the Balm Himself, the Physician Himself standing in front of him granting him Himself the Mystery of Recovery.

The paralytic was looking for a man to throw him into the pool when the angel comes down, so that he may obtain recuperation. And here is the Father Himself asking a Man able to act with justice and the pursuit of truth to descend to the world and forgive the world's sins. The Father, then found no such Man but His Word Incarnate. The Lord says, "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if

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<sup>12</sup> *Homilies on St. John*, 36:2

ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it." (Jeremiah 5:1) He also says, "And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor" (Isaiah 59:16)

- ❖ Listen to the words of this paralytic and consider his great sorrow. Who is more deserving of pity than he who says these words? Have you seen a heart broken because of a long illness? Have you known how provoked by oppression he is? Yet, he did not blaspheme as most people do in their adversity. He did not curse his day, nor did he think the question was difficult to answer. He did not say to Christ, "Have you come to make fun of me, since you ask me if I want to be made well?" But he said in great humility, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool." In spite of the fact that he did not know who was asking him that question, nor did he feel that that Person intended to heal him, he just described his whole condition meekly and did not demand anything more. He seemed like a patient merely describing his illness to his physician.
- ❖ Now, no angel stirs the water; the Lord of the angels does everything. The sick cannot say, "I have no man"; he cannot say "while I am coming, another steps down before me" [7] For though it is necessary that He comes to the whole world, Grace is not consumed; the Powers do not cease, but remain as great as ever. Just as a ray of the sun gives light every day and yet is not used up and its light does not decrease, so is even more the power of the Spirit that does not in any way diminish through the grace given to many. St. John Chrysostom<sup>13</sup>.
- ❖ But who makes the sick well? He who descends into the pool. And when does the sick step down into the pool? When the angel gives the sign by stirring the water. So was that pool sanctified when the angel came down and stirred up the water. The people saw the water stirring and so they realized that the angel was present. And if anyone then stepped into the pool, he was healed. Why was not this sick man healed? Let us consider his own words. He says "I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me." [7] Couldn't you step down after someone stepped down before you? It is evident here that one person only was healed when the water stirred. He who stepped down first was the only one healed. St. Augustine<sup>14</sup>.

Jesus said to him,  
"Rise, take up your bed and walk." [8]

The Lord offered him recuperation in a manner that did not occur to his mind. It was not by putting him into the pool when the water was stirred up, but by a word proceeding from His divine mouth. He commanded with power and the sick man was healed.

The Lord was accustomed to leave a sign after a miracle so that His people may remember His works of love. Thus, when he fed the crowds, He ordered His disciples to take up the fragments. Also when He changed water into wine, He told the servants to take it to the reclining guests. Again, when He healed the lepers, He ordered them to go and show themselves to the priests to testify to their healing. Here, in this miracle, He asks the sick man to take up the

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<sup>13</sup> *Homilies on St. John*, 36:1

<sup>14</sup> *Sermon on N.T. Lessons*, 75:3

bed which carried him during his sickness.

He asked him to take up the bed to be sure that his cure was complete and that he did not obtain physical strength gradually, but immediately through God's word and command. This is the cry of the Savior on the cross as He looks upon the whole church across the ages since Adam to the end: to rise, move and enter into the Father's bosom, the heavenly home. Christ asks the church to take up the bed, that is to share the cross with Him not as a burden carried on the back, but as a throne carrying the church and as glory pouring on it. Isaiah the prophet saw this outstanding image as being the joyful story of salvation and he sang: "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." (Isaiah 60:1) The believing human race does not any more lie under the broken power of sin but rather enjoys the strength of the spirit to carry with the crucified bridegroom His cross the secret of power for salvation and to experience the glory of the Savior.

The story of the healing of this paralytic was linked with baptism since the early church. It was mentioned in some old baptism liturgies and was pictured in some Roman vaults to illustrate the power of baptism. The paralytic is shown as unable to walk; then he gets up carrying his bed on his back in an energetic, full of life way. A glorious picture about the work of baptism that raises the believer from an incurable illness to testify to the new life that he has become in Jesus Christ who rose from the dead.

- ❖ "Jesus" means "Savior", but in Greek, it means "the healer" for He is the physician of the spirits and bodies. He is the healer of the spirits: He opened the eyes of the born blind, and He guided the minds to the light. He cures the visibly paralyzed and leads the sinners to the path of repentance. He says to the paralytic: "Sin no more" and also "Take up your bed and walk" for the body was paralyzed because of the spirit's sin. Christ served the soul first so that the healing extends to the body.

Therefore, if one of you suffers in his self because of his sins, he will find Christ is his physician, and if one of you has little faith, he must say "help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24)

And if one of you feels physical pain, he must not be an unbeliever, he must rather come closer to Jesus who cures such an illness; and he must know that Jesus is the Christ. St. Cyril of Jerusalem<sup>15</sup>.

- ❖ "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2) Now the law of Christ is love and love will not be fulfilled unless we bear the burdens of others. He says, "with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:2-3)

When you were weak your neighbor carried you. Now that you are well, you must endure your neighbor. In this way you complete, O man, what was lacking in you. So "take up your bed" and when you take it up do not stand still, but rather "walk." Through your love for your neighbor and through carrying your neighbor you complete your walk. To what place do you

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<sup>15</sup> Article 10:13

walk in the path of the Lord God who commands us to love Him with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind? You must carry your neighbor, then as you walk you will go to Him with whom you wish to dwell. Therefore, "take up your bed and walk." Saint Augustine<sup>16</sup>.

"And immediately the man was made well,  
took up his bed and walked.  
And that day was the Sabbath." [9]

Why did the Lord order that man to take up his bed on the Sabbath, when the Law forbids such work, especially carrying heavy matter (Exodus 20:8, Jeremiah 17:21, Nehemiah 13:15)?

- A. This man may have been poor and if he left his bed he would have lost it. Besides he could not remain guarding his bed until the morning.
  - B. The Lord has shown that the Jews misunderstood the meaning of Sabbath. They observed it literally missing the right spiritual meaning that it is for the glory of God and the benefit of man.
  - C. Christ was emphasizing to those who were present that He is Lord of the Sabbath. All days are His without any preference between Saturday and any other day. He does the work of the Father continuously.
  - D. By carrying this bed in the middle of the religious capital and among the people coming to celebrate the feast, this man will attract the attention of the multitude. They will investigate the matter and become acquainted with the love of Christ for His people and His care for their spiritual and physical security more than for the literal observance of the law.
  - E. Christ is here testing the extent of obedience and belief of the sick man whom He has healed.
  - F. So that this may be a practical living picture of the church in the Christian era. For the prophets looked at the church in the new epoch and sang: "The Lord raises those who are bowed down" (Psalm 146:8) "O Lord, save thy people... and with them the blind and the lame" (Jeremiah 31:7-8). Therefore all the days of the church are Sabbath (rest) continuously and a joyful continual feast.
- ❖ Observe the faith of this paralytic: when he heard Christ's saying, "Rise, take up your bed and walk", he did not laugh; he got up and became well. He did not disobey but rather took up his bed and walked. Saint John Chrysostom.

## 2. Resistance of the Jews

The Jews therefore said to him who was cured:  
"It is the Sabbath.  
It is not lawful for you to carry your bed." [10]

The leaders of the Jews argued with him and accused him of breaking the Sabbath. He defiled the Sabbath and as he did that openly and deliberately in the middle of the town, he deserved to be stoned to death. They did not realize that it was their envy and hatred of the Lord

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<sup>16</sup> On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 17:9



Christ that defiled their Sabbath and feasts. The Lord Christ went to the paralytic to grant him a new life and new possibilities. But the authorities call the man to find a pretext for his death. As the Psalmist says, "The wicked watches the righteous, and seeks to slay him" (Psalm 37:32)

He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk'" [11]

The answer of the sick man is a testimony for the Lord Christ. The man says, "He who made me well said to me take up your bed and walk." The man does not place the responsibility on the Lord Christ; nor does he wish to change the accusation of breaking the Sabbath. He only stresses the fact that It is impossible for Him who has the power to heal in this sovereign manner to make a mistake or do evil. The man means to say, "I obeyed Him because I trust in His holiness and righteousness."

He who has authority over chronic illnesses in such a supernatural way, cannot be considered breaking the law. He who has such love and mercy must necessarily observe the law which is accomplished through practical love.

The vitality that the man gained was immeasurably more precious than the literal observance of the Sabbath. He, therefore, left the interpretation of observing the Sabbath to Him Who gave him that new life in which he enjoyed tranquillity.

- ❖ Because it was the Sabbath, the Jews were angry, in ignorance, since they were sick with coarse literalness they were, in their clinging stupidity, more shackled than the paralytic. Their minds were paralyzed, their behavior weak, they were truly those to whom was said, "Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees." (Isaiah 35:3) But they were furiously angry claiming that even He who granted the law must necessarily honor it. St. Cyril, the Great<sup>17</sup>.
- ❖ The paralytic did not disobey Christ. Consequently he was immediately healed, and he took up his bed and walked. After that, what he did was even much more important. When he accepted what Christ told him at the beginning, that was not surprising, for he had no one to help him. However, when the Jews surrounded him, madly blaming him and besieged him saying, "it is not lawful for you to carry your bed", he did not listen to their madness, but in clear frank words proclaimed his benefactor in the midst of their synagogue. Listen to what he said to them: "He who made me well said to me, 'take up your bed and walk'" He was almost saying to them: you are mad to order me not to consider Him a teacher, He Who relieved me of my long sickness, and you ask me not to obey all his commands.

Nevertheless, if the paralytic wished to offend them, it would have been possible for him to answer in a different way. As, for example, say: if what I am doing is wrong, it is not my fault but the mistake of him who ordered me to do so. Yet, he did not say that, nor did he beg their pardon. On the contrary, in a glorious voice he acknowledged the charity granted to him and announced in clear strong words, "He who made me well said to me, take up your bed and walk." St. John Chrysostom.

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<sup>17</sup> K3 F4

"Then they asked him, Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk?'" [12]

Whit that question they tried to insult the Lord Christ not only by supposing Him a mere man, but by asking scornfully "Who is the Man...?" meaning there is no comparison between that man who cured you and God who instituted the law.

- ❖ Reflect on how full of scheming were their words. They did not ask the paralytic who healed him. They said nothing about that; instead they mentioned the act which they considered a sin and said, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'take up your bed and walk'" St. John Chrysostom.

"But the one who was healed did not know who it was,  
for Jesus had withdrawn,  
a multitude being in that place." [13]

He may have heard the name of Jesus, but as he lay by the pool for 38 years he had not seen the Lord and had not known much about Him. He was not even able to recognize Him if he saw Him.

Saint Augustine considers that God rested on the seventh day is an allusion to the completion of the work of redemption on the cross on the sixth day (Friday) and His rest in the tomb on the seventh day <sup>18</sup>.

- ❖ It is difficult to see Christ in the multitude, therefore, solitude is necessary for our minds. In solitary meditation it is possible to see God. A multitude is full of noise. Vision requires secrecy. Do not search for Christ in a crowd; He is not like one among a crowd; He is above all the crowd. It is true that the Lord saw him in the multitude; however He knew him in the temple. The man came to the Lord; he saw Him in the temple; he saw Him in the consecrated sacred place. Saint Augustine<sup>19</sup>.
- ❖ The Lord announces openly that the secret of the Sabbath as a sign to keep one day was given to the Jews temporarily. But the completion of the secret was realized in Christ Himself. Saint Augustine<sup>20</sup>.
- ❖ If you say: what was Christ's aim in hiding Himself? I shall answer: Christ hid Himself so that the testimony may not be dubious. AS the paralytic who now enjoyed good health has become a witness for the charity he has received, he is fit to be believed. On the other hand, the Lord did not want to inflame the anger of the Jews even more. For by merely looking at that person those who envied him were ablaze. Therefore, the Lord withdrew and left the work He did speak for itself to them. The Lord did not talk about Himself. He let them talk to the man who was cured and to those who were interested. Saint John Chrysostom.

"Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him:

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<sup>18</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 17:15*

<sup>19</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 17:11*

<sup>20</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 17:13*

See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you." [14]

When that man felt how merciful God was to him, he went to the temple probably to thank God for healing him. It was as though he was singing

"I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving,  
And will call upon the name of the Lord.  
I will pay my vows to the Lord  
Now in the presence of all His people.  
In the courts of the Lord's house,  
In the midst of you O Jerusalm." (Psalm 116:17-19)

This probably happened the same day he was cured.

The Lord Christ met the man in the temple. It may be that as they accused Him of espising the Sabbath, He came to the temple to stress His sanctification of the Sabbath and His preoccupation with collective prayer on that day. He came in particular to grant spiritual insight, notwithstanding His knowledge tht His numerous enemies wanted to kill Him. Nevertheless, since there was an urgnet need to meet a person to build him, Christ did not refrain from going for this man's sake. He has healed the sick man's body, and now He will declare His interest in healing the man's soul from sin.

The Lord Christ made it clear for the man that He knew the secrets of the past: "Sin no more", thus explaining that the man's past sin was the cause of his long illness. The Lord warns against sin that leads to the hospital, the Bethesda pool, to spend 38 years; or rather to hell to be shut off eternally in deprivation from the heavenly glory and in suffering with the enemy of good, Satan.

Sometimes, we have some sickenss because of our sins. This is a divine punishment so that we return to God. As the Psalmist says:

"Fools, because of their transgression,  
And because of their iniquities, were afflicted.  
Their soul abhorred all manner of food  
And they drew near to the gates of death.  
Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble,  
And He saved them out of their distresses." (Psalm 107:17-19)

Notice that the Lord does not refer to the sins at the time He cures the sick, except in the incurable cases, when the illness lasts for a long time as in this case and as in the situation mentioned in Mark 2:5. It may be that because those who lived a long time in sickness thought that having no dealings with people, they are righteous without sin. Therefore He asks them to penetrate deeper in their souls to discover the weakness of their nature and return to God. Such people are in need of greater watchfulness than the others who realize they are sinners.

This may be what Christ said to that man in the temple. As he was eprived of visiting the temple for 38 years during his illness, he may be sitracted by the building, by meeting people and

by what takes place around him. Therefore, Christ wanted to turn the man's eyes to his own depth to beware of sin in his new life. Indeed, I do not think any language can express the feelings of that man when he saw the temple after all those years. May this longing be combined with the meeting with God who dwells in the depth of the soul!

- ❖ When we are baptized we are told "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you." <sup>21</sup> ST. Jerome.
- ❖ It is a simple matter that you obtain something; but it is more important that you are able to keep what you obtain. Faith itself and the honored birth are full of beneficial life not by being obtained but by being preserved. Perseverance to the end, and not the temporary practice of that, keeps the human bien for God directly. Solomon, Saul and many others as they did not continue to the end in the path of the Lord, they were not able to maintain the grace conferred upon them. When Christ's disciple withdraws from the Way, the blessing of Christ also abandons him<sup>22</sup>. St. Cyrian.
- ❖ Someone asks, "What then, is sin the cause of every illness?" No. Not all diseases but some. Some are brought about by a kind of carelessness and negligence such as excessive eating (gluttony), addiction and sloth which cause pain. Jesus wanted to secure this man's future... keeping him in good health with the benefit He offered to him and with fear of future illnesses<sup>23</sup>.
- ❖ Not only by giving the sick man's body power, but rather in another manner He gave him a strong proof of His divinity. When He says to him "Sin no more." He shows him that He knows all his past trespasses. In this way he can obtain his faith in the future<sup>24</sup>. St. John Chrysostom.

"The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who made him well." [15]

He did not say that the Lord Christ was responsible because it was He who told him 'take up your bed.' He rather testified for Him that it was He "Who made him well." He wished to glorify Jesus and, at the same time, to testify for the benefit of his hearers, maybe they think seriously about His miraculous deed.

"For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus,  
and sought to kill him,  
because He had done these things on the Sabbath." [16]

Instead of reconsidering their opinion concerning Jesus the savior of souls and healer of bodies from incurable diseases, their jealousy and envy led them to the desire of practising their father's work: persecution and murder. They found no satisfaction except in bloodshed. Their zeal in sanctifying the Sabbath was to cover up their feelings full of hatred.

### 3. Christ's Discourse about the Sabbath

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<sup>21</sup> *Against the Pelagians 3:1*

<sup>22</sup> *Letter 13 to Rogation, the priest and to other confessors: 1*

<sup>23</sup> *Hom 38. PG 59:217-218*

<sup>24</sup> *Homilies on St. John, 38*

"But Jesus answered them:  
'My Father has been working until now,  
and I have been working.'" [17]

The Lord Christ began a dialogue with the authorities who accused Him of breaking the Sabbath. This discourse was probably in the presence of the sanhedrim on the same day, or two or three days after the sick man was made well.

By saying, "My Father has been working until now" [17] He makes it clear for them that the Father created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath. He stopped His work of creation because He had completed everything. However His rest does not mean ignoring His creation. In His Sabbath He continues caring for His creation, shepherding it and managing its affairs. The Sabbath for God is work in which there is rest and joy inasmuch as He declares His love for His greatly beloved creation. If God practised the Sabbath literally like the Jewish authorities, the universe would have stopped and been destroyed because it cannot remain without divine help. Thus, the Son sanctifies the Sabbath with the continuous work of love as He cares for His beloved. HE works continuously so that all may be made well and grow in knowledge and glory. This is the meaning of the Sabbath according to the divine standard.

On the Sabbath day the male child is circumcised if he is, on that day, eight days old. On the Sabbath the priests offer sacrifices, and on the Sabbath day the shepherds give water to their sheep. All these acts do not break the Sabbath because they carry the fragrance of love. The Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath because He is "Love" itself.

"And I have been working": As He is the Son of God, He practices His Father's way Who works perpetually for the sake of His people. To stop from work of love is to break the Sabbath and corrupt it. On the other hand, to do an act of love is to sanctify the Sabbath. He has not been working like His Father as though each has His own future work. He, rather, has been working with His Father; for "All things were made through Him." Therefore, if he is accused of breaking the Sabbath, this accusation is directed towards God the Father Himself who is never separate from the Son.

The Lord Christ compares Himself to the Father: just as the Father works on the Sabbath day as on other days, so Christ can do the same. This comparison has its danger for the Jewish leaders because it conveys the meaning of equality between Jesus and the Father in the divine plan and work. Who is He who treats the subjects of the Father and the Sabbath as associated with Him?

Saint Augustine observes that the Jews were wrong in understanding the Sabbath in a corporeal way. They thought that God created the world in six days; that He got tired and wanted to be relieved from exertion on the seventh day and He, therefore sanctified that day for rest. This misinterpretation caused trouble to them. However, the spiritual meaning of the Sabbath is that when the six days, or human historical periods, pass, the day of the Lord comes being the seventh day. His rest means our rest also. As for the six days, they are:

- The first day: from Adam to Noah.

- The second day: from the Flood to Abraham.
- The third day: from Abraham to David.
- The fourth day: from David to the Babylonian captivity.
- The fifth day: from the Babylonian captivity to the coming of the Lord Christ.
- The sixth day: the present era from the coming of Christ to His last coming. On that day we take the image of God, since on that day man was created (Gen 1:27) and on that day our creation is renewed (through crucifixion on Friday).

This is how Saint Augustine sees that God works during the six days and that the sixth day is the day on which man was created and renewed to get ready for enjoying rest on the seventh day which is the day of His last coming<sup>25</sup>.

- ❖ So that we may know in a better way the equality of the Father and the Son, behold that when the Father speaks the Son works. Likewise the Father works and the Son speaks. The Father works, as it is written "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." You notice that it was said to the Son "speak a word, and my servant will be healed." (Matt 8:8) and the Son says to the Father, "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am" (John 17:24) so the Father does what the Son says. Saint Ambrose<sup>26</sup>.
- ❖ Surely, as the Church teaches us in accordance to the Savior's words: "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." God works (creates) our spirits everyday with which we increase and work; and He will not stop being the Creator<sup>27</sup>.
- ❖ He gives continuously; He always grants gifts. It is not enough that He grants me a blessing once. It befits Him that He gives me grace at all times. I ask so that I may obtain and when I obtain I ask again. I crave for God's generosity and if He is not late in giving, I do not lack interest in accepting His gift. As much as I drink I thirst. Saint Jerome<sup>28</sup>.
- ❖ If someone asks you, how has the Father been working, He who has ended His work on the seventh day? If only he learns the manner with which He works. What are His works? He cares for the concerns of everything He did and He directs them. When you see the sun rising and the moon turning in its orb; when you see the lakes, springs and rivers, rain and the natural seasons for plants, the nature of our body and the body of undiscerning animals and all other matter with which this universe exists you will learn that God has not stopped working. For, "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matt. 5:45) He also "clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven" (Matt 6:30) and when He speaks about the birds He says, "your heavenly Father feeds them." Saint John Chrysostom<sup>29</sup>.
- ❖ He said that to them because they kept the Sabbath in a corporeal sense imagining God as though He slept after He tired of creating the world until that day. He sanctified that day He began to rest as from weariness.

Now, concerning our old fathers, the mystery of the Sabbath has been established, that

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<sup>25</sup> 1 Cf. *Sermon on N.T. Lessons*, 75:4-6

<sup>26</sup> 2 *On the Holy Spirit*, Book 2, Jutr. (2).

<sup>27</sup> 1 *To Pammachius Against John of Jerusalem*, 22.

<sup>28</sup> 2 *Letter* 133:6

<sup>29</sup> 3 *Homilies on St. John*, 38:2

which we, Christians, observe spiritually by refraining from low work, that is to say from any sin, because the Lord says: "whoever commits sin is a slave of sin." We obtain repose in our hearts and this is the spiritual rest.

AS for the saying that God rested, that is because He did not create a new creation after He ended His work which He made.

In addition the Holy Bible calls it rest in order that we may be urged to do good works after which we rest. It is written in the Book of Genesis "God created everything, it was very good. And He rested on the seventh day" so that you may realize, O man, that it was said of God Himself that He rested after good work, and you may expect rest for yourself after you practise good work.

Since God, after creating man in His own image and likeness and in that He completed all His work which was very good, then He rested on the seventh day, it follows that you should not expect rest for yourself unless you return to that likeness when you were created<sup>30</sup>.

- ❖ Do not think that My Father rested on the Sabbath means that He did not work. He is working even now and likewise I am working. And just as the Father is without fatigue, so is the Son without fatigue<sup>31</sup>.
- ❖ The Universal faith (of the Universal Church) is that the works of the Father and the works of the Son are not separate... AS the Father and the Son are not separate, so are the works of the Father and the works of the son not separate... What the Father does the Son and the Holy Spirit also do. For, everything was made by the word, "For He spoke, and it was done."<sup>32</sup> Saint Augustine.

Some may ask: for example, that the Lord Christ walked on the water, while the Father did not walk on the water; how then do we say that the works of the Father and of the Son are not separate? Saint Augustine answers saying: "See how the Universal Faith presents an explanation for this question: The Son walked on the sea; He put His physical feet on the waves, the body walked and the Divinity directed it, but when the body walked and the Divinity directed it, was the the Father absent? If He was absent, how does the Son say, 'but the Father who dwells in Me does the works'? If the Father who dwells in the Son, He Himself does the works, then walking on the water is the work of the Father by the Son. Consequently, this walking is the work of the Father and the Son without separation. I see both working in it. The Father will not leave the Son, nor will the Son leave the Father. Thus all that the Father works, He does not work without the Son because what the Father does He does not do without the Son."<sup>33</sup>

- ❖ Someone says: how does the eternal give birth to an eternal? As temporary flame produces temporary light, the generating flame is contemporaneous with the light that it generates. The generating flame will not precede the light in time, but from the moment the flame begins, at that same moment the light is born. Show me flame without light,

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<sup>30</sup> 1 St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 20:2

<sup>31</sup> 2. St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 20:2

<sup>32</sup> 3. St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 20:3

<sup>33</sup> 1 St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 20:6

and I will show you God the Father without the Son. Therefore, 'the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do.' This implies that 'He sees' and 'is born' concerning the Son are both the same thing. His seeing and existence are not different; nor are His strength and His Being different. All things that the Son has are from the Father, everything He has power over, or He is the same, everything is from the Father<sup>34</sup>.

- ❖ What the Father does, the Son also does. The Father made the world and the Son made the world, and also the Holy Spirit made the world. If they were three gods, there would have been three worlds. Since they are one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, there is one world that the Father created through the Son in the Holy Spirit. It follows that the Son makes what the Father makes and does not work in a different way. He makes together these matters and makes them in the same way<sup>35</sup>.
- ❖ If you see no separation in the light, why do you want separation in the work? Behold God, look at the word that is inseparable from the word that He speaks. The speaker does not speak in syllables. His word shines in the splendor of wisdom. What was said about wisdom? "She is the radiance of eternal light" (Wis 9:15). Look at the sun in the sky. It spreads its splendor on all the earth and over all the seas, and yet the light is material and simple. If you can truly separate the splendor from the sun, you can separate the Word from the Father<sup>36</sup>. Saint Augustine.

"Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him,  
because He not only broke the Sabbath,  
but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God." [18]

His justification of the sanctity of the Sabbath through Divine work, and not through refraining from work, bore the testimony that He was equal with God whom He called His Father. Therefore, they hated him more, because there is nothing that incites them more than His assertion of His divine authority. Therefore they sought all the more to kill Him, because in their opinion He blasphemed. The punishment for both accusations is death (Exodus 31:14. Lev 24:16)

Some think that what alarmed the Jewish leaders was that He called the Father His personal self Father: This is what is understood by the use of the Greek word. He, then, considers Himself equal with God.

- ❖ It is written: "My Father is greater than I." (John 14:28) It is also written "He... did not consider it robbery to be equal with God" (Philippians 2:6). It is written "He... also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God." (John 5:18) and it is written: "I and My Father are one." (John 10:30) Is it possible that He is less and equal in the same nature? No, one refers to the Divinity, the other to His body<sup>37</sup>. Saint Ambrose.

#### 4. Discourse about Eternal Life

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<sup>34</sup> 2 St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 20:8

<sup>35</sup> 3 St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 20:9

<sup>36</sup> 4 St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 20:13

<sup>37</sup> 1 *Of the Christian Faith*, Book, ch. 18 (224)



"Then Jesus answered and said to them,  
Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself,  
But what He sees the Father do;  
For whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner." [19]

In His speech He always asserts two truths: the oneness (unity) of God, and that He is one with the Father, equal with Him.

When the Jews wanted to kill Him not only because He broke the Sabbath, but also because He said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God [18] His answer was not 'Why do you want to kill me..., I am not equal with my Father.' If the Lord Christ was less than the Father in divinity, He would have been obligated to make that clear. However, He explained that there is not contradiction between Him and the Father, because what the Father does, He does through the Son who is the power and wisdom of God. "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." (John 1:3) He says what the Father sees the Son does; what does He mean by that? Does He see what the Father does and He repeats the same act? Impossible! However, as they both do the same work, so He is one with the Father in will. Therefore, He does the divine work which is according to His Father's pleasure and at the same time His own pleasure. The Son cannot do anything of Himself because of the unity that cannot be split from the Father. Also, the Father does not do anything without the Son because of the eternal unity, because the Son is the power of God, the wisdom of God, the word of God.

The created being can do something of himself; he can misconceive the matter that God cannot do because He is holy without sin. But the Son cannot do except what He sees the Father do. It is as though He says to them, if you accuse Me of breaking the Sabbath, I do not do anything except what I see the Father do; would you consider the Father breaking the Sabbath?!

In His discourse He concentrated on that He gives life to whom He will [21], that His words grant everlasting life [24], that His voice will raise the dead [25-26] and that the hour is coming when He will give life to those in the graves [28-29]

- ❖ The Father shows Him what He will do so that what is done will be through the Son<sup>38</sup>.
- ❖ Then, what we explain, our beloved, the question that we ask is how does the Word see?

How is the Father seen by means of the Word?

And what is it that the Word sees?

I do not have the audacity or carelessness to promise you that I explain that to myself or to you. I reckon your measure and know my limit...

It was meant by that, that we do not understand that the Father does some works which the Son sees, and that the Son does other works after He sees what the Father does. Rather, both the Father and the Son do the same works.

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<sup>38</sup> 1 St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 19:3

So, if the Son does the same work as the Father, and if the Father does the work through the Son, it follows that the Father does not do something, and the Son does another thing; rather the works of the Father and the Son are the very same.

I shall give you an example which is not difficult for you to understand: when we write letters we write them first with our hearts then with our hands... the heart and the hand write the letters. Do you think that the heart writes letters and the hands write different letters? The same letters are executed by the heart mentally and the hand materially.

Notice how these things are done but not in the same manner. Therefore, it was not enough for the Lord to say, "whatever the Father does" but it was necessary to add "in like manner"...

If He does these things in like manner, then let them wake up; let the Jews be destroyed, and the Christians believe, let the heretic be convinced, because the Son is equal with the Father<sup>39</sup>. Saint Augustine.

- ❖ If you ask: then, what is the meaning of Christ saying, "the Son can do nothing of Himself"? I shall answer: this means that He cannot do anything opposed or strange to His Father. This statement proves His equality with His Father and His agreement with Him very much.

Christ's saying: "the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do" is like saying "it is inaccessible to me and impossible that I do a contrary thing." And His saying "for whatever He does, the Son also does" clarifies His complete likeness to His Father.

- ❖ What is the meaning of "the Son can do nothing of Himself"? He can do nothing of Himself opposed to the Father, not something different, not something strange. This shows the more, complete equality and agreement.

Why did He not say "He can do nothing opposite" instead of "He can do nothing"? So that He may prove there is no change, but accurate equality. This statement does not charge Him with weakness, but rather is witness to His great power... as the statement "it is impossible for God to make a mistake" does not charge Him with weakness, but testifies to His inexpressible power.

Thus the meaning here is that He can do nothing, that is to say, it is impossible that He does anything opposite to the Father<sup>40</sup>. Saint John Chrysostom.

- ❖ Neither the Son nor the Spirit has anything of Himself, because the Trinity does not speak about anything out of His Self... Let no one think that there is any difference in the work, in time or direction, between the Father and the Son; let him rather believe in the unity of the same action<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> 1 St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 18:8

<sup>40</sup> 1 Hom 38. PG 59: 221-222

<sup>41</sup> 2 Of the Holy Spirit Book 2:12:134m 136

- ❖ The freedom (of the Holy Trinity) is hidden, not in the existence of differences, but in the unity of the will<sup>42</sup>.
- ❖ The Son was entitled to, and affirmed His equality with the Father, a true equality, regarding all difference in the Trinity as unlikely<sup>43</sup>. Saint Ambrose.
- ❖ Christ made everything... not in the sense that the Father lacked the power to create His works, but that He rather wanted the Son to judge His works, so God gave Him the record of the created things. So the Son says, honoring His Father, "the Son can do nothing but what He sees the Father do, for whatever He does, the Son also does" (John 5:19) He also says "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." So, there is no contradiction in the work, for the Lord says in the Gospels, "And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine" (John 17:10)

We learn this with certainty in the two Testaments, the Old and the New. For He who said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1:26) certainly spoke to an hypostasis with Him. This is shown in the words of the Psalmist: "he said and they were. He commanded and they were created." (Ps. 148:5) So it is as though the Father commanded and spoke, and the Son made everything as the Father commanded<sup>44</sup>. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem.

[Saint Augustine warns us against material interpretation]

- ❖ He did not say, "the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He hears the Father command." He said, "the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do." Look, do you understand that in this way: the Father does something; the Son listens to see what He also does, and that He does another thing similar to what the Father does.

What the Father makes, through whom does He make that? Unless it is through the Son. If not through the Word, you blaspheme against the Gospel" All things were made through Him." (John 1:3)

Therefore, what the Father makes, He makes through the Word. So, if He makes through the Word, He makes through the Son. Who, then, is that other who listens to make something He sees the Father make?<sup>45</sup>

- ❖ The Father does not make things, and the Son makes other things. Everything that the Father makes, He makes through the Son. The Son raised Lazarus from the dead; did not the Father raise him? The Son gave sight to the blind, did not the Father grant him sight? The Father and the Son act in the Holy Spirit. This is the Trinity. The work of the Trinity is one; the greatness one, the eternity one, the works one. The Father did not create some people, the Son others, and the Holy Spirit some others. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit creates one same man... Saint Augustine.
- ❖ Whoever attributes weakness to the Son, attributes it to the Father also. The shepherd carries the whole flock and not only this or that section of it... The Holy Bible promises

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<sup>42</sup> 3 *Of the Holy Spirit* Book 1:17:112

<sup>43</sup> 4 *Of the Holy Spirit* Book 2:8:69

<sup>44</sup> 1 *Lecture* 11:23

<sup>45</sup> 2 *Sermon on N.T. Lessons*, 76:9

abundance of grace, but we acknowledge its scarcity<sup>46</sup>. Saint Jerome.

- ❖ Why is it written: "the Son does the same things" not "similar to those things" except that you may judge that the Son is one in the same works of the Father, not an imitation of what the Father works?

What is the meaning of "what He sees"?

Is the Son in need of physical eyes? No. For if the followers of Arius affirm that concerning the Son, the Father, then is in need of physical works so that the Son may see them to make them.

Then, what is meant by "the Son can do nothing of Himself"?... Is there anything impossible for the power and wisdom of God? Let these people understand that these are two attributes for the Son of God whose power is undoubtedly not a gift He obtains from another. But, as He is the life and does not rely on another to grant Him life, for He gives life to the others because He is the life; likewise He is the Word (1 Cor 1:24) not as an ignorant being asking for wisdom, but as making the others wise from His store. Similarly, He is the power, not as one who obtains it and in his weakness needs more power, but He rather grants power to the powerful<sup>47</sup>. Saint Ambrose.

"For the Father loves the Son,  
and shows Him all things that He Himself does;  
and He will show Him greater works than these,  
that you may marvel." [20]

The two verbs "loves" and "shows" occur in the Greek language in the present continuous and signify love and sight as working continuously without interruption. This is love of the complete unity in the same substance. Therefore, "Aghabi" was not used, but rather "Filin" and seeing the continuous work which denotes the partnership in the same divine work.

The works which are greater than healing the paralytic is raising the dead. [21] And His resurrection and judgement of the world. [22]

- ❖ This shows that all exists through one will, one authority and one strength... Since Christ does nothing of Himself, if Christ does everything like the Father... because He did not say that "everything that He sees the Father doing He does" but "He sees the Father do."<sup>48</sup> Saint John Chrysostom.
- ❖ It is much greater that a dead person is given life, than that a sick person is cured. These are great deeds.

However, when does the Father show these deeds to the Son?

Does not the Son know them?

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<sup>46</sup> 3 Letter 69:1

<sup>47</sup> 1 Of the Christian Faith, 4:4:40-43

<sup>48</sup> 1 Hom 38. PG 59:221-222

The Speaker Himself, does He not know how to raise the dead?

Did He need to learn how to raise the dead back to life, He through Whom all things were made? He who brought us to life when we were nonexistent, did He need to learn how we may be raised from the dead?

What, then, do His words mean?...

He says to us once what befits His glory, and another time what befits His meekness. He Himself the Most High deigned to come down so that He may lift us up high we who are low.

What then does He say: "and He will show Him greater work than these, that you may marvel." [20] What He shows to us is not for His sake. For as the Father shows Him is for our sake. He, therefore, says "that you may marvel."

Why does He not say: "the Father will show you" but says the Father will show the Son? That is because we also are members of the Son and what the members learn He learns in some way in His members.

How does He learn in us? As He suffers also in us.

Where do we prove that He suffers in us? From the voice coming from the sky: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4)<sup>49</sup> Saint Augustine.

"For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them even so the Son gives life to whom He will" [21]

The Father raised the dead as He raised the Sarephath Zidon widow's son, at the time of the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17:22) and the son of the Shunammite (2 Kings 4:32-35) at the time of Elisha the prophet. The Son raises whom He will as what happened to Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:35-42), the Nain widow's son (Luke 7:11-15) and Lazarus in Bethany (John 11:14-44). He gives life as He will, not by asking for strength from outside as in the case of the prophets, and also His disciples. He has absolute authority over life! He has the keys of Hades and of Death (Rev 1:18). He has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens (Rev 3:7). He kills and makes alive (1 Samuel 2:6).

- ❖ The expression reveals an unchanging strength... equality in authority... "for whatever He (the Father) does, the Son also does", shows that He continues in doing everything that the Father does, whether you say raising the dead, forming bodies, forgiving sins or any other thing. He does in like manner as related to Who gave birth to Him<sup>50</sup>. Saint John Chrysostom.
- ❖ This, absolutely, does not mean that the Son gives life to some, and the Father raises others. It means that the Father and the Son raise the same persons, because the Father

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<sup>49</sup> 2 ST. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 21:6-7

<sup>50</sup> 1 Hom 29 PG 59:223

makes all things through the Son<sup>51</sup>. Saint Augustine.

- ❖ In this way the equality of the Son with the Father is simply affirmed through the unity in raising the dead. The Son gives life just like the Father. So that you may realize, here, His eternal life and authority<sup>52</sup>. Saint Ambrose.

"For the Father judges no one,  
but has committed all judgement to the Son." [22]

This asserts that the judging Father does not act without the Son; nor does the judging Son act without the Father. They have one authority and they work together.

The Father judges no one, not because He has no authority, but because this is His pleasure that the Son who sacrificed Himself judges humanity. The Father created us through the Son, redeemed us through His death, and judges us through Him. Christ became the head of the Church through His work of salvation. He became above all (Eph. 1:11). He is the head of every man (1 Cor. 11:3); therefore, He completes that by the pleasure of His believers in participating in His glory. He was the One who began the battle against the kingdom of darkness, and He announces its total destruction in the Last Judgement. If the Son, in His humility became the Son of Man and suffered death on the cross, He also appears as Son of Man to embarrass and humiliate those who rejected Him and pierced Him with the spear of disbelief in Him.

As the Jews asked for His judgement and murder legally, He declared that He is the One who judges and will judge all humanity the Day of Judgement.

- ❖ We need, dearly beloved, great effort in every respect because we shall give account of, and will be asked precisely about, our words and deeds.

Our interest should not be in what happens now, but in what will happen then when we stand before the solemn trial. "For we must all 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 good or bad." (2 Cor. 5:10)

Let us mentally enact this judgement all the time, so that we may be able to persevere at all times in virtue... For He who forgives our trespasses now will judge us, He who dies for us will appear to judge all the human race as the apostle says, "To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation." (Heb 9:28). Therefore, He says here "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgement to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father." [22-23]...

To understand "has committed" and "is born" listen to what was said elsewhere: "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself" [26] What then? Did He give birth to Him first and granted life to Him later?

Was He born without life? Even the devils will not imagine this because this is extreme

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<sup>51</sup> 2 Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 62:4

<sup>52</sup> 3 Of the Christian Faith, 4:10:129

stupidity and evil.

Thus, just as granting life means giving birth to Him who is life, granting judgement is giving birth to Him who is judge.

And lest when you hear that the Father is His source, you conjecture that there is a difference in essence or a lack in honor, He said He will come and judge you, proving by that His equality with the Father. For, He who has the authority to punish and judge whom He will, has the same authority as the Father<sup>53</sup>. Saint John Chrysostom.

❖ "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgement to the Son." [22]... When the Son judges, does the Father remain without work and does not judge?... This was said because in the Last Judgement, the Son only will appear to the human beings; the Father will disappear and announce the Son.

How will the Son be declared? In the form of His ascension because the form of Divinity is hidden with the Father, but the form of the Son is declared to the human beings.

How did they see Him go? In the body which they touched and held, and the wounds they ascertained when they touched. He appeared to them in this body for forty days, declaring His self in truth, not in illusion, in falseness, in a shadow or spirit, but in Himself. He did not deceive them: "Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." (Luke 24:39). This body became truly fit to inhabit heaven, not submitting to death, not changing with time<sup>54</sup>. Saint Augustine.

"that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father  
He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him." [23]

If the Son is honored just as the Father is honored, the Son has the same honor. All creatures, the heavenly and earthly, worship Him and devote themselves to Him, which is appropriate to God only, for He with the Father is the One God.

❖ Is the Son inferior because He said He was sent? I hear of sending, not of separation...

Between two human beings, the sender is greater than he who is sent. However, human affairs deceive men; on the other hand, the divine purify. Do not look at human affairs in which the sender appears to be greater than he who is sent... But in spite of that there are many cases when the greater is chosen to be sent by the one less than him.

The sun sends its rays but is not separated from the rays.

The lamp spreads light and is not separated from that light. I see transmission without separation...

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<sup>53</sup> 1 Homilies on St. John, 39:1

<sup>54</sup> 2 St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 21:12

A person who sends another person remains behind him, while the person who is sent precedes. Does the sender go with whom he sends? As for the Father who sent the Son, He is not separate from the Son... The Father who sends is not separate from the Son who is sent, because the Sender and the Sent is one<sup>55</sup>. Saint Augustine.

- ❖ Do you not see how the honor of the Son is connected to the honor of the Father. Someone may say: What?! We see the same thing in the case of the apostles: Christ says "He who receives you receives Me." (Matt 10:40). In here He says this because He cares for His servants who are His. On the other hand, when He speaks about Himself and the Father, He says that because the essence is one, and the glory is one with the Father. He, therefore, did not say about the apostles, 'so that they honor them'; but here, He says, in truth, "He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father" [23]. When there are two kings, he who insults one of them, insults the other also, especially if one of the two kings is the son of the other. Likewise, he who hurts his soldiers is considered having hurt the king but in a different manner<sup>56</sup>. Saint John Chrysostom.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My words and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life,  
and shall not come into judgement,  
but has passed from death into life." [24]

His instructions, that is to say, the gospel of His salvation, are the seeds of eternal life which conquer death forever. When planted in the heart they raise the believer above eternal death and judgment on the Lord's Great Day. The believer will not enter the city of death where the spirits that deprived themselves from the source of life are imprisoned. The soul of the believer will cross to the empire of life where the believer will receive a new citizenship instead of the town of death. He will enjoy a heavenly residence to live there eternally in heavenly glory and speak a heavenly language.

Though eternal life has no relation to time, yet the deposit for this grant is offered in the present life, so that we may grow in it and enjoy its perfection in the future life.

- ❖ He did not say 'he who hears My word and believes in Me' (instead of believes in Him who sent Me) because in spite of the myriad miracles He performed over a long time, they still doubted Him. When He spoke later in this manner saying, "if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death" (John 8:51), they said to Him "Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.'" (John 8:52) Therefore, so that they may not get very angry, here, behold what He says? "he who hears My word, and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life" [24] This statement has a great effect on the acceptance of what He says, when they learn that when they believe whom they hear they believe the Father also. When they accept this easily they can accept the remainder of His discourse easily. His conversation in a humble way contributed to and introduced them to heavenly concerns. For, after He says, "has everlasting life" He adds: "And shall not come into judgement, but has passed from death

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<sup>55</sup> 1 St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 21:17

<sup>56</sup> 2 Homilies on St. John, 39:2



into life." [24]<sup>57</sup>

- ❖ In these two respects He caused His sayings to be easily accepted. First, because it is in the Father that we believe; then he who believes enjoys many blessings. Not coming into judgement means no punishment, because here He does not speak about death, but about eternal death and also about life without death<sup>58</sup>. Saint John Chrysostom.
- ❖ As human beings love to live on this earth, they are promised life; and as they fear death very much, they are promised eternal life.

What do you love? That you live. You will obtain that.

What do you fear? That you die. You will have everlasting life...

Let us love eternal life, in that we understand how we need to strive very much for eternal life<sup>59</sup>. Saint Augustine.

- ❖ The authority of the Son does not increase, but our knowledge of that authority increases. What we learn does not add anything to His being, but rather adds to our benefit so that through our knowledge of the Son we obtain eternal life. Thus, our knowledge of the Son of God is not glory to Him, it is rather our benefit that is meant<sup>60</sup>. Saint Ambrose.
- ❖ In spite of its union with God, the soul does not enjoy full and absolute happiness; but the more it enjoys His beauty, its longing for Him increases.

The words of the Bridegroom are spirit and life (John 5:24) and whoever clings to the spirit becomes a spirit. Whoever clings to life passes from death into life, as the Lord said.

In this way, the virgin spirit yearns always to come nearer to the spring of spiritual life. The spring is the mouth of the Bridegroom from which issue the words of everlasting life. He fills the mouth that approaches Him like David the prophet who attracted a spirit through his mouth (Ps. 119:131).

As it is necessary for a person who drinks from the spring to put his mouth on the mouth of the spring, and as the Lord Himself is the spring as He says: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink." (John 7:37), therefore, the thirsty souls wish to put their mouths on the mouth from which life springs and say: "Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth" (Song 1:2)

He who grants life to all, and wants to save all, wishes that everyone enjoys a share of these kisses, because the kisses purify the souls from all uncleanness<sup>61</sup>. Saint Gregory of Nyssa.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is,  
when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God;  
and those who hear will live." [25]

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<sup>57</sup> 1 Homilies on St. John, 39:2

<sup>58</sup> 2 Hom 39. PG 59: 222

<sup>59</sup> 1 Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 77:2

<sup>60</sup> 2 Of the Christian Faith, 5:6:68-69

<sup>61</sup> 3 "The Song of Songs by Saint Gregory, bishop of Nyssa; translated by Dr. George Nawar, 1993, Sermon 1

Some people differentiate between the "word" of the Lord Christ [24] and His "voice" [25]. His word is the gospel of His salvation where the believer finds, through the cross, the new life instead of death and enjoys freedom instead of slavery, for the Lord says, "My word is spirit and life." As for His voice, it is in His word where the Bride delights in the voice of her Bridegroom and her heart is filled with the ecstasy of love. She feels His divine tenderness and accepts nothing instead: "My sheep hear My voice" (John 10:27)

The Holy Bible indicates three kinds of death: natural death, or that of the body, spiritual death, and eternal death. The first occurs when the spirit separates from the body; the second is when the spirit is separated from God, and the third happens when the spirit and the body together separate from God in the world to come. Accordingly, there are three kinds of life: natural life in this world where the body and the spirit work in unity together, spiritual life when the spirit enjoys union with God who guides her through the Holy Spirit, and everlasting life when the body shares with the spirit heavenly glory in the bosom of the Father.

With the coming of the Lord Christ the hour has come so that the spirit rises from its death or its separation from God the source of its life, and enjoys the new life here. This new life prepares the believer for the second coming of the Lord Christ when the dead will arise so that he bodies share with the spirits a glorious everlasting life. This is realized through the command of the Lord Christ when the dead hear His voice.

In His first coming, He speaks to the spirit and raises it from death. In His last coming, He orders and the dead rise. Would we hear always His voice that is directed personally to us "Lazarus, come forth!" In all our worship, or rather with every breath of life we must incline our ears to Him to hear His sweet life-giving voice.

- ❖ Resurrection is realized now and the people pass from death into life, from death without faith into life through faith, from death through falsehood into life through truth, from death because of evil into life in righteousness. Therefore, there is resurrection of the dead<sup>62</sup>.
- ❖ Those who believe and obey live. Before they believe and obey they lay dead. They walked and were dead. What do they profit by walking while dead? And yet, if one of them dies the death of the body, they run to prepare the grave; they shroud, carry and bury him; the dead bury the dead. It has been said about them: "let the dead bury their own dead." (Matt 8:22)

Such dead were raised by the Word of God so that they may live in faith. Those who were dead in disbelief were raised by the Word. Concerning this hour, the Lord says: "the hour is coming, and now is." With His word, He raises those: who were dead in disbelief. About them, the apostle says, "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light." (Eph 5:14). This is the resurrection of the hearts. This is the resurrection of the inner man, the resurrection of the spirit.

However, this is not the only resurrection, because there is still the resurrection of the body also. Whoever arises again in the spirit arises also in the body to be blessed in the body.

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<sup>62</sup> 1 ST. Augustine: *On the Gospel of ST. John, tractate 19:8*

But, whoever does not arise first in the spirit will arise in the body for his damnation... When we look up to the Lord that He sealed on us with this resurrection of the spirits towards which we all must hurry and strive to live in and persevere to the end, there remains that He seals on us with the resurrection of the bodies also which will be at the end of the world. Let us now listen to how He sealed on us with that also.

He said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear" that is to say those who do not believe, "the voice of the Son of God" that is to say the gospel, "and those who hear" those who obey, "will live" [25] that is to say will be justified and will not again have no faith. When I say He said that as much as He sees us in need of learning about the resurrection of the body also, and we are left in that condition, He compels His saying: "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the son to have life in Himself." This denotes the resurrection of the spirits, granting life to the spirits. He then adds: "and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man." [27]<sup>63</sup>

- ❖ From which source will they live? From life. From which life? From Christ... He says: "I am the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6)

Do you want to walk? I am the way.

Do you wish not to be deceived? "I am the truth."

Do you want not to die? "I am the life."

This is what your Savior says to you... The people who died will arise; they will pass into life. When they hear the voice of the son of God, they will live. They will live in Him when they persevere in the faith in Him because the Son has life. He has life, so that those who believe in Him will live<sup>64</sup>. Saint Augustine.

- ❖ Did you learn here the sovereignty of Christ and His absolute inexpressible authority? Just as He will be in resurrection, He says, "Now." Therefore, when we hear His voice ordering us to arise, we rise as the apostle says: "when God commands, the dead rise" (see 1 Thes 4:16)<sup>65</sup> Saint John Chrysostom.

"For as the Father has life in Himself,  
so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself." [26]

- ❖ "granted" because of His unity with Him. He granted not so that it may be taken from Him, but so that He may be glorified in the Son. He was granted not so that the Father may guard it, but so that it may be the possession of the Son<sup>66</sup>.
- ❖ Do not think that it is a free gift for blessing, for it is the mystery of His birth. For there is no difference in life between the Father and the Son. How can you think that only the

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<sup>63</sup> 2 Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 77:7-8

<sup>64</sup> 1 ST. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 22:8

<sup>65</sup> 2 Homilies on St. John, 39:2

<sup>66</sup> 3 Of the Christian Faith, 4:10:132

Fathe has immortality and not also the Son?<sup>67</sup> Saint Ambrose.

- ❖ Look, you say and confess that the Father grants life to the Son so that He may have life in Himself. As the Father has life in Himself, the Father has no need, and the Son also has no need. Just as the Father is life, so the Son is life. Both unite in one life and not two lives. Why is it said that thhe Father grants life to the Son? Not as though the Son was without life and obtained life. For if that was the case He would not have life in Himself<sup>68</sup>.
- ❖ What then "He has granted the Son to have life in Himself"? I say, briefly, He gave birth to the Son... As if He says "the Father who is life in Himself gave birth to the Son who is life in Himself." The word "granted" *dedit* may be understood as meaning "gave birth" *genuit*<sup>69</sup>.
- ❖ What is the meaning of "has life in Himself"? That He does not need life from another, He rather overflows with life and from Him the others - those who believe in Him obtain life... He was granted to have life in Himself: who was granted? His Word. Therefore, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God."<sup>70</sup> Saint Augustine.
- ❖ Do you not see that this declares the perfect likeness except in one point, that the one is Father and the other Son? The word "granted" is simply to point out this distinction; all the rest is perfectly equal and alike. It is clear tht the Son does everything with authority and power like the Father and that He does not derive power from another source, since He has life in Himself just as the Father has life in Himself<sup>71</sup>. Saint John Chrysostom.

"And has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man."  
[27]

Saint Ambrose sees that the Lord Christ accepted to obtain the authority to execute judgement "because He is the Son of Man." As the Son of God, He is the judge because He is one with the Father<sup>72</sup>.

Saint Augustine says, Christ is "the Son of God in Himself" [25] It was necessary (in His love) to become the Son of Man when He took us in Himself, or took our nature.

When He raises the dead, we see Him as the Son of God who gives life and resurrection. When He executes judgment His work of salvation without which we are not justified becomes clear to us. We see Him carrying our nature, becoming the Son of Man who died and rose and granted us His justification. The wicked also see Him the Son of Man whom they crucified, despised, and stabbed.

In saying "and has given Him to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man" He turns our attention to the prophecy of Daniel the prophet about Him: "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they bourht him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and

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<sup>67</sup> 4 *Of the Holy Spirit* Book 5:2:35

<sup>68</sup> 1 *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 19:12

<sup>69</sup> 2 *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of ST. John*, tractate 19:13

<sup>70</sup> 3 *ST. Augustine: On the Gospel of ST. John*, tractate 22:10

<sup>71</sup> 4 *Homilies on St. John*, 39:3

<sup>72</sup> 1 *Of the Christian Faith*, 63:78-79

glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." (Daniel 7:13-14)

- ❖ The judge, here, will be the Son of Man. This form will execute judgement, and He stood trial.

Listen and understand what the prophet says in fact: "and they shall look on Him whom they have pierced." (Zech 12:10; John 19:37). They will look on the very same form they pierced with a spear, sitting as Jesus who stood before judgment. He will condemn the real criminals, He who was falsely considered a criminal. He will come Himself in the same form.

This you will see also in the gospel when He went to heaven in front of His disciples, they stood and looked and the angelic voice said: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand... This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11)

Behold now on what basis was that to happen and in truth those who must be judged see the Judge. For those who are judged are the righteous and the wicked together. But "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Matt. 5:8). What remains is that in the Judgement the form of the bond-servant is declared to the good and the evil, and the form of God is kept for the good only<sup>73</sup>.

- ❖ What will the righteous obtain?... I have said that there, we shall be in good health, safe, alive without tribulation, hunger, or thirst, without wrong, or losing our sight. This is what I have said, but I did not say what a greater thing we shall have: we shall see God. This is so great that if compared with all the other benefits, they are considered nothing.

Will the wicked also see God about whom Isaiah said, "the wicked will be rejected and will not see the glory of God" (Is 56:10)? For this reason, He will declare Himself to all, to the good and the evil but will keep Himself for those who love Him... After the resurrection of the body, when the wicked are repelled and will not see the glory of God, He "when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." (1 John 3:2) This is everlasting life<sup>74</sup>.

- ❖ Why then does the Father not come Himself? That is because He is invisible on Judgment Day. "They shall look on Him whom they have pierced": The form that appeared before the judge, will be the Judge. That form that was judged will judge. He was falsely judged, but will judge with justice. He will come in the form of a bond-servant and will reveal Himself in that form, for how will the form of God be seen by the righteous and the unjust? If Judgment was for the righteous only the form of God will appear to them. But since Judgment is for the righteous and the unjust, and since the unjust are not allowed to see God, so "blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Matt 5:8)<sup>75</sup>
- ❖ There, there will be separation (between the righteous and the evil) but not like now.

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<sup>73</sup> 1 Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 77:10

<sup>74</sup> 2 Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 77:11-13

<sup>75</sup> 3 St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 19:16

Now we are separated not in place, but in characteristics, desires, faith, hope and love. Now we live together, we live with the evil, though the life of all is not one. In secret we are distinguished, we are separate like wheat on the threshing floor, not like wheat in the barn. In the field, wheat is separate and mixed, separate because it is different from straw, and mixed because it has not been sifted yet. After that, complete separation will happen... Those who have done good will live with the angels; those who have done evil will suffer with Satan and his soldiers...

After Judgment the form of the bond-servant will cross over... He will lead the body because He is the head and He will deliver the kingdom to God (1 Cor 15:24). Then the form of God will appear openly, that form that the wicked could not see, but only saw the form of the bond-servant.

He will reveal Himself as He promised those who love Him. For He says, "He who has My commandments and keeps them,, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." (John 14:21)<sup>76</sup>. Saint Augustine.

"Do not marvel at this;  
for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice." [28]

When the Lord Christ rose from the dead, no voice was heard, because He rose by His own power and authority. However, at our resurrection on the Last Day, the voice of Christ will be heard, for He has the authority to raise the dead. Likewise, the sound of the angels' trumpets will be heard to announce the coming of the Omnipotent.

❖ All who hear will live; because all who obey will live...

We thus see the resurrection of the mind; would we do not abandon our faith in the resurrection of the body...

Indeed, all groups who are engaged in spreading any religious creed among the people allow the belief in the resurrection of the minds. Else, they will be told: if the self does not arise, why are you talking to me?... But there are many who deny the resurrection of the body and affirm that the resurrection has actually taken place through faith. Such are those whom the apostle resists saying, "Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some." (2 Tim 2:17:18). They say the resurrection took place actually in a manner that we do not expect another resurrection. They blame those who hope for the resurrection of the body as though the promised resurrection was realized through the act of faith, that is to say through the mind<sup>77</sup>. Saint Augustine.

"And come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life,  
and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. [29]  
I can of Myself do nothing.

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<sup>76</sup> 1 ST. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 19:18

<sup>77</sup> 1 ST. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 19:14

As I hear, I judge;  
And My judgment is righteous,  
Because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me." [30]

- ❖ As though Christ says here: 'You will not see in me a strange, different act or work that My Father does not desire.' Saint John Chrysostom.

## 5. John the Baptist Bears Witness to Christ

"If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true." [31]

If He bore witness of Himself without the witness of the Father through the prophets, and without performing divine, miraculous works, they would have had an excuse to consider His witness false. He rejected His witness of Himself because they considered that, a kind of asking for honor from men. He does not want to bear witness according to their criteria which are false. In this way He did not give them a chance either to object to His witness or to doubt in His intention and think that He asks for temporary honor.

- ❖ When He said "My witness is not true" [31] He was rebuking them for their view about and objection to Him. And when He said "Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true" (John 8:14) He declared the essence of the same thing, which is that as He is God, they must trust Him even when He talks about Himself<sup>78</sup>. Saint John Chrysostom.

He presents Himself once as a human being, and another time in the glory of God... Once He says His witness is not true (John 5:31) and another time He says His witness is true (John 8:14)<sup>79</sup> Saint Ambrose.

- ❖ He knew well that His witness of Himself was true, but for the sake of the weak and without understanding, the sun looks at the lamps. Because of the weakness of their insight they did not bear to see the radiance of the shining sun<sup>80</sup>.
- ❖ Did not the martyrs testify of Christ? Did they not testify of the truth? But if we look more carefully at that, we shall see that when the martyrs testified, He testified of Himself because He dwells in the martyrs and they witness of the truth. Let us listen to one of the martyrs, to the apostle Paul: "Do you accept the proof of Christ speaking in me?" (2 Cor 13:3 Valgate). Therefore, when John testifies, Christ who dwells in John testifies of Himself. Let Peter witness; let Paul or the other apostles witness, let Stephen witness, He who dwells in them all He witnesses of Himself<sup>81</sup>. Saint Augustine.
- ❖ If the Lord Himself who will come later to judge everything, did not want them to believe His witness of Himself and preferred to be justified by the witness of God the Father, how much more it is necessary for us His slaves not only to be justified by God's judgment and witness, but also to be glorified through His witness that we must keep<sup>82</sup>. Saint Cyprian.

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<sup>78</sup> 2 Homilies on ST. John, 40

<sup>79</sup> 1 On the Christian Faith, Book 5:10:123

<sup>80</sup> 2 Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 78:1

<sup>81</sup> 3 Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 78:3

<sup>82</sup> 4 Letter 66 to Florentius:2

"There is another who bears witness of Me,  
and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true." [32]

The verb "witnesses" here is in the present continuous because the witness of the Father of the Son is an eternal witness, a witness of love for Him who is one with Him of the same essence.

They believe in the Holy Bible which carries the witness of the Father through the many prophecies, and it is true testimony.

- ❖ As though He says: 'you may be saying to Me, we do not believe You, because it is said to the people whoever is quick to bear witness of himself is not qualified to be believed.'

So Christ's saying "If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true" should not be read simply, but should be read by adding the suspicion of those Jews that Christ's statement is not true.

He mentioned in His conversation three witnesses: the first is the works that He did, the second His Father's witness, and the third is John the Baptist's announcement of Him. He mentioned the last witness first, that is the testimony of Jhn the Baptist. For He says, "there is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true." [32] Saint John Chrysostom.

"You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth." [33]

Although the Lord Christ does not accept testimony from any man, yet, for their sake, He presents John the Baptist's witness of Him or "to the truth." As they respected him as the lamp that shines an hour - at that time John was in prison - the Lord Christ honors him because he is the lamp that announces Christ's coming in the midst of the darkness of this world.

On the one hand, the enemies themselves asked him and wanted to know his opinion; on the other hand, Saint John was known for disregard for temporary honor; and he did not ask glory for himself. He is faithful in his mission. Herod was not able to dissuade him from the truth. Besides, when John testified of the Lord Christ, he had not seen Him.

- ❖ He first said, "You have sent to John" and they would not send to him unless they considered him qualified to be believed. Saint John Chrysostom.
- ❖ Look how it was necessary to say "For You O lord will light my lamp." At last, as he was enlightened, he gave his testimony... He is the lamp that was enlightened; enlightened so that it may give light. What is lit can also be extinguished. In order that he may not be extinguished, would he does not expose himself to the wind of pride<sup>83</sup>. Saint Augustine.

"Yet I do not receive testimony from man,  
but I say these things that you may be saved." [34]

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<sup>83</sup> 1 Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 17:9



The Lord says He does not need the testimony of John because His works are enough proof and greater than the testimony of John.

You believe that John is a prophet; that he does not tell lies, but tells the truth. He testified that I am the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29); if you believe in Me you will be saved from your sins.

- ❖ John's testimony was not the testimony of a man, because he said "I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'" (John 1:33) From this point, it is clear that the testimony of John the Baptist was the testimony of God, because from God he knew it, and He said to him what He said. Saint John Chrysostom.
- ❖ "I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation."...

Who is He who has more understanding than all His teachers?

I ask: Who is He who dares and sets Himself above all the prophets; Who did not only, through words, teach with great authority those with whom He lived, but has also taught the consecutive generations through the writings of the prophets?...

What is said here cannot be about the person of Solomon...

I know Him clearly He who understands more than all teachers, for when He was a boy, twelve years old, Jesus stayed in Jerusalem and His parents found Him after three days (Luke 2:42-46). The Son said: "as My Father taught Me, I speak these things."

It is very difficult for us to understand this about the person of the Word unless we realize that the Son is born of the Father..." He took the form of a bond-servant" (Phil 2:7) As He took that form, those older than Him in age thought that He should learn like a boy. However, He who was taught by the Father has more understanding than all His teachers, because He studied God's testimonies concerning Him and He understands them more than they do when He said these words: "You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Yet I do not receive testimony from man (John 5:33-34). Saint Augustine.

"He was the burning and shining lamp,  
and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light." [35]

He means by the word "burning" that he was burning with zeal in his heart for the repentance and salvation of the people. "For a time" means a short time between his appearance to serve and his imprisonment.

"You rejoice" agalliatheenai means they persevere in joy, or are overjoyed for the news of the appearance of the Messiah who was expected to save them from the Romans. However,

when He announced His spiritual kingdom, they rejected Him and rejected the lamp that announced Him.

When Herod was John's friend, the religious leadership spoke of John with all respect, or at least they did not resist him. But when he was put in prison, by Herod, he was undoubtedly honored by the people, but the leadership did not care for him. At the same time, the leaders were unable to attack him openly, because the multitude counted him as a prophet. Now, as the people realize that John is a prophet, and that he bears witness to Christ, they must accept Christ.

Saint Jerome sees the saints, like Saint John the Baptist, as lamps that shine and that their light denotes their joy and happiness for salvation. As he says, "In all the eastern churches, even where there are no relics of saints, when the Gospel is read, candles are lit even when at dawn the sky is red. This is not to dispel darkness, but as a testimony of our joy. Therefore, the vigils who are mentioned in the Gospel light their lamps always. The disciples are told to always gird up their loins and light their lamps. We read about John the Baptist "He was the burning and shining lamp." So, this sensible light indicates the light we read about in the Psalm: "Your word is a lamp to my feet, O Lord, and a light to my path." (Ps 119:105)<sup>84</sup>

- ❖ This lamp was prepared because of their confusion. Because of that it was said in the Psalms, a long time ago "I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed." (Ps 132:17) What is the lamp compared to the sun?<sup>85</sup> Saint Augustine.
- ❖ "For a time in his light:: This shows clearly their deflection and turning away quickly from John. Saint John Chrysostom.

## 6. The Testimony of Christ's Miracles and Works:

"But I have a greater witness than John's;  
for the works which the Father has given Me to finish -  
the very works that I do -  
bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me." [36]

The Lord Christ talks often about His works bearing witness of His person and mission (John 10:25,32,37,38; 14:10,11). Here by "works" He does not only mean His numerous miracles and wonders and their diversity, but also His works of exceeding love, His conduction when He performs the miracles and His wonderful love for the human race. We often hear that "He was moved with compassion and healed them." Besides, there are His discourses and the unique events in His life, such as the voice of the Father heard at His baptism and transfiguration, and His victory over Satan during the temptation. He points out here the healing of the paralytic as a practical testimony so that they may accept Him and His teachings and be saved.

The word "given" here does not mean that the Son obtains what He did not have. It means executing the divine work of the Father and completing it. For example, salvation is the work of the Holy Trinity: the Father sends His Son to the world to offer Himself as a sacrifice,

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<sup>84</sup> 1 *Against Vigilantius*, 8

<sup>85</sup> 2 *Sermon on N.T. Lessons*, 78:2

and the Holy Spirit prepares the womb of Saint Mary to achieve the divine incarnation. There is not separation, confusion, or overlapping in the work of the Father, the Son and the Spirit; it is one divine work. The Lord declared on the cross that He finished the work (John 19:30). As the apostle Paul says, "For 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." (Heb 2:10)

- ❖ The aim He cared for first was that they believe that He came from God. This is much less than that they believe He is God equal with the Father. Saint John Chrysostom.

## 7. The Father Testifies of Him:

"And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time,  
nor seen His form." [37]

The Father Himself has testified of Him through the prophets as mentioned in the Old Testament and ended with the testimony of Saint John the Baptist. The Father also testified of Him with His voice coming from heaven on the day of His baptism (Matt 3:17) and when He was transfigured before three of His disciples.

- ❖ If you ask where did He testify of Him? I would answer: in the Jordan, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt 3:17)

I make clear that God has no voice or form; He is above all forms and melodies that have this quality. Saint John Chrysostom.

"You have neither heard His voice at any time, or seen His form." [37]

Saint Augustine discusses this verse saying: "Do not submit to the thought that you see God, a physical face; else with such thinking you adapt your physical eyes to seeing Him and you look for a face... Observe who is He to whom we sincerely say: 'My heart said to You, 'You face, Lord, I will seek' '... Search for Him with your hearts. The Holy Bible speaks about the face of God, His arms, hands, feet, chari, footstep... but do not think that what is meant here are human members. If you want to be God's temple you must break this false idol."<sup>86</sup>

- ❖ He is not like us perceiving one side and not the other. This is blasphemy not fit for the essence of God who knows the things before they are. He is holy, omnipotent, above all in goodness, greatness and wisdom.

We cannot give information concerning His beginning, form or appearance, for the Bible says, "You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form." As Moses said: "Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you."

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<sup>86</sup> 1 Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 3

Since it is absolutely impossible to see His form, how can you think of approaching His essence?! Saint Cyril of Jerusalem.

#### 8. The Holy Bible Testifies of Him:

"But you do not have His word abiding in you,  
because whom He sent, Him you do not believe." [38]

Even though you believe in the Holy Bible and the prophecies in it, your hearts are not faithful to the word. You speak the word with your tongues, but your hearts reject it. For though the prophecies about My coming are realized, you do not accept Me. You possess the Books but reject your salvation. This is the opposite of David the prophet who says: "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You." (Ps 119:11)

"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life;  
these are they which testify of Me." [39]

As though He says to them: 'It is not enough for you to pride yourselves upon possessing the Scriptures, and that you read them. It is necessary that you search them diligently so that you may enjoy your redemption and eternal life, because all the Scriptures revolve round My coming to you.' Saint John Chrysostom observes that this statement refers to those who search for precious minerals in the depth of the earth; they dig mines and search with great interest for the precious minerals until they find them.

The Lord Christ mentioned these prophecies in His conversation with His two disciples on the road to Emmaus the day of His resurrection: "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." (Luke 24:27)

The apostle Saint Peter directs us to this living testimony. He says: "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1: 19-21). He also says: "Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow." (1 Pet 1:10-11)

- ❖ Christ sent the Jews to the Scriptures not for ordinary reading, but to search carefully and intelligently; for He did not say 'read the Scriptures' but said "search the Scriptures." Therefore, He commands them to penetrate deeply in them because the words said concerning Him necessitate great attention so that they may be able to find the benefit in their depth. Saint John Chrysostom.
- ❖ We say truly that the literal understanding of the passover: the visible flesh is eaten, but what is hidden in the bones is left (Exodus 12:9). If anyone desires the marrow

hidden in the text, let him search for it with Him who reveals the hidden mysteries to those who deserve them. Nevertheless, we must not give the impression that we shall leave the text without accurate examination. We shall not neglect God's commandment that urges us to search the Scriptures (John 5:39)<sup>87</sup>. Saint Gregory of Nyssa.

"But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." [40]

They search the Holy Scriptures without faithfulness; they present studies and interpretations while ignoring the essence of the Scriptures: the person of the Messiah. For they do not want to meet Him and believe in Him so that they may have life.

"I do not receive honor from men." [41]

He did not ask them for that because He asks in need of honor from them. For the salvation of man does not add anything to God; nor does the damnation of man harm God. Rather, the pleasure of God, the lover of mankind, is in man's stature and eternal glory.

"But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you." [42]

They resisted the Lord Christ under the pretence of jealousy for God, His glory and His Law and that they defend the divine right because Jesus broke the Law and blasphemed when He made Himself equal with the Father. Now He discloses their depths that they have no true love for God, nor zeal for His name, honor or Law. For, if they had that love, they would have known, in truth, who Jesus is; they would have understood His person and work. No other person could have dared to declare what the Lord declared: that the love of God is not in their hearts.

❖ One might say to Christ: Why do You say that? He answers: "I say that to rebuke them because they did not reject me for the love of God. God testifies of Me with His work and prophets. As somehow they had thought before that time that I was against God so they rejected Me. Now, since I showed them these miracles they should have come quickly to me if they loved God, but they do not love Him." Saint John Chrysostom.

"I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me;  
if another comes in his own name, him you will receive." [43]

Saint Ambrose observes that along with the distinction between the Persons, there is unity in the divine name. Therefore, baptism occurs in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and not "in the names" (Matt 28:19). The Son came in the name of the Father (5:43). As the Holy Spirit is called the Paraclete (the Intercessor or Advocate), likewise the Son is called also (1 John 2:1). And, as the Lord Christ speaks about Himself saying, "I am the truth" (John 14:6), the Holy Spirit also is called "the truth" (1 John 5:6)<sup>88</sup> Again the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are called "the light" (1 John 1:5; John 1:8-9; Isaiah 9:2; Ps 4:6)<sup>89</sup> Similarly, the

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<sup>87</sup> 1 The Song of Songs by Saint Gregory, bishop of Nyssa; translated by Dr. George Nawar, Sermon 6

<sup>88</sup> 1 Of the Holy Spirit Book 1:13

<sup>89</sup> 2 Of the Holy Spirit Book 1:14

Three Persons are called "the life."<sup>90</sup>

The rabbis were very proud that whoever introduced himself as teacher, one person or more who had religious authority, testified of him. For this reason Saul of Tarsus had pride in the testimony of his teacher Gamaliel. Our Lord Jesus came and the Father testified of Him; He spoke in His name, and asked for His glory; but the antichrists will come in their own names (Matt 24:5)

- ❖ He clarified the necessity of the teaching concerning the unity of the divine name and that there is no difference, for Christ came in the unity of the name, but the Antichrist will come in his own name... He taught clearly in these words (Matt 28:19; John 14:26; Acts 4:12; John 5:43) that there is no difference in the divine name, in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit<sup>91</sup>. Saint Ambrose.
- ❖ The Jews did not accept the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Son of God, who is God; but they will receive the impostor who will call himself God<sup>92</sup>. Father John of Damascus.
- ❖ Who is he about whom He said will come in his own name? He mentions this in a mysterious way that he who will come is the Antichrist. Saint John Chrysostom.
- ❖ It was said about the Antichrist and about all those who deny the Lord, these words: "I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive." [43] Let us hear John also: "you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come" (1 John 2:18) What is in the Antichrist? We are terrified of him, except that his name is honored, and the name of the Lord is despised? What does he say except: "I justify myself"? We answer: "I have come to Christ not with my legs but with my heart. When I heard the Gospel there I believed. There I was baptized because when I believed in Christ I believed in God."<sup>93</sup> Saint Augustine.

"How can you believe, who receive honor from one another,  
and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?" [44]

The Lord Christ made it clear that their problem is in themselves. Their corruption blinded their eyes and they did not know the truth and receive Him. The main obstacle in the salvation of the Scribes and Pharisees is their pride. They prefer to lose their salvation and damn their spirits than that their reputation is violated among the people. They care for what the people say about them, not for what God testifies of them.

- ❖ He sowed them that they did not ask for God's right, but pretended to. They were on the side of their sickness and withdrew from the glory of God because they desired human honor more than honor from God. Saint John Chrysostom.
- ❖ It is necessary that you care to avoid the nets of love of vain glory. Jesus says: "How can you believe, who receive honor from one another?" [44] What evil is that you sacrificed we cannot believe! Would we rather say: "You are my glory" (Jer 9:24) and also "He who

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<sup>90</sup> 3 *Of the Holy Spirit Book 1:15*

<sup>91</sup> 4 *Of the Holy Spirit Book 1:13:155-156*

<sup>92</sup> 5 *Exposition of the Christian Faith, Book 4, Ch. 36*

<sup>93</sup> 1 *Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 79:6*

glories, let him glory in the Lord." (1 Cor 1:31), "For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ." (Gal 1:10) "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world."<sup>94</sup> Saint Jerome.

"Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father,  
there is one who accuses you -  
Moses, in whom you trust." [45]

They accused Him of breaking the Sabbath and He proved to them that with His work He sanctified the Sabbath because He works according to the Father's pleasure. Now that the falseness of their accusation has been revealed, He does not in turn accuse them of breaking all the Law because He does not need to do that, nor did He come for this purpose. He was not incarnate to judge the people, but to save them. He leaves Moses himself in whom they trust, he himself will accuse and judge them.

"For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me;  
for he wrote about Me." [46]

The five Books of Moses are full of symbols and prophecies testifying of the Person the Lord Christ: His birth, service, crucifixion and resurrection as the Savior of the world. So, whoever believes Moses, believes the Lord Christ Himself because in Him were the prophecies realized.

"But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" [47]

If they do not open their hearts for the prophecies and understand the inner Law, but only hold to the letter in a dry manner, how will they be able to rejoice in the Person of the Lord Christ who is the sinew and center of the Scripture? They have the field but they do not search for the treasure hidden in it. Saint Paul says that a veil still lies on their heart when Moses is read (2 Cor 3:15) and they do not understand the aim of the divine word.

The discourse of the Lord Christ ends in complete silence on the part of the resistant group because they had no answer. It seems that all they did was that they acquitted Him silently. But their hearts were more hardened waiting for an opportunity to trap Him.

### **Inspired by John 5**

I Have No Man!

- ❖ My spirit groans with the Bethesda sick man  
I entered with him as through the five porches  
I entered through the five books of Moses  
I fell under the Law that exposed my weakness  
I discovered I was sick, in need of a heavenly Physician!

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<sup>94</sup> 1 Letter 22:27

- ❖ My life passed like 38 years, during which I lacked true love!  
 I have no man to put me into the water of divine love to get cured!  
 Who may grant me true love for my God and brethren?  
 Who will support me to perfect the law of love that I may be healed?
  
- ❖ You often passed, O Physician of the souls!  
 As though You left everybody to search for me  
 Because I am the first among sinners!  
 With love You continuously repeated:  
 Do you want to be made well?  
 Because of my stupidity I did not hear your voice!  
 I loved the noise of the world and was preoccupied with it.  
 I do not have two ears to hear the voice of heavenly love!  
 Your sweet voice, but because of my hard of hearing I did not listen to it!
  
- ❖ Your wonderful Holy Spirit attracted my heart to You.  
 I heard Your sweet voice,  
 And rejoiced in your face that is fairer than the sons of men!  
 I have confessed to You my need for who will heal me.
  
- ❖ At Your mighty word I rose from my bed  
 In obedience to Your command I took up my bed and walked home!  
 I took up the bed of my illness,  
 I see it and remember my weakness and death,  
 I remember Your authority, You who grant forgiveness and life.  
 I walk, and walk until I enter my house.  
 I shall not rest until I reach the bosom of Your Father, my eternal dwelling!
  
- ❖ You have turned for me my whole life into a continuous Sabbath,  
 My time changed into a feast and surpassing rest.  
 You took me across to the pledge of eternity  
 So that I rejoice in sharing in the divine nature.

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## Chapter Six

Christ, the Bread of Life  
Or  
The Heavenly Bread

In the first stage, John the Evangelist presents to us Christ as renovator; in the second stage He is the resuscitator. Now the evangelist presents to us the person of the Lord Christ as the Heavenly Bread that feeds the spirit and satisfies it so that it may remain alive and grow. He is the Incarnate Word; with His word He raises us to the new life and with His body, the Heavenly Bread, He enlivens us abide in Him.

In this chapter we see the Lord Christ feeding the multitude with two fish and five barley loaves offered by a lad.

First: Jesus lifted up His eyes and saw the hungry multitude. He did not wait for someone to ask for food or someone to feed the crowd; He looked out for the people's needs.

Secondly: As He gives food to the people, He accepts the offering of a small boy. Just as He gives, He takes; this is a sign of mutual love between God and humanity. He raised the morale of the boy who saw his small offering satisfying the hunger of the crowd and filling twelve baskets with leftover fragments.

Thirdly: God honors every person and asks for an offering from a small boy, a young man, or a child, no matter how small the offering may be! This is a sign of man's feeling of his vital role and his participation in the service of humanity.

Fourthly: The two fish symbolize the two Testaments, the Old and the New. The five loaves are symbolic of the five Books of Moses. What a difference between receiving the word from the Lord Christ's hand and reading it through human interpretation. The word of God satisfies and is abundant when Christ gives it to us through His church (His disciples).

Fifthly: He made the people sit down on the grass which symbolizes the body so that we do not let the body, but rather the mature spirit, be the guide. The body submits and works according to the guidance of the spirit and for the spirit, not for physical desires.

Sixthly: The multitude returned the next day to look for Him, not to rejoice in the Maker of miracles, but because they ate and were filled [26]. Therefore, the Lord Christ offered them a new and different food: His Flesh and Blood sacrificed as food that grants eternal life and resurrection.

He who walked on the water to carry us in Him so that we take His royal path offers us Himself as bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world [33]. The Lord spoke clearly saying that He is the divine bread that invigorates us toward eternal life. Many of His followers stumbled and left Him. But He said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" [67] He insisted to offer His Flesh and Blood, not as symbols of something else; else those who left

Him would not have gone away.

The Jews were not able to accept the divine word, nor did they enjoy His body and drink His blood; they, therefore, left Him and went away.

- 1 - Feeding the Multitude 1-14.
- 2 - Christ Walks on the Water 15-21.
- 3 - The People Seek Him in Capernaum 22-25.
- 4 - I Am the Living Bread 26-59.
- 5 - The Complaint of Some 60-65.
- 6 - To Whom Shall We Go? 66-71.

#### 1 - Feeding the Multitude:

John the evangelist was accustomed to mention the miracles not mentioned by the other three evangelists, except for this miracle about which all the evangelists spoke. Everywhere in Matthew the Lord Christ is presented as king (The Gospel according to St. Matthew); as the servant of humanity (the Gospel according to St. Mark), as the friend of human beings (the Gospel according to St. Luke) or as the Son of God who grants sonship to humanity (the Gospel according to St. John). The Gospel wants to satisfy the needs of the people in every respect.

Moreover, the evangelist was careful to mention this miracle so that He may report the long discourse, related to it, about Christ's offer of Himself as the bread coming down from heaven so that we may be filled with Him who is the divine Word. He also offers His Body and Blood, a sacrifice for us for remission of sins and eternal life.

"After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias." [1]

The evangelist establishes the place, time and all surrounding circumstances of this miracle as a testimony for the truth of the story because of its importance in the life of the Church over the ages.

Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the lake of Tiberias and is called in a different place, Gennesaret. Here, it is called the Sea of Tiberias with reference to a town on the west of the lake which was recently expanded and adorned by Herod and which he called Tiberias after the name and in honor of emperor Tiberius. Herod may have made it his capital. The Lord did not cross the sea, but made His journey over the sea, that is to say, on its shores.

Saint Cyril the Great observes that the Lord Christ departed from Jerusalem and went over to the opposite shore of the lake of Tiberias to avoid the hatred of the unbelievers in Him. He did that willingly and not against His will. He teaches us to run away from the attacks of evil, not out of fear of death, but out of love for those who give us trouble.

- ❖ We do not strive for our own good, but for the good of others also. The work of love is not in resisting those who want our harm, nor in accepting what we endure, for this will

arouse their bitter anger because of their failure in controlling what they hate. Love does not seek its own as Paul says (1 Cor. 13:5). This was obvious in Christ. Saint Cyril the Great.

- ❖ My beloved, would we did not compete with the violent, but rather learn that when they do so they do not harm our virtue with their wicked counsels, but rather their violent work is repressed. When an arrow falls on a firm, strong resisting body, it returns with great force against whoever shot it and the violence of those who shot it does not find whom they opposed. Likewise, when we struggle against the disdainful, they intensify their cruelty, but if we bow and bend easily to earth, we stop their madness. Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Scribes and Pharisees heard that He baptized more disciples than John, He went to Galilee to put out their envy and, with His withdrawal, calm their anger which grew with the reports that reached them. When He went for the second time to Galilee, He did not go to the same place as before; He did not go to Cana, but went "over the sea"<sup>1</sup>. Saint John Chrysostom.
- ❖ As for Saint Cyril the Great, he thinks that the crossing to the other shore carries the symbol of the preaching of the Gospel of the Lord Christ crossing from the Jews over to the gentiles and it is impossible for the Jews to cross over because of their disbelief.
- ❖ The crossing of the sea which separates the two sides denotes the difficulty for the Jews to cross over, or rather the impossibility of their walking along the path that leads to it. For God declares that He "will hedge up thy way with thorns... that she shall not find her paths." (Hosea 2:6). What the thorns indicate here, the sea indicates there because it separates the reviled from those who relentlessly abused Him; and it separates the Holy from the defiled. Saint Cyril the Great.

"Then a great multitude followed Him,

because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased." [2]

Saint John does not mention these healing miracles because Matthew the evangelist refers to them in details (Matt. 12:10,22; 14:34-36). The multitude gathered around Him and wished to know Him because of the numerous signs He did. However, for the Lord Christ, the multitude meant no honor to Him, but showed the right of work to present the word of truth and to serve them so that they may rejoice in their communion with Him.

Saint John Chrysostom comments on this verse pointing out that what is said here does not reveal people who have great wisdom, for they were attracted more by the miracles than by the teaching although the signs are for the unbelievers and not for those who believe.

"And Jesus went up on the mountain,

and there He sat with His disciples." [3]

The pulpit from which He spoke to the multitude was the mountain where He sat with His disciples. This mountain is the wilderness of Sidon in Philip's province that is in Galilee.

- ❖ He went up on the mountain to teach us always to rest from time to time far from the noise and confusion of public life because solitude is appropriate to study wisdom. Christ often went up above on the mountain and spent the night there praying, to teach us

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Homilies on St. John, Hom:42:1

that whoever wishes to approach God must free himself of worry and look for a calm time without confusion<sup>2</sup>. Saint John Chrysostom.

- ❖ Let us follow Him as He is persecuted and escapes from trouble caused by those who oppose Him, so that we also may "go up on the mountain and sit with Him." So that we may rise to a glorious blessing, more sublime than everything, and reign with Him. He Himself said, "you are those who have continued with Me in My trials... that in the regeneration when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you ... will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Luke 22:28; Matt 19:28). Saint Cyril the Great.

"Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near." [4]

John the evangelist links this miracle with the Passover by saying, "Now the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near." [4] The true Passover is the offering of Christ's body as a sacrifice on the cross, and this is the very same Eucharist that we enjoy on the altar. This miracle was an introduction for the acceptance of the world of believers of the Flesh and Blood of the Lord sacrificed to give spiritual satisfaction and everlasting life that will not be conquered by time or death.

This happened before the third Passover that the Lord celebrated during His service. It was about ten or twelve days before the feast. The Jews were accustomed to spend a whole month before the Passover in the big preparations for it. They paved the roads, repaired the bridges if necessary, and they spoke about the Passover and how it was instituted.

The multitude in this region may have realized that the Passover was near and all men must go to Jerusalem. Consequently, Jesus Christ will certainly go to Jerusalem and they will have no chance to meet Him among the vast crowds coming from many nations. They, therefore, wanted to take the opportunity to gather around Him and, as much as possible, not to leave Him. They did not postpone their meeting with Him until after the feast, but were wise to take every opportunity to rejoice in Him.

- ❖ If you say: What was the aim of Christ to go, now, up on the mountain and sit there with His disciples? I would answer: because of the miracle that He intended to perform... and so that He may teach us to rest away from what worries us. The quiet and the wilderness agree with wisdom. Christ went up alone on the mountain many times and remained all night praying. Saint John Chrysostom.

"Then Jesus lifted up His eyes,  
and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him,  
He said to Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?'"[5]

Jesus lifted up His eyes and saw a great crowd of people from the popular poor class whose spirits are reflected in their eyes, precious spirits like those of the rich without discrimination. The Lord cares for their spiritual and physical needs and, therefore, asks Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" For it was Judas who had the money box, and

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Homilies on St. John, Hom. 42:2

Philip was responsible for the management of daily food for the disciples.

- ❖ This shows that He never sat inactive with His disciples. He spoke to them, made them listen to Him and directed them toward Him. This shows in particular, His compassionate care, His meekness and His condescension in His conduct with them. They sat with Him and may be looked at each other while He lifted up His eyes and saw the multitude coming toward Him<sup>3</sup>. Saint John Chrysostom.
- ❖ Christ lifted up His eyes to announce that those who loved Him are worthy of the divine look, as it was said to Israel in the blessing: "The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace." (Numbers 6:26). Saint Cyril the Great.
- ❖ Jesus gave some barley bread lest they faint on the way, and He granted the sacrament of His body to the others (Matt 26:26) so that they may strive for the kingdom<sup>4</sup>. Saint Ambrose.

Saint John Chrysostom compares what God did with Moses the prophet and what the Lord Christ did with Philip. In the old time God asked Moses what he held in his hand and Moses informed Him he had a rod that has no power, but God caused it to be His rod with which He performed miracles. Here, the Lord Christ asks Philip about his and the disciples' potentials to feed the multitude. Philip had almost nothing: five barley loaves and two fish that a boy had, but the Lord used them to feed thousands and a load of fragments remained.

Because of His love for man, God wishes always to exchange a dialogue with him and ask him about his possibilities, so that God may, on His part, offer His divine capability that will act through our inability and weak possibilities.

## 2- Christ Walks on the Water

The disappearance of the Lord Christ when the multitudes wanted to make Him king, and His appearance, to the disciples alone, walking on the sea bears an important Biblical indication. The Lord Christ offers His Body, heavenly bread, not so that He may reign on earth, but that He may carry the members of His body (the Church) to the heavenly Canaan. He wanted to correct the wrong interpretations of the Messiah's kingdom. On the other hand, if Moses parted the sea so that the people may go across, the Lord Christ came walking on water to carry His people above the world currents.

The Holy Bible says about God, "He treads upon the waves of the sea." (Job 9:8) The Judaic tradition of the Rabbins says that the Messiah will come from the sea. So the Lord wanted to affirm to them that He is the expected Messiah about whom the Bible prophesied and who is mentioned in the Tradition.

"Therefore when Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king,  
He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone." [15]

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Homilies on St. John, Hom. 42:2.

<sup>4</sup> 2. Concerning Widows, 13:79

The multitude wanted to take Him by force to make Him a king on earth according to their wish. However, He disappeared from among them and departed to the mountain alone. They did not understand the nature of Christ's kingdom and they wanted to honor him in accordance to their thinking, not to divine thought. The multitude wanted to liberate themselves from Caesar and Roman occupation. But the Lord Christ did not want His disciples to be preoccupied with political business or bear enmity to any person.

By departing alone to the mountain He asserts to us the importance of our withdrawal from the world, from time to time, to meet God in secret talk and to enjoy holy silence. Our service of others, no matter how important it is, should not waste for us our personal secret worship.

+ When they filled their stomachs, and food for them was what they mostly cared for, they decided to make Christ a king. However, He escaped... teaching us to despise worldly ranks, showing that He does not need earthly positions because the gifts coming to Him from heaven were radiant and great. Those gifts were the angels, the star, His Father proclaiming and the Holy Spirit testifying, and Prophets warning concerning Him a long time in the past. As for earthly gifts, these are all trivial. He came to teach us to look down upon things here and love future blessings. Saint John Chrysostom.

+ He departed from those who wanted to give Him worthy honor. He refused a kingdom that was regarded as the greatest earthly reward, though for Him it was not, in fact, a thing He wished since He has dominion with the Father over all things.

It befits us to avoid the love of glory that is akin to arrogance and is not far from it.

We must also avoid the glow of honor in this present life because it is harmful. Let us search for holy humility. Let us give preference to one another, as the blessed Paul also gives advice saying, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:5-9)

If we care for heavenly concerns and live for affairs that are above more than for earthly matter, let us reject exaltation on earth if it is offered to us, since it is the origin of all vain glory. Saint Cyril the Great.

Saint Cyril the Great observes that His going to the mountain by Himself alone when they wanted to make Him king, indicates His rejection on earth, but He ascends to heaven, the holy mountain (Ps. 24:3-4), so that when He returns from heaven in His second coming He reigns completely over us.

+ When the Lord sat on the mountain with His disciples, He saw the multitude coming

toward Him, so He went down from the mountain and gave them food at the foot of the mountain. For how could he depart again to the mountain, if He had not descended from the mountain before?

This bears this meaning: the Lord descended from on high to give food to the multitude and then ascend...

He came not to reign immediately, for He reigns in the sense for which we pray “Thy kingdom come.” He reigns always with the Father as He is the Son of God, the Word through whom all things were made. However, the prophets inform us concerning His kingdom in which He is the Christ who became man and caused the believers to be Christians...

His kingdom expands and is declared when the glory of His saints is declared after judgement is accomplished through Him. That is the judgment about which He spoke earlier that the Son of Man will achieve. That kingdom about which the apostle says “when He delivers the kingdom to God” (1 Cor. 15:24). Besides, He Himself refers to it saying “Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (Matt 25:34).

However, the disciples and the multitude that believed in Him thought that He came to reign at once. They, therefore, wanted to take Him by force to make Him king. They wanted to act before the time that He Himself concealed so that He may announce it at the right time.<sup>5</sup> Saint Augustine

+ What is meant by “escaped (departed)”? His sublimity cannot be comprehended. If we do not understand something we say about it, “it escaped me.” Therefore, He departed again to the mountain by Himself alone, this firstborn from the dead rose to the heavens to make intercession for us (Col. 1:18; Rom 8:34).<sup>6</sup> Saint Augustine.

“Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea.” [16]

It may be through the direction of the Lord Christ that the disciples took a boat to go toward Capernaum so that they may not be preoccupied with the useless dialogue about making Jesus king. He wanted to withdraw them from this test, but they face another test, which is the raging sea because of a great wind.

His walking on the sea came after He fed the multitude (Mark 6:34-51; Matt 14:13-33). Here, Christ after giving His life-giving word and His resurrection, He offers Himself at the time of famine as at the time of tempests announcing His divine presence “It is I” who grants help, who satisfies needs, “do not be afraid.”

+ This boat denotes the Church, while He is in the highest... He truly said, “it was dark” because the Light had not come to them. It was already dark, and Jesus had not come to them. When the end of the world approaches and dangers increase, horror intensifies, evil multiplies

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<sup>5</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 25:1-2.

<sup>6</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 25:4.

and denial of faith spreads, then in general, the light is extinguished. In brief the light that John the evangelist reveals wholly and clearly to be love as he says, “he who hates his brother is in darkness.” The darkness of enmity increases between brothers; it increases daily and Jesus has not yet come.<sup>7</sup> Saint Augustine.

“They got into the boat,  
and went over the sea toward Capernaum.  
And it was already dark,  
And Jesus had not come to them.” [17]

+ If you ask, why did He leave them and did not appear to them? I shall answer: to make them have a greater effect. Saint John Chrysostom.

“Then the sea arose because a great wind was blowing.” [18]

+ The great waves toss those who are not with Jesus, those who are separated from Him or who seem absent from Him because they have departed from His holy law. Because of sin they were separated from Him who can save. If it is a burdensome matter for us to be in spiritual darkness. if we are troubled because we are overwhelmed by the sea of bitter voluptuousness, let us come to Jesus for He will save us from the dangers and from death in sin. Saint Cyril the Great.

“So when they had rowed about three or four miles,  
they saw Jesus walking on the sea  
and drawing near the boat;  
and they were afraid.” [19]

25 or 30 stadia equal about 3.5 miles. The sea was about 6 miles in width. According to Josephus the historian<sup>8</sup> the lake was about 40 stadia, that is about 5 miles wide. As for its length, it was about 140 stadia or 18 miles. But Pliny says it was 6 miles wide and 16 miles long<sup>9</sup>.

Saint Augustine observes that the number 25 refers to the law understood literally, whereas the number 30 denotes the law understood through the Gospel. He did not determine whether they reached 25 or 30 stadia. The number 5 indicates the law or the five Books of Moses to which it was referred in the five porches leading to the pool, and the five barley loaves which the lad carried. If someone tried to understand it according to the law (5x5) the result is 25. However, if he tries to understand it through the evangelistic perfection which is the number 6, the result would be 30. The evangelistic perfection is symbolized by the number 6 when creation was completed. When we understand the law according to the Gospel we see Jesus walking on the sea, drawing very close to us.

+ For those, the law is complete and, therefore, Jesus comes. How does He come? Walking on the waves, controlling under His feet all the whirlpools of the world that submerge

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<sup>7</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 25:5.

<sup>8</sup> War, b.3, c.25.

<sup>9</sup> Lib. 5, c.15.



us, pressing down all heights. This is what happens: as time passes and generations succeed, tribulations increase; disasters and sorrow augment. All these rise to swallow us, but Jesus crosses over treading underfoot the waves<sup>10</sup>.

+ He walked over the heights of the world, down, to be glorified by the humble<sup>11</sup>. Saint Augustine.

+ It seems to me that this miracle is other than the miracle mentioned in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew (Matt 14: 22-23).

If you ask: why were they afraid?! I shall answer: The reasons why they were afraid were many: concerning the time, it was dark; concerning the sea, a great wind was blowing; concerning the place, they were not near the land<sup>12</sup>. Saint John Chrysostom.

“But He said to them,  
‘It is I. Do not be afraid.’” [20]

He says: “It is I”; that is to say “I who dwells (among the people)” or “I AM THAT I AM” (Ex 3:14)

He came walking on the water, not to show His power over the sea and nature, but to declare the submission of the laws of nature for those who believe in Him, particularly in the middle of their suffering. He is the Lord who rides the clouds to save His people. He allows that His children have tribulations, but He does not leave them in the middle of their trial. He rather announces His presence to grant them rest and peace.

When they saw the Lord Christ walking on the water, they were afraid and terrified, because they thought He was a ghost. So fear of an illusion is stronger than fear of the trial itself.

+ Contemplate how that Christ did not appear to those who were in the boat right when it sailed, nor when the dangers began, but when they were many miles away from the shore. So it is that the grace of Him who saves does not befall us right when danger begins around us, but when fear reaches its highest and the danger itself seems very violent and we find ourselves in the middle of the waves of affliction. It is then that Christ appears unexpectedly and expels our fear. He saves us from all danger, and with His inexpressible power, He dispels the fears with joy, calm and peace. Saint Cyril the Great

“Then they willingly received Him into the boat,  
and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going.” [21]

The more anguish comes near us, the LORD Christ comes nearer to save us. He draws near us but does not enter the boat of our life by force. He enters when we willingly receive Him.

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<sup>10</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 25:6.

<sup>11</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 25:7.

<sup>12</sup> *Homilies on St. John*, Hom 43:1.

Saint John Chrysostom thinks that Christ did not reveal Himself walking on the water because they were not ready for that because of their weakness. As for the disciples, they saw Him for a short time, then He disappeared because He did not enter the boat<sup>13</sup>.

At any rate, the LORD Christ appeared to the disciples when they were in the center of trouble. As for the multitude who were on land, they did not enjoy seeing Him so. Trouble is a fertile means for the spirit in order that it enjoys seeing its Savior drawing near it walking on the water of the world, trampling over the rough waves challenging the winds.

We do not hear, here, that the LORD Christ rebuked the waves of the sea, or the winds, to be still. However, as soon as they received Him into the boat, they found the boat safe on the shore. It seems the boat came ashore in an unusual way, miraculously. Acceptance of the LORD Christ in the spirit is enough to grant it inner peace in a supernatural manner.

+Christ is our deliverance from all danger. He achieves all deeds more than is expected by those who receive Him.

His disciples alone, and by themselves, as a model for the successive Church teachers across the ages, swim in the waves of the present life, as a model of the sea. They face many hard trials and, in preaching, endure dangers not to be overlooked, at the hands of those that oppose the faith and fight the spread of the Gospel. However, they will be free of fear and of all danger: They will rest from their labor and sorrow when Christ appears to them in His divine power after His death also when He has treaded underfoot the whole world.

This is what walking on the sea indicates, as long as the sea, in general in the holy books is considered a symbol of the world...Thus, when Christ will come in the glory of His Father, as it is written (Matt 16:27) then the boat of the saintly apostles, that is to say the Church, and those who sail in it, that is those who in faith and love rise above worldly business, will without delay or trouble, win the land where they were going, for their aim is to reach the heavenly kingdom, their calm harbor. Saint Cyril the Great

+ O Christians, why are you afraid?

Christ speaks: "It is I; do not be afraid."

Why do you worry about those affairs? Why are you afraid?

He has already told you that those events will surely happen..."It is I; do not be afraid. Then they willingly received Him into the boat." [20-21]

When they recognized Him, they were happy and free of their fears, "and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going" [21]. An end at land was found: from the water region to the solid region, from trouble to steadfastness, from the road to the destination<sup>14</sup>. Saint Augustine

+ He permitted the tempest to rage so that they may seek Him. He appeased the storm so that they may know His authority, and He did not enter the boat so that the miracle may be

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 25:7.

greater!<sup>15</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

### 3—The People seek Him in Capernaum

“On the following day, when the people who were standing on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, except that one which His disciples had entered, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with His disciples, but His disciples had gone away alone—[22]

Saint Cyril the Great says that the miracle of the LORD Christ walking on the water happened at night in darkness. The multitude who watched His movements discovered what happened without being informed by Him. “Whoever wants to follow Christ’s footsteps, and as much as is possible to humankind to be formed according to His model, must necessarily refuse to live the life of pride. He must not deviate seeking praise when he practices virtue. He must not boast when he enters an unusual life of great asceticism. He must rather yearn for God’s eyes only to see him, He who sees all that is hidden and reveals openly and clearly what is done in secret.”

“However, other boats came from Tiberias, near the place where they ate bread after the LORD had given thanks” [23]  
“when the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they also got into boats and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.[24]  
And when they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, ‘Rabbi, when did You come here?’ [25]

What does the other side of the sea mean? It is the north shore where Capernaum is in the land of Geennesaret.

It seems that they found Him in the synagogue [59] for it was the LORD’s custom to attend religious meetings (Luke 4:16). It befits us to seek Him in His people’s meeting place because He is in their midst. When they found that He had departed when they wanted to make Him king, they began to treat Him as a rabbi and not as a king.

+ What did the multitude anticipate, except that He came there walking on the sea? It was not possible that He took another boat, for the evangelist says that there was one boat only, that which the disciples entered. Therefore, when they came to Him after great astonishment, they did not ask Him how He crossed the sea or how He arrived there. They did not want to understand such a great miracle. What did they say then? ‘Rabbi, when did You come here?’ [25]<sup>16</sup>

+ The Jews crossed the Red Sea directed by Moses, but in circumstances totally different from these. Moses did all that through prayer as a servant. As for Christ, He acted with absolute authority. There, when the winds from the south blew, the water divided to make them cross on

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<sup>15</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom.43:1*

<sup>16</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom.43:l.*

dry land (Ex 14:21). But here, the miracle is greater because the sea kept its appropriate nature and its LORD walked on its surface. Thus testifying to what the Book says, “and treads upon the waves of the sea”(Job 9:8).<sup>17</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

#### 4—I Am the Living Bread

“Jesus answered them and said,

Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs,

But because you ate of the loaves and were filled.” [26] Many people do not seek God except to ask Him to stretch His hands and give them their temporary needs. Few people long for a meeting with God for Himself. Many ask of God the cheap bread, and not the precious love: the bread coming down from heaven (Ex 16:14; Neh 9:15; Ps 78: 24; Ps 105:40).

He stresses that He grants bread equal to the Father’s gift, not to Moses’ level [32]. He is God the gift, the bread that comes down from heaven. He feeds man, because He is divine wisdom (Prov. 9:1-5).

He grants bread, and is greater than Moses.

He is the bread that comes down from heaven.

He is the bread that gives satisfaction as He is the wisdom of God.

The Eucharist that grants eternal life.

+ The lenient, gentle style is not always beneficial, for there are times when the teacher must employ a strong language... When the multitude came and found Jesus and flattered Him saying ‘Rabbi, when did You come here?’ [25] He, to show that He does not want glory from men, but rather demands one thing which is their salvation, answered them severely to correct their attitude, not only by using this manner of speech, but also by exposing and revealing their thoughts...<sup>18</sup>

+ He rebuked them with His words, but He did that kindly and with compassion. For He did not say to them: ‘You gormandizers, slaves of your stomachs, I did for you so many miracles but you did not follow Me, nor were you amazed at my works.’ He rather spoke to them gently and amiably saying ‘You seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.’<sup>19</sup> Saint John Chrysostom.

+ We must obey and love Christ, not to obtain physical blessings but to receive salvation from Him. Saint Cyril the Great.

+ Rarely is Jesus sought for His own sake only.<sup>20</sup> Saint Augustine.

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<sup>17</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 43:2.*

<sup>18</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 44:1.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 25:10.*

“Do not labor for the food which perishes,  
but for the food which endures to everlasting life,  
which the Son of Man will give you,  
because God the Father has set His seal on Him.” [27]

The Father has set His seal on Him so that He may execute the work of conciliation and accept, in lieu of the believers, the Holy Spirit to descend on Him. The seal is set on Him, so that we all may be sealed in Him and that we may be counted God’s anointed.

+ As though He says to them: I have fed your bodies so that you may ask for the other food that endures and feeds your spirits. But you hurried to take earthly food and, therefore, I will not guide you toward earthly food, but rather toward that food which does not give temporary life, but everlasting life: food to nourish your spirits, not your bodies.

+ There is nothing neither worse nor more shameful than voracity. It demeans the intellect and renders the spirit corporeal. It causes blindness so that one does not see well<sup>21</sup>.

+ “God the Father has set His seal on Him” [27] meaning: “He sent Him for this purpose, to give you food.” The word announces other interpretations also, for he says in a different place, “He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true” (John 3:33)... It seems to me that this statement hints here at “the Father has set His seal” not that He “admitted” or “declared His testimony.” Christ indeed, admitted about Himself, but as He argues with the Jews He presents His Father’s testimony for Him<sup>22</sup>. Saint John Chrysostom.

+ Who can give the people food that keeps them to everlasting life? This is an entirely strange thing for human nature. This befits He who is God above all. As though He says ‘I am not incapable of giving you food that can endure and be fruitful toward eternal life and eternal joy. For, in spite of that I seem to be one of you, a man that has a body, yet I have been anointed and God the Father has sent His seal on Me to be like Him. Saint Cyril the Great.

+ What is the seal but a particular sign? To set a seal means to set a mark on the thing in order that no confusion may happen between it and another thing.

So, ‘the Father has sent His seal on Him’... that is to say has granted Him a certain thing that in consequence, He may not be compared to other human beings. For this reason, it is said concerning Him: ‘God, Your God has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.’ (Ps. 45:7) What, then does ‘has His seal’ mean other than that He is excepted from the others?

This is the importance of ‘more than Your companions.’ He says: ‘Do not despise Me because I am the Son of Man. Rather ask of Me not food that perishes but the food which endures to everlasting life. For I am the Son of Man in a way by which I am not one of you. I am the Son of Man in a way by which the Father has set His seal on Me... He gave me something

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<sup>21</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 45:1.*

<sup>22</sup> *Hom. 44.*

peculiar to Me so that no confusion may occur between Me and human beings, rather human beings are saved through Me.’<sup>23</sup> Saint Augustine.

“Then they said to Him,  
‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’” [28]

When He asked them to labor not for the food that perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, they asked Him how they may accomplish divine works, or the works according to God’s pleasure. What is required of them more than to obey the Law? Is the Law incomplete and is there what is better than the Law?

Saint Augustine says that the Lord Christ instructed them not to ask for food which perishes, but for food which endures to everlasting life. Therefore, the multitude asked Him, ‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ [28] meaning ‘How can we practice this instruction?’ The answer came: to believe in Him whom He sent.

Belief makes their works acceptable to God. The LORD did not want to differentiate between the works and faith, but rather He declared that belief is itself work. This is faith working through love (Gal 5:6).

+ Their question was not of good intent. We can suppose it did not originate in their wish for learning, but was rather the result of excessive pride, as though they refrained from more knowledge than that they already had. As though they say, ‘suffices us, good Lord, to know the writings of Moses. We know more than we need about the things that the skillful in the works of God should seek. What new thing will You give us in addition to those determined at that time? And what strange thing will You teach us that has not been revealed to us through divine words?’

The questioning here was by way of stupidity, not motivated by an active will. Saint Cyril the Great.

+ They did not say that because they wanted to learn and work (as is shown in what followed that), but so that He may give them food once more<sup>24</sup>. Saint John Chrysostom.

“Jesus answered and said to them,  
This is the work of God,  
That you believe in Him whom He sent.” [29]

The answer was that they lacked one thing that was the essence of the Law: that they believe in Him, the Messiah that the Law mentions as the Savior of the world which sin corrupted.

The word ‘believe’ here has the meaning of practical, living faith: the believer clings to Him and follows Him in the path of the Cross.

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<sup>23</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 25:11.*

<sup>24</sup> *Hom. 45. PG 59:262.*

+ It was necessary that He shows them that they were still very far from worship acceptable to God and that they knew nothing about the truly good things. For, as they adhered to the letter of the Law, their minds were filled with symbols and abstract forms...

The work that the pure spirit practices is faith going toward Christ.

What is much more sublime than this is man's zeal to be wise in knowing Christ more than to adhere to the symbolic shadows. Saint Cyril the Great.

"Therefore they said to Him,  
'What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do?'" [30]

The Jews demanded of the Lord a sign so that they may believe in Him. Did they consider feeding the multitude among whom were about 5000 men, with five barely loaves and two fish, a trivial sign?

They demanded of Him a miracle comparable to that that happened at the time of Moses when their fathers ate the manna in the desert; they ate bread coming down from heaven. They saw the miracle of feeding the multitude with five loaves and two fish and they did not believe. It was not possible that they see greater than this, but their minds were unable to comprehend the truth.

"Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written,  
'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" [31] "Then Jesus said to them,  
'Most assuredly, I say to you,  
Moses did not give you the bread from heaven,  
But my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.'" [32]

So that they may understand the truth, Christ revealed to them the depth of God's deed with their fathers when He supported them in the desert for 40 years with manna coming down from heaven:

- a) It was not Moses, but God who gave them the manna.
- b) The manna was not the true bread, but was a symbol for it.
- c) Now God gives them the true bread not to compare at all with the manna.
- d) He is the true bread from heaven, for whose sake their fathers were given the manna as a symbol for Him.

+ With extreme stupidity they crown Moses with this work (the manna from heaven) and, therefore, they ask of Christ a sign equivalent to that sign, without showing any admiration, at all, of the sign He showed them during an entire day. Even though it was great, they say giving food must extend for them a long time. Consequently, we see Him rebuking them strongly so that they may admit and accept the fact that the power of the Savior and His teaching which they are about to receive, are the more glorious.

+ Now also the Savior tells them they do not understand and they are extremely ignorant concerning the writings of Moses. For, they should have known quite clearly that Moses was serving God's works for the people and also, the works of the Israelites toward God. Moses himself did not perform the miracles, but was rather a servant and a worker in service of these deeds...Let us, then, learn with more discernment and prudence to respect our fathers the saints...However, when the speech is about our Savior, we must say: "For who in the heavens can be compared to the LORD? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the LORD?" (Ps.89:6) Saint Cyril the Great

+ He could have answered them: "I now perform greater miracles than Moses did since I do not need a stick or prayer, but I do everything by Myself. If you remember the manna, behold, for I give you bread." However, the time was not appropriate for such talk because the only thing He earnestly wanted was to give them spiritual food. Contemplate His infinite wisdom and the manner of His answer.<sup>25</sup>

+ Christ's words to Jews: "Moses did not give you the bread from heaven", since the manna is not from heaven, so how may it be said that it is from heaven? It is an expression similar to "birds of the air" and "the LORD thundered from heaven."

His words: "the true bread from heaven" as Christ is the true bread, not that the miracle of the manna was false, but because it was an image and not the truth itself.

+ Why did He not say: "It was not Moses who gave you, but I" but instead He put God in place of Moses, and Himself in place of the manna? He did so because of the extreme weakness of His hearers...Christ guided them gradually. Saint John Chrysostom

+ Jesus promised them a greater thing than Moses gave them. True, through Moses was the promise of a kingdom, of a land that flows with milk and honey, the promise of temporary peace, of many children, good physical health and all the other temporary blessings which imply a spiritual symbol....It was the promise of filling the stomach on earth with food which perishes. As for the other, Jesus, He promises not food which perishes, but food which endures to everlasting life.<sup>26</sup> Saint Augustine

"For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."  
[33]

+ With extreme stupidity you suppose that the manna is the bread from heaven, although the manna fed the Jews only in the desert while the world extends to other innumerable nations. However, when the time of truth came close to our doors, "My Father gives you the true bread from heaven" for whom the gift of the manna was a shadow in old times. He says, "Let no one think that that manna was truly the bread from heaven, but rather was in the interest of that bread that can feed all the earth and give the world perfect life."

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<sup>25</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 45:1.*

<sup>26</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 25:12.*



The true manna is Christ Himself understood as regarding God the Father gave Him in the sign of the manna to those who were in ancient times.

“And given them of the bread of heaven. Men ate angels’ food” (Ps 78:24) ...It is obvious to all that there is no bread and food for the intellectual powers in heaven other than the only Son of God the Father. He, therefore, is the true manna and the bread from heaven whom God the Father gives to all the rational creations.

Christ promises to give us the food that is from heaven, that is to say, comfort through the Spirit, meaning the spiritual manna. With that manna we have strength to endure all hardship and resolution. When we obtain that, we do not fall, because of our weakness, in those matters to which we must not descend.

It was more appropriate for them to realize that Moses was only doing the service of mediation and that the gift was not made by a human hand, but was the work of divine grace. The spiritual is thus in a dense frame and is expressed to us as the bread from heaven that gives life to all the world, not only a food for one only race. Saint Cyril the Great

+ He did not say it was for the Jews only, but for the entire world. This is not a simple food, but is rather the life: another life that is different. He called Him “life” because all were dead in sins.<sup>27</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

“Then they said to Him,  
‘LORD, give us this bread always.’”[34]

The Jews expected with the coming of the Messiah, to enjoy, along with authority, dominion, freedom and all kinds of temporary pleasures. Rabbi Mayemon said that when the Messiah comes He will raise the dead who will assemble in the Paradise of Eden. They will eat, drink and become full at all times. Their houses will be built with precious stones. Their beds will be soft silk. The rivers will overflow with wine and oil flavored with spices. The manna will descend on them having various tastes and every Israelite will find on his plate what pleases him. If he wants fat food, he will find it. A young man will taste it and find it is bread; to an old man it will be honey, and to a child it will be oil. Such will be Christ’s coming times. He will grant Israel peace and will sit in the Paradise of Eden...<sup>28</sup>

+ While our Savior Christ in many words—if we may say so—tries to attract them away from corporeal concept, and with His perfectly wise teachings to make them soar in spiritual meditation, they do not go far from physical benefit. When they hear about the bread that gives life to the world, they imagine for themselves earthly bread because as it is written their “god is their belly” (Phil 3:19). And as they are conquered by the evils of the belly they deserve to hear the saying: their “glory is in their shame.” Saint Cyril the Great

“And Jesus said to them:  
‘I am the bread of life.

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<sup>27</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom.45:1.*

<sup>28</sup> *Cf. Adam Clarke Commentary.*

He who comes to Me shall never hunger,  
And he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” [35]

The LORD Christ, in His other discourses, used to present testimonies that He was declaring the truth. Sometimes, He announces that the Father testifies of Him. At other times He quotes the prophecies of prophets, or He gives His signs, works and miracles. However, here, as Saint John Chrysostom comments<sup>29</sup>, Christ does not mention witnesses as He declares about Himself that He is the bread from heaven, for they saw and felt how He fed them with a few loaves. The saint says that Christ declares His divinity, for whoever comes to Him will be filled and will never hunger.

+ He said to them “I am the bread of life” [35] to rebuke them, because when they thought that the food was ordinary, they rushed to Him, but not when they learned that it was of a spiritual kind.<sup>30</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

+ Now I have come to fulfill My promise in its time. “I am the bread of life”, not corporeal bread, for it does not just satisfy the feeling of hunger and free the body from destruction caused by hunger, but it forms the whole living being once more toward everlasting life. The human being thus created lives forever conquering death. These words refer to the life and blessing we obtain through His holy body. Through His holy body the special characteristic of the only Son, that is life, is transferred to us.

+ When we are called to the kingdom of heaven through Christ—because this is, I think, what the entrance into the Promised Land refers to—the symbolic manna does not concern us any more. For, we are not nourished by Moses’ writings, but rather we have the bread of life, that is Christ. He feeds us to everlasting life by means of the provisions of the Holy Spirit, and partaking of His special body that pours in us communion with God and blots out death that overcame us since the ancient curse.

+ I agree with you that the manna was given by means of Moses. However, those who ate at that time got hungry. I admit with you that water came out from a rock for you, but those who drank got thirsty. And that gift, about which we spoke, gave them merely temporary delight. But, “He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” What, then, does Christ promise? He does not promise a perishable thing, but rather promises that mystery—he Eulogia—in partaking of His Body and Blood. The whole human being then regains incorruption and does not need anything that drives away death, I mean food and drink. Christ’s holy body gives life to them who have the Body in them and preserves them totally in incorruption because His body blends with their bodies. For we realize no other body but His has life in essence. His Body has no equivalent body.

+ When we approach that divine, heavenly blessing and ascend to the holy communion with Christ, by that only do we vanquish Satan’s deception and as we become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4) we rise to life and incorruption. Saint Cyril the Great

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<sup>29</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom. 45:2.*

<sup>30</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom.45:1.*

+ You demand bread from heaven. This bread is before you and you do not want to eat.  
“But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe.”[36]<sup>31</sup> Saint Augustine

“But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe.” [36]

+ They saw the LORD, God in essence, when He fed the great innumerable crowd. They had come to Him with five barley loaves and two small fish that He broke and distributed to them. They saw but did not believe because of the blindness that covered their understanding like fog because of the divine wrath... As they adhere to innumerable stumbling blocks and are bound by cords of their iniquities from which there is no escape (Prov 5:22) they did not accept Him when He came to them He who is able to untie their fetters and liberate them. For this reason, these people were hard-hearted. Saint Cyril the Great

“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me,  
and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” [37]

Saint John Chrysostom directs our attention here to the role of God and the role of man. Man cannot believe by Himself, but by God attracting him to Himself and by God’s free active grace in man. But the human being does not enjoy this faith by force, but rather comes to the LORD, in all freedom, and He keeps and sanctifies him and does not cast him out.

+ He denotes, here, the gentile people who are about to believe in Him whole-heartedly. I shall not cast out the person who comes to Me: that is to say, I shall not throw him like a useless vessel...as a despised person and he will not remain without a share of My care. I shall gather him into My barn and he will dwell in the heavenly places. He will see himself having all hope surpassing man’s understanding. Saint Cyril the Great

+ What He declares, here, is nothing but this: “Belief in Me is not an ordinary thing. It does not come by means of human evidence or proofs. It rather needs a proclamation from above and a spirit whose disposition is good. God attracts that spirit so that it may accept the proclamation.”<sup>32</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

“For I have come down from heaven,  
not to do My own will,  
but the will of Him who sent Me.” [38]

He came down from heaven, not to do what human beings wish, but to act in accordance to His divine unlimited wisdom, according to His goodness and mercy. The Jewish tendency is to despise the tax collectors and sinners and shut the door of heaven in the face of gentiles; but God’s mercies embrace them. The Word, the Son, came to declare these divine mercies.

+ “I have come down from heaven” that is to say, I became man in accordance to the good pleasure of God the Father. I have refused to do deeds incongruous with God’s will so that I may fulfill for them—those who believe in Me—everlasting life and resurrection from the dead

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<sup>31</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 25:14.

<sup>32</sup> *Homilies on St. John*, Hom.45:2.

by destroying the power of death. He endured the contempt of the Jews, their insults, offense, mockery, scourge, spitting and what is worse, false witness, and lastly death.

You will understand why Christ our Savior did not desire the suffering on the cross, and yet wanted it for our sake and for the good pleasure of God the Father. For, when He was about to go to suffer, He addressed God (the Father) saying, in the form of a prayer “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” (Matt 26:39). As He is God the Word, the immortal, incorruptible and life itself in essence, He could not be afraid in front of death. And I believe this is obvious to all, for as He should be alarmed before death when He is on its verge, He is shown truly as a man...The union of humanity with the Word brought back the assurance appropriate to God and was recalled to an honorable aim. I mean to say that human nature did not do what seemed to be good for its own will, but rather followed the divine aim, being immediately prepared to run toward whatever its Creator’s law demands of it to do.

Do you now see how Christ did not want death because of the body and the mortification of suffering, and yet He wanted death so that He may accomplish the purpose of the good pleasure of the Father for the sake of the whole world, that is life and redemption for all! Saint Cyril the Great

“This is the will of the Father who sent Me,  
that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing,  
but should raise it up at the last day.” [39]

God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. But He does not force them to be saved as though they were pieces of rock. He treats them like rational beings having complete freedom.

+ What do you say? Is Your will different from His will? In order that no one may think that, we read what follows. What He said was this: “I came not to do anything but what the Father wills. For, I have no will of My own that is different from that of the Father. Everything that is for the Father is for Me; and everything that is for Me is for the Father. Everything that is for the Father and for the Son is shared. So, He says truly, “not to do My own will”...because as I said at a different place, He concealed higher concerns for a while. He desired to prove that if He said, “this is My own will” they would have despised Him. Therefore, He says, “As I cooperate with that will” desiring to avert them the more. As though He says, “What do you think? Do you vex Me with your disbelief? No, for you anger My Father” and “This is the will of who sent Me that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing”[39]. Here, He appears He does not need their service, since He did not come for personal benefit, but for their salvation, not to obtain honor from them...What came before and after that is that He strives with all zeal to show that He came for the sake of their salvation. And He says that He brings glory to the Father, so that they may not distrust Him.<sup>33</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

“And this is the will of Him who sent Me,  
that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him

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<sup>33</sup> Hom. 45. PG 59:267.

may have everlasting life;  
and I will raise him up at the last day.” [40]

+ Our redemption and deliverance from death, and our restoration to life is the work of the entire Holy Trinity...Through all the Holy Trinity come all good things to us, so that God the Father is all in all through the Son in the Holy Spirit. Saint Cyril the Great

+ Who believes in Him eats the living bread.<sup>34</sup> Saint Augustine

+ Why does He always stress resurrection? So that the people may not judge God's care through the present circumstances alone, like those who despair because they do not enjoy munificence here. They should rather wait for the future affairs. Also they must not think anything of God because they are not punished for their sins. They should rather look out for the coming life. Now, those people do not gain anything (from their iniquity), but we must win profit through suffering by a continuous remembrance of the resurrection...There is resurrection and it is near and not far or at some distance from us. “For, yet a little while He who is coming will come and will not tarry.” (Heb.10:37)<sup>35</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

“The Jews then complained about Him,  
because He said, ‘I am the bread which came down from heaven.’”[41]

The Jews complained about Him because in His talk He asserted to them that He is infinitely greater than Moses, that He alone can give them everlasting life, and that He came down from heaven. They heard about angels coming down from heaven, but they never heard that a man was of heavenly essence.

+ He Himself is “the bread which came down from heaven”, the bread that quickens the deficient and does not diminish. Bread that can be eaten (and tasted) and cannot be wasted. This bread is denoted by the manna. For it has been said, He gave “them of the bread of heaven. Men ate angels’ food” (Ps 78:24-25).

Who is the angels’ food but Christ?

However, so that man may eat angels’ food, the LORD of angels became man. If He had not become man, He would not have had a body; and if He had no body, we would not eat the altar bread.

Let us hurry to the inheritance, looking out for our acceptance of a great pledge from Him.

Brethren, would we yearned for Christ's life, looking out for holding the pledge of Christ's death. Saint Augustine

+ “Whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame.” (Phil 3:19) This is what

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<sup>34</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 26:1.

<sup>35</sup> *Homilies on St. John*, Hom.45:2.

Paul said about some people in his epistle to the Philippians. Now it is clear that those Jews were of this kind. This is obvious in what happened before and in what they said when they came to Christ. When He gave them bread and filled their stomachs, they said He is a prophet and wanted to make Him a king. However, when He preached to them about the spiritual bread and everlasting life, when He led them away from the palpable and spoke about the resurrection and raised their minds to what is above, it befitted them to admire that, but instead they complained and went away.<sup>36</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

“And they said, ‘Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” [42]

+ It was more appropriate for them to realize that Christ who is expected to come would not be without a physical body, but would rather come in a human form as was prophesied about Him. He is in the appearance shared by all. For this reason, the voice of the prophet tells us that the holy virgin “shall conceive, and bear a son” (Isaiah 7:14) ...and “the LORD has sworn in truth to David” (Ps 132:11). He will not turn from what He promised that “I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body” as it was written. It was prophesied also that “there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse” (Isaiah 11:1)...However, as the Jews comprehend the physical measure of Christ our Savior, and as they know His mother and His father (though Joseph was not really His father) they were not ashamed to complain because Christ said that “He came down from heaven.” Saint Cyril the Great

+ The Jews said about Christ “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph?” It is clear that they still did not know His miraculous, wonderful birth. They, therefore, called Him the son of Joseph. They did not say this because He was the son of Joseph, but they said this because they could not hear about His wonderful birth. Saint John Chrysostom

+ Those Jews were far from the bread that is from heaven, and they did not know how to hunger for it...

Their heartstrings were weak; they had open ears but were deaf; they saw but stood blind. This bread in truth requires hunger in the inner man. For this reason He says at a different place, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.” (Matt 5:6). The apostle Paul says that Christ is for us righteousness (1 Cor 1:30). Therefore, he who hungers for this bread, hungers for righteousness, that righteousness who came down from heaven, righteousness that God grants, not that which man does for himself...

What is the righteousness of God for man? It is that man becomes righteous in God.

However, once more, what was the righteousness of those Jews? That was the righteousness they made with their strength and upon which they relied. By this they declared they observed the law by their uprightness, although no one perfects the law without the help of grace, that is to say, the help of the bread that came down from heaven.<sup>37</sup> Saint Augustine

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<sup>36</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom.46:1.*

<sup>37</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 26:1.*

“Jesus therefore answered and said to them,  
‘Do not murmur among yourselves.’” [43]

In spite of the prophecies which affirm that the Messiah will come of David’s descendants, and that He is born of a virgin, the Jews criticize Christ looking on Him with contempt as the son of Mary and Joseph who are perfectly known to them. On the other hand, He gently draws their attention to His heavenly Father who alone can reveal to them the Son Incarnate who grants the resurrection.

+ The Jews looked at Jesus and did not know that His Father is in heaven. They did not confess that He in essence is the Son of the God of all. They only perceived His earthly mother, and Joseph. As He answers them gently, He quickly works by turning them to His divine honor for their benefit. It is as if He knows their secret murmur and what goes on in their minds. Through this same matter He moves them to realize that they fell away from the truth and formed an extremely base idea about Him. It befit them to offer divine honor to Him who knows their hearts perfectly and tests the movement of thought. He does not lack knowledge of the thoughts that go on in their minds...He reveals to them that His knowledge is of the work of exalted grace...

For their good He asserts to them the promise that He will raise from the dead those who believe in Him. Thus, He proves even to the most ignorant people, that He is God truly and in essence because the ability to raise from the dead is that of God alone and does not pertain to any creature. Saint Cyril the Great

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him,  
and I will raise him up at the last day.”[44]

How does the Father draw him? Saint Augustine answers that what draws a person is what he enjoys.

If you offer grass, the flock will be drawn to it, and if you offer fruit a child will be drawn. Thus the Father draws a human being by offering him the Savior as being his desire. The human being that realizes in himself that he is a lost sinner, and yearns to fly from hell and reach heaven, finds in Christ’s blood what attracts him.

As though He says to them “Why do you murmur among yourselves? You cannot believe unless the Father draws you.” He draws the spirits not with partiality, but he who asks enjoys faith; yet He draws no one against his will.

Saint Augustine says “It is possible that a person comes to church against his will. He can approach the altar against his will and partake of the Sacrament by force, but he cannot believe unless he wants to. Faith is not something that is achieved through the body. Listen to the apostle ‘with the heart one believes unto righteousness.’ What follows is this...’and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation’ (Rom 10:10). This confession is issued from the bottom of the heart. Sometimes you hear a person confessing, and you do not know whether he believes or not.

Therefore, since a man believes in Christ with the heart, and what he does he does not do unwillingly, nor is he drawn against his will, so how may we answer the question ‘No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him’ [44]?

Someone may say ‘If he is drawn, he goes against his will. And if he goes unwillingly, he believes...For we do not go to Christ with our feet, but with faith, not with physical emotion, but against our will...’

Do not think that you are drawn against your will, for the mind also is drawn with love.

It is necessary for us also that we do not fear, lest we are reproached in accordance to this evangelical word of the holy Bible by those who are oppressive with words while they are far from active work and from spiritual concerns, lest we are told ‘how can I believe willingly if I am not drawn?’ I say, it is not enough that you are drawn willingly, for you can be drawn even joyfully. “Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.” (Ps 37:4). There is delight for the heart that finds sweetness in that bread from heaven. In addition to this, if what the poetic line says is true ‘Every man is drawn by his desire’, it follows that not through necessity, but through delight, not as an obligation but as a joy, a man is drawn. How much more we must say that a human being is drawn to Christ when he delights in the truth, when he rejoices in the blessing, in righteousness and in everlasting life, all of which is Christ?”<sup>38</sup>

“It is written in the prophets,  
‘And they shall all be taught by God.’  
Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.” [45]

This occurs in Jeremiah 31:34 and Isaiah 54:13. How does God teach us? By declaring His practical love for us through His Son’s cross. Before, they were in terror of God as the judge, but after His declaration of His love for them through the cross, He taught them and drew them to Him so that they may enjoy the everlasting life.

Saint Cyril the Great comments on the statement of the LORD Christ that all will be taught by God, saying “As God is the Father, and this is how He is comprehended and how it is preached about Him, He, through this, sows the knowledge of His Son Himself in His hearers. It is thus said of the Son also, that He is of Him truly in essence and so proclaims the Father. Consequently, He says ‘I have manifested Your name to the men’ (John 17:6) ...The Father plants in us the perception of His Son proper, not with a voice that comes from above the clouds, or encircles the earth like thunder, but by divine enlightenment shining in us that we may understand the revelation of the holy Bible.

+ Do you not see the honor of faith and that it is not of a human being, nor by a human being that they are taught this, but by God Himself?<sup>39</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

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<sup>38</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 26:2-4.

<sup>39</sup> *Homilies on St. John*, Hom.46:1.



+ It is written in the prophets “And they shall all be taught by God” [45] Why, O Jews, do I say this? The Father does not teach you, so how can you know Me? For, God shall teach all men of that kingdom. They will not be taught by human beings. And if they are taught through people, what they understand is an inner gift for them that shines in them and is announced in them.

What is the role of men who preach the news from without? What I do until now is from without. I pour the sound of words into your ears. What is the value of what I say or speak about unless it is revealed for you from within?

Outside, there is the man who plants the tree; inside, there is the Creator of the tree. He who plants and he who waters work without. This is what we do. However, “neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase” (1 Cor 3:7). That means that all those are taught by God. Who are all those? “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me” [45]. Look how the Father attracts. He gives joy through His teaching. He does not use compulsion. How does He attract? “They shall all be taught by God” [45]. This is the Father’s attraction.<sup>40</sup>

+ We know how God teaches those who are God’s meek ones. For those who hear from the Father and learn, come to Him who justifies the ungodly (John 6:45; Rom 4:5) in order that they may keep God’s justification not only in their memory, but also in carrying out righteousness. Thus, he who glories, glories not in himself but let him glory in the LORD (1 Cor 1:31) and overflow with gratitude. Saint Augustine

“Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God;  
He has seen the Father.” [46]

He does not teach them by letting them see Him face to face, or through a direct vocal conversation, but rather, His Holy Spirit works in them. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him (John 1:18).

Saint Cyril the Great observes that here, the LORD Christ means, in an implicit way, Moses the great among the prophets. Some Jews thought that when Moses entered into the thick darkness, he saw with his physical eyes, God who cannot be seen. Here, the LORD Christ affirms that He alone sees the Father because He is born of Him. “However, how and by what means He sees the Father or the Father sees Him, our tongue is incapable of mentioning that thought, but we must understand it in a divine manner.”

+ Someone may object saying, what then, is it not written that ‘the angels of these little ones always see the face of My Father who is in heaven’ (see Matt 18:10)? Yes, but the angels see God not as He is, but according to their endurance. So, Jesus Christ says, “Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God, He has seen the Father.” The angels see God according to their power of enduring and the archangels see Him as much as they can endure, the

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<sup>40</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 26:7.

thrones and authorities see more than the former., but do not see as God is worthy.<sup>41</sup>

The Son with the Holy Spirit alone can see the Father as He really is because He “searches all things, yes, the deep things of God” (1 Cor 2:10). Thus the only begotten Son with the Holy Spirit comprehend the Father in His perfection, for it is said, “Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (Matt 11:27).

As He sees all according to the power of enduring, He, therefore, sees the Father in His perfection and reveals God the Father through the Spirit, since the Son with the Spirit are “One” with the Father in divinity.

The begotten knows the begetter, and the begetter knows the begotten.

If the angels are ignorant in ‘knowing God in His perfection’, let no one be ashamed of confessing his ignorance. Truly, I speak now as anyone speaks at any occasion. But how do I speak, I do not know. So, how can I inform you concerning Him who grants the gift of speaking!

And as I cannot acquaint you with the distinctive qualities of the spirit, how can I describe the Giver of the spirit?!

+ We believe in One God: the Immeasurable, Inexpressible Father whom “no one has seen” but “the only begotten Son...has declared Him” (John 1:18). For, “He who is from God, He has seen the Father” (1 Tim 6:16) He whom the angels always see (Matt 18:10) according to the degree of each. As for the brilliance of the Father’s face “in perfection”, this will remain in sanctity for the Son with the Holy Spirit.<sup>43</sup> Saint Cyril of Jerusalem

+ He Himself has clarified this and declared to us the meaning He intends as He says, “Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.” He immediately adds what enables us to understand: “Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father” [46].

What does He say? I see the Father; you do not see Him; in spite of that you do not come to me, except the Father draws you. And does being drawn by the Father mean other than that you learn from the Father? What do you learn from the Father except what you hear about Him? What do you hear about Him, except you hear the Word of the Father, that is to say you hear Me? In this case when I say “everyone who has heard and learned from the Father” you must say to yourselves: but we have never seen the Father, how can we hear Him? Hear from Me. For, “Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father.” I know the Father. I am from the Father. Hear from Me as the Word that is from Him, not the

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<sup>41</sup> In his article about ‘Divine Care’ translated by Aida Hanna, chapter 3 Saint John Chrysostom discusses the limitations of the wisdom of the heavenly beings in knowing God as He is or His judgments perfectly. He says, “Truly, God even in relation to these ranks is not comprehended and they cannot approach Him. He, therefore, condescends in the manner related in Revelation. For, God is not restricted by place and does not sit on a throne...Rather, His sitting on a throne and being surrounded by heavenly hosts is by way of His love for them.”

<sup>42</sup> Article 6:6.

<sup>43</sup> Article 7:11.

vocal, articulate word, but the Word that remains with the Speaker and draws the hearer.<sup>44</sup> Saint Augustine

“Most assuredly, I say to you,  
he who believes in Me has everlasting life.” [47]

The LORD Christ declares in this that he who believes in Him:

- 1- The Father draws him through His Son’s attracting works of redemption.
- 2- Hears His teachings.
- 3- Accepts the salvation offered to him.
- 4- Is nourished by the Heavenly Bread.
- 5- Is preserved in the Faith.
- 6- Does not perish but is raised in the Last Day.
- 7- Enjoys everlasting life.

+ Considering He is the everlasting life after He gives Himself to those who believe in Him, that is to say “that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith” (Eph 3:17). Saint Cyril the Great

+ Would that what follows urges us: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.” He wishes to declare Himself who He is. He says, he who believes in Me possesses Me. For, Christ Himself is the real God and everlasting life. He, therefore, says, he who believes in Me dwells in Me, and he who dwells in Me, I am for him. And what does “I am for him” mean? That he has everlasting life.<sup>45</sup> Saint Augustine

“I am the bread of life.” [48]

“Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead.” [49]

That manna did not keep their bodies from death, nor did it grant them everlasting life. This is as they understand it because they believed their fathers died in the wilderness and they did not have everlasting life. Their eating of the manna did not preserve them from the wrath of God that descended on them because of their continual rebellion and complaint in the wilderness (1 Cor 10:3-5).

+ He institutes something to attract them; that is that they suppose they are capable of higher affairs than their fathers (meaning the amazing people who lived at the time of Moses). Therefore, after He says that those who ate the manna are dead, He continues “If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever” [51].<sup>46</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

“This is the bread which comes down from heaven,  
that one may eat of it and not die.” [50]

In accordance to that, the LORD came to offer His body as bread that supports their

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<sup>44</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 26:9.

<sup>45</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 26:10.

<sup>46</sup> *Homilies on St. John*, Hom.46:2.

bodies, glorifies them and grants them communion with the spirits forever.

+ The Son only and truly is the bread of life. Those who have communion in Him once and are combined with Him in some manner through their communion with Him are shown to be above the bonds of death itself. We have said several times that the manna is rather a symbol or shadow of Christ. It represented the bread of life. We are supported by the Psalmist in this who shouts in the spirit “[He] had rained down manna on them to eat, and given them of the bread of heaven. Men ate angels’ food” (Ps 78:24-25)...Here the words are addressed to us because is it not foolish and extremely lacking knowledge to assume that the holy angels who are in heaven may, in spite of their incorporeal nature, be able to share with us a material dense food? Saint Cyril the Great

+ To this present day we accept the visible food, for the mystery is one thing and the action of the mystery is another thing.

How many are those who partake of the communion on the altar and die? They truly die through that communion. For this reason, the apostle says, “eats and drinks judgment to himself” (1 Cor 11:29). For, was not what he took in his mouth of the LORD poison for Judas, and yet he took it and when he partook of it, the enemy entered him, not because what he took was an evil thing, but rather because he was evil; he partook of what is good in an evil manner.

Therefore, behold, brethren that you partake of the heavenly bread in a spiritual sense. Present purity to the altar.

For though your sins are daily, at least let them not be deadly.

Before you approach the altar, take into consideration to say well, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” You forgive and, consequently, you are forgiven.

Approach in peace, it is bread, not poison.

However, behold, if you say you forgive but do not forgive you lie; you lie to who is not deceived. You can lie to God, but you cannot deceive Him.<sup>47</sup> Saint Augustine

“I am the living bread which came down from heaven.

If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever;

And the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”

[51]

I die for the sake of everybody, so that I may give life to all, Myself. I have made My flesh a sacrifice for all because death will die in My death and with Me the fallen human nature will rise. For this reason I have become like you, O man. I became an offspring of Abraham in order that “in all things He had to be made like His brethren” (Heb 2:17).

+ The body of Christ gives life to all that partake in Him because He expels death. He

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<sup>47</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 26:11.

comes and enters the dead to eliminate corruption, for (the body of the Word) is entirely full of the Word that removes corruption. Saint Cyril the Great

+ Let not your mouth, but rather your heart be ready...When we accept Him we think in Him. We accept only a little and rejoice in the heart. What nourish us is not what we see, but rather what we believe in. Therefore, we do not require what touches our exterior senses. We do not say 'Let those who see with their eyes and touch with their hands the LORD Himself after His resurrection, believe. If what is said is true that we did not touch Him, why then do we believe?'<sup>48</sup> Saint Augustine

Saint John Chrysostom points out the fruits of the Eucharist:

+ Those who partake of the Eucharist (the Body and Blood of the LORD) are granted a calm spirit, forgiveness of sins, communion of the soul, attaining the heavenly kingdom, liberty with Him rather than judgment and condemnation.<sup>49</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

Saint Irenaeus describes the Eucharist as the Bread of Eternity. Likewise, Saint Ignatius of Antioch calls the Eucharist, the Eternal Remedy.<sup>50</sup>

+ In the last days He summed up everything in Himself. Our LORD came to us not in His own capability, but rather in accordance to what we can see. Truly, He could have come to us in His inexpressible glory. However, we were not able to endure the greatness of His glory. Therefore, the Perfect Bread of the Father offered Himself to us in the form of milk because we are small children. Thus He came as a man so that we may eat, I say, from His very Body, and with this milk secretion we get accustomed to eat and drink the Word of God and so carry in us the Bread of Eternity, that is the Spirit of the Father.<sup>51</sup> Saint Irenaeus

“The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying,  
‘How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?’” [52]

Saint John Chrysostom comments on this statement saying that it was not appropriate for the Jews to argue in this manner after witnessing the miracle of the five loaves. In his comment, he also writes:

+ We need to understand the sacraments, what they are, why they are granted and what benefits we get through them.

We become one body and “members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones” (Eph 5:30). If only the partakers of Communion follow what I say! So that we may become one not through love only, but in the very fact, we unite with that Body. This is realized with the food that He offered to us without charge, yearning to reveal His love for us. For this reason, He mixed Himself with us and blended flesh with our flesh in order that we may become one, like a body united with the head...

Christ guides us toward a true friendship, so that He may reveal His love for us. He grants those who desire Him, not only that they see Him, but also that they touch, eat, stick their

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<sup>48</sup> *Sermons on N.T. Lessons*, 62:5.

<sup>49</sup> *The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, prayer after the Epiclesis*.

<sup>50</sup> *Ad. Eph. 20:1*.

<sup>51</sup> *Adv. Haer 4:38:1. PG 7: 1105-6*.

teeth into His body, that they accept and be filled with their love for Him.

Would God we return from that table like lions breathing flames that terrify Satan, thinking of our Head and of His love that He revealed to us.

In most cases the fathers introduce their children to others to feed them. As for Him, He says, ‘As for Me, I do not do this. I feed you with My body, wishing that you all be born again and have good hope in the future.’ For He who gives you Himself here, how much more He will give you later.

I desired to become your brother. For your sake I associated Myself with you in flesh and blood. I again give you the flesh and blood to be related to you.

This blood renews the image of our King in us. It radiates inexpressible beauty and hinders the sublimity of our spirits from being taken from us; but rather waters and invigorates it perpetually.

Blood that is extracted from our food does not become blood immediately, but becomes something else. As for this Blood, it is not so; it rather at once quenches the thirst of our spirits and acts in them with great power.

This secret Blood, if we take in truth, repels the evil spirits and keeps them far from us, while summoning angels and the LORD of angels to us. For, as soon as the evil spirits see the Blood of the LORD, they run away, while the angels come...He shed this Blood and caused heaven to be easily attained.<sup>52</sup>

+ Truly, the ecclesiastical sacraments are awe- inspiring. In truth, the altar is awe- inspiring. A spring flows from Paradise and overflows in actual rivers. From this table, a spring is brought that produces spiritual rivers.<sup>53</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

+ The LORD of all, Himself, requires us to be so as the prophet Isaiah says, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the LORD. For as heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Is 55:8-9) However, He who excels us immeasurably in greatness of wisdom and power, how can He not do something wonderful that surpasses our understanding?

If you, O Jew, insist saying ‘how?’ I also say to you

How did you go out of Egypt?

How did Moses’ rod change into a serpent?

If you always use the word ‘how’ you will not believe in the whole Bible and you will reject the sayings of the saints.

+ Those who believe now can also learn; because this is what Isaiah the prophet says, “If you will not believe, you will not understand” (Is 7:9 LXX). Therefore, it was right that first, faith becomes firmly rooted in them, then will follow the understanding of things they do not know. Saint Cyril the Great

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<sup>52</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom.46:3.*

<sup>53</sup> *Homilies on St. John, Hom.46:4.*

+ Like Nicodemus who was confused and said, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (John 3:4), similarly those were confused and asked, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” Saint John Chrysostom

+ The believers recognize the Body of Christ is they do not neglect being the body of Christ. They become the body of Christ when they desire to live in the spirit of Christ.<sup>54</sup> Saint Augustine

“Then Jesus said to them,  
‘Most assuredly, I say to you,  
unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man  
and drink His blood,  
you have no life in you.” [53]

+ If with a touch of His holy body only (in the raising of Jairus’s daughter, Luke 8:54 and the raising of the widow’s only son, Luke 7:12-14) He gives life to a decaying body, how may we not benefit with the greater wealth of blessing (the Eucharist) of which we partake! When we taste it we obtain Him who grants life. For it will surely be transformed for our personal good which is eternal life...

We, who by nature are prone to physical corruption, abandon our natural weakness by mingling with Life and change into the quality of life. So, this does not just require a re-creation of the spirit through the Holy Spirit toward everlasting life; but rather this earthly coarse body needs to be sanctified and called unto incorruption through the denser and nearer participation. Saint Cyril the Great

Saint Cyril the Great is astonished that the Jews who believe that by eating the paschal lamb and sprinkling its blood on the doors, they escape from death and are considered holy, still do not believe that by partaking of the Body and Blood of the Lamb of God they obtain everlasting life.

+ When both His Body and Blood gave us vigorous health, and in short, the big question concerning perfection (that is to say with Christ the head and the Church the body) arose, would God those who eat continue eating and those who drink continue drinking. I wish that the hungry and thirsty eat Life and drink Life...For, it will be so; the Body and Blood of Christ will be Life for the human being. If what we take in the sacrament is a visible thing; yet in truth we eat and drink that spiritually.<sup>55</sup> Saint Augustine

+ It is not permitted for anyone to partake of the food called “Eucharist” unless (a) he believes that what we preach is true (b) he washes with the water of the forgiveness of sins and the new birth, and (c) he lives as Christ taught us. For, we do not accept that as ordinary bread and drink. Rather, that Jesus Christ our Savior became flesh through God’s Logos. He took flesh and blood for our redemption. This is what we learned that the food sanctified by the prayer which is His words; this food that enlivens our; body and blood through transmutation from the

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<sup>54</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 26:13.

<sup>55</sup> *Sermons on N.T. Lessons*, 81:1.

Body and Blood of Jesus who became flesh and blood.<sup>56</sup> Saint Justin the Martyr

+ There is no doubt whatsoever concerning the truth of the Body and Blood. For, now with the declaration of the LORD Himself and our faith, this is true Body and true Blood and what we eat and drink take us across so that we exist in Christ and He exists in us.<sup>57</sup> Saint Hilary Bishop of Poitiers

+ We offer Him what is His rightly the partaking and union of the body and spirit. For, when the bread, which is a product of the earth, accepts God's call, it is transformed from ordinary bread into the Eucharist containing two realities, the earthly and the heavenly. Likewise, when we accept the Eucharist, our bodies become incorruptible because we hope for the everlasting resurrection.<sup>58</sup>

+ He saved us with His blood...and as we are His members we also are animated by means of His creation...

He knows the chalice (it is part of the creation) that it is His Blood with which He moistens our blood. And He knows the bread (which is also part of the creation) that He elevates as His Body and from which He grants growth to our bodies...Therefore, the mixed chalice and broken bread...become the Eucharist, the Blood of Christ and His Body giving growth and support to our body. How can the heretics assert that the body is unable to accept the gift of God which is everlasting life, which animates (the body) with the Body and Blood of the LORD and become a member in Him? The blessed Paul declares that we are "members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones" (Eph. 5:30).

He does not say this about the spiritual, unseen man, for the spirit has neither bones nor flesh; but he indicates this provision by which the LORD became a real man having flesh, nerves and bones. The chalice that is His Blood and grows in the Bread that is His Body animates this Body

Thus, also He enlivens our bodies, and when buried and decomposed in the earth, they will rise at the right time and the Logos will grant them resurrection for the glory of God the Father. He is who freely grants the dead immortality, and the decaying incorruption; for God's strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9)<sup>59</sup> Saint Irenaeus

+ There is a chalice with which the inner rooms in our spirit are purified. This chalice is not in accordance with the old provision, nor is it filled with public honor. This is rather a new chalice that comes down from heaven to the earth (John 6:50-51) filled with wine pressed out of an amazing cluster hung in the shape of a body on the wooden cross, like a bunch of grapes hanging on a vine. This is the cluster from which is the wine which cheers man's heart (Judges 9:13). It removes sadness, pours in us and carries the smell of wonder which is that of faith, true piety and purity.<sup>60</sup> Saint Ambrose

"Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life,  
and I will raise him up at the last day." [54]

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<sup>56</sup> *The Faith of Christians, First Apology*, 65-67.

<sup>57</sup> *On The Trinity, Book 8:14*.

<sup>58</sup> *Adv. Haer. 4:18:5*.

<sup>59</sup> *Adv. Haer. 5:2, 3*.

<sup>60</sup> *On the Christian Faith, Book 2:20:135*.



+ He did not say ‘He came to pass in flesh’, but ‘He became flesh’ to clarify the unity. And, we do not say that God the Word, who is of the Father, changed into the nature of flesh, or that the incarnation changed into the Word....But in an inexpressible manner that surpasses human understanding, the Word united with His particular body and He joined it all to Himself...He expelled corruption from our nature and also removed death which ruled since old times because of sin. Therefore, whoever eats the holy Body that is Christ’s has eternal life, because this Body has the Word that is for Life by nature. He, therefore, says, “and I will raise him up at the last day.” Instead of saying, “My Body will raise him up”, that is to say, will raise whoever eats My flesh, He puts the pronoun “I” in the statement “I will raise him up.” Not as though He were different from His own peculiar flesh, for after the unity, the separation into two is forever impossible. He, therefore, says, “I, God, became in him, through My distinctive flesh. That is, I will raise up at the last day the person who eats My flesh. For, it was truly impossible that He who is life by nature would not conquer corruption with certainty, and would not prevail over death.” Saint Cyril the Great

Saint Cyril the Great observes that the LORD Christ granted us His Body that gives life, like yeast thrown in us so that the dough is leavened. And as the leaven is in the dough, so is the dough in the leaven. Similarly, Christ abides in us and we in Him. Once more, He offers us His Body and Blood like seeds in our depth “Thus, our LORD Jesus Christ hides life in us through His distinctive Body and plants it like a seed of immortality and removes all corruption in us.”

+ Lest they think that the promise of eternal life through this food and drink is in a manner that they do not die now physically, He condescends to confront this thinking. He says, “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life”, and immediately completes, “and I will raise him up at the last day” [54]. Thus, it is in spirit that he has eternal life in the tranquility that the spirits of the saints receive. As for the body, eternal life will not be taken from it; on the contrary, it will obtain it in the resurrection of the dead at the last day.<sup>61</sup> Saint Augustine

“For My flesh is food indeed,  
and My blood is drink indeed.” [55]

+ What does He say? He wishes to say that it is true food that saves the spirit For, He affirms to them...that it does not befit them to consider His words a puzzle or a parable. They rather must know in particular that there is a need for eating the Body.<sup>62</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

+ The manna food satisfied the need of the body for a very short time. It eliminated the pain of hunger, but after that it had no power and did not grant those who ate it eternal life. So, this was not the true food and the bread that comes down from heaven. As for the holy Body that is Christ’s that nourish to immortality and to eternal life, this is indeed the true food.

They drank water from the rock also...but what did those who drank benefit by that, for they died. That was not the true drink, but rather the true drink is in fact the precious Blood of Christ that removes corruption from its root and gets rid of death that dwells in the human body.

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<sup>61</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 26:16.

<sup>62</sup> *Hom.47. PG 59:275.*

## Saint Cyril the Great

“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.” [56]

+ Christ nourishes His Church with these sacraments, for they strengthen the essence of the spirit.

Therefore, the Church seeing this great blessing encourages her children and friends to come together to the Sacrament. The Church says, “eat, O friends, drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.” (Song of Solomon 5:1). What we eat and what we drink are revealed elsewhere in the statement, “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him.” (Ps 34:8).

In this Sacrament, Christ who is the Body of Christ is not a corporeal, but a spiritual food...This food as recorded by the prophet strengthens our hearts, and this drink makes glad the heart of man (Ps 104:15).<sup>63</sup> Saint Ambrose

+ What an awe-inspiring condescension! The Creator gives Himself to His creatures for their gladness.

Life gives Himself as food and drink to the mortal. He urges us, “Come; eat My flesh and drink the Wine I have mixed for you. I have prepared Myself as food and mixed Myself for those who desire Me. Of My own will I became flesh; I shared your flesh. I am the wheat grain that gives life. I am the bread of life. Drink the Wine that I have mixed for you, because I am the drink of immortality. I am the true vine (John 15:1). Drink of the Wine that I have mingled (Prov. 9:5).<sup>64</sup>

+ The smallest bit of the blessing (the Eucharist) mingles with our whole body and fills us with its powerful effect. Thus, Christ came to be in us and we also abide in Him. Saint Cyril the Great

+ These days the teachers nourish you; Christ nourishes you everyday. His table is always ready in front of you. Why, O listeners, do you see the table and do not come to the feast?

Believers know well what the LORD says. As for you, catechumen, who are called to listen, you are deaf because your physical ears are open wanting to hear the words that are said, but your hearts’ ears are closed since you do not understand what is said.

Easter is near; submit your name for baptism...so that you may understand the meaning of ,”He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”[56]<sup>65</sup>

+ How necessary is it for us to understand Him?

Do these words (“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him”) include even those about whom the apostle says, they “eat and drink judgment to themselves” (1 Cor 11:29) when they eat this Flesh and drink this Blood? Did Judas who sold his LORD and betrayed Him (although Luke the evangelist declares very clearly that Judas ate and drank with the other disciples the first sacrament of the Body and Blood, receiving them from the LORD’s hands) abide in Christ and Christ in him?

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<sup>63</sup> *On the Mysteries* 9:55, 58.

<sup>64</sup> *Meditation on the Mystical Supper*, Hom. 10. PG 77 in Toal 3:155-157.

<sup>65</sup> *Sermons on N.T. Lessons*, 82:1.

Do many of those who partake of that Body and drink that Blood hypocritically, or those who after partaking of the Body and Blood retrogress, abide in Christ and Christ in them?<sup>66</sup> Saint Augustine

“As the living Father sent Me,  
and I live because of the Father,  
so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.” [57]

The statement, “I live because of the Father” as expressed in Greek carries the meaning that the cause of His life is the Father. Thus, the Son does not live alone, but the life of the Father is the life of the Son without separation.

+ When the Son says that He was sent, He refers to His incarnation...Who takes Me in himself by partaking of My body will live and will be completely engrafted in Me. I am He who can grant him life, because I am of an origin that grants life, that is God the Father. Saint Cyril the Great

+ Some people ask, how can the Son be equal to the Father, as He says that He lives because of the Father?

Would that those who oppose us in this point, tell us first what the life of the Son is. Is it a life granted by the Father to someone who is in need of life? Moreover, how can the Son be in need of having life, as He Himself is life, for He says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life”?

Indeed, His life is eternal and His power is eternal. Was there a time when life did not have itself?

Contemplate what was read today about the LORD Jesus that He “died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.” (1 Thes 5:10). He whose death is life, cannot His Divinity be life, and we regard His Divinity as eternal life?

However, is His life truly in the power of the Father? Why?

He has revealed that even His physical life was not in the power of another. He states, “I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.”

Therefore, how can His Divine life be looked upon as though it depended on the power of another, if His physical life is not subject to any power but His own power? Yet, there is another power for the sake of the unity of power. That is as He gave us to understand that He lay down His life through His own power and His completely free will. Likewise, He also teaches us that He lay it down in obedience to His Father’s command. Here is the unity of His will and the will of His Father.<sup>67</sup> Saint Ambrose

“This is the bread which came down from heaven  
not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead.  
He who eats this bread will live forever.” [58]

+ The prophet Malachi, one of the twelve, had already proclaimed, “I have no pleasure in

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<sup>66</sup> *Sermons on N.T. Lessons*, 21:17.

<sup>67</sup> *Of the Christian Faith*, 4:10:108-122.

you, says the LORD of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand. For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen” (Mal 1:10-11). These words indicate clearly that the ancient people (the Jews) will stop giving offerings to God. However, in every place a pure offering will be offered and the name of the LORD will be glorified among the Gentiles. But, what other name will be glorified among the nations like that of our LORD, by whom the Father is glorified and man also? And because this is the name of His Son who was incarnate by Him, therefore He calls Him “His name.”<sup>68</sup> Saint Irenaeus

+ It is appropriate for the Eternal to give that which is eternal, rather than give temporary pleasure with food that can hardly last for a few moments...It is suitable for Him who came down at that time to place those who partake of Him above death and evanescence. Saint Cyril the Great

+ So, we live because of Him, because we partake of Him, that is we partake eternal life that is not ours of ourselves.

On the one hand, He lives because of the Father who sent Him when He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of the death of the cross (Phil 2:8)....

He says, “I live because of the Father” meaning that He is of the Father, not that the Father is of Him. This is said without effect on Their equality. As for saying, “he who feeds on Me will live because of Me”, this does not mean that His equality with the Father is similar to our equality with Him. He rather clarifies the grace of the intercessor: “This is the bread which came down from heaven” [58].

We live because we eat Him, for we cannot have eternal life of ourselves. He says, “not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever” [58]. Those fathers are dead, means they did not live forever (by means of the manna). As for those who partake of Christ, they certainly die temporarily, but will live forever because Christ is eternal life.<sup>69</sup> Saint Augustine

“These things He said in the synagogue, as He taught in Capernaum.” [59]

They saw Him teaching everybody openly in the synagogue, as He Himself says through Isaiah also, “I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth” (Is 45:19) for He said those things openly. Saint Cyril the Great

Saint John Chrysostom observes that the LORD Christ delivered His speech at the synagogue for two reasons. The first was to get hold of the largest number possible of His enemies. The second reason was that He wanted to stress the point that He does not oppose the Father. Therefore, if they serve God in the temple, He does not avoid the temple, but rather considers it the house of His Father in which He teaches.

## 5—The Complaint of Some

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<sup>68</sup> *Adv. Haer.* 4:17:5, 6.

<sup>69</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 26:19-20.*

“Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said,  
‘This is a hard saying;  
who can understand it?’” [60]

It is clear that besides the twelve disciples, there were many who accompanied Him. Some of them found His talk, concerning His celestial being and His offering of His Body and Blood for everlasting life, difficult and they went away.

+ The spiritual person cheers himself with our Savior’s words and shouts in truth, “How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth” (Ps 119:103). As for the worldly, he, in ignorance, considers the spiritual mystery, foolishness...It is appropriate for him who rushes toward true faith in Christ, to travel across a royal path. Saint Cyril the Great

+ The LORD gives us His Body to eat. If we understand this as corporeal, this is death. But He says about His Body that it has everlasting life. Therefore, we need to understand the Body not in a corporeal sense.<sup>70</sup> Saint Augustine

“When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this,  
He said to them, ‘Does this offend you?’” [61]

By saying this to His disciples He made it clear to them that He is divine and knows their hearts. And, as He cannot be deceived by appearance, He also does not deceive others. In this He made it evident for them that He is God and His teaching is the truth.

“When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this” [61]. He knew their inner thoughts by His divine power, for nothing is hidden from Him. His knowledge was not through divine revelation as in the case of some prophets. He is the divine Word who discerns the thoughts of the heart (Heb 4: 12-13). Therefore, we must sanctify not only our spoken words and apparent behavior, but also our thoughts with His Holy Spirit.

“What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?” [62]

Here, He hints at His ascension into heaven because the delight with the Body and Blood of the LORD grants us an exaltation of the heart, mind and all our inner self so that we may enjoy the participation with the divine Christ.

+ Christ used this meaning when He spoke with Nathaniel. For He said to him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree’, do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” (John 1:50). Also in His discussion with Nicodemus, He said, “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.” (John 3:13) Saint John Chrysostom

+ They did not recognize the beauty of the Sacrament, nor that excellent provision concerning it. Moreover, they discussed it among themselves, how can a human body plant in us everlasting life; how can a thing of our same nature grant immortality? When Christ knew their

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<sup>70</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 27:1.

thoughts, because all things are naked and open to His eyes (Heb 4:13), He again cured their illness and guided them with His hand in various ways so that they may understand those things they still ignored.... If you suppose that My body cannot grant you life, how can it ascend to heaven like a bird? For, if it cannot give life because it is not in its nature to give life, how can it fly into the air and ascend to heaven? For this is also impossible. However, He who has made this earthly body, heavenly, He will make it grant life also even if its nature disintegrates according to its particular being. Saint Cyril the Great

+ He said to them that He will ascend to heaven surely in His whole being “if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before” [62]. Then, you will surely at least see that will not be in that way you think He will distribute His Body. Then, they will certainly realize that His grace is not consumed through eating.<sup>71</sup> Saint Augustine

“It is the Spirit who gives life;  
the flesh profits nothing.  
The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” [63]

+ When you look closely at the mystery of the Incarnation, you know who He is who came in that body. You then will surely feel, without considering the Divine Spirit Himself also that this Body can grant life though that flesh in itself profits nothing at all. For, if the flesh unites with the Word that gives life, the flesh will grant life entirely rising to the supernatural power without obliging the insubordinate to change to that particular nature. Saint Cyril the Great

+ “It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing.” This is what He says, ‘There is a necessity that you continue listening spiritually to the things concerning Me. Whoever listens physically, profits nothing, nor does he gain any goodness.’ It is a carnal matter that you despise Him who came down from heaven, and you think He is the son of Joseph.

“How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” [52] All this attitude is corporeal. However, there is a need to understand these words with the soul, spiritually...

“The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” [63] This means that they are divine, spiritual words. They have nothing that is corporeal or that follows the rules of nature. They, rather, are free of such needs and are above the laws that came down to govern this world. They also have a different meaning.

Now as in this statement, He says ‘spirit’ instead of ‘My Spirit.’ Therefore, when He speaks about flesh, He does not mean things of the body, but listening bodily. He, at the same time, points out to those who always ask for the physical, when they should ask for the spiritual, that if they accept His words bodily, they will profit nothing.

What then, is His body not flesh? It certainly is. How then does He say, ‘the flesh profits nothing’? He does not speak about His flesh, God forbid! He speaks rather about those who accept His words in a physical way. What does physical understanding mean? Looking at what is before our eyes merely without imagining what is beyond. This is physical understanding. However, it befits us not to judge by sight, but to behold all the sacraments with the inner eyes.

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<sup>71</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 27:3.

This is 'spiritual vision.'<sup>72</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

Saint Augustine wonders, how does the LORD Christ say 'the flesh profits nothing' [63], whereas the Word became flesh, and He Himself gives us His flesh? Saint Augustine answers, that the statement here is like the saying, "knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (1 Cor 8:1). Thus, knowledge without love puffs up; yet this does not deny the importance of knowledge. Likewise, the flesh without the Spirit profits nothing. Consequently, he who accepts the Body of Christ in a bodily manner is similar to the person who eats sheer material food and his partaking of it has no profit for him. "Add the Spirit to the flesh, like adding love to knowledge. If through the flesh Christ profits us much, does the flesh profit nothing? It is by the flesh that the Spirit works for our salvation. The flesh is a vessel filled with the contents, not as what it is (alone). Did He not send His disciples, and did their bodies profit nothing? If the bodies of the apostles profited us, is it possible that Christ's flesh profits nothing?...Therefore, 'It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing' is in accordance to the understanding of the flesh, not as 'I give My flesh to eat.'"<sup>73</sup>

+ It is the Spirit that gives life to us the members...This is said so that we may love union and fear schism. Nothing a Christian should fear like his separation from Christ's body and, in consequence of not being a member of Christ, he does not live by Christ's Spirit. The apostle says, "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His." (Rom 8:9)<sup>74</sup> Saint Augustine

"'But there are some of you who do not believe.'

For Jesus knew from the beginning who were who did not believe,  
And who would betray Him." [64]

The statement here concerns Judas who betrayed Him and also concerns those who left Him. He declares that what will happen is not strange to Him because from the beginning He knew everything. He also shows that what happens is of His own complete free will. All souls are exposed before the LORD Christ. He knows the honest and faithful in their belief, and also the pretenders who behave hypocritically.

+ He does not say, 'there are some of you who do not understand.' He tells us the reason why they do not understand, 'there are some of you who do not believe' [64] and, therefore, they do not understand. For, the prophet says, "if you will not believe, you will not understand" (Is 7:9 LXX). We are united by faith and live by understanding. Let us approach Him first by faith so that we may live by understanding. For who approach do not resist, and anyone who resists does not believe. How can the resisting live? He is the opponent to the ray of light by which he understands. He does not close his eyes, but shuts his mind. Therefore, "there are some of you who do not believe." Let them believe and open up and be enlightened.<sup>75</sup>

+ Judas was present there...The LORD did not mention his name. He described him, but did not mention his name. Yet, He did not stop talking about him, in order that all may fear,

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<sup>72</sup> Hom 47. PG 59: 277-278.

<sup>73</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 27:8.*

<sup>74</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 27:6.*

<sup>75</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 27:7.*

though one only will perish.<sup>76</sup> Saint Augustine

“And He said, ‘Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.’” [65]

This does not mean that God distinguishes between one group and another. It means that he who asks will receive. He who asks for the truth, the Father will deliver to him the truth and secure him in the Truth, and so he will not fall.

+ In the case of those who did not believe in God in the wilderness, they were, therefore, restrained from entering the Promised Land. Similarly, those who do not honor Christ because of their disbelief will not be granted entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. Saint Cyril the Great

+ It is an amazing thing that when preached concerning the crucified Christ, one listener scorns and the second listener esteems. Would that he who despises ascribes to himself this accusation (disbelief). As for the person who reveres, let him not claim for himself (his belief). When he hears the LORD Himself saying, “no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father” [65] he must rejoice that he received. Let him with a humble heart, not with arrogance, offer thanksgiving to Him who granted that, lest what he obtained through humility he loses through pride.

+ We believe and so are granted; for when we believe we are given that great gift. Therefore, rejoice that you believe, and if you have not grown yet, that is because “what do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Cor 4:7)<sup>77</sup>

+ To teach us that belief itself is a gift and that it is not by rights, He says, “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.” [65] When the LORD says this, we remember the words of the Gospel as the LORD says, “No one can come to Me unless the Father draws him” [44]. He does not say “guides” him, but He says “draws” him.

This force (in pulling) happens to the heart, not to the body. Why, then, are you astonished? Believe and you will come. Love and you will be pulled.

Do not suppose here a type of cruel or difficult force. It is a gentle, delightful force and the pleasure itself draws them.

What draws the flock when fresh grass appears and they are hungry? Nevertheless, I do not imagine a physical attraction. It is rather a quick relation to desire (to eat).

In this manner you also come to Christ.

Do not understand this as a long journey. Rather, wherever you believe you come. For, we come to Him who is everywhere. We come to Him by love, not by sail, since in this journey the waves of temptation are various and violent.

Believe in the Crucified. Your faith will enable you to climb up to the cross.

You will not drown. The cross will carry you. In this way, in the midst of the disturbances of the world he sailed, he who said, “But God forbid that I should boast except in

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<sup>76</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 27:7.*

<sup>77</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 27:7.*



the cross of our LORD Jesus Christ.”<sup>78</sup> Saint Augustine

“From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.” [66]

+ It is well that the evangelist does not say they “left”, but that they “went back” to the affairs they had left behind. He declares that they deprived themselves of any growth in virtue. By departing they lost the faith they had before. However, this did not happen to the twelve disciples.<sup>79</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

Saint Cyril the Great observes that just as those who have weak sight go away from the sun and are pleased to sit in dark places, those who are mentally ill go away from Christ the sun of righteousness who reveals the great divine mystery. This is also what the people of Israel did when Joshua returned after spying into the Promised Land. They rebelled against him and went back. They lost Joshua’s company in crossing over to the Promised Land.

+ That which is precious in the eyes of God is not at all the number of His worshippers. It is, rather, the exaltation of their true faith that is important, not their small number. For this reason, the Holy Book says that many are called, but a few come. Saint Cyril the Great

+ This may have been written for our comfort. For, sometimes when a person announces the truth, he is not understood. He is opposed and his audience leaves him. This person is then sorry that he said the truth and he thinks, “It was appropriate for me not to speak in that manner. I should not have said that.”

Behold, for this is what happened to the LORD. He spoke and lost many. Those who remained with Him were a few, but He was not troubled. He knew from the beginning who will believe and who will not. If this happens to us we are bitterly alarmed. Let us find rest in the LORD and let us speak with dignity.<sup>80</sup> Saint Augustine

## 6—To Whom Shall We Go?

“Then Jesus said to the twelve,  
‘Do you also want to go away?’” [67]

The words of the LORD Christ addressed to the twelve are stern because He desires believers who trust Him and abide in the truth with all their free will without any coercion or difficulty. He chose them from the world, gave them the exalted sacraments, and offered them His capabilities. They were in touch with His divine life, and it remained that they decide, themselves, without hesitation, because they were about to walk the path of the cross.

He said nothing to those who went back because He does not oblige anybody to believe. However, He used that situation to strengthen His disciples’ faith.

+ If I said, ‘Why did He not praise them?’ I would answer, ‘In that, He combined two

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<sup>78</sup> *Sermons on N.T. Lessons*, 81:2.

<sup>79</sup> *Hom 47. PG 59:279.*

<sup>80</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 27:8.*

aims. The first was to preserve the suitable rank of the teacher; for, if He had praised them, they would have thought that they had given Him a present. The second aim was to make it clear to them that He did not need them to follow Him.” Saint John Chrysostom

+ He did not rebuke those who left Him. Nor did He threaten them in a cruel manner. On the contrary, He turned to His disciples and said, ‘Do you also want to go away?’ Thus, He acknowledged the legal rights by which a man exercises his freedom and freely chooses his death or his salvation.<sup>81</sup> Cyprian the Martyr

“But Simon Peter answered Him,  
‘LORD, to whom shall we go?  
You have the words of eternal life.’” [68]

Saint Peter was distinguished by his extreme zeal and by being always ready. He, therefore, answered at once, not only for himself but also for all the disciples. He realized that they could not enjoy everlasting life without Messiah the Savior. Eternal death, hell and eternal suffering cannot overtake anyone who clings to the Savior. The world, the flesh, or Satan do not grant eternal life.

Some people did not accept the words of the LORD Christ and they went back. But some approached Christ even more and realized, with the apostle Peter, the power of Christ’s words that grant eternal life. His words have the fragrance of life for life, and the stench of death to death.

Saint Peter spoke in the name of all souls clinging to the LORD Christ. He spoke like Ruth who said to her mother-in-law, “Entreat me not to leave you, or to return from following after you; for where you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge” (Ruth 1:16). Peter spoke also like Nehemiah who courageously refused to leave his place of work, to hide in the temple and shut its doors, lest they kill him. Nehemiah said, “should such a man as I flee?” (Neh 6:11)

“LORD, to whom shall we go?” [68]. If we went to the Patriarchs, they would send us back to You. For, Abraham saw Your day and rejoiced. And if we went to Moses, he would give us the Law that guides us to You. If we went to the high priests, or the Scribes and Pharisees and sat at their feet, what would they offer except their hypocrisy and hatred of the truth? Who declares the truth to us but You? Who grants us eternal life but You?

+ We need to sit beside the One and only teacher, Christ. We must adhere to Him continuously and never separate. He is our LORD who knows well how to guide our footsteps toward life without end....For, it befits us, thus, to rise to the heavenly divine dwellings and proceed toward the Church of the first born to feast with goods beyond human comprehension.

+ As though they say, ‘We shall stay with You. We shall cling to Your commandments forever and accept Your words without stumbling.’ Saint Cyril the Great

Saint Cyril the Great observes that the events that took place during the journey of the Israelites in the wilderness, symbolize the truth that we now live. In the Book of Numbers, it is

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<sup>81</sup> Letter 59 to Cornellius: 7.

said that the real guide of the people of Israel was God. He appeared as a cloud that when taken up from the tabernacle, the people traveled, and ‘where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents.’ (Nu 9:15-18). In this same manner we must attach ourselves to the LORD. We must not move unless He commands us. “We cannot leave the LORD. We must rather strive to remain with Him spiritually. This is truly more appropriate for the saints.”

“Also we have come to believe  
and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” [69]

With spiritual wisdom, the apostle Peter gives priority to faith over knowledge without ignoring the role of knowledge. They believed in the Son of the living God and knew His mysteries by adhering to Him and participating with Him.

+ The Word announced these teachings through His bride’s windows. She is the dove who responded to His beauty because she was enlightened by the ray of understanding and got to know the rock that is Christ. She says, “let me see Your countenance, let me hear Your voice; for sweet is Your voice and Your countenance is comely.” (Song 2:14)...Simon saw that which the bride wanted to see. Those who heard the sweet voice of Christ got acquainted with the grace of the Gospel and cried, “LORD, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (John 6:68)<sup>82</sup> Saint Gregory of Nyssa

+ They say they believe and know, so they link the two together. For, a person must believe and also understand. We accept the divine concerns by faith; but this does not mean that we avoid altogether examining those concerns. We rather try to attain a moderate knowledge as Paul says, “now we see in a mirror, dimly” (1 Cor 13:12). It is good that they did not say that they knew first, then they believed. They put faith first followed by knowledge and not the opposite. For, it is written, “if you will not believe, you will not understand” (Is 7:9 LXX). Saint Cyril the Great

+ Not that we knew and believed, but “we have come to believe and know” [69]. We believe so that we may know, because if we wanted to know first and then to believe, we would neither know nor believe...

What have we come to believe and know? “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” [69], meaning You are life eternal itself that You grant only by Your Body and Blood that are You.<sup>83</sup> Saint Augustine

“Jesus answered them,  
‘Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?’” [70]

The LORD Christ corrected Saint Peter by declaring that He was the one who chose them as His disciples and He knew that among them is a person who will be used by Satan who is a murderer from the beginning and does not know love, but only knows hatred and betrayal.

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<sup>82</sup> *Song of Solomon by St. Gregory of Nyssa, translated into Arabic by Dr. George Nawar, Sermon 5.*

<sup>83</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 27:9.*

+ I ask Him why He chose Judas the traitor? Why did He give him the moneybox, though He knew that Judas was a thief? Shall I tell you why? God judges the present, not according to the future.

He does not use His foreknowledge to condemn a person, though He knows that later that person will do something that will not please God.

Nevertheless, in His inexpressible goodness and mercy, He chooses a person who, He knows, will be good for sometime, but will veer to evil. He gives that person a chance to change and repent. This is the meaning of the apostle's words, "not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance. But in accordance with your hardness and your unrepentant heart you are storing up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds" (Rom 2:4-6).

Adam did not sin because God knew beforehand that he would do so. God, being God, knew beforehand that which Adam will do with his complete free will.<sup>84</sup> Saint Jerome

+ He shows that those who withdraw from Christ will perish in their sin., As for the Church that believes in Him and abides in His teachings, she will never withdraw from Him. And those who remain in the house of God are the Church.<sup>85</sup> Cyprian the Martyr

+ His rebuke rouses their consciousness and causes each of them to be steadfast in regard to himself. For, He does not frankly say who will betray Him; He rather throws the yoke of offense on only one without clear definition. He, thus, makes them all face the challenge. He asks them to be more careful and vigilant, for each of them is terrified lest he should lose his life.

+ He called the man who does the will of the devil, 'a devil.' This is so, because just as "he who is joined to the LORD is one spirit with Him" (1 Cor 6:17), so is the opposite also. Saint Cyril the Great

+ Consider His wisdom. He did not declare the traitor (He did not mention his name). Yet, He did not leave him hidden. Thus, on the hand, the man will not be ashamed and become despised. But, on the other hand, lest he should think his behavior is not known, and offends without fear, the LORD rebuked him clearly gradually.<sup>86</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

"He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon,  
for it was he who would betray Him,  
being one of the twelve." [71]

The LORD Christ indicated much the traitor without hinting at his name so that He may give Judas a chance to repent and examine himself if he wished.

Some would ask, "if Judas had changed his mind, how would it have been possible to fulfil the prophecies? How would our salvation have been achieved?" Certainly, God would have accepted Judas and the design of redemption would have been realized in a different way. The prophecies would have been fulfilled in a different person because the prophecies did not indicate the name of the betrayer.

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<sup>84</sup> *Against the Pelagians*, 3:6.

<sup>85</sup> *Letter 59 to Cornellius*: 7.

<sup>86</sup> *Homilies on St. John*, Hom.47:4.

+ He was a denier of Him who offered him great benefit and honor. He took money and lost righteousness. As he was dead, he betrayed Life. He followed Him as a disciple, but persecuted Him like an enemy. All this iniquity is of Judas, but the LORD used Judas's wickedness for good. Christ endured being in the place of betrayal so that He may save us. Behold, for the iniquity of Judas was transformed into goodness. How many martyrs Satan persecuted! If Satan had stopped persecuting them we, now, would not have celebrated the crowning of the martyrs...Thus, the evil done by the wicked harms him, but does not violate God's goodness.<sup>87</sup>

+ Let us, beloved, profit much by this aim that we partake of the Body and Blood of Christ, not in mere mystery, as many wicked people do, but in the Communion of the Spirit. We then abide in the Lord's body as members and we live by His Spirit. Let us not be offended by many people who now partake of the Sacrament in a worldly manner, for they will have eternal punishment. Now, the body of Christ is as mixed and an object of study "but the LORD knows who are His."<sup>88</sup> Saint Augustine

## **Inspired by John 6**

### **Your Wonderful Body Sanctifies My Body**

+ Your eyes always look at the multitude coming toward You.  
They come to You and do not return empty.  
You satisfy the hungry and quench the thirst of the thirsty.

+ Like a lad I give You five loaves and two fish.  
I give You the five books of Moses and the Gospels that You granted me.  
I clear my perception to find in Your Book food to fill the crowds!  
Yes, grant me that I sit down with Your people on the grass.  
Grant our spirits inflamed by Your Spirit to guide and control our bodies.

+ We sit down and through Your Church enjoy Your spiritual food.  
We are filled exceedingly and the baskets of the world are full of the abundance of Your grace.  
You give our spirits drink and our bodies food.  
You never leave us in want!  
Our spirits are grateful for You are the source of all blessings!

+ You came, O Word Incarnate.  
So, we are not ashamed to ask You for our needs.  
I confess to You, O Friend of mankind  
My spirit groans under the burden of my physical desires.

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<sup>87</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 27:10.*

<sup>88</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 27:11.*

+ My screams have reached Your heavens!  
Woe unto me a wretch, who will save me from my dead flesh?  
Because of Your love, You, O Word of God, became flesh.  
You lived among us as one of us!  
We saw Your body not separate from Your divinity!  
Your holy Body is the source of all holiness!

+ You gave me Your Body and Blood, a true food and drink!  
I enjoy them and abide in You and You in me!  
I get engrafted into You, O True Vine.  
Sin cannot control me again.  
Neither can death overcome me  
As long as I enjoy union with You!

+ Your Body and Blood is remedy for my life.  
They set me free from the sphere of corruption to incorruption  
I withdraw my relation to the earthy Adam  
And become Your son, O You Last Adam!  
Instead of dust I become truly a heaven!

+ Accept, O my Savior, my thanksgiving offering  
I wished to take delight in the manna in the wilderness of Sinai!  
But my fathers ate it and died!!  
You now grant me Your Body and Blood  
I partake of them and do not forever die  
For I will live with You, sharing in glory as You promised.

+ Your promises are truly great.  
Who, but those whom You draw with Your love, can understand Your promises.  
Many went back and did not walk with You.  
They thought it hard to obtain what they could not understand.  
But I cry with Your disciple  
“LORD, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”  
I hear Your sweet voice and my whole being is attracted to You by love.  
I hear Your voice and Your splendor shines in the depth of my soul.  
I hear Your voice and my inmost being is silent so as to delight in the sweetness of Your  
word!  
How wonderful are Your words, and how generous are Your promises!  
You are all love, O Savior of the world!

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## **Chapter Seven**

### **The LORD Christ Speaks about Pentecost**

#### **The Spring of Living Water!**

The LORD Christ was late going to Jerusalem because the Jews wanted to kill Him. His relatives asked Him to perform miracles to show His followers, but He rebuked them. Then at the appropriate time He went up to Jerusalem. At the feast He announced the coming of the Holy Spirit who grants thirst quenching and joy.

The Jews habitually left their houses during the Feast of Tabernacles and dwelled in temporary tents for a week so that they may remember they were strangers and mere guests in this world.

During the first seven days of the feast they brought water from the pool of Siloam. The water was brought in a golden vessel and the high priest poured it in front of the people to declare that whoever is thirsty may approach and drink. This indicated the rock from which water flowed for the people in the wilderness. On the eighth day they did not bring water from the pool. This was to show that the people would drink from the springs of Canaan, not from the water of the wilderness. On that day, the LORD Christ who is the Supreme High Priest and Bishop of our souls, stood up to offer Himself as the spring that flows living water into the depths of the souls of believers. He asked the believers to drink joyfully from the wells of salvation (Is 12:3; Zech 14:8; Joel 2:28-32).

- 1 – Jesus Does not Appear Openly in Judea (1)
- 2 – The Dialogue about His Going up to Jerusalem (2-13)
- 3 – His Speech at the Feast (14-18)
- 4 – His Discourse about Breaking the Sabbath (19-24)
- 5 – Many Believe in Him (25-36)
- 6 – The Promise of Pentecost (37-48)
- 7 – The Testimony of the Officers of the Altar for Him (49-53)

- 1 – Jesus Does not Appear Openly in Judea

“After these things Jesus walked in Galilee;  
for He did not want to walk in Judea,  
because the Jews sought to kill Him.” [1]

The healing of the paralytic on the Sabbath aroused the anger of the religious leaders (John 5:16) and they sought to kill Jesus either by stirring up the people against Him or by indictment. For this reason, the LORD Christ preferred not to appear publicly in Jerusalem, and instead, to walk in Galilee. This was not out of fear of death, for He came to die for mankind. It was rather in wisdom until His time would fully come.

The Evangelist used the word “walked” which in Arabic is “frequented” to give us an idea about the life of the LORD Christ during His service. He chose no place where to stay to serve. Before He came to Galilee He used to go often to Judea and walk from town to town. That was the first part of His service that the other three evangelists did not refer to. He traveled to

Galilee on foot, not riding a horse or even a donkey. He and those who accompanied Him walked from place to place and wherever He stayed He performed blessings.

The LORD Christ gives us a practical lesson in withdrawing from danger, not out of fear, but in order to serve, as He advised His disciples (Matt 10:23). However, if we are called to witness to His name and have no chance to leave that place, we should count ourselves unworthy to sacrifice ourselves for His name's sake.

+ Saint Cyril the Great comments on this verse saying that the phrase "After these things" means "after all He said and did" Jesus began to walk gladly more in Galilee and did not want to walk in Judea. For, His presence among the Galileans (Gentiles) appeared to be much better than life with Israel. This is as Jeremiah says, "I have forsaken mine house, I have left mine heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies (Jer 12:7 LXX). This is seen in the rites of the burnt offering, as the lamb is killed, not in front, but on the left side of the altar (Leviticus 1:10-11). The altar looked toward the east, so the lamb was toward Galilee, the church of the nations. Thus, "His eyes observe the nations" (Ps. 66:7).

But though He was welcome in Galilee, still the Cross followed Him wherever He was, whether in Judea, Galilee, or the capital Jerusalem. In Judea they sought to kill Him [1]. In Galilee, in spite of all His miracles, many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. And in Jerusalem the chief concern of the religious leaders was to get rid of Him by any means. They did not care to keep the law, but they sought to kill Him (John 7:19). The Sanhedrim sent officers to take Him (John 7:32). They spread the spirit of terror so much that no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews (John 7:13). They, moreover, took up stones to throw at Him (John 8:59).

Truly, He did not attack those who rose against Him. However, He did not, one bit, abandon His message and work of redemption even though that cost Him the shame of the Cross.

John, chapters 7 and 8 give us a living image of the extent of hatred, envy and malice in the hearts of the Jewish religious leaders at that time against the person of Jesus Christ. In their opinion, He distorted the image of the Promised Messiah. They wanted the Messiah to be in compliance with their human desire, but not conforming to God's magnificent plan.

+ The people of Israel practiced extreme hatred against Him. He, therefore, was in better condition among His enemies. He made His dwelling with those who showed more tenderness than He found with His kin who should have loved Him.

We do not consider Christ's withdrawal a type of cowardice. We do not accuse Him of weakness, for He is omnipotent. We rather accept this as a divine provision because it befitted Him to endure the Cross for all at the appointed time and not before Saint Cyril the Great

+ There is no worse evil than envy and spite for through them death entered the world (Wis 2:24). When he saw man being honored, Satan could not bear that and he, therefore, did all he could to kill man. Because of envy Abel was slain and David came close to being killed. Many other righteous people also we killed and the Jews became the murderers of Christ. Saint John Chrysostom

+ He offered an example of our weakness. He did not lose His power, but He rather presented comfort for our weakness.<sup>1</sup> Saint Augustine

## 2 – The Dialogue about His Going up to Jerusalem

"Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand." [2]

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 28:2.



The Feast of Tabernacles: This feast is celebrated on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Tisri (also called Tishreen, or Letham) which coincides with the last half of September and first of October. It is the seventh month of the religious year and the first month of the civil year. The feast took its name after the tents that were erected near the temple and at public places, in town squares, on house roofs, and in the gardens where the Jews lived. The booths remained for eight days in remembrance of the forty years the Jewish fathers lived in the wilderness. This feast is one of the three major feasts during which the Jewish men were obliged to go up to Jerusalem in accordance to the law.

The most important characteristics of this feast are great joy, dwelling in booths, and the unique rites distinguished by two complementary aspects that are light, and the pouring of water. The Jews used to go up to Jerusalem one day before the feast. Some Jews went up before the tenth day of the month to celebrate the Day of Atonement and stayed there until the Feast of Tabernacles.

Concerning the pouring of water, the Talmud records that beginning with the first day and for seven days, two great processions went out at dawn. One group collected olive branches, palm leaves, and leaves of other trees such as the willow and the myrtle. They tied the branches and leaves together with threads of gold or silver, or with ribbons. They carried them all day, took them to the assembly, and held them during prayers. On the following days, they carried them to the temple and walked round the altar singing, "Hosanna, we ask You deliver us!" Trumpets sound on every side. Saint John was probably referring to this feast when he spoke about the souls of the martyrs under the altar in Paradise (Rev. 6:9). They are given palm branches and they sing, "Salvation belongs to our God."

Nevertheless, the most joyful rites of the feast according to the Jews were to go with the second procession to the pool of Siloam. The high priest leading the procession carried a golden vessel that he filled with water from the pool and took back to the temple.

Groups of singers (choirs) accompanied both processions that returned singing praise adapted from Isaiah 12. "Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust, and not be afraid. For the LORD Jehovah is my strength and my song, and has become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall we draw water out of the wells of salvation." (Is. 12:2-3). The Coptic Church adapted the song, "The LORD is my strength, my praise, and has become my salvation" to be the doxology of the Pascha. This is considering the fact that the LORD Christ was taken out of Jerusalem to be offered as a Passover sacrifice for the salvation of the world. As the apostle Paul says, "Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach." (Heb 13:12-13). Moses and Elijah spoke about this exodus with Jesus Christ during His Transfiguration on Mount Tabor (Luke 9:30-36). Thus, the Cross was associated with the Feast of Tabernacles as all the people leave their houses and live in temporary booths in preparation for entering the Divine Bosom eternally.

The two processions arrived at the temple at the same time. The morning burnt sacrifice was offered. Those carrying the branches made a beautiful booth over the altar. With three blasts of the trumpets the priests received the high priest who carried the golden vessel. The priest went up the steps to the altar and with him another priest carrying another golden vessel filled with wine. They poured the drink offering of water and wine in two golden perforated bowls that were suspended over the altar. The drink offering would then trickle down the altar. The people used to joyfully drink the water of the pool of Siloam during the days of the feast as a remembrance of

the water that flowed from the rock at the hands of Moses the prophet. That was the water that their fathers drank. They then remembered the words of Isaiah, “Ho, everyone that thirsts, come to the waters, and he that has no money; come, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” “Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.” (Is. 55:1; 12:3).

The Sadducees believed the drink offering should be limited to wine only. In about the year 95 BC the high priest was Alexander Panias, a Sadducee. He poured the water on the floor far from the altar, so the Pharisees rose against him and wanted to kill him. A battle then began between the Sadducees and the Pharisees and ended in the victory of the Pharisees after the murder of more than six thousand men.

In any case, as the water and wine were sprinkled on the altar, the temple music was heard along with the chanting of the Hallelujah Psalms (Ps 113-118). As they sang “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!” “Save now, I pray, O LORD” “Oh, give thanks to the LORD” (Ps 118:1, 25, 29) the worshippers waved the branches around the altar.

The association of this feast with water becomes clearer when we know that on the second day of the feast (called the Smaller Celebration) there were merry evening festivals and the following days were called “The Joy of Water Streams.” The Talmud distinctly says, “Why was it called ‘Water Streams’? That is because the Holy Spirit overflows, as it was said, ‘With joy waters gush out of the fountains of salvation’”

On the seventh day they circled the altar seven times. This procession was called the “Hosanna rabba.”

During this feast many sacrifices were offered. On the first day they offered the usual burnt offerings and 13 bullocks, two rams, and 14 lambs. They also offered flour and wine. Besides, they offered goats as a sin offering. On the following days they offered the same but eliminated one bullock each day, so that on the seventh day they offered seven bullocks only. On the eighth day that was considered the climax of joy, they offered one bullock, one ram, and seven lambs as burnt offerings. They also offered one goat as a sin offering. Moreover they offered the usual flour and wine offerings. On that day they also brought to the temple the first fruits of their last harvest or that became ripe recently.

Moses instructed that the feast must be celebrated for eight days. However, the Jews added a ninth day which they called “Joy of the Law.” On that day they read the five Books of Moses.

The institution of this feast occurs in Leviticus 23:34. The feast was not observed for a long time, then it was reconstituted (Neh 8:14).

“His brothers therefore said to Him,  
‘Depart from here and go into Judea,  
that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing.’ [3]

The Holy Bible usually calls relatives in the same family ‘brothers.’ Therefore, the words “His brothers” probably mean the LORD Christ’s relatives, no matter what family relations might be. Those relatives, out of their love of appearance and honor, asked Him to go up to Jerusalem. They had two aims. The first was that His disciples who accompanied Him for two years in service, may see His glory in Jerusalem during the feast celebrations. The second aim was that He might establish His kingdom in the capital city. It may also be that these relatives who did not yet believe in Him –as the Evangelist himself points out- asked Him to depart not

out of loyalty for Him, but with bad intention. On the one hand, they wanted to give Him advice as to one who is unable to control even His own life and is in need of guidance. And, on the other hand, they were not thoughtful about His safety, for they knew how dangerous His appearance in Jerusalem was among the leaders who were filled with envy toward Him.

Some writers believe that they asked Him to go to Judea in order that the Pharisees and leaders may examine the miracles and wonders He performed and may so discover the deceptive tricks in them. This would then vindicate the disbelief of His relatives.

“For no one does anything in secret  
while he himself seeks to be known openly.  
If You do these things,  
Show Yourself to the world.” [4]

They thought that our LORD Jesus shared their feelings and thoughts and that His miracles were not motivated by His love for others but were rather performed as a public demonstration. They, therefore, gave Him this advice so that He may take this opportunity to achieve His aim. He must not waste time in making miracles in Galilee, in towns and villages where ignorant people cannot support Him. He should better perform His miracles in the capital city so that He may win popularity among the important personalities in the community. Moreover, His fame will spread throughout the nation because, during the feast, men come to Jerusalem from everywhere. It is as though they say to Him, ‘If You are proceeding to be the Messiah, go into the Capital and reveal Yourself. For, You cannot become Israel’s Messiah while You stay in villages and small towns far from the assembly centers of the people and leaders.’

“For even His brothers did not believe in Him.” [5]

They did not believe He was the promised, expected Messiah. They probably thought He was an esteemed leader or a prophet. For, if He was the Messiah, the savior of Israel, He should reveal Himself to the whole world.

His relatives did not believe in Him. However, they asked for a public demonstration of His miraculous deeds so that the observers may admire them. They did not speak wisely for the sake of their salvation and the redemption of their brethren. It is written in Jeremiah, “For even thy brethren, and the house of thy father, even they have dealt treacherously with thee; yea, they have called a multitude after thee: believe them not, though they speak fair words unto thee.” (Jer 12:6 LXX).

+ Their words seem to come out of love, but they came out of malice. They accused Him of cowardice and of love of vainglory. The expression, “For no one does anything in secret” is addressed to cowardly people and to those who doubt that their deeds are real. Moreover, when they add “while he himself seeks to be known openly” they accuse Him of asking for vainglory.<sup>2</sup>  
Saint John Chrysostom

+ As they did not believe in Him, their words were motivated by envy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Homilies on St. John* 48:2.

<sup>3</sup> *Sermon on N.T. Lessons* 83:1.

+ Why did they not believe in Him? The answer is that they asked for human glory. His brothers pretended they gave Him advice for the sake of His glory. They spoke with the wisdom of the flesh to the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us.<sup>4</sup> Saint Augustine

“Then Jesus said to them,  
‘My time has not yet come,  
but your time is always ready.’” [6]

The LORD Christ answers in defense of His hiding all that time in Galilee by saying that He does not wish to anticipate the events, for His time has not yet come. He did not want to go to Jerusalem and arouse the leaders there until the time of His passion came according to His divine plan. He also made it clear to them that He would not go to demonstrate His miraculous deeds, or to win popularity and reveal Himself to the world, but rather He would go to achieve the purpose of redemption. They can go to Jerusalem as visitors, but He, this time will go to be examined and offered as the Passover sacrifice, for He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The time of His Passion had not yet come because this work of redemption was achieved in accordance to the divine plan. As for His relatives, they faced no danger since they were friends of the world. They could go anytime that they liked. Also the time for Him to go up to the feast had not yet come because He had a special arrangement for going up. As for them, they could go to the feast at any time. Here, He exposes the intentions of His brothers indirectly without hurting their feelings. As their intentions were bad and evil, the evil world did not hate them since their deeds were harmonious with the thought of the world. On the other hand, He will conclude no truce with the world that cannot bear Him.

+ Your time is always ready. Where you are there is no danger. But, My time, when the time of the Cross comes, I must die. As this was the meaning, He made that clear when He said, “the world cannot hate you.”<sup>5</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

+ Whoever enjoys association with the LORD Christ must behave appropriately and prudently. He must know that every work has its particular time or the fullness of time. But those who behave recklessly and without constraint live as they like and any suits them without obligation. The time had not yet come for preaching without limit or for open and public announcement because the Jewish mind was not yet ready to understand. They could not accept My words without rebellion and anger. There was no opportunity yet for My call to be made known to the world. On the other hand, their time was present and always ready. They achieved their design and nothing hindered them or forced them to take suitable measures to be shown what they should do or not do, as was the case with Christ. Saint Cyril the Great

+ Behold how Christ answers them very gently. He did not say to them ‘Who are you to give Me advice and teach Me?’ He rather said, “My time has not yet come.” Saint John Chrysostom

+ They offered Him counsel to strive for glory. Their advice was worldly and with

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<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 28:4.

<sup>5</sup> *Homilies on St. John* 48:2.

earthly provision. They wanted Him to be known and even become famous rather than to hide in obscurity.

The LORD answered those who offered Him advice concerning glory, thus, “My time has not yet come.” That is to say, the time of My glory has not yet come.

Oh, how subtle this answer is!

They counsel for glory; He wants the glory preceded by humility. He desired to prepare the path for the same glory through humility. Those disciples certainly asked for honor to sit one on His right hand and the other on His left. They thought only of the aim, but did not see the necessary road to reach that aim.

The LORD drew their attention to the path through which they reach their homeland in the suitable provision. The homeland is high above; the road below on this earth is the life of Christ, that is Christ’s death.

That earth is Christ’s dwelling; the road is Christ’s suffering. He who refuses the road, how may he ask for the homeland? In short, He gave the following answer to those who also want glory “Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” (Matt 20:22). Behold the way you must take to reach the heights you wish for. The cup that He alludes to is truly that of His humility and suffering.<sup>6</sup>

+ Let us be upright in heart for the time of our glory has not yet come. Let us say to those who love this world the same as the LORD said to His brothers, “your time is always ready” [6]. Let us dare to say this, for we are the body of our LORD Jesus Christ, His members and we joyfully know our Head. Let us then say this without hesitation since He condescended and said it for our sake.

When those who love this world insult us, let us say to them, “your time is always ready, but our time has not yet come.” For, the apostle says to us, “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

When our time comes, he says, “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” (Col 3:3-4) Saint Augustine

“The world cannot hate you,  
but it hates Me  
because I testify of it that its works are evil.” [7]

The Jewish leaders cannot hate you because you carry their same thoughts. You desire a temporary messiah who will appoint himself an earthly king. You are the sons and servants of the world. Nothing but worldly matter preoccupies you, and the world certainly loves those who belong to it. As for Me, the world hates Me because I censure corruption and sin.

The LORD Christ did not want to go up to the feast with His relatives, lest they use propaganda on the pretext that it is necessary to declare Christ. Whereas it has been said about the LORD Christ that He shall not cry nor cause His voice to be heard (Is 42:2).

+ The mind that evil pleasures enslave is really furious when urged to acquire the necessary self-possession. Saint Cyril the Great

+ “The world cannot hate you” [7] Does this mean anything other than that the world

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<sup>6</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 28:5.

cannot hate those who love it, who bear false witness? For they call evil things, good, and good things, evil. “But it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. You go up to this feast.” [7-8] What does this mean? Since you ask for human glory; since you desire exaggeration in physical joy and do not contemplate eternal joy, on that feast day you aspire to human glory. But My time, that is to say, My time of glory, has not yet come. That shall be My feast. It will not precede, nor come after, these days, but will remain eternally. It will be rejoicing and unending joy, forever without end, calm without clouds.<sup>7</sup>

“I am not going up to this feast.” [8]

That is because He does not desire temporary glory. He rather teaches them a profitable lesson to correct and urge the people to the eternal feast. He wishes to turn their love for the world to love of God<sup>8</sup> Saint Augustine

“You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come.” [8]

Saint Cyril the Great observes that His brothers or relatives here represent the Jewish people as a whole as they are all the LORD Christ’s brothers, His own. He asked them to go up to celebrate the symbol, for they still loved the shadow. But His pleasure is not in the symbol or shadow, but in the truth when the appropriate time comes and the fullness of time comes so that He may offer Himself a true feast.

+ The LORD clearly says here that He will not observe the feast with the Jews. He will not go up with them and share their joy in the shadows. For, what is said about the few extends in meaning to all the Israelites, as all the multitude of the Jews are symbolically His brothers. He, therefore, refrains from attending the feast with them. According to a saintly prophet<sup>9</sup> saying, “I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols.” (Amos 5:21-23) The Savior Himself also says, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:24) Saint Cyril of Alexandria

Saint John Chrysostom says that Christ said He would not go up to the feast at that moment. That is to say He would not go up with them.<sup>9</sup> He did not want to go up with them at that time to be crucified, for the hour of crucifixion had not yet come.

“When He had said these things to them, He remained in Galilee.” [9]

+ He indicated in these words that He did not need them. He did not wish to flatter them, but He let them go to observe the Jewish ordinance. Saint John Chrysostom

+ Christ remains joyfully away from Judea and in Galilee where He dwells more

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<sup>7</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 28:8.

<sup>8</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 28:8.

<sup>9</sup> Hom 48, PG 59:285.

peacefully and safely. He reveals to them His true love for them and His rejection of the inhabitants of Judea. He has actually made the Church of nations worthy of divine love. He has disclosed the beauty of the Church of nations that He loved and went up to as to a bride in her room. Saint Cyril of Alexandria

“But when His brothers had gone up,  
then He also went up to the feast,  
not openly, but as it were in secret.” [10]

He had refused to go with His relatives because they had demanded that not for spiritual profit, but to obtain honor because of the miracles.

Saint Augustine has dealt with the opinion of some concerning the LORD Christ when He said to His brothers that He will not go up to the feast and left them go to Jerusalem, then He later decided to go. Saint Augustine explains that the LORD does not say He will not go up to the feast, but He says, “yet” meaning today. As they celebrated the feast several days, He remained in Galilee that day, then went up to Jerusalem after that. His reason was that His brothers did not ask Him to go with them, in their company, but wanted Him to go alone before them. However, according to the saint, Christ appeared as a weak man running away from the resistant as He fled from Herod into Egypt. He, thus, let them go up to Jerusalem and the next day He followed. Saint Augustine observes that the LORD Christ went up at about the middle of the feast, which is after many days.<sup>10</sup>

The word “yet” that the LORD Christ uses shows that He refused to go up with them at that moment, but that His refusal to go up to the feast was not final. It is clear that in His words to them, The LORD Christ separates their point of view and His in going up to the feast. They will go to participate in the formal festivities and to meet their relatives and friends. They also considered the feast an excellent opportunity for the LORD to go up and expose His deeds to the people. However, He goes up to the feast to offer Himself the Paschal sacrifice for the world. He, therefore, desires to go up alone to isolate their thinking from His.

Moreover, their going up as a group will be openly accompanied with Praise, Psalms and palm leaves. But His will be as it were in secret to achieve a secret message that the world could not understand.

Finally, they went up to Jerusalem at once. On the other hand, He went from Galilee and came to the region of Judea by the other side of the Jordan (Matt 19:1; Mark 10:1). At the end of His journey He went to Bethany, a village near Jerusalem, to visit Lazarus and his sisters (Luke 10:38-39). He then entered Jerusalem about mid feast. So, His itinerary was completely different from that of His relatives.

+ He does not say “in secret”, but “as it were in secret.” In this manner He uses this to teach us how we should conduct our affairs.<sup>11</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

+ In order that you may know the Almighty God who grants life, the Son of the All powerful, He adds a proof of His majesty by saying, “And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine.” (John 17:10) <sup>12</sup> Saint Ambrose

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<sup>10</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 28:10.*

<sup>11</sup> Hom 49. PG 59:287-288.

<sup>12</sup> *Of the Christian Faith*, 5:7:93.

“Then the Jews sought Him at the feast, and said,  
‘Where is He?’” [11]

Some writers believe that this refers to the Jewish crowds or people. For, they yearned to see the Person who performed unique wonders. He was the subject of their conversation, even though they were divided into two groups concerning their perception of Him. However, the general opinion shared by the early church fathers and the contemporary scholars is that the word “Jews” here as in most verses in this Gospel, means, according to the Evangelist, the Jewish leadership including the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees. They were those who wished to get rid of Him, like King Saul who wished to kill David the first day of the month (1 Samuel 20:27)

Even those who admired the person and deeds of the LORD Christ, they did not know His reality. They thought He was only a righteous man. But they did not understand that He was the Son of God. Even today some people who do not believe in Him look up to Him as a unique, righteous leader. Yet they cannot become acquainted with Him.

They sought Him not because they believed in Him and looked for spiritual blessing, but to assail Him with insults. Saint Cyril of Alexandria points out that “they did not disdain to ask ‘where is that man’ or ‘where is He’ for this is an expression about a man who is rejected.”

+ The Jews ask, ‘where is He?’ because of their intense hatred and hostility for Him they did not want to mention His name. Saint John Chrysostom

“And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him.  
Some said, ‘He is good.’  
Others said, ‘No, on the contrary, He deceives the people.’” [12]

The Greek word is translated here as “complaining” but in Latin it means “murmur.” Saint Augustine says that complaining and dispute occurred concerning Him. For, in this world we live as in winter. Some see in some kinds of fruit trees that they are dead. They do not realize that the trees live until summer that is the time of judgment. “Our summer is the appearance of Christ. ‘Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent’ (Ps 50:3). ‘A fire goes before Him, and burns up His enemies round about.’ (Ps 97:3) That fire burns the dry trees to which it is said, ‘I was hungry and you gave Me no food.’ While, on the other side, on His right hand, are seen abundant fruit and many leaves that will remain green forever.”<sup>13</sup>

+ In my opinion, the first group (those who said He is good) was the majority. The second point of view was that of the rulers and priests, for this calumny against Him fits their envy and wickedness.<sup>14</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

+ Let them say about you if you are growing in Christ ‘he deceives the people.’ This was said about Christ Himself and is said about the whole body of Christ. Think that the body of Christ is still in this world. Think that the body of Christ is still under examination. How the chaff blasphemes about Him. The wheat and chaff will be threshed together; chaff will be burnt up and the wheat will remain. Therefore, this saying about Christ is for consolation when it is

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<sup>13</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 28:11.

<sup>14</sup> *Homilies on St. John* 49:1.



said about any Christian.<sup>15</sup> Saint Augustine

+ They waded into the most ridiculous fantasy; they deviate much from truth and yet they do not refrain from calling Him a ‘deceiver’ He who shows the straight path of righteousness. Saint Cyril the Great

“However, no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews.” [13]

No one dared to speak about Him for fear of the Jewish leaders. The mere mention of His name was considered a crime that might lead to be deprived of the right to worship.

+ Who were those who did not speak of Him for fear of the Jews? Certainly those who said ‘He is good’, not those who said that He ‘deceived the people.’ For, those who said He deceived the people were heard and their voices were loud like the sound of the leaves of dead trees. They raised their voice louder and louder.

Those who said He was good whispered, as they felt more and more oppressed.

Now, the Church grows because He graciously gave the Church to spread over the entire world. Now, only those who say He deceives the people whisper. Those who say He is good speak in a louder voice.<sup>16</sup> Saint Augustine

+ How incredible it is that the people fear the Jews and tremble but are not instructed by the Law and do not learn to live appropriately. For, fear is an evidence of the highest degree of slavery.

So, they were forced to transgress without examining the aim of Him who granted the Law (And, as they did not dare to praise the good) they judged wickedly, not willingly but by force according to the choice of the others. They despicably condemned Him who was worthy of praise and admiration.

The leaders were able to conduct them against the divine commandments and were thus responsible for the loss of all the people.

The prophet testifies saying about them that they were the cause of the eternal perdition of the people “the pastors are become brutish, and have not sought the LORD. Therefore all their flocks did not understand and shall be scattered.” (Jeremiah 10:21 LXX). Saint Cyril the Great

### 3 – His Speech at the Feast

“Now about the middle of the feast  
Jesus went up into the temple  
and taught.” [14]

He went to Jerusalem about the middle of the feast and as usual He went up into the temple and began to preach openly. Saint John does not record Christ’s sermon. This may be because another Evangelist registered it.

He went the fourth or fifth day of the feast in order that He may leave the people in the

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<sup>15</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 28:11.*

<sup>16</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 28:12.*

first three days to their preoccupation with the tents they erected and the branches they carried all day. They did not comprehend as desired the spiritual meaning of these things because their minds were not ready, or may be because they had no time to be attentive to the LORD's words and deeds.

Why did He teach? He came to present the truth, in hope that men may yearn for true knowledge and enjoy it. By teaching He filled the vacuum caused by the preoccupation of the religious leaders with their own righteousness and honor and with politics instead of with interest in spiritual knowledge.

It is as though the LORD Christ occupied the status of teachers and revealed their inability to achieve their mission. He accomplished the promise "For thus says the LORD God; behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out....I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, says the LORD God. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment." (Ezekiel 34:11, 15-16). "And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd." (Ezekiel 34:23).

+ I suppose everybody truly wondered but that not all found the way to faith.<sup>17</sup> Saint Augustine

How is it that He says, "My doctrine" and yet at the same time He says, "is not Mine"? It is the doctrine of the Father who sent Him. The evangelist had previously declared that Jesus is the Word of the Father. Therefore, Christ Himself is the doctrine of the Father; He is the Word of the Father and what Christ teaches is Himself so that the believers may acquire Him. He is His doctrine and at the same time He is of the Father. He is the divine unchangeable doctrine. This is not teaching that is pronounced with words and letters, but is the only One with the Father. He carries us to the Father for conciliation and conformity with His love.

+ It is appropriate for us more reasonably to avow that we hear the will of the divine nature in particular in the holy places. Saint Cyril the Great

The evangelist did not present to us all the LORD's teachings and sermons during this period. However, he presents three kinds of dialogue and conversation. A dialogue with the Jewish leaders [verses 14-24] another with the people of Jerusalem [25-30] and a third with the officers whom the chief priests and Pharisees sent [32-36].

"And the Jews marveled, saying,  
'How does this Man know letters, having never studied?' [15]

The Jews marveled when they heard His teaching because He spoke with authority. He quoted from the books of the Old Testament. He explained, argued and said proverbs. His teachings are profound and convincing. They attract the simple people and satisfy the learned. They convince even those who oppose Him. It is written in the Gospel according to Saint Mark, "He entered the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." (Mark 1:21-22; see also Mark 6:2, Matt 13:54, Luke 4:22). He did not enter a school for the rich; He did not sit at the feet of a rabbi; He did not travel to some country as the philosophers did; nor did He enter a public school in His

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<sup>17</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 29:2.

own country. Moses learned the wisdom of the Egyptians, but Jesus did not learn even the wisdom of the Jews. They did not realize that He did not need to receive knowledge from men, for He Himself is the Divine Truth and His will is one with the Father.

+ Have you seen how the evangelist shows that their marveling at Him here was full of evil. For, the evangelist does not say that they marveled at His teaching or that they accepted His words. Saint John points out that their astonishment was of a different kind. They were puzzled and said, “how does this Man know letters, having never studied?” They should have known and ascertained that their perplexity proved that His teaching was not of human beings. However, they refused to reveal this meaning and wanted to stop only at their amazement at Him.<sup>18</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

Saint Cyril the Great observes that the frivolous people asked, “where is that Man” and so they confessed their ignorance. But those who said, “how does He know letters, having never studied”, considered themselves well learned and they judged Him. Owing to their knowledge they should have searched for the secret of His knowledge of the Books, though He did not study. They may have also compared Him and Moses and considered Him uneducated while Moses “was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians” (Acts 7:22).

+ Only Christ alone is good, perfectly good in all things. He is, among all, the only Person who has wisdom and understanding. And He has excellence not through learning but as a special characteristic.

All that is good is in God in essence. In Him it does not emanate from outside. Thus, wisdom is in Him also; He Himself is wisdom and in particular He is the source of wisdom. He grants partial wisdom to those who partake in Him, the heavenly rational beings and also the beings on earth. Saint Cyril the Great

“Jesus answered them and said,  
‘My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.’” [16]

As they marveled at His knowledge, He declared to them that His doctrine does not originate from a school on earth, or from the rabbis and lawyers. His doctrine comes from the heavenly Father, since He is the Christ who saves the world. He says, “My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.” [16]

When Christ performed a deed of divine love, He confidently referred that deed of love to the Father as in John 3:16, lest some may think that the Father represents divine wrath and the Son is divine mercy. Later, certain groups, like the followers of Marcion went to the point that they believed that the God of the New Testament came to save the world from the cruel God of the Jews. For this reason, the LORD Christ explains that His divine plan is to accomplish the doctrine of the Father and His provision for the sake of the redemption of the world and that this is the good pleasure of the Father and of the Son.

When the Jews marveled that He knew the letters though He did not study, He made it clear to them that He did not need human teaching or wisdom, for He is the wisdom of the Father. The words He says are in harmony with the will of the Father. His doctrine is divine, not human.

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<sup>18</sup> *Homilies on St. John 49:1.*

+ Once more He answers their secret thoughts by referring His teaching to the Father. In that He desired to silence them.<sup>19</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

+ He, suitably, reveals Himself as equal to God the Father who never studied but knows all things, essentially without learning. He excels all understanding and is above all wisdom existing in creatures. Therefore, it was possible for Him through other events also to show to His listeners and affirm to them that all that is in the Father is in Him also because of their unity in essence. Saint Cyril the Great

+ Does not His teaching that is free of rhetoric show that He teaches not as a human being, but as God? He did not study but He directs His teaching.<sup>20</sup> Saint Ambrose

+ Direct your thoughts towards Christ's doctrine, so that you may reach God's wisdom, and when you reach Him remember this "the Word was God" (John 1:1). Then you will discern the saying "My doctrine" is true. Contemplate the Word, who is He? (the Word of the Father) and you will truly understand "My doctrine is not Mine"<sup>21</sup>

+ In short, it seems to me, dear beloved, that the LORD Jesus Christ said, "My doctrine is not Mine" meaning 'I am not of Myself.' We say and believe that the Son is equal to the Father, that there is no difference between them in nature and essence, and that there is no temporal separation between the begetter and the begotten. We fervently maintain that. But still one of them is the Father and the other is the Son. The Father cannot be Father without having the Son, and the Son likewise may not be Son without having the Father. Yet, the Son is God from the Father, and the Father is God but not from the Son. The LORD Jesus Christ is called Light of Light; both together are one Light, not two lights.<sup>22</sup> Saint Augustine

"If anyone wills to do His will,  
he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority." [17]

The LORD Christ gave them a proof that the origin of His doctrine is neither from an earthly school nor from a rabbi, but is of the Father. His divine doctrine is perfectly harmonious with His deeds. He came to the world submitting obediently to the Father so that He may remove from us pride and insubordination. He opened for us the path of perfect obedience when we united with Him so that we ask not that that is for us, but that is of God and we find our pleasure in this.

He is the way that leads us to enjoy the divine embrace through our participation with Him in obedience and humility. He, thus, opens the door for us so that we may receive the divine doctrine, not with argument, mere reasoning, and arid scrutiny, but with practical acceptance of the will of God in us and by conformity with His divine design for us. This will not be accomplished unless we practically unite with our Christ so that He may grant us perfect

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<sup>19</sup> *Homilies on St. John* 49:1.

<sup>20</sup> *On the Christian Faith*, Book 2:9:79.

<sup>21</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 29:4.

<sup>22</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 29:5.

obedience, give us His righteousness and reveal to us His mysteries.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Thus, the source of our learning is the Holy Trinity. The Spirit illuminates the depth of our soul and the Son, the true light, enters and takes us to the Father's bosom so that we may live in the great mysteries and experience their guarantee in this world until the day when we meet Him.

+ You ask, 'what is the meaning of Christ's words?' The answer is that He means to say, 'Remove your doubt, anger, envy, and hatred that originate falsely in you. There is no hindrance that prevents you from knowing that My words are truly God's words.' Saint John Chrysostom

"He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory;  
but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him  
is true; and no unrighteousness is in Him." [18]

The characteristic of the impostor or swindler is that he seeks his own glory and talks about himself. This is the characteristic of the antichrists and false prophets. They want to achieve their own will, not God's will. But the mark that proves that Jesus is the true Christ is that His words are from the Father and He seeks the glory of the Father, yet Their will is one and Their glory is one.

The Son became flesh, but though He is the Son of Man, His doctrine is not the outcome of human experience. It is neither a temporal study, nor the fruit of a special thought. Its source is rather the Father who sent Him. It is a truly divine doctrine; there is no falsehood or fallacy in it.

"No unrighteousness is in Him" means 'no falsehood or fallacy is in Him.'

+ "He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory" [18]. This is he who will be called Antichrist and about whom the apostle writes he "exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped" (2 Thes 2:4). The LORD declares about the same person (the Antichrist) that he seeks his own glory, not the glory of the Father. The LORD says to the Jews, "I have come in My Father's name and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive" (John 5:43).

He states that they will receive the Antichrist who will seek his own glory, who will be puffed up, disloyal and certainly destructive.

But our LORD Jesus Christ reveals to us His great example of humility. He who undoubtedly is equal to the Father, seeks not His own glory but the glory of the Father. How much more this befits you O man who when you do a good deed seek your own glory and when you do evil you offend God?

Know yourself; you are a creature.

Know your Creator. You are a servant. Do not despise your God.

You are adopted but not because you are worthy.

Seek the glory of the One who will grant you this grace that you are an adopted human being.<sup>23</sup> Saint Augustine

#### 4 – His Discourse about Breaking the Sabbath

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<sup>23</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 29:8.*

“Did not Moses give you the law,  
yet none of you keeps the law?  
Why do you seek to kill Me?” [19]

The LORD confronts the accusation of the rulers that He deceives the people [12] by accusing them that they break the law. How can He deceive the people when He accomplishes the will of the Father! They claim that they keep the law, but they break the law when they kill the innocent. Here, the LORD denounces them openly inside the temple touching their dearest claim, which is that they keep the law.

+ He did not accuse them of breaking the law as individuals, but rather that the entire Jewish nation nullifies the Law of Moses. In accusing Him of breaking the law concerning the Sabbath they reveal themselves as aggressors and conspirators plotting to kill Him. In so doing they commit the worst sin (killing the innocent). Saint Cyril the Great

+ You seek to kill Me for this reason, which is that not one of you keeps the law. If you kept the law you would have known Christ in every letter of the law and you would not have killed Him when He was present among you.

Behold their answer: “You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You.”

What troubled the people? The truth. For, the impaired eyes cannot endure the brilliant light.<sup>24</sup> Saint Augustine

“The people answered and said,  
‘You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You?’” [20]

The rulers and those with them may have denied having a plot to kill Him, in order that they may not arouse the people. The people were, therefore, astonished. Besides, lest they appear as transgressors of the law for seeking to kill a man without trial or to kill an innocent person, when the LORD asked them, “Why do you seek to kill Me?” [19] they said, “Who is seeking to kill You?” As for the accusation “You have a demon”, this is often repeated when they find nothing to blame Him for or to oppose Him.

+ The Jews were aware of the accusations and they tried to deny them even though they did not deviate from their intrigue of murder. However, with many endeavors they keep away from themselves the appearance of transgression of the law. For, the pride of the Pharisees is only in dissembling. Saint Cyril the Great

+ He says, ‘No wonder you do not seek Me. For, you do not obey the law that you think you follow and you persist in that you received it from Moses. It is no new matter that you have no interest in My words.’<sup>25</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

“Jesus answered and said to them,  
“I did one work,

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<sup>24</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 30:2.

<sup>25</sup> *Homilies on St. John* 49:3.

and you all marvel.” [21]

The work He refers to is healing the paralytic (John 5) on the Sabbath.

+ On the basis of this one work, and though it was done for the salvation of a man lying on the ground to save his life, you condemn the Omnipotent for this reason? The commandment that according to your stupid conception He broke was infringed not for some trivial, worthless reason, but to save a man and his life. You are angry without cause. It was more appropriate that you praised Him who has such great divine power. Saint Cyril the Great

Saint John Chrysostom surmises that the work that the LORD Christ did was healing the man born blind on the Sabbath. The work He did was greater than the circumcision that Moses ordered. The commandment of circumcision came to break the Sabbath also because they circumcised on the Sabbath if that was the appointed time. Indeed, the LORD did not say directly, ‘I did a greater work than circumcision.’ He said, “Moses therefore, gave you circumcision.” [22]

“Moses therefore gave you circumcision  
(not that it is from Moses,  
but from the fathers),  
and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath.” [22]

The circumcision was granted to them as a good gift, not as a burden. Its practice is not an infringement of the law. The commandment of circumcision was given a long time before Moses, since the time of Abraham (Gen 17:9-10). It was then incorporated in the Law of Moses as part of it, even though there is no commandment in the Law of Moses concerning circumcision.

The teachers of the Jews gave the commandment concerning circumcision more importance than the Sabbath. The Jews kept the circumcision ritual on the eighth day even if it fell on the Sabbath. Keeping the Sabbath was then not observed for the sake of public health. If that was the case concerning the practice of circumcision literally, how much more important was it for the sake of the safety of the entire man when all the members of the paralytic lying down in his bed for 38 years are healed.

The commandment of circumcision goes back to the time of the patriarchs before Moses the prophet. It does not go back to the beginning of creation. But the LORD Christ’s deed concerned the being of a man naturally since his creation. For God desires the human being to be sound spiritually and physically since the beginning of creation.

Saint Augustine says, “As though the LORD Christ says ‘As circumcision is specifically a kind of salvation seal and men must not stop the work of salvation on the Sabbath, you, therefore, must not resent Me because I healed a man entirely on the Sabbath [23]. For a man is circumcised on the Sabbath.’”<sup>26</sup>

Saint Augustine also says that circumcision on the eighth day was performed with a knife of stone. This was a token of removal of physical lust from the body. The LORD Christ, the true Rock, came to offer to the believer on the eighth day a spiritual circumcision through His resurrection. He says listen to those who were circumcised with the true stone. The apostle

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<sup>26</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 30:4.

admonishes them saying, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” (Col 3:1-2) He speaks of the circumcised saying, ‘Christ is risen. He has removed your physical lust, the evil desires, the unnecessary things with which you were born and the worse things you have added by living an evil life. If then you were circumcised with the Rock why do you still maintain your emotions on earth?’<sup>27</sup>

+ Moses himself, the minister of the law, broke the law of the Sabbath to perform circumcision that extended from the patriarchs to the time of the Jews. Moses did that to prove that he kept the tradition of the patriarchs. And, as God works also on the Sabbath, He announces about Himself that He also works. This then is not a violation of the Sabbath, for He has the same thought as the Father. For this reason He says, 'My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.' ”John 5:17)

Moses was interested in honoring the tradition of the patriarchs more than in honoring the Sabbath. Why then are you falsely alarmed concerning Me and amazed as if I was eager to violate and despise the law, though I do a deed equal to that of the Father and conform always with Him in every intention? Since He works on the Sabbath, I refuse to be lazy on that day. Saint Cyril the Great

“If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the Law of Moses should not be broken,

are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath?” [23]

Circumcision involves a wound, blood and pain. Yet, it is performed on the Sabbath that is a day for rest. What then is it in relation to the LORD Christ who grants healing to a man completely? If the painful work of the law is allowed on the Sabbath, is it not even more necessary that the joyful gospel that grants peace be practiced on the Sabbath?

The parents and relatives of the suckling are very anxious that the circumcised child be healed in that circumcised part. But the LORD Christ is concerned for making a man completely well.

+ Circumcision is a means of care for man and is more important than the commandment concerning the Sabbath because it was necessary that the sick person be perfectly well. Why then is the Sabbath an obstacle, or how may it be reasonable that the ordinance of the Sabbath stand in the way of healing the whole body? For it is actually allowed without blame to break the Sabbath so that a small part of the body may be well. Saint Cyril the Great

+ You see that we obtain the distinction of participation in the essence, not in the natural focus, but in that of grace. The reason is that the Father loves us. He loves the Son and consequently loves the members of His body.<sup>28</sup> Saint Jerome

“Do not judge according to appearance,  
but judge with righteous judgment.” [24]

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<sup>27</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 30:5.

<sup>28</sup> *Against Jovinianus*, 2:29.



The LORD Christ asks them to judge with righteousness, not according to appearance. For, the preoccupation with the letter, rather than with the spirit, ruins our judgment concerning matters of the law. The Sabbath as a day of rest is a day of mercy and love for the glory of God, for the edification of His people and the salvation of all as much as possible. Let their judgment concerning the healing of the paralytic on the Sabbath be in this spiritual conception, not in accordance to the letter.

+ The law that you are so zealous in observing and for which you rose so fervently cries aloud to you saying, “You shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God’s (Deut 1:17). Thus, you who judge Me as a transgressor because of the Sabbath, and you decide it is perfectly right to be angry for this reason; do you care for the honor of the law? Mortify yourselves when you hear this message, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” For you exempted Moses from transgression and you rightly did not judge him in this even though he broke the Sabbath for the sake of circumcision that is from the patriarchs. Will you then, free the Son from blame; for He always agrees with the thought and will of the Father and every deed of the Father the Son also does?! How can you judge the Son only and not Moses also when they were both involved in the same act that you blame concerning the Sabbath? Saint Cyril the Great

+ It is as though Christ says, ‘I did a deed more worthy and better than circumcision.’ Saint John Chrysostom

+ Now in accordance to the Law of Moses you circumcise on the Sabbath. You do not judge Moses. However, when I made a man completely well you were angry with Me. “You judge with partiality, regard the truth!”<sup>29</sup>

+ We do not think that this was not said for our sake because we did not exist at that time. Would we do not retrogress but look forward as He rebukes His enemies, for we ourselves do things the truth condemns.

Indeed, the Jews judged according to appearance. Consequently, they did not belong to the new covenant. They do not have the kingdom of heaven in Christ. They do not unite with the assembly of the holy angels. They wanted temporal things from the LORD: the Promised Land, victory over the enemies, many children, and abundance of fruit. These are things God truly promised them; real and good things He promised earthly people. All these things were given to them in the old times.

Now we are renewed, we have the new man because He who is the New Man came. For who is he who is thus new like Him who was born of a virgin? In Him is a new birth and in us is the new man.

Who is the new man? He is a man renewed from the old.

To what is he renewed? To someone who requests heavenly things and yearns for the eternal. His zeal is for the celestial home where he does not fear an enemy or lose a friend, where he lives well emotionally and lacks nothing.

We have a totally different hope from theirs. Would we do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment. We thus benefit by the Lord’s words; we profit

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<sup>29</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 30:6.

by His words, and His grace helps us.<sup>30</sup> Saint Augustine

## 5 – Many Believe in Him

“Now some of them from Jerusalem said,  
‘Is this not He whom they seek to kill?’” [25]

In the opinion of the Jews Jerusalem was the source of spirituality and the true divine knowledge. However, the people in Jerusalem were confused because of the attitude of their religious leaders. Do they really seek to kill Him as one who blasphemes and deceives the people? Why then did they not arrest Him while He taught openly?

Here we see the conduct of the people coming from outside Jerusalem as different from that of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Those who came from outside did not know that the leaders were full of envy and hatred and opposed the LORD Christ. On the other hand, the dwellers in Jerusalem were aware of the plots of those leaders against Him.

Scholars distinguish three groups concerning the attitude of the Jews with regard to the LORD Christ (1) The rulers, priests, and Pharisees were full of hatred against the LORD Christ (2) The people of Jerusalem knew the feelings of the first group. They stood in confusion whether to submit to the leaders who at the same time did not take action to get rid of Him, or to enjoy His works of love, His signs, and His doctrine that has spiritual power of attraction because the LORD teaches with authority (3) The strangers who came to Jerusalem for the feast. They admired the LORD and knew nothing about the feelings of the first group against Him. They were astonished when they heard Him say they seek to kill Him [20]. They considered that a delusion he had or a demonic idea.

+ We believe that the remaining Jewish people did not know the conspiracy of their rulers. But those in Jerusalem, who lived most of the time with the rulers and dwelt with them in the same city and met them continuously, knew their evil plots against Christ the Savior. Saint Cyril the Great

+ Those who knew how violently they sought Him, were astonished at the power that protected Him from being arrested. And as they did not know His power as they should, they imagined that the rulers recognized Him as truly the Christ and therefore they let Him go though they eagerly sought to kill Him.<sup>31</sup> Saint Augustine

“But look! He speaks boldly, and they say nothing to Him.  
Do the rulers know indeed that this is truly the Christ?” [26]

If the rulers did not know surely that this is truly the Christ what caused them to endure His bold reproof and His renewal of matters that were ordinances since old times. They found Him healing even on the Sabbath. Moreover, they were very much grieved when He frankly said, “Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law?” Yet they endured it all. Saint

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<sup>30</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 30:7-8.

<sup>31</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 31:2.

## Cyril the Great

“However, we know where this Man is from;  
but when the Christ comes, no one knows where He is from.” [27]

The majority of the people knew that Jesus was born in Bethlehem from the seed of David. However, according to Isaiah the prophet Who shall declare His generation?” (Is 53:8) That is to say His birth and appearance are a secret. The rabbis had this saying, “Three things happen suddenly: a thing we find unexpectedly, the sting of a scorpion, the appearance of the Messiah.” Therefore, the people of Jerusalem wondered whether Jesus was the Christ or not because they knew where He was from.

They did not realize that what Isaiah said was about His great eternal birth and was also about His priesthood as He is according to the order of Melchizedek whose parents no one knows. But the prophets announced many details concerning His incarnation and the Jews knew where He was to be born (Matt 2:4-5).

+ They did not comprehend the writings of the holy prophets about Him. These writings are in two divisions.

Sometimes the prophets indicate that He will come to the world in the flesh. They announce His birth in flesh of a virgin: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son” (Is 7:14). They even announce where He will be born: “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” (Micah 5:2)

However, when they introduced, as much as possible, His incomprehensible birth of God the Father, they said, as mentioned before, “who shall declare His generation?” “For His life is taken from the earth.” Or concerning the quotation “whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting”, by His goings, he means the Only Begotten Son like glamour emanating from light. His special going forth from the Essence that gave birth to Him to His particular Self that is before all ages, all days and all moments. Saint Cyril the Great

+ They say, “no one knows where He is from” in spite of the fact that when their rulers were asked they insisted He must be born in Bethlehem.

Once more, they say He will not come out of Galilee but from Bethlehem [41, 42]. Do you not see that their statements are said in anger? They say, “we know” and “we do not know”; for they are divided over one subject.<sup>32</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

+ As He is a Man, the Holy Scriptures had informed us what will occur to Him. But as He is God, this was hidden from the wicked people and needed the righteous to reveal it. Moreover, they say, “but when the Christ comes, no one knows where He is from” [27]. Isaiah who introduced the idea says this: “who shall declare His generation?” In short, the LORD Himself answered both: they know where He is from, and also they do not know. For He testifies to the prophet’s information concerning His weak humanity, and also concerning His divine glory.<sup>33</sup> Saint Augustine

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<sup>32</sup> Hom 50. PG 59:294.

<sup>33</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 31:2.

“Then Jesus cried out, as He taught in the temple, saying,  
You both know Me, and you know where I am from;  
And I have not come of Myself,  
But He who sent Me is true,  
Whom you do not know.” [28]

The LORD Christ answered those questions openly. He cried out in the temple. He was probably calling the priests and rulers who did not dare to come nearer and did not bear to hear His voice. He called them so that they may approach and listen. He did not teach in secret, but openly because He presented the truth without deceit as they alleged. It is as though He said to them, “he, who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

“You both know Me, and you know where I am from” as though He says, ‘this is true; I am from your nation; I am related to you; you know where I was born. However, concerning My divinity you do not know Me, nor know where I am from. You do not know who sent Me.’

“And I have not come of Myself”: He is not a mere Man who works for His own sake. The Father sent Him and He works for the salvation of all humanity. He is the Son of God who had promised to send the Messiah, the Savior of the world. He is the divine promise realized, but they reject Him and His

Gospel.

It was not easy for the rulers to accept these words because they imply an accusation of ignorance on their part. They do not know God. He alone knows Him, not because God sent Him as He sent the prophets, but because Christ is “of Him” born everlasting of Him. Thus, on the one hand, He refers to their ignorance, and on the other hand, He manifests Himself as the Son born of the Father. This is, in their opinion, blasphemy that must be punished by death. However, a secret power prevents them from arresting Him until the hour does come.

+ As a Man He did not come of Himself. As the Son of God He did not take His beginning from a human being. But, as He says, “Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning.” (John 8:25) The words I say to you are not of man, but are divine.<sup>34</sup>

+ Then, what is the meaning of “He who believes in Me, believes not in Me” (John 12:44)? This means, ‘Do not believe what you perceive in the human form, nor in solely the man you see.’ For, as much as we must not believe in Him as just a man, we must believe that Jesus Christ Himself is God and Man at the same time. For these two reasons He says, “I have not come of Myself” (John 7:28). As a Man He has not come of Himself; and as the Son of God He did not take His beginning from man. He says, “Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning.” The words I say to you are not of man but are divine.<sup>35</sup> Saint Ambrose

+ The words, “you know where I am from” do not refer to a particular place, but His saying, “He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know” indicate the ignorance they reveal through their deeds. As the Apostle says, “They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him” (Titus 1:16). Their error originates not only from ignorance, but also from wickedness, their evil thought and bad judgment. In spite of their knowledge, they desired to be ignorant.

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<sup>34</sup> *On the Christian Faith, Book 5:10:120.*

<sup>35</sup> *On the Christian Faith, 5:10:120.*

When they said, “we know where this Man is from”, they did not declare that He is from heaven. His answer, “you know where I am from” [28] means He is not from the place they assume, but from where He who sent Him.<sup>36</sup>

+ His words, “I have not come of Myself” declare that they knew the Father sent Him, but still they did not want to avow it.

He blames them on two counts: first that they spoke in secret, but He spoke openly to shame them and reveal their secret thoughts. Secondly, while they insist, “no one knows where He is from” He affirms that He Himself is the Christ.

They say, “no one knows” referring to distinctive local places. However with these same words He reveals Himself as the Christ because He has come from the Father. His words concerning the Father, “whom you do not know” aroused their anger. He rebuked them because, as He knew their pretence of ignorance, His reproof was enough to dishonor them.<sup>37</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

+ The Scriptures, God’s inspiration, have granted you to know Me and to know where I am from. That you know I am from Nazareth or Bethlehem, and that I am born of a woman does not excuse you to have no faith. But, because of these things that were said about Me and because of My birth in flesh, you should rather have advanced in understanding the mysteries concerning Me, rather than echoing a single word of a prophet who spoke about My incomprehensible birth from God the Father.

+ I am not like you. I shall not imitate your despicable behavior against Me. For, I have not come of Myself. I do not yield to natural impulse as you do. I have come from heaven and He who sent Me is true. He is not like the devil who sent you, Satan the liar whose spirit you received and you dared to tell lies about the prophecies. Satan stirred you up to invent words and say they are God’s words. For the devil is not true; he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). Saint Cyril the Great

+ As though He says, ‘you know Me, and you know where I am from. But you do not know where I am from... You know where I, Jesus the Nazarene, am from; you know. You know His parents because His birth of a perpetual virgin was concealed from you. The virgin’s husband acknowledges this, for he can testify honestly as a jealous husband that that was the expected virginal birth.

They knew the facts concerning Jesus as a man. They knew His face, city, and family. If they inquired, they would know where He was born. In truth, He said, “you both know Me, and you know where I am from” [28], but this that you know concerns my human form.

As for His divinity, He says, “I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know.” [28] You could have known Him and believed Him who sent Me. “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” (John 1:18) “Nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” (Matt 11:27). Saint Augustine

+ “Whom you do not know” since you do not know Him who is of Him and in whom

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<sup>36</sup> Hom 50. PG 59:294-295.

<sup>37</sup> Hom 50. PG 59:295.

alone the Father is declared. For, he who has seen the Son has seen the Father (John 14:9) and he who knows the Son does not ignore Him who begot Him.

He is not like them who do not know His Father. He affirms that He knows Himself and knows Him (the Father) very well indeed. For, He is God from God the Father and has a special, wonderful, and strange knowledge of all those things as befits Him alone. For, the Son does not know the Father in the same way we know Him. The nature of creatures reaches the conception of God through understanding only and does not exceed its appropriate limits. It unwillingly submits to the divine nature combined in the inexpressible words. But, the only begotten Son of God the Father who begot Him perfectly in Himself, depicts the essence of the Father in Himself and knows Him in an inexpressible sense because things concerning God cannot be expressed. Saint Cyril the Great

“But I know Him, for I am from Him,  
and He sent Me.” [29]

+ Why does He say, “I know Him, for I am from Him, and He sent Me” [29]? He declares both in a glorious manner. He says, “I am from Him” because the Son is from the Father, and the Son is as Him from whom He is the Son. We, therefore, say that the LORD Jesus Christ is God from God. We do not say about the Father that He is God from God, but that He is God. We say about the LORD Jesus, light from light. We do not say about the Father that He is light from light, but that He is the light. This is why He says, “I am from Him.”

But depending on your beholding Me in the flesh “He sent Me.”

When you hear “He sent Me” do not think that there is a difference in essence, but only in the authority of Him who begot.<sup>38</sup> Saint Augustine

Saint John Chrysostom comments on the wonderful meekness of the LORD Christ through which He won many souls to belief in Him.

+ Do you not see how He always desired to prove by this: “I have not come of Myself” “He who sent Me is true” that He endeavored not to be considered an enemy of God? Notice the great benefit of His humble words, for it was later said “When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?”<sup>39</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

“Therefore they sought to take Him;  
but no one laid a hand on Him,  
because His hour had not yet come.” [30]

+ The Lord’s rebuke silenced the Pharisees. And when they were sure that their silence concerning these things harmed their obduracy and benefited the multitude (for they were convinced He was the Christ) they thirsted again for His murder and put their reverence of the law aside. They were then counted as unworthy to remember the commandment “the innocent and righteous slay thou not” (exodus 23:7). However, the divine act restrained them, controlled their evil action and changed their plots into mere attempts. Saint Cyril the Great

+ “Therefore they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour

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<sup>38</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 31:4.

<sup>39</sup> *Homilies on St. John* 50:2.

had not yet come” that is to say, because He did not will that.

For, what is the meaning of these words, “His hour had not yet come”? The LORD was not born subject to a particular destiny. You must not believe this concerning yourself: (that you are destined. All the more reason that you do not think that about your Creator.) If your hour obeys His good will (and is not by fate) how much more appropriate it is that His hour will not come except in accordance to His good will?

The word “the hour” does not mean the hour when He will die unwillingly, but rather means the hour when He willingly condescends to die. He waited for the hour when He dies just as He waited for the hour when He was born. The Apostle spoke about that saying, “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son born.. (Gal 4:4). For this reason, many ask why did not Christ come before? The answer is, because the fullness of the time had not yet come. In the first place it was necessary to announce His coming throughout many years and eras because His coming is not a trivial event. The foretelling for a long time of Him to whom we adhere eternally was requisite.

The greater the eminence of the judge the longer is the line of his forerunners who announce his coming.

In short, when the fullness of the time had come He who saved us from time came. When we are saved from time we reach eternity where there is no time. Then we shall not say, ‘when will the hour come?’ because the eternal day is not preceded by yesterday, nor is it cut short by tomorrow. But in this world the days recur one after the other; days pass and days come and no day is everlasting. During the moments we are speaking one moment drags another, each moment in turn.

Since we began speaking we have become older, for certainly I am now older than when I was in the morning. Likewise, nothing remains without change; nothing is stable in time. Therefore, we should love Him through whom time was made, for when we love Him we are free from time and abide in the everlasting where there is no change in time.

The blessings of our LORD Jesus Christ are great. For our sake He existed in time, He who made time. He existed among all things, He who through whom all things were made and He became that which He created.

He became Man He who created man so that the things He created may not perish. We consider this provision happened the hour He was born. However, at that time the hour of His suffering had not yet come. He therefore had not yet suffered.<sup>40</sup> Saint Augustine

“And many of the people believed in Him, and said,

‘When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these which this Man has done?’”

[31]

The more the anguish of the rulers and their attempts at killing the LORD Christ and subduing the public, the more did the truth become clear. Therefore, many of the people believed in Him.

The rulers detected unbearable blasphemy in the overt speech of the LORD Christ. Yet, many of the people perceived in His acts of extreme love a sure proof that He was the Promised Messiah, for it was impossible that anyone could do signs similar to those of the LORD Christ. The LORD indeed said that He came for the rising of many, and also for the fall of many.

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<sup>40</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 31:5.

+ As I often repeat the worldly are convinced not by the teachings or by preaching, but by miracles.<sup>41</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

+ They always labored to show that He was not the Christ. But, if we consider that He is not the Christ, will the Christ be better than Him? Saint John Chrysostom

+ The LORD healed the humble and the poor. The leaders were in rage and they for this reason only did not know the Physician and even sought to kill Him. There were many people who quickly saw their sickness and without delay knew their cure. Behold how the multitudes were stirred by His miracles and so believed in Him.<sup>42</sup> Saint Augustine

“The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning Him, and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take Him.” [32]

Many of the people began to believe in Him and there was murmuring among the crowd. The rulers felt that any delay was not in their interest. They, therefore, sent officers (of the temple) to arrest Him.

+ The people accused them truly that they were more defeated by their envy than by an interest in the deliverance of the people. And it seems that the crowd wronged them, and became more thirsty for belief in Him.

+ It was more suitable for the chief priests to be leaders in good judgment and have control over the direction of advice that does not oppose God. But as they were far from any good course and had thrown the divine law behind their personal lives, they were swept away by the satisfaction of their stupid agitation only. That is because it is written the head has become the tail (Deut 218:44) for the leader has become a follower and by agreement with the perverse Pharisees, has given vent to his attacks against Christ also. Saint Cyril the Great

“Then Jesus said to them,  
‘I shall be with you a little while longer,  
and then I go to Him who sent Me.’ [33]

Here He speaks to the people, not to the officers. He shows that He knows all about the secret plots of the rulers against Him, though they yet failed to practically fulfill their aim.

+ Tell Me why you are so angry as though I shall stay with you a long time in this world. I confess I am a heavy burden for you. I do not bring much joy to those who do not honor virtue. But do not lay death snares for Me before it is time. “I shall be with you a little while longer” and I shall go joyfully when the right hour for My suffering comes. I shall depart as God from among the wicked, but I shall remain with My people all the time even though it will seem I am absent in the flesh.

Why do you torture yourselves with fruitless counsel?  
Sheathe your envy weapon, for you point it at no aim.

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<sup>41</sup> *Homilies on St. John* 50:2.

<sup>42</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 31:7.*



Life will not submit to death; corruption will do no harm to incorruption.

The gates of Hades will not confine Me and I shall not become a dead body in your graves. I shall rise up high to Him from whom I am.

I shall ascend again to heaven seen by the people and the angels together as a judge of your blasphemy.

Human beings will wonder at My ascension and when the angels meet Me they will say, "What are these wounds in Your hands? Then I shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends." (Zech 13:6). Saint Cyril the Great

+ I need to complete My provision through that My suffering may be executed.<sup>43</sup> Saint Augustine

"You will seek Me and not find Me,  
and where I am you cannot come." [34]

Some liken the LORD Christ's words to the pillar of a cloud and the pillar of fire that appeared to the people of Israel in the wilderness. For, Christ's words are, on the one hand, radiant and joyful, but, on the other hand, they are dark.

The joyful aspect is in that the LORD Christ walked in this world a little while, to cross over to the valley of pain then ascend to the Father. It is a world full of hardship that He traveled every day carrying the cross, but this will not last long. Our days are full of trouble; we must endure the thorns and overstep the obstacles and barriers, but we thank God, these are few! Pain will not travel with us to Paradise!

He says, "I go" and so affirms that He willingly, and not against His will, accepts death. He chose this difficult journey as the ambassador of the Father. He offered His life to be a sacrifice for the sake of the world, and then returned to the Father. The uprising of the rulers against Him and their opposition had no power without His permission. At the same time, His heart burned as a Son of Man to go to the Father.

As for the dark side, it concerns the rulers who have so much envy and hatred that they hurry to remove Him from all the earth. However, they do not realize that they seek Him and do not find Him. They obtain the consequence of their ingratitude towards Him. They drink of the cup of their sins when they cannot know and reach Him.

Some writers say that here He speaks about the event when the Romans led by Titus will invade Jerusalem. The Jews will then cry for a savior like Ahab when he sought Elijah and searched for him, but could not find him (1 Kings 18:10).

He may mean that they will, on the Day of Judgment, discover that they opposed the truth. They will seek to participate in the glory with the Messiah, but they will not find Him because the way of repentance will have been closed and everyone will receive according to his deeds. They expect to be saved and rejoice in heaven, but they will find that He whom they resisted is the heavenly judge of humanity and that they are not fit to enter heaven, for they refused the cross, the tree of life.

+ The blessed Paul writes in truth, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." (2 Cor 6:2) And again, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all" (Gal 6:10). For, when we lose the opportunity, we lose what it brought. We must not sleep

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<sup>43</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 31:8.

when the blessings are there; we must rather be vigilant and strive wisely to obtain what is profitable, not when the search is futile.

+ Let then the spiritual Paul call with a loud voice those who died to sin, saying, “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” (Col 3:3-4) In his sermon about the resurrection he also writes, “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the LORD in the air. And thus we shall always be with the LORD.” (1 Thess 4:17)

Yes. As when the thief, who was hanged with Him and was at the very point of death, believed in Him, he took hold of the grace of the saints. For, Christ said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43)

Thus, those who honor Him with obedience will be with Him with no hindrance. They will rejoice because of the blessings that surpass understanding. But those who do not desist from offending Him with their stupidity although they are sons of the wedding, they will be cast out in the abyss of grief to receive bitter punishment. As it is written, they “will be cast out into outer darkness” (Matt 8:12). Saint Cyril the Great

+ Here He, beforehand, tells them about His resurrection. When He was present, they did not know Him. But later they will seek Him when they discover that the multitudes had believed in Him.

Wonderful signs will happen when the LORD rises and ascends to heaven. His disciples will achieve great deeds. He will work through them as He personally worked. For, He said to them, “without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

When the lame man who sat at the gate walked after he heard Peter’s voice, the people were filled with wonder. Then Peter spoke to them saying that it was not by his own power that he made the man walk, but through Him whom they killed (Acts 3:16). Many were pricked in their hearts and asked, “what should we do?” when they perceived that they were involved in a horrible crime when they killed Him whom they should honor and worship.<sup>44</sup>

+ He did not say, ‘where I shall be’, but said, “where I am [34] because Christ has always been in that place when He was on His way back. He came in a manner through which He did not leave that place (heaven). “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.” (John 3:13) He did not say He was in heaven. He spoke while He was on earth and said that at that time He was in heaven.<sup>45</sup>

+ He did not say, ‘you will not be able to come’, but He said, “you cannot come” [34] because at that time they were not able for that. And, so that they may know that He did not say this to cause them to lose hope, He said to His disciples, “where I am going, you cannot come” (John 13:33). Yet, in His prayer for them He said, “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am” (John 17:24). He explained to Peter saying, “where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward” (John 13:36).<sup>46</sup> Saint Augustine

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<sup>44</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 31:9.*

<sup>45</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 31:9.*

<sup>46</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 31:4.*

+ Even in this present life, a soldier who disrespects his king cannot see the king, but is dismissed from his position, and is punished cruelly. Therefore, if we steal, are greedy, or offend others, if we do not practice deeds of mercy, we cannot go there. We shall then suffer the experience of the foolish virgins who could not enter. They were lazy, their lamps were extinguished, that is to say, grace left them.<sup>47</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

“Then the Jews said among themselves,  
‘Where does He intend to go that we shall not find Him?  
Does He intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?’ [35]

They thought that He spoke about leaving Judea and going to the Dispersion in the world to preach the Jews who were in many countries having Greek culture and using the Greek Septuagint. The Jews in Judea wanted to clean the Jews from Hellenic (Greek) thought. They thought He intended to go to the pagan nations to preach to them.

+ What is “the Dispersion among the Greeks”? This is what the Jews called the Gentiles because the Jews were dispersed in all places and were intermixed with the others without satiation. This shame caused them to fall later and they became scattered. After saying this, they noticed that they did not say that He will go to destroy them, but they said, He will go to “teach” them. To this degree they dropped their anger.<sup>48</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

+ Indeed, the LORD was going to the Gentiles (the Greeks) not in His personal presence, but on His feet. What are those two feet? Those are the two feet that Saul wanted to trample on by persecuting Christians. Then the Head cried to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4)<sup>49</sup>

+ This that the LORD speaks about saying that they do not know the place – if it is right to call it a place – is in the bosom of the Father. Christ never left it, and they were not qualified to comprehend where Christ was from where He will never withdraw. For where He goes He has always been.

How can the human heart understand this?

And even more how can the human tongue explain it?

They never understood that and yet they foretold our salvation by saying that the LORD will go to the Dispersion among the Gentiles. They accomplished what they read, but did not understand: “A people I have not known shall serve me. As soon as they hear of me they obey me” (Ps 18:43) Those who were in front of His eyes did not listen to Him, but His voice rang in the ears of those who heard of Him.<sup>50</sup> Saint Augustine

“What is this thing that He said,  
‘You will seek Me and not find Me,  
and where I am you cannot come’?” [36]

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<sup>47</sup> *Homilies on St. John 50:3.*

<sup>48</sup> *Hom 50.*

<sup>49</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 31:10.*

<sup>50</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 31:10.*

+ They do not say, ‘He will ascend to heaven’ even though they heard Him say clearly, “I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I go to Him who sent Me.” [33] But they imagined a city of the Greeks as if the Father sent Him among them.

They are like those who prophesy and do not know what they say. Some divine force drove them and caused them, in their doubt, to introduce Christ into a Gentile city and think that this might happen after a little while.

In saying this they offend Him with disgrace as though He had transgressed the law; as though He broke the divine commandments and disregarded all things. Saint Cyril the Great

## 6 – The Promise of Pentecost

“On the last day, that great day of the feast,  
Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.’” [37]

Those who attached themselves to Moses the prophet, drank water from the rock in the wilderness. The rock followed them and overflowed with water to quench their thirst. But he who believes in the LORD Christ carries the Rock inside himself and the flood springs not from the outside, but inside him, in his inner self where the kingdom of God is.

The Jews call the running water, living water, because it moves all the time and does not stop. Likewise, when the LORD Christ is in the heart, the believer enjoys many blessings and those blessings inundate those who surround him (Prov 10:11). We do not only drink of the spring inside us and rest in the divine grace given to us, but we must also let this inner well overflow to quench the thirst of many. Thus, the dry, barren earth changes into a Paradise and its water overflows the dry, barren spirits to share its new paradisiacal nature.

On the last day of the feast, the LORD Christ stood to offer a call to the people about to return to their homes. He offered His invitation openly crying out. During the first days of the feast they offer sacrifices for the seventy nations in the world. However, the last day is devoted for Israel alone. Therefore, the eighth day was considered “great” and had its special importance.

+ He does not say, ‘You must drink, you must run whether you like or not.’ He rather says, ‘Let whoever wishes and is able, run and drink, for he will overcome and drink.’<sup>51</sup> Saint Jerome

+ It is not an insignificant matter that we read that a river proceeds from the throne of God. The Evangelist John writes, “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” (Rev 22:1-2) This is certainly the river proceeding from the throne of God, that is to say, the Holy Spirit that who believes in Christ drinks as Christ Himself said [37-38].<sup>52</sup> Saint Ambrose

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<sup>51</sup> *Against Jovinianus*, 1:12.

<sup>52</sup> *Of the Holy Spirit*, Book 3:20:153-154.

+ In conclusion, a man must either take everything from the river or the valley, or he perishes. We, therefore, say that our LORD Jesus Christ is compared to the river; in Him we find all joy and comfort in hope; in Him we rejoice in spiritual bliss. Saint Cyril the Great

+ If we are thirsty, let us come not on foot, but by means of our emotions. Let us come, not by moving from our place, but by love. Although in accordance to my inner self I like also to move from one place to another, yet whoever changes his place physically, does so because he is motivated by his heart. If you now like something and previously you liked something else, you are now not at the same place where you were.<sup>53</sup> Saint Augustine

+ Even though the soul is united with God, yet it does not feel fully and absolutely happy. The more it enjoys His beauty, the more it yearns for Him. The words of the Bridegroom are Spirit and Life (John 5:24). All those who adhere to the Spirit become spirits. All those who adhere to Life pass from death into life as the LORD said.

Thus, the virgin spirit always aspires to grow through the spring of spiritual life. The spring is the mouth of the Bridegroom, from it emerge the words of everlasting life. He fills the mouth that approaches Him, as David the prophet said that he opened his mouth and received the Spirit (Ps 119:131). In order that he may drink, it is necessary for the person to put his mouth on the mouth of the spring. The LORD Himself is the spring as He says, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37). Therefore, the thirsty souls wish to put their mouths on the mouth that gives life and say, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" (Song of Solomon 1:2).

He who grants life to all and desires all men to be saved yearns for everyone to enjoy a share of these kisses that purify from all filth.<sup>54</sup>

+ We need to meditate well on the holy words in the Song: "Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards." (Song of Solomon 4:8)

What do these words mean?

The Spring of grace attracts all those who are thirsty, as the Spring says in the Gospel, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37).

In these words, Christ does not set any limit for our thirst and our movement towards Him. Nor does He limit our thirst quenching. His command extends to all times and urges us to thirst and go to Him. Those who tasted and saw, through trial, that God is great and good (Ps 34:8) have a sense of taste that impels them to approach more. Therefore, the person who walks continuously towards God does not lack this incentive to advance.<sup>55</sup>

+ If we wish to quote a greater evidence from the Holy Bible, we point out the words of the LORD Christ to those who believe in Him, that rivers of living water will flow out of anyone who believes in Him. He says, "He who believes in Me ... out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." (John 7:38) Add to this that the pure hearts are referred to as showing the work of

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<sup>53</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 32:2*.

<sup>54</sup> *Song of Solomon by Saint Gregory of Syssa, translated into Arabic by Dr. George Nawar, 1993; sermon 1.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid., sermon 8.*

law written in them (Rom 2:15). The Apostle explains that the Law is written in the heart. It is written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God (2 Cor 3:3). God draws these letters in the spirit, not on tablets of stone – so says the Apostle – but on the tablet of the pure heart, the light and luminous.

It is necessary to trace the holy words that are in the pure, clear memory, over the leading force of the spirit, in distinct relief. The breath, indeed, refers to the glorification of the Bridegroom's heart only, the tablet that emits light the color of the sky.

This image guides us so that we may be aware of the heavenly things, where our treasure is (Matt 6:21). If we keep God's commandments steadfastly, sacred hopes will be created for us to invigorate our spiritual eyes.<sup>56</sup>

+ After that, the Song raises the Bride to the highest glory with the additional name that she is a well of living waters and streams from Lebanon. The Holy Bible teaches us that the nature of God is to grant life. This is expressed in a prophecy by a man of God that says, "they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters" (Jer 2:13). Then, the LORD Christ says to the Samaritan woman, "Jesus answered and said to her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.'" (John 4:10) The LORD said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive." (John 7:37-39)

All these statements indicate that the living water is the holy nature. It is permissible, therefore, that the Song says truly of the Bride that she is a well of living waters and streams from Lebanon. This, indeed, contradicts the known fact that all wells contain stagnant water. However, the Bride alone has running water in a deep well and this water overflows continuously.

Who is able and worthy to understand the wonders granted to the Bride? It is clear that she reached her utmost wishes. For, she is compared to the eternal beauty, from which all beauty originates. Her fountain is exactly similar to her Bridegroom's fountain; her life is like his, her water is his. His word is a living word and by it lives every spirit that receives it.

This water flows out of God as the Spring of living waters says, "for I proceeded forth and came from God" (John 8:42).

The Bride keeps the flow of living water in the well of her spirit. She becomes a dwelling that treasures this living water that flows from Lebanon, that is to say, that forms the streams from Lebanon, as the text says.

We have become in communion with God by possessing this well in order that we may achieve Wisdom's commandment (Prov 5:15, 17) and drink waters out of our own well and not the well of a stranger. We enjoy that in Christ our LORD to whom is glory and majesty forever. Amen.<sup>57</sup> Saint Gregory of Nyssa

The Psalm refers to God as a river that flows with His blessing to quench the thirst of the human race (Ps 36:7-8). He will extend peace and glory to the Gentiles (Is 66:12 LXX).

"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said,  
out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." [38]

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*; sermon 14.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*; sermon 9.

Who believes in Me and accepts Me as the Messiah about whom the Scriptures prophesied, the Holy Spirit dwells in his heart and overflows with life. He becomes a spring that has abundance of the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, freedom, and enlightenment. The Jews were used to liken the work of the Holy Spirit to the ‘former’ and the ‘latter’ rain and to the fountains, wells and rivers and so on (Ps 36:8-9; Is 44:3-4; Joel 2:23).

When He says, “If anyone thirsts”, He means, if anyone senses his want of righteousness, his need for the spiritual blessings, or his inner emptiness.

“Let him come to Me and drink.” Let him not stand before the chief priest and admire the golden vessel from which he pours a little water from the pool of Siloam. Let him not go to many contradictory pagan philosophies that attract and deceive men. Let him rather come to the LORD Christ as the Holy Bible presents to us in both Testaments.

+ The reward of faith is great and endless. The believer says that he enjoys the richest blessings of God. For, he will be filled with the gifts of the Spirit that will not only enrich his mind, but will also be able to overflow in the hearts of others like a running river that abounds with bliss granted by God to his neighbor also. Saint Cyril the Great

+ There is inner thirst, and there is inner heart, for there is inner self. This inner self is truly invisible, but the outer man is visible. However, the inner is better than the outer. The invisible is more loved, for, certainly, the inner man is more loved than the outer man.<sup>58</sup>

+ What does the fountain mean, and what is the river that flows out of the heart of the inner man? This is the inclination to be charitable and to care for one’s brother. If he imagines that his drink must satisfy him alone, there will be no living water flowing out of his heart. But, if he hastens to care for his brother, he will not be dry, but will rather overflow.<sup>59</sup> Saint Augustine

+ The heart...where, in the Holy Bible, do we find these words, that ‘out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’? Nowhere.

What, then is the meaning of “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said”? Here, we must stop, for the statement “out of his heart will flow rivers” may be an assertion about Christ. Many said, “this is truly the Christ.” They said, “When the Christ comes, will He do more signs than these?” He reveals the need for true knowledge, and that they must not be content with the miracles, but with the Scripture.

He previously said, “search the Scriptures” (5:39) and also, “It is written in the prophets” and “they shall all be taught by God” (6:45). He said, “Moses accuses you” (5:45) and here He says, “as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers” hinting at the greatness of the grace and its overflow. In another place He calls it “everlasting life”, but here He calls it “rivers of living water.”

For, when the grace of the Spirit enters and dwells in the mind, it overflows more than any fountain.

It will neither stop nor waste away.

He calls it “a well” and “rivers”, so that we may understand that it gives unending help

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<sup>58</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 32:2.

<sup>59</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 32:4.

and that at the same time it is an unfailing energy. It is not one river, but numerous, countless rivers.

It is possible for a person to understand clearly what this means if he takes into consideration the wisdom of Stephen, the eloquence of Peter, and the zeal of Paul.<sup>60</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

+ Thus, the LORD commands the prophet to cross the river (1 Kings 17:2) so that he may drink of the New Covenant, not only of one river, but “out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” [38]. These are rivers of understanding, rivers of meditation, spiritual rivers that will dry up at times of disbelief, lest those who defile sacred things, and the non-believers drink of them. At that place, the ravens knew what the Jews did not know. The ravens brought him food, while the royal, honorable people persecuted him.<sup>61</sup> Saint Ambrose

“But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” [39]

God does not withhold His Spirit from the human race. He created man so that the Spirit of God works and dwells in him. But man turned his back willingly and did not accept Him. The Spirit then became a guest working in the men of God and in prophets, and even sometimes, in non-believers to attract them to faith. However, when the LORD was glorified on the Cross, He paid the price for the forgiveness of our sins and our glorification in Him. He granted us the Spirit in abundance as He had promised in Joel 2:28.

The Holy Spirit is the greatest gift; He is the giver of gifts. We received a promise of His coming to the Church and His dwelling in the heart of the believer. He will distribute the talents and gifts as He wills, for the glory of God, the growth of the Church, and the redemption of the spirits.

Saint Augustine opines that the Holy Spirit descended on many before Jesus was glorified with His resurrection. Examples are Simeon the Elder, Anna the prophetess, and Saint Mary at the Incarnation. However, the descent of the Holy Spirit after the Resurrection, was general on the Church on Pentecost when all the Gentile languages were spoken. But why does not the believer obtain the gift of speaking in Gentile languages when he is baptized now and receives the Holy Spirit?

Saint Augustine answers this question saying that as the Church spread over the world, Christians spoke all the languages of the world. Every Christian, as a member of the universal Church, considers himself as one who speaks all the languages of nations, because the languages of his brethren are considered his language, for he and they are members in one body.<sup>62</sup>

Once more, Saint Augustine says that after Christ’s resurrection, Christ granted us the Holy Spirit through whom we love the Church and enjoy her love and unity. We enjoy the resurrection with Him when with our hearts we leave the world and live with Him in heaven. “We have the Holy Spirit if we love the Church. But we love the Church if we abide in her unity and love. Here, we are born and die. Would we do not love the world, but leave it with love and with love dwell in the highest with the same love that God loves us. In this life journey would we

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<sup>60</sup> Hom 51. PG 59:300-301.

<sup>61</sup> Letter, 63:78-79.

<sup>62</sup> St. Augustine: ON the Gospel of St. John, tractate 32:7.



do not think of anything but that we remain here and that with good life we prepare for ourselves a place that we never leave.”<sup>63</sup>

If the Holy Spirit was not yet given, how did the prophets of the Old Testament perform miracles? Was not that the work of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them? Again, how did the Lord's disciples practice miracles before the Holy Spirit descended on them? Saint John Chrysostom answers this question saying, “They cast out demons not with the Spirit, but some of them did that through the power given them.”

“He sent them”: the Evangelist does not say, ‘He gave them the Holy Spirit’, but says, “He gave them power” (Matt 10:1) to cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons in the same manner as the prophets. In the case of the prophets they all confess that this is the gift of the Holy Spirit. But this gift was limited and would depart and was incomplete on earth. The Holy Spirit was preserved for particular individuals. “But the future overflows.”<sup>64</sup>

+ The Cross is called “glory.” It was necessary to offer the Sacrifice for us first to remove the hostility that is in our body, in order that we may become friends of God and then accept the Gift.<sup>65</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

+ The Holy Spirit is the river that flows – according to the Hebrews – from Christ to the earth. We have accepted that, as Isaiah prophesied (Is 66:12). This great river that will always overflow and never stop is not only a river, but is also one of the abundant currents that overflow greatness as David says, “There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God” (Ps 46:4). Thus the irrigation of that city, the heavenly Jerusalem, is not by an earthly river, but by this Holy Spirit who proceeds from God, the source of life. That stream that proceeds from the One who satisfies us seems to overflow abundantly among the heavenly thrones, potentates, and powers, and among the angels and archangels, running in the complete share of the seven spiritual virtues.<sup>66</sup> Saint Ambrose

+ God the Father began to give the Spirit again. Christ was the first to accept the Spirit as the First One in the renewed nature. For, John testified saying, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven ...and He remained upon Him.” (John 1:32)

Christ did not accept the Spirit for Himself, but rather for us in Him. For, all good things overflow also in us through Him.

For, when our grandfather, Adam, digressed through deceit, he fell into rebellion and sin, and he did not keep the blessing of the Spirit. Thus, in Adam, the human nature lost all the good that God gave it. It was necessary, therefore, that God, the Unchangeable, should become a Man in order that the goodness He obtains as Man He keeps in our nature forever. Our guide in the interpretation of these mysteries is the godly Psalmist himself. He says to the Son, “You love righteousness and hate wickedness. Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.” (Ps 45:7).

+ There is a rich, special glamour in the holy prophets. They get it from the source of enlightenment, that is the Holy Spirit who can guide them to understand forthcoming things and

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<sup>63</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 32:8-9.

<sup>64</sup> Hom 51: PG 59:300-301.

<sup>65</sup> Hom 51: PG 59:301.

<sup>66</sup> *Of the Holy Spirit* 1:16:177-178.

know terrible news. But we are confident that those who believe in Christ do not only obtain enlightenment through the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit Himself dwells and makes His home in them. Let us comprehend that He means the residence of the Holy Spirit in human beings is perfect. Saint Cyril the Great

“Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said,  
‘Truly this is the Prophet.’” [40]

Some said that He is the great Prophet about whom Moses the prophet spoke (Deut 18:15). However, unfortunately, they could not understand that the Prophet meant the Messiah, the Savior of the world. Others said He was the Christ.

“Others said,  
‘This is the Christ.’  
But some said,  
‘Will the Christ come out of Galilee?’” [41]

The Old Testament prophesied that the Christ would come of the tribe of Judah from the line of David. Therefore, some doubted, as they did not know that He was born in Bethlehem, but thought that He was born in Galilee.

Saint Cyril the Great says that the crowds, like the Pharisees, lacked accuracy in this matter. They thought that the Prophet that God promised to Moses He will raise up from among his brethren, like Moses (Deut 18:18) was a different person from the Christ. Because of their lack of accuracy, the Pharisees thought that three persons would appear. For, they say to Saint John the Baptist, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” (John 1:25)

“Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David  
and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?” [42]

The Jews knew that the LORD Christ would come from the seed of David (Ps 132:11) and would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). But, as Saint Cyril the Great says, the Jews fell into error and needed right thinking because it was rumored that Jesus was brought up in Nazareth (Luke 4:16).

“So there was a division among the people because of Him.” [43]

+ Because of their division they did not know the Christ. They did not understand the accuracy of the Scripture. For, if they believed that Jesus was the Prophet mentioned in the Law, they would not have fallen into this unbecoming discussion. Saint Cyril the Great

“Now some of them wanted to take Him,  
but no one laid hands on Him.” [44]

The result is that there was a division among the crowd. There were four groups. One group believed He was the Prophet, but not the Christ. Another group believed He was the

Christ. A third group could see in Him signs of the Christ, but they stumbled because they thought He was from Galilee. The fourth group followed the rulers and wanted to take Him, but could not.

+ No one laid hands on Him, not because they honored Him, but because only His power stopped them. Saint Cyril the Great

“Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees,  
who said to them,  
‘Why have you not brought Him?’” [45]

Although this was the last great day of the feast, yet they could not be happy because they deprived themselves of the LORD Christ, the source of joy.

The chief priest performed the feast ritual. Yet he, the priests, and Pharisees were not preoccupied with helping the people to enjoy God’s love and understand the mystery of the feast, but they instead distracted the people with appearances while the rulers conspired. In their opinion, church politics were more important than the spiritual work. They sat in the special meeting room waiting for the arrival of the officers of the temple with Jesus in fetters.

As they sent the officers of the temple to arrest Him, they were terrified when they saw the officers coming back without Him. They were astonished when the officers returned without Him and they may have thought that He, as usual in such cases, had hidden until the hour would come.

“The officers answered,  
‘No man ever spoke like this Man.’” [46]

They did not expect that the officers of the temple themselves would be attracted to Him and testify boldly before the multitude that “No man ever spoke like this Man.” The officers may have followed the LORD since He came about the middle of the feast. They listened attentively to Him to find a reason for arresting Him. But, the more they listened, the more they were convinced that He was righteous and full of heavenly wisdom.

The rulers told them that He was a false prophet and deceiver. But when they heard Him, they adhered to Him and realized that He taught the truth, all the truth, and nothing but the truth.

+ We may assume that the words of the officers were full of reason. They reasoned as follows. We are satisfied with the teaching of the Scripture. We boast that we are learned in the divine Law, and we admire wisdom as goodness not from this earth. Why, then, do we wickedly expel Him who has wisdom and, in great misconception, disgrace Him whom we should not accuse, but to whom we owe special love? Yes. We submit to the Law, and yet we are eager to kill an innocent and righteous man (Ex 23:7) without cause.

Concerning the statement, “No man ever spoke like this Man” I believe that one can say about this something to this effect. They probably meant to say, ‘it is unreasonable to blame us because we have not brought to you now whom you want. For, how can a person resist, even against his will, a Man whose words are those of a god.

He does not speak like a human being, His words are not those of a human being; they are those that rightly belong to one who has God’s nature.

Let anyone say if any holy prophet can call himself a river or dare to say, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.” When did the great Moses say to us, “He who believes in Me out of his heart will flow rivers of living waters”? How can we take Him against His will, He who is above us immeasurably, as God is above men?

This is how the officers gave a clear proof that the LORD is God in essence. This is how they attacked on every side those who resisted God. Saint Cyril the Great

+ Here are the chief priests and the Pharisees who thought that they had more wisdom than others. They came to the Christ and saw His wonders; they read the Scripture, but nothing profited them. They were blind.

But their officers heard with the multitude one speech of the LORD Christ and that speech trapped them. They went to Him to arrest Him, but they returned bound and amazed at Him.

We admire their understanding, for they did not need signs, but only His doctrine to lure them.

They did not say that no human being ever did such wonders like Him. They said, “No man ever spoke like this Man.” We, therefore, must not marvel at their understanding, we must rather be surprised at their boldness because they said that to the Pharisees who had sent them.

Their words are not the words of those who merely admire Him, but they also blame their masters because they oppose without listening. Although they did not hear a sermon, but only a brief talk, they were convinced. When a person hears a long sermon his mind decides impartially and does not need a long discussion.<sup>67</sup> Saint John Chrysostom

“Then the Pharisees answered them,  
‘Are you also deceived?’” [47]

No wonder that since its beginnings and until now, some think that Christianity deceives. Whoever accepts it is deceived.

+ See how this answer is full of some kind of despair. They have no hope for the people. What has hindered your love for us, though you grew out of the same lack of belief as we did! Saint Cyril the Great

“Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him?” [48]

For them, the criterion for truth is that a large number of the rulers accept Him. For, though many among the populace believe in Him, the rulers still think that if only a few of them believe in Him, this proves that He is a deceiver and has no truth in Him.<sup>68</sup>

## 7 – The Testimony of the Officers of the Altar for Him

“But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.” [49]

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<sup>67</sup> *Homilies on St. John 52:1.*

<sup>68</sup> *68 Homilies on St. John 52:1.*

The Pharisees despised the people. They did not regard the people's belief in the LORD Christ as important, but they thought the people did not understand the law and were, therefore, accursed.

The religious leaders at that time, even though they were in conflict among themselves, they still agreed in considering the people uneducated and so scorned and despised them. Instead of blaming themselves for neglecting to care and teach the people, they said the people were accursed. They blamed the people for their ignorance, instead of blaming themselves for failing in their task as teachers.

+ The Pharisees fell as usual in the sin of bragging. They accused of ignorance those who admired Jesus for His wonders and for doing divine deeds. They crowned themselves alone with service in accordance to the law and with knowledge of the Scriptures. They admired themselves much and they became thoughtless. In their extreme contempt they easily described the people as ignorant. Saint Cyril the Great

+ O Pharisees, you bear the blame, for the multitudes believed in the LORD Christ, but you denied Him. They acted as those who know the law. How, then, may they be accursed? Truly, you are accursed because you did not observe the law. Saint John Chrysostom

“Nicodemus

(he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them {50]

‘Does our law judge a man before it hears him  
and knows what he is doing?’” [51]

Nicodemus was a Pharisee and one of the rulers of the Jews. God, thus, was not without witness even among the corrupt Sanhedrim. God's witness in Nebuchadnezzar's palace was the prophet Daniel; in Artaxerxes's palace Nehemiah was God's witness, and God found Hushai among Absalom's wicked advisers and used him to change their evil counsel into foolishness.

Nicodemus objected to the false steps they took against Jesus. He said that they acted against the law.

+ Nicodemus exposed them as ignorant of the Law. They neither knew nor observed the law. For, the law does not decree the murder of a man before his judges hear him. Yet, these hurry to kill Him before they hear Him. Therefore, they disobey the Law. Saint John Chrysostom

+ He was somewhat alarmed because he considered himself accursed along with the others. For, a man's conscience hastens not to be silent when faced with things he opposes. He diverted the very insult to them, not frankly, but by discussion, and his words of objection took their force from the Law but not in a direct, open manner. Saint Cyril the Great

“They answered and said to him,

‘Are you also from Galilee?

Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.’” [52]

Although Nicodemus did not leave his membership in the Sanhedrim to follow the LORD Christ as His disciple, he testified for Him in the middle of the assembly in the darkest

moments.

They based their discussion on several mistakes besides their envy and malevolence. They thought that Jesus was from Galilee, although He was born in Bethlehem of the house of David. They thought that most of His disciples were Galileans, yet He had many disciples from Judea. Moreover, they claimed that no prophet had arisen out of Galilee, but Elijah the prophet was from Gilead.

+ The Pharisees falsely say about Christ our Savior, “no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.” They should have rather inquired how He who came of Jewish parents (John 6:42) could be a Galilean. They should have taken into consideration that He was brought up in Nazareth. They should not, for this reason, stray from faith. Saint Cyril the Great

+ When the Pharisees say to Nicodemus, “search and look” they imply that he should go and learn. That is to say, Nicodemus did not know all that was written in the Scriptures.

“And everyone went to his own house.” [53]

The meeting ended and everyone went to his house without reaching a final decision.

### **Inspired by John 7**

#### **Let Living Water Pour Forth in Me**

+ Allow me, dear LORD to record this unique feast.  
Thousands and thousands of people were busy erecting their tents  
The tents were everywhere in the streets, squares, and fields.  
The crowds went out in two processions rejoicing.  
One group took tree branches and palm leaves to wave them  
And the other group went to Siloam with the chief priest to bring water.  
Everybody was eager to participate with great joy in the rituals of the Feast of  
Tabernacles.

+ Behold, I see two secret, serious processions.  
One secret procession was of the confused rulers.  
They did not feel happy with the feast as long as You lived to serve humanity!  
They did their best to get rid of You at any cost!  
And they considered every lie was in keeping the law so that they might kill You!

+ But Your secret procession is truly wonderful!  
You refused to go up with Your relatives to Jerusalem for the Feast.  
You went as it were in secret to celebrate a true Feast!  
Instead of the booths, You desired to build Your city in the hearts of those who believe in  
You.

Instead of the olive branches and palm leaves You gave them Your peace and victory.  
Instead of the leaders' talks full of hypocrisy, You announced that You are the Truth.  
Instead of pouring water from a golden vessel,  
You revealed rivers of living water gushing inside us.

+ Yes. Let living water pour forth in me.  
So that instead of celebrating a symbolic feast of tabernacles, I celebrate an eternal,  
continuous feast.

Instead of the water of Siloam, I drink the Holy Spirit.  
I drink and overflow on my brethren.  
Your Spirit turns our wilderness into a divine paradise!  
Your Holy Spirit grants us Your true peace!  
Your Holy Spirit grants us constant victory!  
Your Holy Spirit makes of us a holy city for God.

+ Yours is the glory, who goes up to Jerusalem.  
You change all bitterness into an everlasting joy.  
You open my heart's door for Your Father and Your Holy Spirit.  
The heavenly find in it their pleasure.

+++

## The Gospel according to St. John- Chapter 8

### **The Lord Jesus Christ is the Light of the World**

#### **The One Who has Opened the Door of Hope**

The scribes and the Pharisees brought to the Lord Jesus Christ a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They asked whether He would condemn her and have her stoned according to the law of Moses. They probably expected Him to support the sentence of stoning. Consequently, they would ask Him to throw the first stone at her. They believed that this would cause the crowds to be disgusted and therefore turn away from following Him. Those who had been attracted to Him on account of His gentleness and tenderness, even with sinners, would turn away from Him. Should the Lord refuse to condemn her, He would be seen as someone breaking the law and therefore deserve to be condemned to death Himself.

The Lord did not oppose the sentence stated in the law. However, He inquired as to the person who is qualified to implement the sentence, and He said:

**“He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first,” [7].**

The oldest one among them was the first to leave the place, and then the others followed him out. In the meantime, the Lord kept writing on the ground and in a language that revealed to each one his own hidden sins. The adulterous woman was the only one left standing before the Judge of the whole world. He had not come to condemn, but He had come to save. Therefore the Lord asked her not to return to sin again. He alone had the right to condemn her. However, He opens the door of hope to sinners so that they might repent. He offers Himself as the Liberator of the soul, for He is the Divine Truth [23].

Whereas the Lord is gentle and tender towards sinners, He is stern with the religious leaders. They obeyed and practised the work of Satan their father who is both a murderer and the father of all liars. The Lord wanted to liberate them from being the children of Satan. This would enable them to enjoy the truth rather than lies. They would then practise love rather than indulge in the lust to kill. They claimed to be Abraham’s free children; yet they did not walk in his steps. Rather, they fulfilled the plots of Satan. The Lord Jesus Christ told them how Abraham rejoiced when he saw the day of the Lord, and when he saw that day he was glad [56].

The way the Lord dealt with the adulterous woman reveals the nature of the Lord and His deep love towards sinners. He shines upon them with the rays of love in order to disperse the darkness within them.

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**1- The Woman Caught in Adultery**



**‘But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives’ [1]**

In the previous chapter we have watched how the Lord was being troubled especially by the religious leaders. Now when the evening had come, the Lord left the city and went to Mount Olives. Usually, He would go to rest in the home of a friend, or He would stay in any of the tents that were set up for the Feast of the Tabernacles. Some observers believe that on that evening the Lord could not find anyone in Jerusalem that could receive Him, so He went to Mount Olives. Others believe He went there to spend the night in prayer.

\* The Lord Jesus Christ spent the whole of the last day of the Feast- which was the eighth day of celebrations- teaching in the temple in Jerusalem. He had criticized the teachings of the Pharisees. In the evening, they left for the day and had returned to their homes; whereas the Lord went up to Mount Olives. During the day the Lord taught in the temple; and at night He would go to Mount Olives. Here the Lord intends to teach us not to own homes bought by our business and to be content with the bare necessities for our comfort; bearing in mind that we will eventually leave these buildings behind and depart to the eternal world. Consequently all our struggle to possess these buildings would have been wasteful and useless.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘But early in the morning, He came again to the temple,  
and all the people came to Him.  
And He sat down and taught them’ [2].**

The Lord Jesus Christ came early to the temple in order to teach the people. They had come to the One who had taught them the day before, and He had come early to find them. Even though He had probably spent the whole night in prayer on Mount Olives, yet as one who loves His work, He had come early to the temple. His desire is that everyone would enjoy the knowledge He had to offer. Moreover, He loves those who come and seek Him early. Accordingly His words are: “I love them who love Me, and those who seek Me diligently will find Me (Prov.8:17).

The Lord wished to meet with the people within the temple. He had not come to make them abandon their ancient traditions. Rather, He had come to grant them a new understanding and a new concept regarding the law, the temple, and the manner of worship. He sat down to teach them as one who possesses authority. He desired them all to sit with Him, to keep still and enjoy Him as they listened to the truth.

It was customary for the great teachers to sit down while they taught since such meetings could go on for a long time. Note what St. John says: “...and all the people came to Him....” The verb ‘came’ implies continuity in the stream of those coming; while the expression ‘...all the people...’ indicates the crowds. Therefore the reference is that there was constant and increasing movement since the early morning (Lk 21:38).

**‘Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought to Him a woman  
caught in adultery. And when they had set her in their midst... [3]**

Some scholars believe that because adultery had become so widespread, some parts of the law concerning that subject were not carried out. For example, the adulterous woman was no longer brought to a priest or made to drink the bitter water (Num 5:14). Moreover, many of the men were guilty of adultery too.

The scribes and Pharisees saw how the crowds were gathered around the Lord and were listening to His teachings since the early morning. Therefore, on the one hand, they sought to

spoil this gathering by bringing the adulterous woman. In this way they would distract the attention of the crowds away from the Lord's teaching. On the other hand, they wanted to set a trap for the Lord: if He forgave her, He would have broken the law. If He condemned her, the crowds would be repulsed by His cruelty.

**‘They said to Him: “Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act “[4].**

They address the Lord as ‘teacher’ although on the previous day they had called him a ‘deceiver’ (7:47).

The scribes and the Pharisees had failed in the essence of their mission which is to offer to every soul the knowledge of God's will and consequently enjoy His divine love. They became so preoccupied with the literal application of the law that they neglected man's salvation and the joyously deep fellowship with God. Therefore it was not hard for them to find a woman caught in adultery and to bring her to the Lord. Each one of them carried a heart made of stone that hungered and flourished by the spilling of blood. They sought to stone both her and the Lord Jesus as well.

They did not realize that the Lord, who is the Word of God, would criticize the law and perfect it. Indeed, He raises it from being deadly letters to constructive words that would sanctify the innermost depths.

Those who were preoccupied with the literal interpretation of the law believed that they would definitely conquer and rejoice as the woman would be stoned to death and banished from life. They believed that she did not deserve to live in a house or even exist on earth. They had decided that she deserved to be thrown in a pit and hit by a shower of stones. They were unaware that they had come to the Almighty Forgiver of sin. He alone would draw her away from the house of Satan and from adultery. He would not only forgive her, but He would also lead her to find the Holy One. She would consequently discover the Bridegroom of her soul and her heavenly nuptial home where she will dwell.

The story of the adulterous woman opens the door of divine love and mercy to every soul. This leads each soul to discover the law of the Lord and its attractive inner aspect. Consequently the soul would hear the divine Voice saying: “ ...for God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved’ (Jn. 3:17; 12:47). Then nothing could have the power to condemn the soul to eternal death. Rather, the soul would have found the One who is willing to buy her with His precious Blood, and grant her heavenly righteousness. The Lord will intercede for her before God and carry her into the Divine embrace. In this manner the whole chain of events is transformed: from being a soul brought before judges ready to condemn her, she is brought into an eternal and heavenly wedding.

In his letter to **Eustochum** about the virgins, **St. Jerome** requests them to leave their father's house- that is Satan's home- in order to adhere to the heavenly groom. You might ask: ‘I have left my childhood home, I have forgotten my father, and I am born anew in the Lord Jesus. What is my reward? The following words provide the answer: ‘...the King will desire greatly your beauty’ (Ps 45). This is the great mystery, and on that account a man leaves his father and mother and adheres to his bride, and the two become (not one body as the passage says) but one spirit (Eph.5:31-32). Your Bridegroom is neither haughty nor does He belittle you...He leads you into His ways while holding you with His royal hand<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 22:1

**‘Now Moses in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned.  
But what do You say?’ [5]**

Moses is not the one who issued the sentence concerning stoning an adulterer. Rather, it is found in the commandments and the law that he received from God; and it states that such a deed is to be punished by stoning (Lev. 20:20; Deut 22:22). It was a means of executing the sentence of death in his time.

As the Pharisees thirsted to spill blood, they were driven to invent false and dangerous accusations against the Lord Jesus Christ. They therefore brought this woman and presented her case even though it was incomplete legally. Their accusation was illegal since they had neither brought along the other party involved in the criminal act nor the witnesses that were required by the law. In spite of that, the Lord did not reject her case. On the contrary, He drew everyone’s attention to the real meaning of the commandment and the intrinsic intention of the law.

\* They insisted that the Lord answer their sly questions, and believed He would not be able to get away from their two-edged question. On the one hand, if He would forgive the adulteress they would accuse Him of disregarding the law and the commandments and of approving adultery. On the other hand, if He orders them to stone her He would be discredited of the tenderness and gentleness which attracted the crowds to Him. Nevertheless, the Lord never ceases to be the all compassionate, merciful, and gentle One. He does not circumvent the law and upholds and defends it. He rescues the woman from being killed yet He does not contradict or abolish the law.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of  
which to accuse Him.  
But Jesus stooped down  
and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear.’ [6]**

They came to the Lord as they would come to a judge demanding Him to apply the law. Should He decline He would be condemned as a traitor and blasphemer and deserving the death penalty by stoning. They did not realize that He is the heavenly Comforter and Defender who seeks to save sinners and absolves their sins even though He is the Divine Judge.

He **‘wrote on the ground with His finger’**: He is the One who wrote the Ten Commandments with His finger on the stone which He delivered to Moses. Now, the Lord writes with His finger on the ground to reveal that they had broken the law. They are unable to execute the penalty of stoning for they are sinners and deserve to die. Today the Lord Jesus Christ writes on the ground of our hearts to transform its corrupt sand into a sanctified heaven. He writes with His Holy Spirit (with His finger) to perfect and fulfill the law. In this manner we will discover our sins and failings rather than be preoccupied with the sins of others; and we will be concerned with our own salvation as well as that of others. Indeed, the Lord records with His finger the work of love filling our depths!

Had the Lord condemned her to death, they would have reported Him to Pontius Pilate. He was the one who had stripped away from the religious leaders their authority and kept it solely in the hands of the Roman governor. Besides, the Roman law did not include a death penalty for adultery. Had He vindicated her, He would have been accused of lenience and legal incompetence in matters concerning chastity and purity.

They were not asking for His advice with a sincere desire to learn the truth and to obey Him. Rather, they were testing Him...therefore they did not deserve to receive a candid answer from Him. Consequently, He simply revealed to them what lay in their hearts, thoughts and intentions. Although He did not expose each one's wickedness publicly and hid their shame, He embarrassed them as He indicated His intimate knowledge of each one's failings.

\* If you were to ask me: 'What did the Lord write on the ground?' My answer would be: 'Probably something that led the scribes and Pharisees to feel embarrassed and ashamed. Something that would lead them to repent.'

\* Their words and opinions could possibly arouse the crowds against the Lord. Eventually, they were able to bring accusations against Him that led to His condemnation. All these acts were directed against whom? Insolence faced uprightness; falsehood opposed truth; the corrupt heart challenged the righteous heart; and ignorance defied wisdom! When have people such as these prepared a net and not fallen headlong into it themselves? Notice how the Lord righteously answers them while maintaining His gentleness. He did not fall into the trap they had set up; whereas they were caught up in it. They were surprised to find that He had drawn them to fall into their very own trap<sup>2</sup>.

### **St. Augustine**

**'So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them: "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first" [7]**

The manner of stoning was done according to the teachings of the Jewish leaders as follows: the hands of the accused were tied behind the back and the person would be half naked. He/she would stand on a platform that would be ten to twelve feet high and two witnesses would then push the accused forcefully causing the condemned to fall down. If the person did not die at that point, one of the witnesses would hit him/her with a huge stone in the chest. Most often this would be fatal. However, this was not the manner followed in all the cases of stoning.

As they press for the Lord's opinion, He remained silent and as though He did not hear them. Finally, He delivered the woman to them and asked them to judge her if they could.

**'And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground" [8]**

In some interpretations, the explanation is that the Lord was writing down the sins of the accusers. He was writing on sand rather than on marble or copper. In this manner, the writing would remain for a few moments and then disappear. However, the Lord writes our names in the palm of His hands so that they remain inscribed there eternally. As for our sins, He writes them in the earth and on the ground where they would get buried and eventually disappear. He wrote in the earth so that the earth judges the earth. As for the Lord, He came to save and not to condemn.

\* The Lord seems to be saying: 'I have revealed your sins to you, O scribes and Pharisees: they are similar to those of this adulteress...or even worse...and they are as bad as your own conscience can witness against you. Therefore do not insist on condemning this woman as sternly and harshly as you do. Rather, think of your own sins and examine their gravity; for you are sinners and criminals who deserve to be punished in the same manner. If you condemn her, then condemn yourselves first. Besides, if you decide to stone her, then authorize your own stoning as well...in this manner, the Lord Jesus Christ saved the adulterous woman.

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<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*

He did not oppose the law in this instance for He is the ever Almighty, wise, and merciful One.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The same persons who did not abide by the law are the ones who sought to implement it. They were therefore guilty of neglecting it rather than submitting and obeying the law.

Condemning as adulterers yet claiming chastity!

O Jews, Pharisees, teachers of the law and its guardians, you have now heard...yet you have not acknowledged that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Giver of the Law!

What does the Lord intend when he writes with His finger on the ground?

The law has been written by the finger of God. However, it has been written on stone due to the wickedness of peoples' (stony) hearts. Now, the Lord writes on the ground for He demands fruit. You have heard the law...may it be obeyed, and may the adulterers be merciful...

Does the punishment of this woman through those who deserve condemnation convey that the law has been obeyed?

May every person search himself and delve into his own depths. May he sit on the judgment seat that is in his own mind. Let each one place himself behind the bars of his own conscience and force himself to confess: for no one but the spirit within him knows what lies in his depths; and he will discover that he is a sinner.

Yes indeed, either you leave this woman to go her way, or you will receive with her the punishment stated in the law.

If the Lord had pronounced that she did not deserve to be stoned, He would have appeared to be unjust. Conversely, if He had condemned her He would not have appeared to be merciful. As the gentle and just One, hear Him say: **"He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first" [7]**

This is the Voice of justice. Let the guilty be punished, but not through sinners. Let the law be imposed but not through those who break it<sup>3</sup>

**St. Augustine**

**"Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last.**

**And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst" [9]**

If they had left, then how was the woman standing in the midst? Those who had left were her accusers. As for the crowds who had come to hear the Lord, they had remained and the woman stood in their midst. It is as though the Lord had not written the sins of all the people. He had written the sins of her accusers only...for he who judges his brother will be judged! And he will be sentenced with the same sentence he has pronounced on others. Those who have been conquered by sin are usually filled with violent sentiments towards sinners. In contrast, the righteous treat sinners gently as they tend to convict themselves rather than others.

The Pharisees paraded to be jealously opposed to sin. At the same time it was evident that they were not free from its bondage. The Lord exposed them (Matt 23:27, 28) as being inwardly unclean and corrupt.

The way they dealt with the adulterous woman not only enabled the Lord to avoid the trap they had set up for Him, but it also led to their fall into that same trap. Indeed, they were brought to shame before the crowds. They were unable to implement the law and none found himself qualified to throw the first stone at the woman. May we never throw stones at our brothers while we ourselves deserve to be stoned.

They were terrified by what the Lord had written on the ground. And so was

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<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 33:5

Nebuchadnezzar when he saw a hand writing on the wall before him (Daniel 5:25). Blessed are those who find their peace in the writings of the Lord Jesus Christ; and woe to those who get terrified and tremble as they read His words.

The Lord Jesus Christ turned the eyes of the people away from the woman's deed and away from the issue of judging her; and led them to focus on their own inner conscience. They were enabled to see their own corruption, repent, and return to love God. Although they discovered their failings, they did not admit them; and instead of accepting the advice of the Physician of souls, they took flight as from a battlefield (2 Samuel 19:3). They feared exposure and embarrassment so they fled. Yet instead of running to the Lord their Savior, they ran away from Him lest His light would expose them.

When the woman's accusers withdrew, she could have run away too. However, she found her salvation with the Lord. The manner with which He dealt with her did not mean that He embraced sin. He proclaimed that He had come to save the world rather than bring condemnation. Therefore sinners and tax gatherers did not fear to come to Him who knows the hidden secrets of all mankind.

The situation quickly changed! Here was a desperate woman awaiting the sentence of stoning to be issued in a few moments; and bloodthirsty leaders eager to condemn her and rejoice in spilling her blood. What terrified her most was the look on their faces rather than the stones they held in their hands. Everyone had abandoned her but she found herself standing before the ultimate Lover of sinners. She felt the amazing Divine work that sanctified her life and won her over into the kingdom of heaven! Instead of fear, she experienced the emotions of some one at a wedding...she saw the heavens rejoicing and awaiting her eternal wedding!

By leaving, the woman's accusers revealed their admission to being guilty of the same crime as hers. Indeed, they left because they feared that the Lord might begin to mention their sins one by one...

**'...beginning with the oldest...':** the oldest among the accusers left first, either because they had committed many sins throughout the years of their lives, or because they were more intelligent and so were affected by the power of the Lord's words.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**When Jesus looked up He found all the accusers had left while the woman stood alone before Him.**

**So He said to her: "Woman, where are those accusers of yours?**

**Has no one condemned you?" [10]**

**'She said: "No one, Lord."**

**And Jesus said to her: "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." [11]**

Some scholars find that the woman had been treated in a cruel and violent manner by those who had caught her. Therefore the Lord considered that she had been punished sufficiently.

In saying to the woman: **"Neither do I condemn you"** the Lord seems to imply the following: 'I alone have the power to condemn you, O woman. For I alone am the judge. However, since I have come to save the world and not to condemn, therefore I do not condemn you.'

By telling her to **"go"** He is really telling her 'go and feel secure, for your adultery has been removed from you as I have released you of your sins...therefore go....'

The Lord's words: **"and sin no more..."** can be interpreted as follows: 'I charge you not to go back and sin again, otherwise I will condemn you. From now on do not go back **'as a dog returns to his own vomit'** (Prov. 26:11; 2Peter 2:22). Do not sin anymore to avoid

condemnation.'

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The most holy One who had the power to change the nature of the five loaves and multiply them; who made the dumb nature of the donkey to speak; who taught the adulteress to be chaste (John 8); who transformed the nature of the burning fire into a cool medium for those thrown into the furnace; and who for Daniel's sake changed the fierce nature of the lions into a gentle one...can also transform the soul that has become a barren desert due to sin. He alone can lead the soul to enjoy His goodness, mercy, and peace by His Holy Spirit and divine promises.

**St. Macarius the Great**

\* We have heard the Voice of Justice [7]. Let us also hear the Voice of Mercy...of the Holy One who has driven away her enemies as He spoke justice, and who has turned His eyes mercifully as He told her: **"Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."** [11]

May those who love the gentleness of the Lord be warned and fear His truth! For He is good and upright (Ps 25:8). You love Him because He is good...fear Him because He is upright...

The Lord is gentle, patient, and tender. Yet He is also just and upright.

He gives you the chance to improve and correct yourself. Yet you like to delay His judgment more than to correct your ways!

Were you evil yesterday? May you become good today!

Do you continue in the pursuit of evil today? Attempt to change that tomorrow...but how do you know that tomorrow will come?... God has promised to be forgiving to those who correct themselves. Yet He has not promised to extend my life (to tomorrow)!<sup>4</sup>

**St. Augustine**

**St. Augustine** warns us against despair as well as against false hope. Those who despair because God is not forgiving kill themselves through their despair. However, those who become careless and are slow to repent, as they trust that the mercy of God will save them tomorrow, are also condemning themselves because of their false hope<sup>5</sup>.

**2- The Messiah: the Light of the World**

**"Then Jesus spoke to them again saying:**

**"I am the light of the world.**

**He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness,  
but have the light of Life."** [12]

When the accusers withdrew and the woman left, the Lord continued teaching the crowds. The accusers had wanted to stir and confuse the crowds. However, the Lord intended to focus on His teachings by these words: **"I am the light of the world..."** [12]. Without Him everyone would remain in darkness, despair, and death. The Pharisees realized that by saying these words the Lord was indicating that He is the awaited Messiah, since the prophets had used the symbol of light when they spoke of Him (Is 60:1; 49:7; 9:9). In the writings of **Bamidbar Rabba**, he says: "The Israelites said to God: "O Lord of the world, You have commanded us to light lamps for You. You are the light of the world, and the light lives through You!"<sup>6</sup>

**"He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness..."** In other words: 'he shall be

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<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 33:7

<sup>5</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 33:8

<sup>6</sup> Adam Smith Comm.

delivered from ignorance, betrayal, and sin.’

Some scholars find that these words refer to a Jewish custom of adding a ninth day to the Feast of the tabernacles. On that day, they would bring out all the holy books from the storage boxes and place them in a place lit with candles in order to call to mind the words in Proverbs 6:23 ‘For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life.’

Many scholars find that one of the most important memories related to the first Tabernacle is the time when chief priest poured water as we mentioned in the previous chapter. The procedure was followed according to the tradition of **‘the light’**, and it was done in memory of the pillar of light that went before the people in the wilderness. It led them through the darkness of the night (Ex13:21), and it continued to do so until they crossed over into Canaan in fulfillment of the Divine promise.

During that feast, it was customary to use a huge candlestick with branches. Four of its lamps were filled with oil and they had to use a ladder to go up to light it. The Talmud mentions that it was 50 feet high. This light was exceedingly bright, the Mishnah states: “There was no area in Jerusalem where the light was not reflected.” This brilliant light was a very rare sight in the old cities.

Some scholars believe that the candlestick lights were snuffed out after the Feast. The Lord Jesus Christ stood where the lights had been snuffed and He dazzled those coming to the Feast. The darkness had replaced the light, so He proclaimed the need for the Divine light: the Messiah, God’s slave, who is the light who has come for all peoples.

Isaiah states:” I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness, and will hold your hand, I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house (Is 42:6-7) --- that you should be my salvation to the ends of the earth (Is 49:6)

“I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles, and I will make my justice rest as a light of the peoples---” (Is 51:4).

The saintly interpreters provide an explanation to the words: “The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?” (Ps 27:1). They state that the law is a light. The Lord has proclaimed that He is the divine word, the light of the world, which gives light to every person in the world.

When they claimed that the temple is “the light”, the Lord asked them to destroy the temple and He would rebuild it in three days (Jn 2:20). By saying so, He proclaims, the temple of His Body. This is because He is the resurrection of the temple that embraces all the new creation. The Church/Temple is enlightened by the light of His resurrection.

When St. John the Evangelist speaks of the heavenly Temple, he says:”---for the Lord God the Almighty and the lamb are its temple-----for the glory of God illuminated the city and the lamb is its light (Rev. 21:23, 24).

The Lord Jesus Christ speaks of man’s life as a journey in the middle of a dark world. A person needs the sun of righteousness to shine upon him/her and to accompany him so that he might not stumble. It is appropriate for a believer to follow and be led by that light in all the concerns of his life. He is the true light in which we find our peace. As we look up to Him and make friends with Him; as we have faith and walk in Him, He will become our light. He will enlighten us not only by being a lamp shedding light to our eyes and feet, but to all our body. He will lead us in this world and will lift us up through the Holy Spirit to the heavens. There, we will enjoy the promise of eternity.



The Lord clearly indicates that He is one of the prophets. However, He is the Lord of the world. He is not the light of Galilee, of Palestine, or Israel; but He is ‘the light of the world.’

**St. John Chrysostom.**

If we are priests of the Lord and of God, then I cannot find anyone else whom I ought to follow more than God the Lord. Indeed, He affirms in His Holy Gospel that:” **I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light life**”[12]<sup>7</sup>.

**Caprianus the Martyr**

\* I believe that the Lord’s words: ‘**I am the light of the world**’ [12] are clear to those who have the eyes that share this light. As for those who only possess physical eyes, they would be surprised to hear His words: ‘**I am the light of the world**’<sup>8</sup>.

\* There is a Light who is the Creator of the sun’s light. Let us love that light. Let us yearn to reach out and thirst for Him. Consequently, He will lead and take us to Him. In this manner we will live in Him and we will not die...

The One who shines over you so that you might see Him is the same (source) who flows over you and quenches your thirst....

Even when the Lord Jesus Christ did not reveal himself to everyone as He was hidden by the cloud of this body, yet He is who He is: The One who controls everything through the power of His wisdom...

Your God is fully present in everyplace, and He will never abandon you, if you do not abandon Him<sup>9</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* Let us follow Him now so that we may be rewarded later on. Let us follow Him in faith, so that we may receive grace later on by our eyes. The apostle accordingly says: “Therefore, we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:6-7). When do we walk by sight? When possess the light of life. When we attain that insight, and when the darkness passes away.

On that day when we will rise again, it is said: “in the morning I will direct (my voice) to you and I will look up” (Ps 5:3). What does ‘in the morning’ imply? When the night of this world passes away; when the fears of temptation are over; and when that lion roaming in the night and seeking to devour someone has been conquered.

“In the morning, I will direct (my voice) to you, and I will look up.” Now, my brothers, what do you think: what is our duty in this present life other than what the psalmist says? In another place, he says: “All night I make my bed swim---with my tears” (Ps 6:6)

The Psalmist states that he cries every night and yearns fervently for the light. Therefore the Lord responds to his desire and he says in Psalm 38:10: “...all my desire is before you and my sighing is not hidden from you” (Ps 38:9).

Do you yearn to go? It is impossible for you not to see: for if you ask to go, you proclaim that to all mankind...

Do you yearn for God? Who can see that other than God? Of whom do you ask for God...except from Him? For He can be sought of Himself, as He is the One who has promised to give us Himself.

May the soul lay out her desire and open her wide embrace. Then let her pray and attain what eye has not seen and what ear has not heard and therefore what has “never entered into the

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<sup>7</sup> Letter 63 to the Brother Cecil:18

<sup>8</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 34:1

<sup>9</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 34:3-6

heart of man” (1 Cor.2:9)

We can desire and yearn for Him and we can follow after Him. However, we are unable to deserve attaining Him and express Him in words<sup>10</sup>.

St. Augustine

**‘The Pharisees, therefore said to Him**

**“You bear witness of yourself; your witness is not true” [13]**

When the Pharisees who had accused the adulteress had left, some of them remained. These wanted to contradict the words of the Lord. They knew **“the light”** is the title of the Messiah whom the people of the Old Testament expected to come, and as it is written in Daniel 2:22

The Pharisees therefore contradicted themselves. For we find in the Old Testament some prophets who bore witness to themselves and who confirmed that they had received divine revelations or prophecies from the heavens. Indeed, some Pharisees had questioned St. John the Baptist and asked: “What do you say about yourself?” If they had listened faithfully to the Lord’s teaching and miracles, they would have discovered that He is the Lord and the Messiah: He did not need any external witness.

**‘Jesus answered and said to them:**

**“Even if I bear witness of myself,**

**my witness is true, for I know where I came from**

**and where I am going; but you do not know where**

**I came from and where I am going”[14]**

Because the Lord knows that He is the Son of God, He neither attacked nor needed their false witness. He just revealed his identity, His relationship with the Father and the mission He had to fulfill through his incarnation. All this was sufficient testimony for Him.

The Lord confirmed three facts:

**First:** His conviction concerning the reality of his own identity: Here there is no doubt or any need to argue. He knows who He is before descending from heaven; revealing Himself to the world: He came from the Father and is returning to Him (Jn 16:28). He came from glory and is returning to it (Jn 17:5)

**Secondly:** They were not qualified to judge Him or His teaching, for they were ignorant and wanted to remain in the darkness of their ignorance. They condemned Him according to their physical whims. Indeed they were not qualified to judge matters that are divine and spiritual. Although the Lord qualified to judge and condemn -being the fair Judge- yet He postponed judgment until His second coming.

**Thirdly:** His testimony for Himself is confirmed by the testimony of the Father for Him [18].

\* The Lord Jesus Christ has the prophets witnessing for Him. These had been sent before Him. They acted as the ushers or heralds who run before the Judge. John the Baptist also witnessed for Him. Nevertheless, the greatest testimony is the one He bears to Himself... He is the true light who enlightens everyone who comes into the world<sup>11</sup>.

\* **“---for I know where I came from and where I am going...”** The One speaking to you in person possesses all things, yet He still came. However, by coming He has not left the other possessions (the heavens). Besides, He will not abandon us when He returns over there.

Why are you amazed? He is God and what has occurred cannot be done by man. It cannot

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<sup>10</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate :34:7*

<sup>11</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate :34:3-6*

happen even with the sun; for it is ready to set, the sun leaves the East. In this manner, it has to return there when it rises... As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He comes and yet He is still the (in the heavens); and when He returns, He is still here (on earth). Listen to the words of the Evangelist: “No one has seen God at anytime. The only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” The Evangelist does not say ‘who was in the bosom of the Father’ as this would have implied that by His coming He had left the Father’s embrace...

The Lord was speaking here on earth, and at the same time He proclaimed that He was present there, in the heavens, too.

When the time drew near for Him to leave this place, He said: “...lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20)<sup>12</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* Whoever denies that the Son proceeds from the Father, does not know the Father from whom the Son proceeds. Moreover, that person does not know the Son because he does not know the Father<sup>13</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

**“You judge according to the flesh, I judge no one.”[15]**

When the Word became flesh, the Pharisees condemned Him according to the flesh. They thought He was merely a man. They did not realize the reality of His being the Word, the wisdom, and the power of the Almighty God. His work testified to His being the promised Messiah. They deceived their own selves as they attempted to measure divinity with human terms and spirituality with physical ones.

They studied the law and the divine promises with physical eyes. Therefore the Holy Book became a literal study, upholding temporary salvation, false honor, and the deadly literal word. Consequently they stumbled when they had to recognize the Messiah and the Father who had sent Him.

\* To live according to the flesh implies that a person is living in a wicked manner. Similarly, a person who condemns according to the flesh, does so incorrectly<sup>14</sup>.

\* **“I judge no one” [15]:** For if I wanted to condemn, then you would have been condemned...but the time of judgment has not come yet. Here the Lord implies that He will not be alone but the Father will also be with Him to condemn them<sup>15</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* We say that there will be one Judge for the living and the dead. Yet the Lord says about himself: **“I judge no one.”** This matter can be solved in two ways: We either understand it to mean ‘I do not judge anyone now’ which agrees with the Lord’s words, ‘I have not come to judge the world but to save it.’ The Lord does not deny that He judges but states that He delays judgment. Or, because He says: **“...you judge according to the flesh”[15],** and He adds that **“I judge no one”** in order to indicate that does not do like them, who judge according to the flesh<sup>16</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“And yet, if I do judge, my judgment is true,  
for I am not alone,  
but I am with the Father who sent Me”[16].**

\* The Lord indicates clearly that He is not alone in condemning them. Indeed, the Father

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<sup>12</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 35:5*

<sup>13</sup> *On Christian Faith, Book 19:127*

<sup>14</sup> *Hom 52.PG 59:307*

<sup>15</sup> *Hom 52.PG 59:307*

<sup>16</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 36:4*

too is with Him and demands that they would be judged<sup>17</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* It is as though the Lord is saying: **‘My judgment is righteous, because I am the Son of God.’** How do you prove you are the Son of God? **“... for I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me.”** There is one Essence, one Divinity, an eternal fellowship, complete equality without any conflict...yet the Father is the Father, the Son is the Son...and the Son is a different icon from the Father. This is what we truly believe. Stating that He is different in nature is false. I am not the Son in a manner which hinders Me from being with the Father; neither can He be the Father in a manner which hinders Him from being with me. I have taken on the form of a slave, yet I have not lost the image of God<sup>18</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* May we choose the Lord to be our Judge, my dear brothers. For God is our witness against men’s tongues and their suspicious. He is the one who will not refuse to bear witness and who will be all the more glorious when He is Judge. That is because the Witness himself will be the Judge as well<sup>19</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“It is also written in you law that the testimony of two men is true” [17].**

Although it is possible that two or more could agree to bear witness falsely (1 Kings 21:10); yet it would be accepted as a true testimony as long as it is not contradicted (Dent 17:6 , Num. 35:30)

**“I am one who bears witness of Myself,  
and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me”[18].**

Just as the Father and Son participated together in the creation, so do they work together for man’s salvation. The Son does not work alone but He works with the Father who also bears witness of Him.

**St. John Chrysostom** believes that the Pharisees knew that He is the Messiah, yet on account of their jealousy they addressed Him as though they had not recognized Him. They had come to test Him and therefore He considered that they did not deserve an answer from Him. Consequently, He did not quote any Old Testament prophecies or symbols pointing to His person. He just stated that He bears witness to Himself, indeed his miracles, teachings, and the Cross, whose moment was getting closer, all were witnesses for Him. He did not need another witness; for the Father bore witness of Him as He is one with the Son<sup>20</sup>.

Do you not agree that the Lord said so to indicate that He is of the same Essence and has no need for any other witness, and that He is not lesser than the Father? At least take note of His independence (distinct feature)<sup>21</sup>!

If the Messiah is a lesser being than the Father, the Lord would not have said these words! Now, and so that you do not imagine that the Father has been added to witness in order to meet the requirement of two (witnesses), note that His authority is different from that of the Father’s. A person comes to witness when he is self confident and not when he himself needs a witness. This is true for others too. If that person is involved in wrong doing then he needs the testimony of another witness as he cannot be trusted. However, this is a different case completely, since when the Lord witnesses for himself and when there is someone else to witness

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<sup>17</sup> Homilies on St. John 52:2

<sup>18</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 36:9

<sup>19</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 36:11

<sup>20</sup> cf Homilies on St. John 52:3

<sup>21</sup> Homilies on St. John 52:3

of Him, then this confirms that He is trustworthy. In every way, He will proclaim His independence (without separation).

He puts himself first: **“I am One who bears witness of Myself”** [18]. It is evident that the Lord reveals his equality in honor. Besides, they will not benefit at all by saying that they know the Father while they have not recognized the (Messiah).

The problem is that they do not wish to recognize Him. Therefore the Lord tells them that it will be impossible for them to know the Father without knowing the Son first. Indeed, He is the One who attracts them to know the Father. By leaving them, even if they would have sought to know the Father, the Lord says: “you cannot know the Father without Me.” For he who blasphemes against the Son, does not do so against Him alone, but also against the One from whom He comes<sup>22</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“Then they said to him:**

**where is your Father?**

**Jesus answered: you know neither Me nor the Father.**

**If you had known Me, you would have known my Father also.”**[19]

The Lord Jesus Christ accused them of not knowing God. It is true that God had been known in Judaism (Ps 67:1). They actually had partial knowledge of God as they recognized Him to be the Creator of the world, yet their eyes were darkened and they could not see the glory of the light shining upon the face of the Lord Jesus Christ. The reason for their ignorance of God lay in their ignorance of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ who reveals the knowledge of the Father.

\* The expression: “...you both know me and you know where I am from” (Jn7:28) is a reference to His person as a human being. As for the saying: “you know neither Me nor my Father” this is a reference to His divinity... Clearly, when the people of Jerusalem said “...we know where this man is from” (Jn 7:27) they were referring to the fact of his birth in Bethlehem (Matt 2:1). They knew His mother was Mary and that His brothers (actually his cousins) were James, Joses, Simon, and Judas (Matt 13:55). That explains why the Lord answered to the testimony of those who said: “we know where this man is from” by saying: “you both know me and you know where I am from.” However, when the Lord speaks to the Pharisees, He says: **“Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going.”** As He speaks of His divine nature, He is speaking about Himself as the basis and first born over all creation (Col. 1:15)<sup>23</sup>

**Origen**

Some heretics believe that when the Lord said to the Pharisees **“...nor my Father”** He meant that His Father is someone other than the Creator whom they knew through their reading of the Old Testament. However, the ignorance of the Pharisees, evident in this passage, arises from their wickedness. The wicked do not know God even though they could believe in Him as the Creator; and even though they could speak of Him as God. Indeed they neither remained steadfast, nor walked according to His pleasure.

\* If someone is able to present a full account of matters concerning God; and if he has learned from his fathers that God alone is to be worshipped; yet still does not walk righteously, then the Bible speaks of such person as one who does not carry the knowledge of God.

A person truly knows about matters concerning the Creator and priestly service to him,

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<sup>22</sup> *Homilies on St. John* 52:3

<sup>23</sup> *Commentary on John*, Book 19:7,10

then the children of Eli the priest possessed such knowledge, for they lived in the temple, the place of worship- yet in spite of that, they committed sins; we are told in the first book of Samuel: „the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the Lord” (1 Sam 2:12)...

The same is applicable in the case of the wicked rulers of Israel and Judea, and not only to the sons of Eli. In the same manner the Pharisees did not know the Father, for they did not live according to the will of the Creator!<sup>24</sup>

### Origen

\* When the Lord spoke about God his Father, they questioned Him, saying: **“Where is your Father?”** They were able to know the Lord’s Father in the flesh. Therefore they condemned His words, as they put them in a carnal context. However, the One speaking to them was the One who had appeared in the flesh; whereas the hidden One is the Word: the tangible human being and the intangible God... they despised Him as they did not know Him. And they did not recognize Him since they did not see Him. They did not see Him because they were blind; and they were blind due to their lack of faith!<sup>25</sup>

‘We see You alone; and we do not see your Father with you. Therefore how do you say that you are not alone and that you are with your Father? Otherwise, show us that the Father is with you.’

### St. Augustine

**“These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple,  
no one laid hands on Him,  
for His hour had not yet come” [20]**

**The treasury:** St. John the Evangelist reports that **the treasury** was the place where Jesus went to deliver his teachings. Probably he is referring to an area where people brought their contributions to the temple, so St. John is not referring to the place where the precious treasures of the temple were stored. The area where Jesus went was part of the Women’s court. Thirteen boxes in the form of a horn were placed there for the offerings. On each box, there was an inscription indicating how the contributions would be used. In that manner, the giver would place his/her contribution according to the service he desires to be fulfilled. The place is called ‘the women’s court, but it does not really indicate that it is reserved for women only, or that men are forbidden to enter., rather it indicates that the women are allowed to enter there, and not into other areas. The Gentiles are allowed to enter into ‘the court of Gentiles’, while it does not prohibit the Jews from entering there.

The people liked the ‘women’s court’ as the four candlesticks in it were lit during the Feast of the Tabernacles which we mentioned earlier. This area was also called Gazith and it was located opposite the area where the Sanhedrin was held. That explains why during his trial, the Lord said: “I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in the synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing” (John 18:20).

Before the whole nation, as well as before the Sanhedrin, the Lord proclaimed that they did not know the Father because they did not recognize the Lord [19]. In spite of that, they were unable to arrest Him.

Their uncontrolled tongues blasphemed against Him, yet their hands were bound because His hour had not yet come. The Lord had bound them, through his divine power, and they were restrained until it was time for his crucifixion.

The Evangelist writes about the Lord: **“... for his hour had not yet come.”** By this St.

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<sup>24</sup> Commentary on John, Book 19:13,15

<sup>25</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 37:1

John indicates that the time had not yet come and which God had set for the Lord Jesus Christ to be crucified. In that sense his crucifixion did not occur through the power of the rulers. Indeed it occurred by God's divine plan. Indeed, they had tried to kill Him before and had failed; and they were powerless after that. Indeed, had He wanted, He could have prevented his crucifixion.

#### **St. John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord's presence in the place where the people brought their contributions to help the needy; and in the treasury of the temple where the common good is achieved, indicates that the Lord brings goodness more than anyone and anything. He offers these words concerning eternal life (Jn 6:68); besides his teachings about God (the Father), and about Himself as he says: **"I am the light of the world..." [12].**

His presence in the treasury is more valuable than any currency, and this is why the Lord says: **"... If you know me, you would have known my Father also."** Note also all the rest of his teachings on this subject.

All the gold that others offered seems like a grain of sand when compared to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ; and the silver would be like dirt in comparison (Ezekial 7:19). Indeed, every word that the Lord pronounces is altogether wisdom...<sup>26</sup>

\* The Lord did not say all He knew when He was teaching in the treasury. He said only what the people there could comprehend. Actually, we do not believe that the whole world could contain the totality of God's word (Jn 21:25)<sup>27</sup>.

\* Although the Lord taught many things in the treasury and in the temple, yet no one arrested Him. This is because His words were more powerful than those who wanted to catch him. As long as He was speaking, none of those who planned against Him could arrest him. However, when they caught Him, He was silent. It is for this reason that He kept silent when Pilate interrogated him; and also when He was beaten (Jn 19:9). This was the time when He wanted to suffer on behalf of the world. Had he spoken, he would not have been crucified due to weakness (2 Cor.13:4). Indeed, there is no weakness in the Speaker who is the Word<sup>28</sup>.

#### **Origen**

### **3- The Doom of Unbelievers:**

**'Then Jesus said to them again:**

**"I am going away and you will seek Me,  
and will die in you sin.**

**Where I go you cannot come." [21]**

The Lord Jesus Christ issues a warning to unbelievers. Their denial will propel them to eternal suffering. He also offers words of encouragement and grace to the meek and simple souls. The warnings he directs to unbelievers are terrifying since there would be no time to repent. Accordingly He says: "They are like children sitting in the market place and calling to one another saying: We played the flute for you and you did not dance; we mourned to you and you did not weep." (Lk 7:32). Very often the Lord opens the gate of hope in this manner and through kind and gentle words. Yet He also uses stern warnings to protect his children from stumbling; or to encourage them to rise up and move away from what they have stumbled into.

**"I am going away":** They prayed Him to leave them, for they neither wanted Him nor did they want to hear His words. Here, the Lord is telling them that He was going to leave, that

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<sup>26</sup> Commentary on John, Book 19:53-55

<sup>27</sup> Commentary on John, Book 19:59

<sup>28</sup> Commentary on John 19:59-61

in leaving them they would die in their sin rather than have life. When they would be in trouble they would seek the help of the Messiah whom they have rejected and crucified. However, He will not be found according to their whims. They had rejected him and gone after false messiahs who offer the wrath of God rather than eternal life.

They seek Him yet their materialistic and literal minds confine them within the limits of the earth. Therefore they seek but do not find Him; for he has ascended into the heavens. They seek him while they are imprisoned in the grave of temporal glory and material business. Consequently, they do not find him. He is the light of the world and because they die in their sins they are unable to see the One who forgives sins and redeems souls from corruption. In this manner, the heavenly Physician exposes the disease to the sick ones as he wants them to accept to meet with Him and enjoy being healed.

**.”your sin...”** occurs in the Greek version in the singular (not in the plural) as the focus is on the sin of blasphemy and rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice that St. John the Evangelist directs our eyes to focus on the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Savior of the world. More than any other evangelist, he repeats the verb **‘to die’** and the noun **‘to sin’** so many times: “to die” occurs thirty eight times in the Gospel of St. John, in contrast to five times in Matthew, nine times in Mark, and ten times in Luke. Indeed, it has not occurred so densely in any other New Testament Book except in Romans where it occurs twenty three times only. The words **‘to sin’** occurs seventeen times in the Gospel of St. John; while it only occurs seven times in Matthew, six times in Mark, and eleven times in Luke. However, St. John does not aim to direct our focus on sin and its consequent fruit of death. For although sin is deadly, his focus is on the Conqueror of sin. Through the power of His Cross, we live in the spirit of victory and triumph. Moreover, we are enabled to lead a new life rather than suffer spiritual death.

The Lord had said these words on the previous day too (Jn 7:34).

\* **“ I am going away and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin”**: We wonder if the Lord was saying these words to all those present and listening to Him or just to those present whom He knew did not believe. These would consequently be unable to follow Him and would die in their sin. They would be unable because they were unwilling and had become handicapped. They deserved what the Word pronounced: **“to die in your sin”**<sup>29</sup>.

Someone may comment: Since He directs these words to people who insist on not believing, then why does the Lord tell them “you will seek Me”? Truly, there are many ways of seeking the Lord who is the Word, the Truth, and all Wisdom. Nevertheless...to **‘seek’** is sometimes used to refer to those planning against him, as this verse reveals: “Then they sought to take Him; but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come (Jn 7:30). Also this verse: ‘I know that you are Abraham’s descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you’ (Jn 8:37). In John 8:40, we read the words: “But now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God.” (8:40). Therefore the words **“... you will seek Me”** is directed to those who seek in the wrong way. It does not oppose the promise. “...for he who seeks finds...” (Matt 7:8). There are always distinctions among those who seek the Lord Jesus Christ. Not everyone asks for salvation in the correct manner or with the purpose of being blessed by Him<sup>30</sup>.

**“...You will die in your sin.” [21]** If this is interpreted in the usual clear manner, it conveys that sinners will die in their sins; whereas the righteous will die in their righteousness. However, when “will die” is interpreted to refer to the death of the enemy of the Lord Jesus

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<sup>29</sup> Commentary on John, Book 19:70

<sup>30</sup> Commentary on John, Book 19: 72-73



Christ (1 Cor.15:26) the reference is to those who will die as a result of having committed a sin leading to death (1 Jn 5:16). It is clear that these words have been directed to those who had not yet died. You may wonder: what will happen to those who are still alive and have not yet believed? Yet they will die some day? One of them may claim that though they have not believed as yet, they have not committed a sin leading to death. Besides, there are those who have not received the Word and so have not committed a deadly sin. They are alive and suffering of the disease in the souls; and this disease does not lead to death (Jn 11:4)...<sup>31</sup>.

\* May we be cautious not to catch the disease of death. Our sickness may be healed through (repentance). It is different from the disease that is impossible to heal (the insistence not to repent)<sup>32</sup>.

\* Let us compare the verse in Ezekial 18:20 "The soul who sins shall die." with the Lord's words **"you will die in you sin."** Indeed, sin is the death of the soul. We do not believe that this applies to all sin; it applies only to the sin that St. John describes as 'sin leading to death' (1 Jn 5:16).

\* Let us further underline the distinction between a sin that leads to the death of the soul and another sin that indicates a sickness of the soul. And there probably is a third kind of sin that is the one which leads to the loss of the soul. The following words refer to this last kind: "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Matt 16:26; Lk 9:25). Also refer to the verse: "If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss" (1Cor 3:15)<sup>33</sup>.

### Origen

Sin is a dangerous disease that infects that whole person- his soul and body - and consequently death reigns over that person. However, by the coming of the incarnate Word of God, who is the Physician of both the soul and body, He made a distinction between two kinds of sins or two kinds of diseases. There is a disease that does not cause death (Jn 11:4). Indeed, it works for the glory of God as it refers to (the soul) that accepts God's word. Therefore she abandons the grave of corruption, enjoys removing all sinful ties, and witnesses to the One who is risen and grants resurrection. The other kind of disease is that which causes death. The Lord speaks about this last kind as He addresses some of his hearers who will seek Him and die in their sin. The Lord is referring to those who are determined to reject Him until they die. These commit a sin that leads to death (1Jn 5:16)

\* The Lord says: **"I am going away and you will seek Me [21],** not because you yearn for Me but due to your hatred. After the Lord moved out of their human sight, they all searched for Him. Those who hated Him as well as those who loved Him looked for Him The first sought Him with the spirit of persecution, while the others sought Him with the desire to receive and hold Him<sup>34</sup>.

\* It is right to follow the path the disciples took when you pray to live the life of the Lord; and it is wrong to want to live according to Him in the manner of the Jews for these sought Him with a perverted heart: what did the Lord add? **"... and you will seek Me-** not because you have good intentions- **"therefore you will die in your sin."** This happens to those who seek the Lord in a wrong manner and consequently die in their sin: the sin of hating the Lord Jesus Christ who is the only One where salvation is found. Clearly, whereas there are those who have hope in God and who do not repay evil for evil; there are also those who repay goodness by wickedness.

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<sup>31</sup> Commentary on John, Book 19:79-80

<sup>32</sup> Commentary on John, Book 19:82

<sup>33</sup> Commentary on John, Book 19:85

<sup>34</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 38:1

\* **“... where I go you cannot come”**: the Lord said the same words to his disciples on another occasion. However, He did not tell them: **“...you will die in you sin...”** as He did not deprive them of hope. Earlier, the Lord had informed them that it would be some time before they would go to the place where He was going. This is because at the time the Lord was speaking to his disciples, it was impossible for them to follow Him; they would join Him later on. As for His other hearers, and based on His fore knowledge, the Lord knew that they would not join Him and therefore He said: **“... you will die in your sin”**<sup>35</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* The Lord intended to touch their souls, and embarrass and terrify them by His words. Note the fear that filled them as a result. Although they wished to kill Him and so get rid of Him, yet they asked where He planned to go. They imagined that His words would have dangerous consequences. The Lord also had another aim and that was to underline that His (death) will not happen as a result of their power. Therefore He spoke openly to them about it and predicted His resurrection<sup>36</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘So the Jews said:**

**“Will He kill himself because He says,**

**‘Where I go you cannot come’?’[22]**

When the Lord said these words on another occasion, they thought that He was going to the Greek cities to preach among the Jews who were dispersed there. However, this time they realized that He was speaking about His death! This reveals how they thought of Him not only as a human being like any of them but that He was even more wicked as He was going to commit suicide out of despair.

\* **“...where I go you cannot come”[22]**, because when someone dies in sin, he/she cannot go to the place where the Lord Jesus Christ reigns. Indeed, no dead person can follow the Lord for **“...the dead do not praise the Lord/ nor any who go down in silence. But we will bless the Lord (Ps115:17-LXX 26)”**<sup>37</sup>.

\* The Lord’s power to die by His own free will, and to abandon the flesh behind Him is revealed in His words: **“I am going away”**<sup>38</sup>.

\* The Judaic writings state the Lord Jesus Christ would be born in Bethlehem and that He would come from the tribe of Judah. This is according to the correct interpretation of the prophetic words. Moreover, concerning His death, tradition reports that He would withdrew from life in the manner we have indicated earlier. It is evident that the Jews were aware that it would be impossible to follow someone who would be leaving in this manner. It would be impossible for anyone even if he understood these matters, to follow and go where the Lord was going. That is why they did not intend it literally when they said: **“...will He kill himself, because He says: “where I go you cannot come”? [22]...”**<sup>39</sup>.

\* Anyway, we believe that they said these words as they knew what tradition reported concerning the death of the Lord. Therefore, rather than glorify the One who would depart from life through the Cross, they craftily said: **“will He kill Himself?”**<sup>40</sup>

\* They might have hesitated, yet they seemed to allude to His glory which would be

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<sup>35</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 38:2

<sup>36</sup> *Homilies on St. John* 53:1

<sup>37</sup> *Commentary on John*, Book 19:83

<sup>38</sup> *Commentary on John*, Book 19:111

<sup>39</sup> *Commentary on John*, Book 19:104

<sup>40</sup> *Commentary on John*, Book 19:113

revealed at the time of His death. It is as though they were saying: “Does His spirit depart when He leaves the body behind and by His own will?” Is that why the Lord said: **“where I go You cannot come?”**<sup>41</sup>

\* Contemplate also the words of St. Paul who says something similar to that in these words: “.Christ has given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God (Eph 5:2)”<sup>42</sup>.

**Origen**

\* The Scribes and Pharisees behaved just like other people who typically think, understand and judge matters according to the flesh. When they heard the Lord’s words, they said: **“will He kill Himself?”**... What a way to utter these violent words that reveal exceeding ignorance...By saying **“where I go..”**, the Lord did not mean going to death , but going to that which is after death.<sup>43</sup>

**St. Augustine.**

**‘And He said to them,  
“You are from beneath;  
I am from above.  
You are of this world;  
I am not of this world” [23].**

According to human wisdom, no one can determine his fate if he decides to end his life by his own hands. That is why they thought the Lord was speaking about his death by committing suicide. They probably wished to spread this rumor to spoil His image before the people. Suicide is a crime that the law condemns, since it involves the spilling of man’s blood: “I will demand a reckoning ...I will require the life of man” (Gen 9:5). The picture of Ahithophel, who committed suicide, remains to be a severe example of a corrupt life (2 Sam.17:23). It is true that Samson chose to kill himself in return for the death of thousands of idol worshippers who died with him. Besides, there are those who admire the ones who died in the stronghold of Massada who chose to kill themselves and their families rather than be captured by the Romans. Nevertheless, suicide in the mind of the public is a sin of despair; and the fire of hell is the sentence brought against those who commit it. The historian Josephus mentions this when he says that it is necessary to bury the bodies of the enemies promptly; but those who have committed suicide are left without burial until sunset and as a form of punishment. He mentions that in some nations the custom was to cut off the right hand of the person who had committed suicide since it had the audacity to separate the body from the soul. Consequently, the hand was separated from the body.

This was the prevalent thought of the Jews during the time of Christ They considered suicide a sin. This was in total opposition to many Greek scholars who considered suicide an act of bravery that is praise worthy. These scholars believed that through suicide a person ends his temporary life and transports himself to enjoy a long and honorable life.

The Lord Jesus Christ exposes the reason for their ignorance concerning Him. The reason why they could not understand from where He had come and where He was going: It arises from the difference between His nature and theirs. It is as though He is telling them: “You are able to practice the act of killing, even that of killing yourselves, because you come from below and because there is nothing godly within you. You are from below: earthly, physical, and satanic.

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<sup>41</sup> Commentary on John, Book 19:114

<sup>42</sup> Commentary on John, Book 19:119

<sup>43</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 38:2

They are from the earth and earthly; He is from heaven: the infinite Creator. Therefore they need to comprehend His divinity and believe in Him. For “... **if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins**” (24).

\* In this passage, the Lord is referring to earthly thoughts and physical aspirations as He says: “... **I am not of this world.**” It is not a denial that he became incarnate, but it does indicate that He is far removed from their craftiness.

### St. John Chrysostom

**Origen** comments that those who are from below ultimately belong to this world. However not everyone who is of this world comes out of it. Indeed, a person can be a citizen of heaven (Phil 3:20). Besides, even though a person proceeds from below and is of the world, yet it is possible for him/her to be transformed. They could become from above and so no longer belong to this world.

\* Such a person resolves not to belong to this world any more; for he was from below and of this world and chose to be transformed and be born from above... therefore the Lord tells his disciples: “Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you...” (John 15:19). Indeed the Savior came to call and save those who are lost (Lk 19:10). Besides, He came to transfer those who are from below and those who have been registered as citizens, whose names have been moved from among those from below to those who belong above. He is the same Lord who has descended to all the levels below the earth and for the sake of those who were waiting there (Eph. 4:9-10). He is also the same One who has ascended above all the heavens and has prepared the way for those who seek Him. These have become His true disciples walking in the path that leads to matters above the heavens- in other words, intangible matters<sup>44</sup>.

\* Pay attention, if you want to learn who is from below according to the Holy Bible, and who is from above; then know that ‘the treasure of every person is found in his/her heart’ (Matt. 6:21). He who stores his treasure on earth comes from below as a result of such action. Whereas when someone stores his treasure in heaven (Matt. 6:20), then he is born from above and bears the image of the heavenly Man (John 3:3, 1 Cor. 15:49). By ascending into the heavens, such a person fully attains his heavenly destination<sup>45</sup>.

\* It is possible to state that a person from below practices the deeds of the flesh, whereas the one from above bears the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Again it is possible to state that a person from below loves this world whereas a person who loves God comes from above according to St. John’s words (1 John 2:15). A person who does not love the world, nor the things in the world, is not of the world. Rather that person says “But God forbid that I should glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me and I to the world (Gal. 6:14-16)<sup>46</sup>”.

### Origen

\* What does the Lord say to those who carry earthly features? He says to them “**You are from beneath**” (Jn 8:23)... Therefore you bear the taste of the earth since you like the earth just as the snakes do.

You eat the earth, ...what does this mean?

You get nourished by earthly matters and find pleasure in them. You open your mouth to

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<sup>44</sup> Commentary on John, Book 19:135-137

<sup>45</sup> Commentary on John, Book 19:138

<sup>46</sup> Commentary on John, Book 19:139

speak of worldly things, and your hearts do not seek heavenly matters.

**“You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world,” [23].**

But how could He be from below while He is the One who has created the world? All those who are from below have come after the world had been created; indeed the world preceded them. Consequently, man comes from the world.

Since the Lord Jesus Christ has existed before the world, and there was nothing at all that existed before Him, for “In the beginning was the word, ...and all things were made through him” (John 1:1,3). Therefore He comes from Him who is above... from the Father himself. There is no one above God and He created the Word equal to him and in everlasting fellowship with Him ; the only Son since time infinite, who has laid the basis of time<sup>47</sup>.

\* Dear brothers, the Lord had explained to us what He intends us to understand concerning His accusers: **“You are from beneath.”** He is actually saying, “You are of this world” for they were sinners, wicked, unbelievers, and had the aroma of earthly things...

But what did the Lord Himself tell the apostles? **“...I chose you out of the world”** (John 15:19). Therefore those who were from beneath were transformed into persons who were not from beneath. They began to belong to the Lord Jesus Christ who created the world. As for those (the Jews) who continued to be from beneath, they were told that **“...(they) will die in (their) sin”** (24)<sup>48</sup>.

\* He who has created the world has come to you and saved you from this world. If the world dazzles you, then you wish to be impure forever. But if the world ceases to dazzle you, then you are truly pure.

However, if the world still appeals to you due to certain defects, then let the One who has the power to purify you live in you. As a result, you will become pure as well<sup>49</sup>.

St. Augustine

**“Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins, for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” [24].**

\* The Lord came for this reason: to take away the sins of the world; for it is impossible for mankind to get rid of them except through washing them away. Therefore it is necessary for the person who believes not to depart from this world while bearing the old man. As long as a person does not, through faith, kill the old man, bury, and die in him (the old man), then he will go to that place and be punished for his earlier sins<sup>50</sup>.

St. John Chrysostom

\* Since a person who does not believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah dies in his sins, then clearly a person who believes in him does not die in his sins. However a person, who dies in sin, even though he claims to believe, is still an unbeliever because he is merely concerned with the truth; and his claim to faith is void of deeds. Such faith is, therefore, a dead one; and is similar to that kind which is mentioned in the epistles. In the epistle of James, such faith is condemned (James 2:17)<sup>51</sup>.

\* Therefore, who is that person who believes, or who is convinced to have a nature that agrees with the Word and unites with Him? Such a person does not commit the sin which is

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<sup>47</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 38:4*

<sup>48</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 38:6*

<sup>49</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 38:6*

<sup>50</sup> Hom 53.PG 59:311

<sup>51</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 19:152*

described as one leading to death (1 Jn 5:16). That person does not sin – according to these verses – and does not resist in any manner the upright word but lives according to the words: “whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God...”<sup>52</sup>.

\* He who believes that the Word was with God since the beginning (Jn 1:1) would never do any unreasonable act as he meditates upon God’s word.

And whoever believes that the Lord is our peace (Eph 2:14) does not wish to engage in any conflict, such as those who delight in war or seek to arouse trouble.

Moreover, since the Lord Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God as well as His power (1 Cor 1:24); then a person who believes in Him, and that He is the source of power, will not be weak in doing good works....

For we believe that He is the source of stability and power based on the verse, “And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in you” (Ps 39:7). Therefore, when we surrender to anxiety, we reveal that we do not believe in Him who grants stability. And if we become weak, then we do not really believe that He is the power<sup>53</sup>.

Origen

The Jews are miserable because they die in their sins and not because they commit sin. This is what every Christian needs to avoid, and it is why we accept baptism. It is also why those who are in danger due to sickness or some other problems seek help; and why a mother carries, with pure hands, her child to church. She does not want him to go out into the world without baptism. Otherwise, he would die in the sin with which he/she was born<sup>54</sup>.

\* If you believe that I am He, you will not die in your sins. The Lord brings hope to those who are fearful. There is hope for those who are asleep; for they will wake up and their hearts will enjoy constant renewal. Indeed, after the Lord’s crucifixion, many believed. The Bible testifies that many were members of Christ, but had not yet joined His Holy Body. Indeed, some of those who had crucified and hung Him up on the Cross, later became members in the Lord. They had mocked Him as He hung up there, and the one who had struck His side with the sword, as well as those who had offered Him vinegar to drink.... Of all these, the Lord said: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do”<sup>55</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

Referring to the Lord’s words, “... **if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins,**” St. Augustine comments that the Lord Jesus Christ intended to remind them of the words God had spoken to Moses, “I am who I AM” (Ex 3). This was God’s answer when Moses asked him about his name. By this, God indicates that He is the beginning; He is the past, the present, and the future<sup>56</sup>.

**Then they said to him:**

**“Who are you?”**

**And Jesus said to them,**

**“Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning...” [25]**

The Lord’s answer to them could be restated as follows: “I am the beginning”, or ‘Arche.’ Just as I have spoken to you in the Old Testament, I have not changed. From the beginning, it has been written that from the seed of the woman, the head of the snake shall be

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<sup>52</sup> Commentary on John, Book 19:153

<sup>53</sup> Commentary on John, Book 19:155-157

<sup>54</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 38:6

<sup>55</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 38:7

<sup>56</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 38

bruised (Gen. 3:15). This is the essence of the faith of the fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). The Lord Jesus Christ is the Intercessor achieving the promise and the subject of the prophecies. From the beginning of His service, He declared to the Jews that He is the Son of God, the Bread of Life. Why did they continue to ask this question which He had answered repeatedly. The Lord informed them that He is the Savior of the world. Yet they asked, ‘Who are you that you threaten in this manner? What authority do you have over us?’

\* It is as though the Lord was telling them: “You are totally unqualified to hear My words or even learn who I am. For everything you say is with the purpose of testing Me, and you have not considered anything of My teachings. I could use all these matters as testimonies against you.” This is the implication of this verse<sup>57</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Those who had heard the Lord teaching with great authority were obliged to ask who it was who uttered these words. The Savior then proclaimed, “ ... **if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.**” [24]. Thus He reveals that He is greater than any human being. Indeed, He bears the divine nature<sup>58</sup>.

**Origen**

**“I have many things to say and to judge concerning you,  
but He who sent Me is true;  
and I speak to the world these things which I heard of Him.” [26]**

The Lord declares that He can expose their reality since He discerns all hidden things. He knows about their pride, their wickedness, and their hatred of the light. He knows about their jealousy towards what is true, their blasphemy, and their lack of faith and their evil intentions regarding Him. What the prophets have said about you is true. Nevertheless, now is not a time of judgment but rather it is time for salvation.

**The Lord teaches us here that we should not say all the things we know, especially concerning the wickedness in others. Conversely, He asks us to seek people to repent, and to return to the truth and so enjoy fellowship with God.**

\* It is as though the Lord is saying, ‘Since the Father has sent Me to save the world, which is a good purpose, therefore, I do not judge anyone now. Indeed, I speak these words that lead to your salvation, and not those intended to condemn you.’

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘They did not understand that He spoke to them of the Father.’ [27]**

Because the devil had blinded them, and so they thought that the Lord was speaking about His physical father who lived in Galilee, and not about the Father who is His Father.

**Then Jesus said to them,  
“ When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He,  
and that I do nothing of Myself;  
but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things.” [28]**

Crucifying Him marks the peak of their wickedness. It is only then that they will realize that they have crucified the Lord of Glory. This reality will be revealed to them as a result of the signs that will occur during and after His crucifixion, as well as at His resurrection after that.

The burned offering was called ‘a raising.’ In many of the litanies of offering and sacrifices, the meat was lifted up and moved before the Lord. In the same manner, the Lord was

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<sup>57</sup> Hom 53 PG 59:311

<sup>58</sup> Commentary on John, Book 19:159

lifted up on the Cross. During the Divine Liturgy, the instance when the priest chooses the lamb is called ‘the lifting of the lamb.’ The priest places the lamb (the Bread) in a cloth and lifts it up to his forehead as he prays, “Glory and honor; honor and glory to the Holy Trinity.” Sometimes, in the Holy Bible, ‘lift’ is used to indicate ‘to glorify.’ St. Peter the apostle uses it in this sense in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, “Therefore, being exalted to the right hand of God” (Acts 2:23). St. Paul also uses this word in the same sense, “Therefore, God also has highly exalted him...” (Phil 2:9). In the Old Testament, Joseph says, “Now within three days, Pharaoh will lift up your head to restore you to your place” (Gen 40:13).

The word ‘lift’ is also used to imply humiliation or death; as when Joseph said, “Within three days, Pharaoh will lift off your head from you and hang you on a tree” (Gen 40:19).

Here, when the Lord says, “...**When you lift up the Son of Man**”, we find both meanings. From their perspective, they will lift Him up on the Cross in shame and embarrassment. However, from the perspective of the Father, He will raise and glorify Him; for through the Cross all the power of Satan is publicly exposed and denounced (Col. 2:15).

**\* The Lord did not say, “You will know who I am,” but rather, “You will know that I am He.” In other words they would know that that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God. ‘He bears all things and I am not against that One ...for you will know my power and the oneness of thought with the Father.’ Actually, the Lord says, “...I do nothing of myself, but as my Father taught me, I speak these things” [28]. With these words, the Lord proclaims that in essence He is like the Father himself; He does not utter anything except that which is in the mind of the Father<sup>59</sup>.**

St. John Chrysostom

\* What does all this mean? It seems that all He has said is that they would know who He is after He undergoes all the sufferings. Undoubtedly, the Lord knew that He would reveal Himself to some of them such as those saints He had chosen and whom he foreknew before the foundation of the world. These would believe after the fact of His sufferings. ...He appears to say, “I will not be concerned with your enlightenment and will postpone that until my sufferings are over.” This does not mean that all who had heard Him would believe only after His passion because the Bible reports, a few verses later on, that “**As He spoke these words, many believed in Him**” [30]. However the Son of Man had not been lifted up as yet.

The ‘lifting up’ that the Lord is talking about here refers to His sufferings and not to His glorification. It refers to the Cross and not to heaven, yet He was also glorified there when He was hung on Cross<sup>60</sup>.

\* These words were intended to comfort those who might despair on account of a sense of guilt. This is reinforced by hearing the Lord as He forgave those who put Him to death.

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<sup>59</sup> Hom 53. PG 59:311

<sup>60</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 40:2



\* **“...I do nothing of myself...”** [28]. What does this mean? That I am not alone for the Son is God and He proceeds from the Father. However, the Father is God but does not proceed from the Son. The Son is God proceeding from God; the Father is God but does not proceed from a God. The Son is light from light and the Father is light but not from light. The Son is an entity yet there is an entity from whom He proceeds. The Father is an entity but there is not an entity from whom He proceeds<sup>61</sup>.

\* How did the Father talk with the Son? Did He talk to Him? According to the Lord's words **“...as my Father taught me, I speak these things...”** [28].

When the Father taught the Son, did He use words such as those you use when you talk to your son?

How could the Father use words when He is talking to the Word?

How many innumerable words would have to be used when talking with the One Word?

Does the Son bring His ear close to the Father's mouth?

All these are physical considerations ...discard them from your hearts, for God speaks to our hearts without a voice as we have indicated earlier. Therefore how much more does He speak to His Son?

The Father speaks to His Son in an intangible manner since He gave birth to the Son in a non-physical manner as well.

God did not teach His Son as though He was conceived without knowledge. Therefore 'taught' here conveys that He was born with full knowledge ...the Son has received knowledge from the Father from whom He has also received His being. This does not mean that He was born first and then received knowledge. Rather it conveys that as the Father at birth brought Him into being, so at birth too He gave Him knowledge. It is a natural simple fact since His being is not something different from His knowledge; both are One and the same<sup>62</sup>.

St. Augustine

**“And He who sent me is with me.**

**The Father has not left me alone,**

**for I always do things that please Him”** [29].

They seemed to possess the authority to kill Him. Yet this did not mean that the Father had abandoned Him. He is always with Him and they are never apart. What the Son does is pleasing to the Father; and so the Son was going to obey the Father and sacrifice Himself in order to save the world.

\* So that they would not think that the Lord's words **“He who sent me”** indicates a deficiency in Him, He adds: **“He...is with me.”** While the words 'sent me' refer to God's plan, the words 'is with me' refer to His divinity. The Lord also clarifies that His actions on the Sabbath are pleasing to His Father as He says: **“...for I always do those things that please Him.”** Indeed the Lord Jesus Christ struggled intensely to reveal that He never acted contrary to the will of His Father.

St. John Chrysostom

**“...He who sent Me is with Me”** [29] ...this equality in being is **‘permanent’**, and has no beginning or follow up ...indeed there is no beginning and no end. This is because the divine birth has no beginning in time since time itself has been created by the Only Son<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>61</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 40:2

<sup>62</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 40:5

<sup>63</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 40:6

St. Augustine

**‘As He spoke these words, many believed in Him [30].**

Whereas the Scribes and Pharisees stumbled due to His words and teachings, many of the people believed in Him. Just as the sun which dries up the mud is the same sun which melts wax, so were the Lord’s words: the words which carried the aroma of life to the living, were the same which carried death to those who were dead.

The Greek word for ‘believed’ implies they believed the truth. However, it does not convey the firm and living faith; for in their hearts and minds they expected to see the Messiah in the terms of their material and political world: a Messiah who would liberate them from the Roman occupation and reinstate in the world the honor of their nation.

\* Many of the Jews believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, yet it was not with full faith. They believed the simple notions of the faith; but they chose what was convenient and comforting to them.

**St. John Chrysostom.**

#### **4. Spiritual Freedom**

**“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him,**

**“If you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed” [31].**

As the Lord’s teachings began to affect the hearts of those who believed, the Lord turned his attention from the proud Pharisees to the simple believers. They were beginners and He wanted to speak to them about inner liberty. He wanted to carry them, from mere belief that had no spiritual depth, to steadfastness in Him, as well as constant growth and fellowship with Him. They were weak in their faith, but as a Shepherd He carried them in the palms of His hands; tenderly and gently. He opened the door of true discipleship to them which provides constancy and steadfastness in His word. It is not sufficient to join His school, for they have to be steadfast. Consequently, they would enjoy constant and unceasing growth. Many have appeared to be disciples and carried His name, but they have not persevered in His word. True discipleship to him involves constancy in Him and enjoying fellowship with Him. As long as we live, we need to belong to His school, and be serious about knowing and enjoying Him in a practical manner. Truly, we have accepted the divine Truth, yet we need to walk in His way. We need to love and hold on to Him and preserve Him within us.

\* The Lord speaks these words in order to achieve the result that takes place after that: **“As He spoke these words, many believed in Him” [30].** He spoke in the treasury where the poor came to obtain what they could and what was distributed to them. Therefore, many believed; but there were many who did not know Him. Among those who believed, there were those who remained steadfast in His teachings and these became His true disciples. For this reason, not many knew Him, since they did not become liberated when He delivered the Truth [33]. Indeed, only a few wake up and attain freedom.

Who are those who knew him, or those who lift Him up? According to the Lord’s words: ‘When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He’ [refer to verse 28]. Now, no one is given milk to drink while He prepares himself to eat solid food (1 Cor. 3:2; Rom. 5:12). Such a person therefore says: “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2)<sup>64</sup>.

**Origen**

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<sup>64</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 19:65-68*

\* In order to become a disciple, it is not enough to just come. You also need to continue (be steadfast). That is why the Lord did not say: 'If you have heard My words' or 'if you come to My word,' or 'if you praise My word.' Notice he says, " If you abide (continue) in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" [31-31]. What do we say, my brothers? That we abide (persevere) in the Word of God.... Is that a hard thing to do or what?

If it is hard, then let us look forward at the great reward.

If it is not hard, then you would have been rewarded for nothing.

Let us abide (continue) in Him who abides in us.

If we do not abide in Him, we will fall. As for the Lord, if He does not abide in us, He will not have lost a resting place. Indeed, He excels as He rests in the Father who is One with Him and never abandons Him.

God forbid that man abides within his own self, for he loses himself by such an action. Therefore, **we abide in Him out of our need, whereas the Lord abides in us out of His mercy towards us**<sup>65</sup>.

\* What does "If we abide" convey? If you build on the rock..."(Matt 7:24)

How great this is, my brothers!...

What is the reward? **"You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."**

'Bear and listen to Me, for you are aware that My voice is soft.

Help Me by listening quietly.'

What a glorious reward! **"You shall know the truth."**

Now, someone might say, "What do I benefit by knowing the truth?" **"The truth shall make you free."**

If the truth does not appeal to you, then let liberty have its appeal

In Latin, the word "liberate" carries two meanings. We are used to hearing this word applied to someone who is free, to indicate that he has escaped from some danger or surmounted some obstacle. However, the appropriate meaning for liberation is 'to be safe', 'to be healed' and to 'be perfect.' In this sense, to be liberated means to be free<sup>66</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

Knowledge of the truth does not imply mere theoretical knowledge. Rather, it signifies having experienced and united with the truth.

\* Notice that the Holy Bible does not state in other passages that those who unite with any object/someone and become one, get to know that other object with whom they have become associated and preoccupied. Before such a unity and fellowship existed, they did not know anything about that object/person until they learned some information from the descriptions offered to them.

For example, Adam said to Eve," This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh." (Gen 2:23) Till then, Adam had not known his wife, but when he got attached to her, we are told: "Now Adam knew Eve his wife." (Gen 4:1)

Those who find it hard to accept our use of the expression 'Adam knew Eve his wife' as an example of the manner in which we know God, let them consider the following: First, this is a great mystery (Eph 5:23). Then compare how the apostle uses the same words he used about the male and female to speak about the relationship between man and God. "Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot in one body with her? For 'the two,' he says, 'shall become one

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<sup>65</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 84:1

<sup>66</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 84:2

flesh.’ But he who is joined with the Lord is one spirit with Him.” (1Cor 6:16). Consequently, he who adheres to a harlot knows a harlot, and he who adheres to a wife knows the wife. This applies even more truly to a person who adheres to God, and consequently gets to know God in a sacred manner.

Since this is so, then the Pharisees neither knew the Father nor the Son<sup>67</sup>.

**Origen**

\* ‘If you abide (continue) in the faith which has just begun in you now, you who believe, what will be your destination?’

Look at the nature of the beginning and where it will lead you. You love the foundation and are concerned with the peak. Pray while you are at this simple, yet sublime height. For faith needs humility; yet, knowledge, immortality, and eternity demand sublimity and not earthly qualities. They demand heights, fulfillment, eternal stability and complete liberation from hostile attacks or fears of failure. These are great things which have their beginnings in faith but are often belittled.

When a building is constructed, those who have no experience often give little attention to the foundations. A great pit is dug and stones are thrown everywhere and in any way. There is no decoration or beauty. In spite of that, all that enchants us about the tree arises from the roots. Look at the roots and you will not be enchanted; look at the tree and you will be astonished by its beauty. Foolish person! What you admire grows out of what does not enchant you.

Similarly, the faith of believers appears to be a trivial matter and you have no scale by which to measure it.

Let us therefore listen to what faith has to offer. Let us consider its greatness as the Lord says in another passage, “...if you have faith as a mustard seed” (Matt. 17:20). What could be less significant than that? Yet what greater energy spreads from it? What would be smaller than that? Yet what could spread more powerfully from that seed? The Lord says **“If you abide in My word,”** that is if you believe. So where will that lead you? **“...You are My disciples indeed”** [31]. What benefit does this bring to them? **“...You shall know the truth”**<sup>68</sup> [32].

St. Augustine

\* **“If you abide in My word”**; these are words uttered by Him who reveals what is in their hearts. He knows that they have believed, but will not continue in their faith after that. So here the Lord is giving them a great promise that they will become His disciples. Some had already abandoned Him. So here He is referring to these as He says **“If you abide...”** For the others had heard and believed, yet they had abandoned Him and did not remain steadfast; “...many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more” (John 6:66)<sup>69</sup>.

St. John Chrysostom

**“And you shall know the truth  
and the truth shall make you free” [32].**

The Lord is speaking, here, about knowledge that arises from practice and experience. These are powerful means that promote true discipleship to Him and result in inner freedom. As long as sin is found in man, then it has not yet been destroyed and he/she is unable to live

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<sup>67</sup> Commentary on John, Book 19:22-24

<sup>68</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 40:8

<sup>69</sup> Homilies on St. John 54:1

in the spirit of an adopted child. In the baptismal waters, we have been granted that Spirit and can call the Father “our Father” (Rom. 8:15). Slavery to sin is the most dangerous form of slavery, and getting liberated from it is the greatest form of freedom.

A person who knows the truth and abides in it- in other words, who knows the Lord Jesus Christ and embraces Him- becomes liberated from the slavery of sin. He gets to have the thoughts of the Lord which are in harmony with the will of God. Consequently, such a person lives in perfect freedom according to the will of the Creator.

He is the Liberator who says “The spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has annointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives...” (Is. 61:1). On the Cross, the Lord has liberated us from our sins and their slavery. And with His resurrection, He has granted us His divine righteousness. Indeed, we are no longer slaves to sin. His holy word has liberated us from slavery to the literal word. Therefore we may live with the free spirit as children of God. As a result, we are able to experience the heavenly life as those who enter into the heavenly Jerusalem who is our free mother.

Had they not attained such knowledge while the Lord spoke to them? If they did not have knowledge, then how did they believe? **They believed in order to know and not because they already knew.** We believe so that we might know and not vice versa; for what we will get to know “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man...” (Is 64:4; 1 Cor 2:9). For what is faith other than believing what you have not seen as yet?<sup>70</sup>

\* **“And you shall know the truth”**: the truth is unchangeable. The truth is bread that nourishes our minds and never fails. He changes those who eat Him while He does not undergo change within those who have been filled with Him. The truth is the Word of God...the only Son. This truth became incarnate for our sakes; He was to be born of the holy Virgin Mary and so fulfill the prophecy:” Truth shall spring out of the earth” (Ps 85:11). Therefore the truth, who was speaking to the Jews, was concealed in the flesh. However, He was not concealed in order to be denied but in order to delay His revelation. This was delayed so that he may suffer in the flesh: and He suffered in the flesh in order to liberate it from sin. Consequently, He appeared wholly weak physically; and His Divine glory was wholly concealed<sup>71</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* **“And you shall know the truth”**: in other words, you shall know Me for I am the truth. All the Judaic teachings are symbols, but you will know the truth in Me, and this shall liberate you from your sins. The Lord did not say: ‘I will liberate you from slavery’ for He left it to them to reach this conclusion<sup>72</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**They answered Him,  
“We are Abraham’s descendants,  
and have never been I bondage to anyone,  
how can you say, ‘ you will be made free?’” [33]**

It is clear that they did not comprehend the Lord’s teachings about ‘freedom.’ They

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<sup>70</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 40:9*

<sup>71</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 41:1*

<sup>72</sup> *Homilies on St. John 54:1*

considered his invitation to enjoy freedom an insult to them. For they were the children of Abraham who was free and who called God 'his Friend' (Is. 41:8). The Jews used to boast that they were descendants of that great father. Rabbi Akiba, who died in the year 135 A.D. approximately, says: [Even the poorest people in Israel are considered free people, even those who have lost all their belongings, for they are the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The whole nation holds dearly to this special honor of being related to these great fathers and this had nothing to do with their economic status]. This is how the Jews felt at the time of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They believed that their physical lineage from Abraham liberated them. However, we read of the foolish rich man in hell, pleading to Abraham his father and saying: 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.' (Lk. 16:24).

How did they dare say **"we have never been in bondage to anyone"** [33]? Were they not slaves to the Egyptians and liberated by Moses? Had they not been enslaved several times by neighboring nations in the era of the Judges? Were they not in bondage in Babel for seventy years? And finally, were they not paying taxes to the Roman Caesar?

People who are materialistic do not pay attention to inner bondage. Their whole concern is focused on physical lusts.

\* This is what the Jews boasted about: 'We are Abraham's descendants'; 'we are Israelites.' Yet they never indicated or referred to their righteous deeds. That is why St. John shouted out, telling them: "... and do not think to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our Father" (Matt 3:9). Why did the Lord not embarrass them since they had often been in bondage under the Egyptians, Babylonians and many other nations? Because He did not seek to honor Himself, but sought their salvation and benefit. Therefore He was mounting His pressure with that goal in mind... He was not seeking to reveal that they were slaves to people; but that they were slaves to sin. This is dangerous slavery and no one can liberate them from that except God alone<sup>73</sup>.

### St. John Chrysostom

\* Every person - Jew, Greek, rich, or poor- having authority or public office- emperor or beggar- **"whoever commits sin is a slave of sin"** [34]. If people recognized their bondage, they would know how to attain freedom.

A person who is born free is transformed from a free person to a slave if he is captured by barbarians. If another person hears about that, feels compassion, and decides to use his money as a ransom, he goes to the barbarians and redeems the captive. In such a manner that man's liberty is restored as he is released from the injustice...

We ask the redeemed person: 'Have you erred?' He answers: 'I have.' Therefore do not boast about yourself that you have been redeemed. And you, who have redeemed him, do not boast. Indeed you should both turn to the true Redeemer, the Lord, who partially considers those who commit sins as slaves; while they are really considered dead ones.

What men should fear is the bondage that sin actually inflicts upon them. Why? Is it because they appear to be alive? Have these words been wrongly quoted: "... let the dead bury their own dead?" (Matt 8:22). Therefore all those under the bondage of sin are dead and enslaved to death: they are dead in their service and servants (slaves) in their death<sup>74</sup>.

\* Who is He who liberates from death and slavery other than He who is free and "adrift

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<sup>73</sup> Homilies on St. John 54:1

<sup>74</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 84:3

among the dead” (Ps 88:5)? Who is the One “adrift among the dead” other than the One who has no sin yet living among sinners? The Lord Jesus Christ Himself, our Savior, declares that:” The ruler of this world is coming and he has nothing in Me” (Jn 14:30). The (ruler of this world) catches those who are deceived and lured by him, and all those whom he urges to commit sin and he is the one who “has nothing in Me.”

Come, O Lord, come, O Savior. May the captive get to know you, may the one who has been captured escape to you, Be a Savior to him.!

When I was lost, the One who came in the flesh found me while Satan found nothing in Him. The ruler of this world found my body; but what kind of body did he find?

He found a dead body that he could catch, crucify and kill!

O Deceiver, you have erred! The Lord cannot be deceived ... you found that He had a body that is susceptible to death, yet it was not a sinful body though in the form of one: “God...by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom 8:3). He was in the flesh, yet not in sinful flesh but “in the likeness of sinful flesh.” With what purpose? :“...that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit” (Rom 8:4).

No one who claims to be free continues to be a slave. May our spirits not remain in bondage, for He forgives our sins (debts) day by day<sup>75</sup>.

\* Speaking about freedom in this life: where is the truth in their claim that they “have never been in bondage to anyone”? Was Joseph not sold (Gen 37:28)? Have the holy prophets not been captured and held in exile (2 Kings 24; Ex 1:1)? Another instance again, did not this nation, who used to make milk in Egypt, have to serve under vigorous rulers with hard bondage- not engaged in the gold or silver business- but in making bricks, and all manner of service in the field (Ex 1:14)? O you ungrateful nation, if you had never been enslaved then why was the Lord constantly reminding you that He has saved you from bondage (Ex 13:3; Deut 5:6)?...How did you pay the taxes to the Romans, and through that have set up a trap by which to catch the truth when you asked “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” You did so in order to accuse Him promptly of insulting the freedom of Abraham’s descendants should He have condoned such payment. At the same time, should he have expressed opposition, you would have complained before the kings of the earth that He opposes the payment of taxes to them<sup>76</sup>.

St. Augustine

**Jesus answered them,**

**“Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin...” [34]**

This awesome opening “Most assuredly I say to you” introduces a fearful proclamation. The Lord uses this very often when He launches on a matter of extreme seriousness. In this respect, He is different from the prophets who used the words: “This is what the Lord says.” They did so because they were God’s faithful servants; whereas the Lord Jesus Christ speaks for Himself and in his own right as the Son of God and says **“I say to you.”**

**“Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin”:** there is no righteous man who has never sinned. Yet not everyone who commits a mistake is a slave of sin. By saying, **‘whoever commits sin’**; the Lord refers to those who intend to commit sin and prefer it over the righteousness of God. These prefer the path of wickedness over the path of holiness (Jer. 44:16-17). By such behavior, they make a treaty with sin and accept it as their law: they allow sin to dictate their physical lusts and love of the world.

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<sup>75</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 84:6

<sup>76</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 41:2

A person realizes his/her bondage to sin as he practices it. At first, one may believe that he is in control and has the right to obey or reject a certain sin. However, once sin has access, it holds the steering wheel directing the soul. Then a person gradually loses control over his will. It is as though sin is a drug which is hard to get rid of. Consequently, the person is manipulated according to the sin's whims. This leads him to do things he never imagined he would ever do. According to the Desert Fathers, when sin occupies a place in man's heart or mind and reigns over him, it exposes him to other sins. These may dominate him too, while leading him into a chain of sins which he cannot conquer on his own.

**\*“Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.”**

He is a slave of sin: what a fate for man, and for sin!

Who would not tremble before these words? May our Lord and God grant us-you and I-to speak properly about such freedom. May we seek it, and avoid such bondage.

What a miserable bondage! When mankind suffers from wicked masters who demand us basically that we change our Master.

What does a slave of sin do? To whom does he bring his needs? To whom does he pray for salvation?...

Where does he escape from sin while he carries (his master) where ever he goes. The wicked conscience cannot escape from itself and there is no where to which he can go.

Indeed, a person cannot withdraw from himself because sin abides within him, he commits sin in order to attain some physical pleasure... The pleasure passes away while sin remains. What makes him rejoice transpires while the thorn remains after it. What a wicked bondage!

Let us all escape and go to the Lord. Let us voice our rebellion against sin to God who is our Savior. Let us pray that we get sold so that He may redeem us with His blood; for He says:” you have sold yourselves for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money” (Is 52:3). Without money on your side due to Me. This is what the Lord says because He has paid the price, not with money but with his own Blood. Otherwise we would have continued to be needy slaves<sup>77</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever” [35].**

The Lord is probably referring here to the exile of Ishmael and how he lost his inheritance (Gen. 21:10-14). A slave has no right to the inheritance of the family who has raised him; whereas the legal son has that right. The legal son has also the right to grant freedom to any slave of the family, and to deal with his inheritance in whatever manner he wishes.

The freedom of which the Jews boasted was a hallucination and an imaginary one, for they possessed neither inner nor outward freedom. This is the result of inner sin: it tricks its slaves into hallucinations of freedom. They get to believe that by living wickedly they are living a free and unrestrained existence. They imagine that they are demolishing what they believe to be bonds of goodness and faith. True freedom is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. In Him, the believer sees the law of true love even if the price is self sacrifice for others. True freedom has divine potentials for the believer as he enjoys fellowship with the Divine Nature. No imaginations or materialistic transient factors can captivate him. On the contrary, the believer finds pleasure in harmonizing his will with that of God, his heavenly Father.

\* If you wonder, why does the Lord mention ‘the house’ when he speaks and reminds

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<sup>77</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 41:3-4*



them of their sins? Our answer would be: To demonstrate that just as the master holds authority in his own house, so does He have power and is Master of the creation. By saying **“...does not abide”**, the Lord refers to the lack of power to grant privileges since the slave is not master of the house. However, the son is lord of the house and that is why He says **“... a son abides forever”**: as a metaphor borrowed from the context of human life. So that they would not say: ‘who are you’, the Lord said: **“Everything belongs to Me; I am the Son who lives in my Father’s house.”** By using the word **‘house’** the Lord reveals His power. In another passage, the Lord calls the kingdom His ‘Father’s house’: “In my Father’s house are many mansions...” (Jn 14:2). Because in this passage His teachings focus specifically on freedom and bondage, the Lord uses metaphors in order to inform them that they have no power by which they could enjoy freedom (nor to receive forgiveness.)<sup>78</sup>

#### St. John Chrysostom

\* Many sinners come into the church. That is why the Lord did not say: ‘the slave is not in the house’ but rather said “...a slave does not abide in the house forever.” Our hope, dear brothers, is that we become free through Him who is free. By liberating us, He will transform us into slaves. We were slaves to lust, but when we are liberated, **He transforms us into slaves of love.**

This is also echoed in the words of the apostle: “for you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” (Gal 5:13).

Therefore, a Christian person does not say: ‘I am free, I have been called to freedom. I was a slave and have been liberated and through my redemption I have become free to do whatever pleases me. No one can oppose my will since I am free...’

Do not damage your freedom by committing sin, rather, use it by not falling into sin. You become truly free only when you have a sanctified will.

**You are free even though you are still a slave, liberated from sin, and serving righteousness.** The apostle accordingly says: “for when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard of righteousness” (Rom 6:20,22)<sup>79</sup>.

#### St. Augustine

**“Therefore if the son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” [36].**

**St. John Chrysostom** comments that in these verses the Son reveals his equality with the Father regarding authority; for only God justifies and condemns (Rom. 8:33,34). The Son has no sin and grants freedom from sin; and this is an authority that belongs to God only. The Lord, moreover, indicates that the liberty they think they possess is not a genuine one. However, the liberty that the Son grants is the real one: “...you shall be free indeed”<sup>80</sup>.

\* The Lord came in the flesh, that is in the likeness of the sinful flesh (Rom 8:3). But he did not come in the flesh of a sinner, for there was no sin whatsoever in Him. On that account, He became the offering for sin; for there was no sin in Him<sup>81</sup>.

\* Truly He grants us liberty from sin as He is fully entitled to do so. Accordingly, He says in the Psalms: “I am like a man who has no strength, adrift among the dead” (Ps 88:4,n5). Therefore He was the only free one who had no sin. When He says: “...the ruler of this world is coming...” the Lord is referring to Satan who will appear in the persons of the Jews who would

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<sup>78</sup> Homilies on St. John 54:2

<sup>79</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 41:8

<sup>80</sup> Homilies on St. John 54:2

<sup>81</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 41:5

persecute Him and “He has nothing in Me” (Jn 14:30,31). This is why no trace of sin will be found in the Lord as well as in any of those who are killed and are righteous martyrs. ‘Satan will have nothing in Me...I am not paying the price of death due to my sins; but I die to fulfill My Father’s will. In so doing I will tolerate death; even though I could have avoided suffering had I wished not to suffer.’ In another context, the Lord explains: “...I have power to lay it (my life) down, and I have power to take it again” (Jn 10:18). Here we definitely have the words of Him who is free among the dead<sup>82</sup>.

\* Just as a doctor detests the disease of the patient and uses all the medical means to remove it and heal the suffering one; so does God work, through grace, in man in order to remove sin and liberate us.

\* The apostle accordingly declares what we are about to acknowledge: “For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man” (Rom 7:22). That is the moment when we become free as we rejoice in the word of God, because freedom brings joy. As long as you practice goodness out of fear, then the Lord will not be the reason for your joy. **May your joy arise from Him so that you may become free.** Do not fear punishment, but rather love righteousness. Do you still dislike righteousness? Then fear judgment in order to be granted the love of righteousness<sup>83</sup>.

St. Augustine

**“I know that you are Abraham’s descendants,  
but you seek to kill Me,  
because My word has no place in you” [37]**

It is good for the Jews to boast that they are descendants of Abraham, but why have they not followed in the spirit of their father in his faith and obedience to God? Why did they not confirm their lineage through their deeds rather than seeking to kill the Lord Jesus Christ? Since killing the innocent is considered a great crime, then how would you judge the act of killing the King of Kings? Abraham, in complete obedience and faith, offered his dear son as a burnt offering to God. Here we find them in total rebellion as they seek the death of the dear Son of God!

They boast of their lineage from Abraham who was given the promise to be the father of numerous nations. Although the time for the fulfillment of the promise had come; and that the Lord had come from Abraham’s lineage to gather all Abraham’s spiritual children; yet here we find the Jews seeking to kill Him. The mystery behind their rebellion against the truth; and their lack of pleasure in the blessings which their father Abraham enjoyed, is declared here in the Lord’s words: **“...because My word has no place in you.”** They did not leave a place in their hearts for the words of the Lord who is himself the truth. Due to the envy and hate that filled their hearts, there was no possibility for truth to enter.

When a person shuts the doors of his heart with physical lust and love of the world, then there is no place for truth to enter and fill him. Truth does not force His way in when He is not welcomed. When He is welcomed, he enters as though into His house, takes charge of the steering wheel in order to direct all the motions of the heart, thought, feelings, and senses. Consequently, such a person is transformed through divine grace into a spiritual being led by the Spirit of God.

If you boast on account of your lineage from Abraham, then you need to promote yourselves and live in the same manner as he did. The Lord did not say “you have no place for

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<sup>82</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 41:7*

<sup>83</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 41:10*

my words” but He said **“My word has no place in you”** as He was indicating the sublimity of his teachings. In spite of all that, this was not the reason why they wanted to kill him. They wanted to kill him because they did not honor or listen to him with the intention of learning<sup>84</sup>.

#### **St. John Chrysostom**

**Origen** offers a distinction between ‘descendants’ and ‘children’ from a literal point of view. Descendants or seeds are put into a woman and she may or may not give birth to a child. This implies that all children are either descendants or seeds, but not all are children. Therefore all those who live in the manner of Abraham are his descendants and children. Whereas those who are his children according to the flesh, but do not walk in his ways, are only descendants and not his true children. Based on that, **Origen** says that if there is a person who is neither Abraham’s child nor his descendant, then he is not to be blamed, like them, if he is a sinner. This is because he has not had the chance to be born of the seed of a righteous man and grow to be like his father. As for those who are Abraham’s descendants, they should have been counted as his children and they should have walked in their father’s footsteps. Though they are descendants yet they are not true children of Abraham since they do not live according to the ways of their father<sup>85</sup>.

**Origen** also states: **[Abraham became Abraham although he is not an offspring of Abraham (he did not conceive himself) but an offspring from those who came before him. Similarly, it is possible for a person, who sows good seeds in himself, to become another Abraham in spite of not being of his offspring in any way. Yet he possesses the capacity to sow seeds like Abraham<sup>86</sup>].**

The people of Israel lived in the same manner as the Amorites, Hittites, and idol worshippers. Therefore the Bible describes them saying: ‘your father was an Amorite and you mother a Hittite’ (Ezk 16:3). Although they were an offspring of Abraham and descended from Sarah; yet they were considered neither Abraham’s nor Sarah’s children.

\* This clearly teaches us that we need to interpret the whole story of Abraham symbolically. Besides we need to adopt his ways in a spiritual manner from the very start: “get out of your country, from your kindred, and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you.”(Gen 12:1). These words are said to everyone who wishes to be God’s child...and the Lord God who appeared to Abraham will appear to us and promise to grant us the land around the high Terebinth tree as an inheritance to our spiritual descendants (Gen 12:6).

Moreover, he who understands the commandment: “must do the works of Abraham”, must build an altar for God who will appear to us where the high Terebinth tree is. From there Abraham had to travel to the mountain, that mountain lies west of Bethel which means “the house of God.” It is for this reason that he set up his tent in Bethel that lies on the west; and Ai lies on the east- ‘Ai’ meaning feasts...

If you are the children of Isaac, then live in the ways of Isaac. The same applies to Jacob as well as to all the holy fathers. Conversely, every person who commits sin is considered to be a child of Satan according to the flesh; since “... he who sins is of the devil” (1 Jn 3:8)...

That is why we say that every person will return to his fathers upon departing from this life. At the time of departure, it will be imperative to say, not only to Abraham but to all mankind: “Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers...” (Gen 16:15). However, ‘...in peace’ is not said to everyone as it applies only to the saints who have retained their righteousness to a

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<sup>84</sup> Hom 54.PG 59:317-318

<sup>85</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:3 etc

<sup>86</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:16

good old age. It is said to those who have progressed and enjoyed a long spiritual journey; for ‘understanding comes with old age in mankind’ and ‘the silver- head is a crown of glory’(Prov. 16:31), and an ornament for the truly righteous elders<sup>87</sup>.

**Origen**

**\* “I know that you are Abraham’s descendants , but you seek to kill me, because My word has no place in you.”..** I know that you are Abraham’s descendants according to your physical origins but not according to a believing heart. If you had received My words, they would have arrested you, and then you would have been caught like fish that is caught in the net of faith. Then what is the meaning of **.”..has no place in you”?** It has no place in your hearts that are unwilling to receive them. This is how the word of God works; and this is how it should be with believers: it is like what a fishing rod is to fish. It picks the fish when the fish takes it. No harm touches those who are caught for they are caught to be redeemed and not to be destroyed... as for those others, they have inherited the form of the flesh yet they have become separated from Abraham because they rejected to walk in his faith as his true children<sup>88</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

### **5- Adopted Children of God or Adopted Children of Satan**

**“I speak what I have seen with My Father,  
and you do what you have seen with your father”[38].**

As the Jews boasted to be children of Abraham and his descendants according to the flesh; the Lord Jesus Christ presented himself to them as the Son of God in nature. He wished them to bond with Him so that they might enjoy adoption as children of God through grace; rather than what has happened to them as adopted children of Satan.

They wished to kill Him although He is the Son of God according to nature. Through their deeds and plots they confirmed their acceptance to be adopted children of Satan.

The words of the Lord Jesus Christ are the eternal truth which He sees in the bosom of His father, for He is the Word of God.

There are two families that will never unite: God with his children and Satan with his children. No one can belong to the two families at the same time. By accepting one you necessarily resist the other even though the resistance may not be apparent.

The Lord offers what He hears from the Father as well as what He sees. Because He resides in the Father, He sees Him. What the prophets utter are things they have heard from God or have received through visions. As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He is the Divine Word and the Truth Himself.

**\* Through my words I proclaim the Father in truth. That is how you need to go about your work too. For I have the same essence as the Father, and the same truth as well<sup>89</sup>.**

**St. John Chrysostom**

**\* Yet Abraham was also born among mankind and there were many who came before and after him. Listen to the voice of the Father to his Son:” I conceived you before Lucifer ever was” (Ps 15:3 Vulgate). He has been born who gives light to all, ever before Lucifer existed...Why is Lucifer mentioned. Because when he was enlightened, he shed light. And why did he become darkened? Because he did not abide in the truth (Jn 8:44).**

**\* “I speak what I have seen with My Father and you do what you have seen with your father’ [38].** I see the truth and I utter the truth for I am the truth. When the Lord speaks

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<sup>87</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:67 etc

<sup>88</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 42:1

<sup>89</sup> Hom 54. PG 59:318

the truth which He sees with the Father, **He is actually seeing Himself speaking of what He sees with the Father:** For He is the Word, and the Word was with God (Jn 1:1). The evil which these people were doing, and which the Lord condemned and resented, where had they seen it? They saw it with their father ... here, the Lord is speaking of another father which they had. This was a father who had neither conceived nor created them to become mankind. Yet they were his children on account of their wickedness and not on account of their humanity. They were his children because they followed and imitated him and not because they had been created by him<sup>90</sup>.

St. Augustine

**They answered and said to Him:**

**“Abraham is our father.”**

**Jesus said to them:**

**“If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham” [39]**

The son bears the nature of the father and naturally imitates him. Therefore it would have been appropriate for them to bear Abraham’s faith, obedience, and righteousness if they were truly his children. They would not have sought to kill the One who speaks the truth- this is something Abraham would never have done. In this manner they deprived themselves of belonging to his spiritual lineage.

\* The Lord here deals with their intention to kill. He mentions Abraham as He desires to draw them away from their preoccupation with being descendants of Abraham; and to tear away their haughtiness. He desires to motivate them to be more concerned with the hope of salvation. They can find salvation neither in Abraham nor in their natural bond with him; but rather in possessing his (righteous) will. This was the whole reason for their inability to come to the Lord: they thought that being Abraham’s descendants was enough to secure their salvation<sup>91</sup>.

St. John Chrysostom

\* **They answered and said to him: “Abraham is our father”[39].** It is as though they were saying: “what are you saying against Abraham? Or “If you dare, find fault with Abraham.” It is not that the Lord is unable to dare and to find fault in Abraham; but rather that Abraham was not the person that the Lord would want to find fault with, for he would praise him. However, these scribes and Pharisees desired to defy Him so that He would speak wickedly of Abraham. This would give them the chance to fulfill their intention<sup>92</sup>.

St. Augustine

**“But now you seek to kill Me,**

**a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God.**

**Abraham did not do this”[40].**

\* Those seeking to kill him, seek to kill a human being. Yet even though they have killed him; the God (the Divinity) cannot be killed. They wanted to kill Him and yet could not. So they conspired against Him as they would against a human being. They could not comprehend that the One they were conspiring against is God. No one would want to continue conspiring against Him once he is convinced that the One he is targeting is God<sup>93</sup>.

\* They would probably kill the body of the Word, but it is clear that they could go no further after that. Therefore we should not fear those who kill the body but are unable to do

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<sup>90</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 42:2

<sup>91</sup> *Homilies on St. John* 54:2

<sup>92</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 42:3

<sup>93</sup> *Commentary on John*, Book 20:82-82

further harm. We should not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul which is consecrated to the Word<sup>94</sup>.

\* May these words be applicable to all those who have come after the Lord, as well as to those who went before Him: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me...” (Gal 2:20). We also need to focus on the Lord’s words: “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matt 22:32). This probably indicates that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are alive because they too have been buried but are risen with the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 2:12; Rom 6:4). However, this did not happen, by any means, at the time when Christ was physically buried, or at the time He arose in the body. Yet, this is only our own observation and comment on the words: “Abraham did not do this” [41]<sup>95</sup>.

#### Origen

\* ‘Abraham was not a murderer. I say this for I am the God of Abraham and when I say this I am saying the truth...I know that you are Abraham’s descendants.’ The Lord did not deny their lineage but He condemned their deeds<sup>96</sup>.

\* We come from other nations, yet if we emulate Him, we will become Abraham’s children. Listen to the apostle’s words: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made.” He does not say ‘And to his seeds’ as though speaking of many; but as of One: “...and to your Seed, who is Christ...and if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:16,29). We have become Abraham’s descendants; and God has made us heirs with him. He has stripped the inheritance away from the earlier heirs, and He has adopted those who have come after them. The Lord has cut off the natural branches that have become dry on the olive tree. This tree had its origins in the patriarch, and the humble and wild olive tree has been grafted into it (Rom 11:17)<sup>97</sup>.

#### St. Augustine

\***St. Augustine** comments on the Lord’s words and says: St. John the Baptist attacked the haughtiness of the Jews who had come to him. They boasted that they were descendants of Abraham, yet they did not follow his example. He clearly states that “God is able to raise children to Abraham out of these stones” (Matt 3:7-9). [If you do not bear fruit, which indicates repentance, then do not boast of such lineage. God can condemn you without denying there are children of Abraham: they are those who imitate him in his faith and are therefore his children. “God is able to raise up children to Abraham out of these stones”- we are such children. Through our fathers we had become stones as we had taken stones to be our god and had worshipped them. From these stones, God has created a family for Abraham<sup>98</sup>].

**“You do the deeds of your father.”**

**Then they said to Him, “We were not born of fornication, we have one Father- God” [41].**

The Lord revealed a truth hidden from them: by their actual deeds they had become adopted children of Satan who is a murderer. Ever since the beginning, he did not abide in the truth [44].

The Jews may have intended, by these words, to indicate that they were not descendants of Ishmael who was the son of the servant; whereas they came from the lineage of Isaac the son of Sarah, the free woman. Besides, they claimed they did not descend from Moab or Edom who

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<sup>94</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 20:81-82*

<sup>95</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 20:93*

<sup>96</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 42:3*

<sup>97</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 42:5*

<sup>98</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 42:5*

were born out of a sinful relationship between Noah and his two daughters.

\* The matter does not end with the reference to the branch and the stone; but with the indication that mankind has sinned even more through their choice of Satan to be their father, while he is the destroyer of souls. That is why the Lord reprimanded them saying: **“You do the deeds of your father”**, pointing to Satan who has become the father of mankind through deceit and not by nature. Just as Paul became the father of the Corinthians through his good teachings, so has Satan become called the father of those who willingly consent to obey him (Ps 50:18)<sup>99</sup> ..

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* When we sin, we acknowledge that we have not yet stripped away our birth from Satan; even though we have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. That explains why the Lord told the Jews who had believed: **“You do the deeds of your father.”** The word **‘father’** here refers to Satan; and the Lord uses it again in this sense when He says: **“You are of your father the devil” [44].**

\* These words indicate clearly that a person is not a child of Satan as a fruit of creation. Moreover, we cannot consider that any person is God’s child as he has been created by Him.

It is also clear that a person who was previously known as a child of Satan can become a child of God. This is clear in St. Matthew’s Gospel as he reports the Lord’s words: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you and persecute you; **that you maybe sons of your Father in heaven**” (Matt 5:43-45)<sup>100</sup>.

\* Since all who abide in Him do not commit sin, then those who commit sin do not abide in the Son. And since all those who commit sin do not see Him, then he who sees Him does not sin<sup>101</sup>.

\* The person who is born of God does not sin. It is true that it is not written that the person born of Satan does not act righteously; but rather that a person who acts wickedly comes from Satan<sup>102</sup>.

\* Some claim that there are some creatures who come from God, and that they are in no way born of God. These creatures are definitely of a lower rank in the world in contrast to those considered to be born of God<sup>103</sup>.

\* He who is born of God does not commit sin for the Seed of God abides in him. Through the power of this Seed within him, the feature of inability to sin appears in him. At the end of St. John’s Epistle we read these words: “We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him” (1Jn 5:18).

\* Those who are Abraham’s children do the deeds of Abraham. The first thing he did was to leave his land, his family, and his father’s house; and he departed to the land which God would show him. This is why the Lord reprimanded the Jews and faced them with the fact that they were not Abraham’s children: they had not left their father’s house and they were still loyal to the evil father and doing the deeds of that father<sup>104</sup>.

\* When the Lord said that God is His Father (Jn 5:18), He did not indicate a man as His father. Therefore the Jews responded: **“We were not born of fornication”** as they opposed Him. They also added: **“We have one Father- God” [41].** It is as though they were telling Him: ‘We are the ones who have one father-God- whereas you do not since you claim that you were born of

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<sup>99</sup> Essay 7:13

<sup>100</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:106

<sup>101</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:109

<sup>102</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:114

<sup>103</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20: 118

<sup>104</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:126

a Virgin, and therefore were born of adultery/fornication.

You boast that you were born of a Virgin by claiming that God alone is Your Father. We are the ones who know God as our Father yet we do not deny that we have a human father too',<sup>105</sup>.

### Origen

\* The Jews realized that the Lord was not talking about their physical lineage from Abraham. They knew He was referring to their deeds, and they were aware of the significance of His words. Wickedness entails deviation from God and it consequently leads to spiritual fornication. They therefore stopped talking about their lineage since they had failed to follow Abraham's example. That is why they said: **"We were not born of fornication, we have one Father- God" [41].**

\* 'You claim that God is your Father, therefore consider Me as your brother at least.' At the same time, the Lord repeats words He has often said to offer a motive to those who have an alert heart: **"I proceeded forth and came from God, nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me"**...The Lord Jesus Christ came from God and is equal to Him, the only Son, and the Word of the Father. He came to us for the Word became incarnate in order to dwell among us. His coming indicated His human form as well as His divinity. He enables us to progress through that Divinity which is in the flesh. Had He not become incarnate in order to enable us to progress, we would never have received Him who is the eternal One<sup>106</sup>.

\* The Lord says: 'Why do you not understand My words? Because you are unable to hear them'...Why are they unable to listen other than because they refuse to walk uprightly by believing in Him? Why was that? Because "You are of your father, the devil." Until when will you continue to speak about a father? Until when will you continue to change fathers- your father is Abraham at one time, then it is God at another. Listen to the Son and He will tell you whose children you are: **"You are of your father the devil"**<sup>107</sup>.

\* Why are you his children? Due to your lusts and not because you were born of the devil.

What are his lusts? **"He was a murderer from the beginning."** This statement clarifies the rest of the Lord's words: **"...the desires of your father you want to do....You want to kill Me because I am the One who informs you of the truth."** The devil has evil intentions towards man and seeks to kill him. Because of his wicked plans, he took the form of a snake and enticed the woman, and through her he injected his poison into mankind. Both Adam and Eve died because they listened to the devil (Gen 3:1). Had they not listened to him, they would both have listened to God; for it was imperative for man to obey the Creator and not the Deceiver...

Satan is called the 'murderer' not in the sense of someone armed with a sword and cloaked in an armor. Rather, in the sense of someone who approached man and sowed his wicked suggestions and killed him.

Therefore do not imagine that you are not a murderer too when you invite your brother to wickedness, By coaxing him to behave wickedly, you are actually killing him. So that you may know what you are doing, listen to the words of the Psalmist: '...the sons of men....whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword' (Ps 57:4).

Indeed, you fulfill the desires of your father for you are unable to walk according to the Spirit; and therefore are driven wildly towards the flesh.

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<sup>105</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:130

<sup>106</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of John, tractate 42:8

<sup>107</sup> St. Augustine: on the Gospel of St. John, tractate 49:9



**“He was a murderer from the beginning”**: at least ever since the beginning of human life.

Ever since then the possibility of killing people holds true. Only since man was created did it become possible to kill man; since before that time man had not been created as yet....

How did he get to be a murderer? Because **‘he does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.’[44]**.

So he knew the truth but he stumbled because he did not abide in it. And why did he not abide in the truth? Because the truth is not in him in the same manner that it is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. For in the Lord the truth abides in a manner that makes Him the Truth itself. Had Satan abided in the truth, he would have abided in the Lord Jesus Christ. But he did not because there is no truth in him<sup>108</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**Jesus said to them,**

**“If God were your Father, you would love Me,  
for I proceeded forth and came from God;  
nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me” [42].**

They believed they were God’s children, and had not committed the crime of fornication. Although they did not worship idols, yet, by rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ and resisting Him, they testified to the opposite of that. They attempted to defend their status as God’s children, yet they had to admit that the Jewish nation, as a mother, had lost her union with God. On account of sin, they had become divorced: Thus says the Lord: “Where is the certificate of your mother’s divorce whom I have put away...For your iniquities you have sold yourselves, and for your transgressions your mother has been put away” (Is 50:1). What had been told to their fathers at the time of Isaiah is being told them again here on account of their bondage to sin.

The meaning of the Lord’s words: **“...for I proceeded forth and came from God...”** could be interpreted in two ways due to the place of the joining word used in the Greek text: this joining word could convey ‘estrangement’ or ‘accompaniment’ in respect of the other being; or proceeding from inside while remaining with the Essence. In the correct Greek writings, however, the meaning is: **the Word came without essentially being separated from the Father who is the Essence. Therefore the coming of the Lord into our world did not isolate Him from that same and one divine Essence.**

\* From every aspect, it is evident that the Lord Jesus Christ does not oppose God. Moreover the reason for their unbelief is not a result of the Lord’s teaching but a result of their estrangement from God. The Lord told them He had not committed any sin and that He came from God. Moreover, He told them that He was sent into the world by God and that He spoke the truth...after all that, they still did not believe in Him. Clearly, they did not believe because they were corporeal<sup>109</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord Jesus Christ proceeded from God, and after He left He still continued to abide in Him<sup>110</sup>.

\* It is clear that His accusers thought that the Father had a physical home; and that the Son came to this life just by moving from one tangible place to another. They did not understand

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<sup>108</sup> St. Augustine: on the Gospel of St. John, tractate 42:10-11

<sup>109</sup> Hom 54.PG 59:319-320

<sup>110</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:156

that the change was from one condition into another in the sense that we accept<sup>111</sup>.

**Origen**

\* The One who proceeds from the Father and comes from God cannot be charged except with what is worthy of God<sup>112</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

**“Why do you not understand My speech?**

**Because you are not able to listen to My word”[43].**

A person who is unable to hear the word of the Lord, may eventually enjoy this ability at some other time. Sometimes the inability to hear is because that person’s hearing has not yet been healed by the Word who says to the deaf: “Be opened” (Mk7:37)<sup>113</sup>.

Their hearts needed to hear the words of the Lord in order to tear away their haughtiness and hypocrisy, and to destroy the corruption within their souls. They needed to hear His words in order to sanctify their will. However, they insisted on not departing from evil. Therefore the words of the Lord were mysterious and meaningless to them. To their ears, it all sounded so impractical.

\* The inability to listen is not a natural outcome which cannot be healed<sup>114</sup>.

\* Lying indicates an opponent to the One saying: “I am the truth” (Jn 14:6). Lies oppose the Lord Jesus Christ. Such an opponent has the devil as his father who is a devil and a liar himself<sup>115</sup>.

**Origen**

**“You are of your father the devil,  
and the desires of your father you want to do.**

**He was a murderer from the beginning**

**And does not stand in the truth,**

**Because there is no truth in him.**

**When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources**

**For he is a liar and the father of it” [44].**

Had they not insisted on resisting Him in their conversation with Him, the Lord would not have told them **“You are of your father the devil.”** He had no desire to hurt anyone’s feelings. However, their insistence on lying, on being rebellious, and on killing the truth made Him face them openly with their real status as children of Satan. He hoped His words would bring them to face their own reality and therefore motivate them to retreat from their wickedness.

The words **“...you want”** in Greek convey continuous insistence in executing what they wanted. This is a feature of the enemy of goodness. The devil insists on his wickedness and obstinately persists in fighting the truth to the end. He pours this feature into all those who accept him as their father. In contrast, we find that the children of God possess the spirit of meekness and obedience.

These Jews were not the children of righteousness since they hated the dear Son and sought to kill Him. They are by definition the children of Satan. The world is divided into two teams: one represents the kingdom of God; and the other belongs to the kingdom of Satan.

Satan works within the sons of disobedience (Eph 2:2). These are also known as descendants (seeds) of the serpent (Gen 3:15); and the sons of the wicked one (Matt 13:38). They

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<sup>111</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 20:159*

<sup>112</sup> *Of the Holy Spirit, Book 1:16:107*

<sup>113</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 20:164*

<sup>114</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 20:165*

<sup>115</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 20:173*

share with Satan his wicked features, bear his image, obey his laws, and emulate him.

This is a very serious accusation and hard for any person to accept. How much harder would it be when it is directed to a people who believed they were the only nation who worshipped God, and who had great pride as they were labeled as ‘God’s people’? That is why the Lord presented a practical proof that His words were true: “...**the desires of your father you want to do.**” It is as though He was telling them: ‘you give Satan great joy as you respond to his temptations and achieve his goals through you.’ The most important features of Satan are: murderer as he opposes God who is ‘love’, and liar as he resists the truth. Here they were doing just these two things: they were seeking to kill the Son of God as well as rejecting and resisting the truth. Consequently, they became murderers and liars; the children of the father of liars.

He is a murder from the beginning for he deceived Eve through the serpent; and deceived Adam through Eve. He destroyed their lives and killed them spiritually and physically. Then death entered into the world and instilled in Cain a murderous spirit. Consequently, he killed his brother Abel. This is consistent with the thought of the Jews themselves for Sohar Kadesh speaks of the wicked who are called ‘the children of the old serpent that killed Adam and his seed.’

**“Satan speaks from his own resources...”**, in other words, he speaks from the lies within him. That is how he spoke through the serpent and managed to deceive Eve and removed her away from the truth. When a person utters a lie, he is really uttering what belongs to Satan and so becomes Satan’s mouthpiece.

\* The Lord dismissed them from their lineage to Abraham. But then they dared to boast of a greater claim and said: “...We have one Father- God...” Therefore the Lord hit them hard by telling them that they were born of the devil and not of Abraham [44].

\* People use lies not as an object worthy of them but as a foreign tool<sup>116</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* A good tree cannot produce bad fruit. Neither can a bad tree produce good fruit<sup>117</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

\* Not everyone who utters a lie is a father of liars. If you have received an untrue message from a person and repeated that message then you are really uttering a lie. However, you are not the father of that lie since you have received it from someone else. In Satan’s case, he is a liar himself as he gives birth to untrue words and therefore they are words that he has not received from someone. Just as the Father gave birth to Truth as His Son; so has Satan given birth, after his fall, to untruthfulness as his own child....Therefore withdraw yourself from the father of lies; and hurry to the Father of Truth: embrace Him for the Truth will grant you the joy of freedom<sup>118</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* **Satan is the first source of sin and the father of the wicked.** This is not our statement; for these are God’s words: “For the devil has sinned from the beginning...” (1Jn3:8; Jn 8:44)...However, he was not forced to sin but, as it were, he had a natural inclination to sin. Otherwise the weakness of sinfulness would have bounced back to his Creator as well. It is of his own free will that Satan became accepting of this name, and brought it upon himself through his own deeds.

He was the archangel; but he became known as Satan due to his deceptive ways.

He was God’s good servant; but then became rightly called a ‘devil’ which means ‘the

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<sup>116</sup> Hom 54.PG 59:319

<sup>117</sup> Against Jovinianus, 2:18

<sup>118</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of st John, tractate 42:13

opponent.’

This is not our personal teaching, but they are drawn from Ezekial the prophet. He was inspired to cry and mourn over Satan, and said: “You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden (read Ezekial 28:12-17).

After a number of verses, Ezekial goes on to say: “You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.”

Ezekial rightly says “...till iniquity was found in you...”, for Satan brought it to himself and so evil did not come upon him from outside. The prophet promptly indicates the cause by saying: “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor...by the multitude of your iniquities ...I turned you to ashes upon the earth.” These words agree with the Lord’s words in the Gospel: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Lk 10:18).

Here you see how the Old and the New Testaments agree together!

When Satan was exiled, he attracted many to him. He sows lust into the hearts of those who listen to him as he is the source of whoring, adultery, and all kinds of evil. Because of him, our father disobeyed and suffered exile. Paradise with its amazing fruit was transformed into the earth producing thorns<sup>119</sup>.

#### St. Cyril of Jerusalem

\* The Lord’s words here refer to all those who lie. Lies on the lips of any liar are the product of what is within him- that is from the lies within him. In addition, the Lord’s words “...he is the father of it” indicate the fact that anyone whose mouth utters lies is a father of the lies which he has uttered<sup>120</sup>.

\* It is not contradictory to confirm that the desires of Satan consist of murder, inflicting injustice, and greed. In fact, he sows similar desires in his children. Moreover, it is not unkind to say that his desires are unclean acts that are in stark conflict with purity. It is not hard to believe that Satan’s desires arouse in his children impure matters<sup>121</sup>.

\* We know that anyone who wishes to practice Satan’s lusts cannot have God as his father; for he has become Satan’s child. He changes in accordance to the wicked desires that Satan wishes to fulfill. Indeed, that person becomes transformed into the image of the wicked father. He becomes a product of Satan: an earthly person with Satan’s brand; because the first man was a product of the earth (1Cor 15:47-49)<sup>122</sup>.

\* If we do the deeds of God and desire to do His will, then we are God’s children. But if we do the deeds of Satan, and are eager to follow his lusts, then we come from Satan our father. On that account, we need to be alert to what we do as well as what we desire. Indeed, **the desire to experience Satan’s lusts is enough to brand us as his children**<sup>123</sup>.

\* Adam and Eve died instantly on the day they ate of the forbidden tree. No one else other than Satan the murderer was responsible for their death. He deceived Eve through the serpent, and Eve gave her husband from the tree and he ate (Gen 3:1-6)<sup>124</sup>.

\* He is rightly called a murderer; not because he has killed certain people, but because he has killed the whole human race: “for in Adam all die” (1 Cor 15:22)<sup>125</sup>.

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<sup>119</sup> Essay 2:4

<sup>120</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:175

<sup>121</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:177

<sup>122</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:181

<sup>123</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:193-194

<sup>124</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20: 221

<sup>125</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:224

\*On the one hand, the murderer killed us. On the other hand, through God's grace, we have been buried with the Lord Jesus Christ and have risen with Him: "...But just as Christ was raised...even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4)<sup>126</sup>.

\* Now the murderer rules over those who are perishing and he governs the dead. However, he cannot rule over anyone who is alive<sup>127</sup>.

\* God encouraged Moses to abide in the truth and said to him: "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock" (Ex 33:21). Therefore the Rock is the Lord Jesus Christ (1Cor 10:4). The Lord also says: "I am the truth" (Jn 14:6). Thus the words "stand on the rock" and "stand on the truth" are synonymous. A person can achieve that only after going through many trials and difficulties<sup>128</sup>.

\* If there is someone who has never told a lie and who has remained steadfast in the truth, then he is not a human being: for the Lord speaks to such a one and to all those like him saying: "I said: You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High" (Ps82:6)...the rest of the verse is not added in this context as it says: " But you shall die like men" (Ps 82:7).

\* If some have not remained steadfast in the truth, then clearly Satan the murderer has not remained in the truth since the beginning...and the reason given for that is **"because there is no truth in him."** As for why there is no truth in him, it is the fact that he is a deceiver who accepts to lie. Indeed, he has deceived himself through himself. On that account, he is considered the most wicked of all. Others have been deceived through him, whereas he created deception out of himself<sup>129</sup>.

\* Someone may say that the statement "there is no truth in him" indicates that the one who arouses wars against the Lord has no share in the fellowship with Him.

Another may say that because there is no truth whatsoever in Satan, he is deceived in every way. The reason for that is that he is a devil, wicked, and the most evil among those who commit sin.

Among the multitudes of sinners, some may discern some truth in the middle of numerous wrong issues. However, there is no particle of truth in Satan.

A third party may agree with the others and claim that there could not be a reasoning being who adheres to an incorrect opinion on every issue; or who always rejects the truth even that related to minor matters. They believe that when Satan thinks he would at least adhere to a correct opinion just as a reasoning being would do. Such ideas are based on the belief that Satan is a human being with a body, etc....<sup>130</sup>

\* We need to understand this statement: "(he) does not stand in the truth...": this does not indicate a specific kind of nature or that it was impossible for him to abide in the truth<sup>131</sup>.

### Origen

\* Every person who is from God is considered to be our brother. As for the person who refuses to share in doing good of his own free will, then he is considered as one who sows evil. He consequently becomes 'the father of liars' (Jn 8:44); for he has prepared to fight all those who have chosen to live in a godly manner<sup>132</sup>.

### St. Gregory of Nicea

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<sup>126</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:226

<sup>127</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:227

<sup>128</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:240

<sup>129</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:242-244

<sup>130</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:248-250

<sup>131</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:252

<sup>132</sup> Song of Solomon by St. Gregory, Bishop of Nicea- translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar, 1993; Sermon 2

\* Every person needs to pay great attention so as not to be disarmed by ‘lies’; for **a liar cannot be united with God.**

**A liar is alienated from God.** The Holy Bible states that a liar proceeds from the devil who “is a liar and the father of it” (Jn 8:44).

That is why Satan has been called the father of liars; whereas the Truth is God. The Lord Himself declares: “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6).

Do you not see, therefore, how we could be estranged from God on account of lying; and with whom we become united (through lies)?! Since this is so, we need to love truth with all our strength and zeal. This will enable us to fulfill our real desire to be saved. We also need to guard ourselves against all lies so that they do not separate us from the truth and life<sup>133</sup>.

**Fr Dorotheous**

**“But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me” [45]**

When the **Truth** came to them, they did not listen. These verses inform us that “Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for the truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. So truth fails...” (Is 59:14-15). The Bible also tells us that “There are those who rebel against the light; they do not know its ways nor abide in its paths” (Job 24:13).

\* They seem to have based their belief on what is tangible when the Lord worked miracles. However, they did not believe on account of His deep teachings<sup>134</sup>.

**Origen**

\* The speaker here considers himself to be a young child standing before God. He has chosen the Almighty to be his Father and Mother. God is his Father since He is His Creator; and His Mother since He watches over him, educates and feeds him, nurses and teaches him.

We have another father and mother...at the time when we had no faith, Satan was our father (Jn 8:44). We also had another mother- Babylon. However, we become acquainted with a Father who is God...and a Mother who is the heavenly Jerusalem- the Holy Church which has a part of it that is still estranged on earth...

By staying away from the father and mother- that is away from Satan and Babylon- we are received by God to be His children. He comforts us with things that do not transpire, and blesses us with eternal gifts...

The Lord Jesus Christ is our Head, and He is in Heaven. We have not yet risen above the reach of the hands of our enemies; and they are still able to roar wildly and attack us. However, our Head is indeed in heaven, and He tells us “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me” (Acts 9:4). He has also a home within us who live below (on earth). Yet we are with Him above at the same time for “He lifts up My head above my enemies”[6:10].

**St. Augustine**

**“Which of you convicts Me of sin?**

**And if I tell the truth,**

**Why do you not believe Me?” [46]**

Due to their resistance against the truth, the Jewish leaders examined each word of the Lord Jesus Christ. They did so in order to find fault with Him and not with the desire to get to know Him. He therefore asked them: **“Which of you convicts Me of sin?”** In this situation, the Lords confronts sin with the Truth; and it is as though truth and righteousness are one and the same; just as sin and lies are one and the same. Truth bears fruit and one of its fruits is

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<sup>133</sup> *Philokalia, Book 1*

<sup>134</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 20:274*

righteousness: in the same manner; lies are exposed by their fruit- that is by sin.

The word ‘**convicts**’ in Greek is a legal term that implies ‘setting up evidence against the accused.’ No one can ever face and oppose the Lord Jesus Christ or witness against Him; whereas the Holy Spirit “convicts the world of sin” (Jn 16:8). He is the One who presents the true evidence of the world’s sins, its judgment, and condemnation.

Our Lord is the only One who has no sin (1 Peter 2:22). He was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet He was without sin (Heb.4:15). Therefore He could address these words to all who knew Him. In that light, you can understand that these words are directed to all mankind, and not only to those who heard them on that day: **“Which of you convicts Me of sin?”** These words need to be interpreted as meaning: ‘Who, out of all mankind ....?’ Or ‘What kind of person can accuse Me of sin?’ Surely, no one can do that<sup>135</sup>.

\* All things considered, the Lord Jesus Christ can say these words to all mankind as well as to Satan and all the armies subject to him. However, they cannot utter any accusation that He has sinned. This statement is in harmony with the Lord’s words: “...the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me” (refer to Jn 14:30)<sup>136</sup>.

\* We too would be able to regain our confidence, after a while and great struggling, and be able to say the same words as the Lord’s. Even as we depart of this world, we would be able to face Satan and his fallen angels who seek the chance to attack us and say: **“Which of you convicts Me of sin?”**<sup>137</sup>

### **Origin the Scholar**

**“He who is of God hears God’s words;  
therefore you do not hear,  
because you are not of God” [47]**

Here the Lord brings another accusation against them: they are not of God for they do not hear Him. Samuel heard the word of God whereas Eli could not hear His voice. The Jewish leaders had become like Eli and could not hear God’s voice. Neither were they able to respond to Him for they were not of God.

\* Paul, by natural lineage, was a child of wrath (Eph.2:3) before accepting the power to change and become God’s child (Jn 1:12). Who is better than him who underwent such a change? If the only way to become a child of God who is in heaven is to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matt 5:44-45), then evidently no one listens to God’s words just because he has been naturally created by Him. Indeed, a person listens to God because he accepts to become God’s child. Moreover, he accepts that power and uses it adequately to love his enemies and pray for his persecutors. In this manner, he testifies to being a child of the heavenly Father: proceeding from Him, listening and understanding His words as well as digesting the knowledge they convey. Such features belong to God’s children who, on the one hand, have renounced their birth of (Satan) and are no longer slaves (Rom 8:15); and on the other hand have accepted their birth from God through the Spirit of adoption (Rom 15:8).

\* Often, when we do not hear the words of God- that is when we do not understand them, we need to realize that this is a way that God uses to reprimand us for not being His children: When a person does not hear God’s words it signifies that person’s decision not to be God’s child and therefore not proceeding from Him. This may happen even though that a person might

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<sup>135</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:277-278

<sup>136</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20: 281

<sup>137</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20: 282

have accepted the power to become God's child; yet has not changed (Jn 1:12). Such a person can become the child of the heavenly Father only by loving his enemies and praying for his persecutors (Matt 5:44-45; Lk 6:28)<sup>138</sup>.

### **Origen**

\* Here too, the Jewish leaders reveal that they are not God's children by the way they think. This is due to their being corrupt and not due to their nature as human beings. In a sense they are of God yet at the same time they are not. They are of God according to nature; yet they are not of God due to their corruption<sup>139</sup>.

\* In the same manner, they are Abraham's children, yet they are not ...they are his children based on their physical origin. However, they are not his children due to the sins of their parents who came after him and were persuaded by Satan. The same analogy can be applied to our Lord and God: they came from God but were not from Him. How did they come from God? Because God created man from whom they came...He is the great Engineer of nature. He is the Creator of the body as well as the spirit. How can they not be of Him? Because they have followed Satan's ways and chosen to be corrupt themselves. Therefore they have become Satan's children and no longer come of God<sup>140</sup>.

### **St. Augustine**

## **6- The Lord is Accused of Blasphemy**

**‘ Then the Jews answered and said to Him,  
“Do we not say rightly  
that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?”’[48]**

When the Lord revealed their wickedness and refuted their claim to being Abraham's children, they attacked Him. They accused Him of blasphemy against God as well as against the nation. They accused Him of being a Samaritan- that is of being an enemy of the Jews, and of being an enemy of God since he had a demon.

No title other than ‘Samaritan’ could convey the enmity between a person and the Jewish nation. They had previously called the Lord a ‘Galilean’ to convey that He was a mean person. Calling Him a Samaritan, however, conveyed that he deserved to be brought to justice as an enemy of the Jewish nation. They considered the Lord to be a traitor to the country and to the nation. This is the same accusation the Samaritans charged against the Jews for they said that the Jews were not descendants of Abraham and they sought to damage their image and destroy their claim to being ‘God's people.’ For many long centuries the Jews had called Christians ‘Samaritans’ to convey their hostility towards them. The second accusation: **“You have a demon...”** reflects their belief that there existed an alliance between the Lord and Satan based on two factors: His teachings marked Him as a ‘Samaritan who had broken away from their ranks- an inventor and a rebel opposing their laws. Besides, His miracles made them accuse Him of having a demon.

In amazing insistence, they affirmed that they were people of learning and knowledge. They claimed that they were convinced, based on their knowledge, that he had a demon. How? God had spoken to Abraham and the prophets; and these had listened to His words and interacted

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<sup>138</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20: 291-293

<sup>139</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 42:15

<sup>140</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 42:15



with Him. They walked His walk and yet they had died. Therefore could the words of Lord Jesus Christ be greater than God's words? That was their logic and that was the fruit of their knowledge.

On this occasion the Jews revealed their ignorance. They could not distinguish between the Lord's words "see death" and "taste death." The Lord Jesus Christ tasted death, through the grace of God, for everyone (Heb. 2:9). The words 'see death' convey constant failure and subjugation under the power of death while fearing it. A person would be seized with trembling just thinking of death.

\* It seems that there were some people who secretly commented among themselves about the Savior. They called Him a 'Samaritan' to indicate that He was like the Samaritans who interpreted incorrectly the Jewish tradition. The Jews did not deal with the Samaritans (Jn.4:9) as they disagreed with them concerning many teachings<sup>141</sup>.

\* It is relevant to wonder how they could dare call the Savior a 'Samaritan' while He taught many things concerning the resurrection and judgment. Indeed, this is so different from the beliefs of the Samaritans who denied the concept of life after death and rejected the permanence or immortality of the spirit. They could have intended to insult Him by describing Him as a Samaritan because He was preaching the same teachings as the Samaritans... or because He seemed to comment upon the resurrection and eternal life just because He wanted to win the approval of the Jews and so preached what is generally accepted by them<sup>142</sup>.

\* They said that the Lord was possessed by a demon due to His teachings that transcended the limits of man's comprehension. For example, He claimed that God was His Father (Jn 5:18); that He descended from heaven (Jn 6:32-35); and other numerous matters that are reported throughout the other gospels.

\* They might have said that He 'has a demon' because some of them believed that He was Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons, and therefore could cast out demons (Lk 11:15)<sup>143</sup>.

### **Origen**

**'Jesus answered,**

**"I do not have a demon;**

**but I honor My Father,**

**and you dishonor Me [49]**

**Origen** comments that the Lord Jesus Christ did not respond to the accusation that He was a Samaritan. However, He answered the accusation that He had a demon. Origen explains that the reason for this is that the Lord Himself had given the example of the good Samaritan (Lk10:30-34) which revealed the tenderness the Samaritan demonstrated toward the wounded one who had fallen by the roadside.

If Paul could 'become all things to all men so that (he) might by all means save some' (1Cor 9:22); then our Lord would do much more. He is the One who seeks to save all mankind. It did not embarrass Him to be a Samaritan to save Samaritans. Note that the meaning of 'Samaritan' is 'guardian'; and the Lord is the Guardian of all souls<sup>144</sup>! Truly, He is the guardian of those who have recognized that 'Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in

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<sup>141</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:310

<sup>142</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:311-312

<sup>143</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:313-314

<sup>144</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:316

vain' (Ps 127 :1). [The following verses describe the Lord as the guardian of all human souls: 'He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep' (Ps 121:4); and the Lord is the keeper of the young and the poor (Ps113:7)<sup>145</sup>]. Origen adds: [At any rate, the Hebrews used to call the guards by the word 'Somer.' Their traditions also report that the Samaritans first received that name when the Assyrian king sent them to be guards in the land of Israel after the exile<sup>146</sup>].

\* The Lord rejected one accusation, and disregarded the other. He answered: "I do not have a demon..."; but He did not say "I am not a Samaritan." Moreover, He did return the curse by a similar one, or the blasphemy by another one. It was appropriate for Him to renounce one accusation and leave the other, and He did so with a certain goal in mind, my friends: because a 'Samaritan' indicated 'a guard' or 'keeper' and He knew He is a guard Himself: 'He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep'; and 'Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain' (Ps127 :1). Therefore the Lord is our keeper and He is the One who has created us ...that is why He answered that He has no demon, and yet did not say that He was not a Samaritan<sup>147</sup>.

### St. Augustine

\* Listen to the Lord's response after He was insulted: **"I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father...."** The Lord did not wish to say 'I am not a Samaritan' but rather said **"I do not have a demon."** He was faced by two accusations: He renounced one and appeared to accept the other by being silent. If He had denied being a Samaritan, He would have denied, at the same time, His being a guardian. He kept silent regarding a matter He knew to be true; but He rejected patiently what they unjustly said about Him. Notice how the Lord did not get angry when He was insulted. Besides, His response did not carry wicked words. If His accusers did not have demons themselves, they would not have been able to say such shameful things against God<sup>148</sup>.

### Pope Gregory the Great

**St. Augustine** reveals to us the role of Satan in people's lives. He says the following:

\* A prevalent concept in the Bible is that sinners act unreasonably in so many ways only because they have accepted the influence of a bad spirit or the unclean will of a devil.

\* Moreover, '...there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin' (Eccles 7:20). Therefore there is no one who is constantly free of devils and who never falls as a prey to their influence<sup>149</sup>.

\* Is that not a proof that we are subject to Satan: when we shout out, driven by anger and displeasure, or in a state of frenzy, or act like a neighing animal gone wild? As a result of that, we even abuse our wives and treat them lustfully as untamed horses (Jer 5:8). Moreover, do we not disregard the Lord's words urging us to get liberated from lust?

Consider how we become miserable, depressed, and frustrated due to anger and absence of the sublimity worthy of reasonable beings. We forget that not a single sparrow falls into a trap without the permission of God. He rules over all the concerns of mankind and His rulings are just. Is there any explanation for our sufferings other than that Satan has overpowered and corrupted the controlling element within us?

Besides, how do you explain our fear of things that are not fearful? What about our exaggerated expressions of joy over unworthy things? All these can be explained only as being devilish responses that fill a person who has been unable to say truthfully: **"I do not have a**

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<sup>145</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 20:320*

<sup>146</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 20:321*

<sup>147</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 43:2*

<sup>148</sup> *Hom. 16, Forty Gospel Homilies, 114-115 Pl16:1150*

<sup>149</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 20:326*

**demon...**<sup>150</sup>.

\* The holy books of the Bible reveal that even those who have been transformed into better beings were unable to say constantly and from the beginning that they ‘**do not have a demon.**’ Such a statement is true of the Lord Jesus Christ alone and it applies to Him from the very beginning. That is why He alone has honored the Father in a worthy and correct manner<sup>151</sup>.

#### **Origen**

\* “**...But I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me...**” [49]. These words are intended to convey the following: ‘I do not honor Myself so that you do not think that I am arrogant. I honor the only One; and if you knew Me you would have honored Me just as I honor the Father. I act worthily, while you do not’<sup>152</sup>.

#### **St. Augustine**

\* A perfect Father conceived a perfect Son; and delivered all things into His hands. Therefore the Son declares: “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father...” (Matt 11:27). The Father is glorified through the Son who states: “...I honor My Father”; and also “...Just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love...” (Jn15:10)<sup>153</sup>.

#### **St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* “**...I glorify My Father...**”: The Lord has no father other than God who is in heaven.<sup>154</sup>.

\* We too fulfill these words when we comprehend and accept the cleansing of the new birth (Titus 3:5). By being washed by the Holy Spirit, we become children of God; and so we do not call anyone on earth our ‘Father’ (Matt 23:9). Indeed, it is in this manner that we become the children of God who is in heaven; and brothers to the One who said: “...I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God...” (Jn 20:17).

When the Lord says accurately and with full legal correctness “...I do not have a demon...”, it becomes evident for all who follow His example that they become empowered and can do all things through Christ who grants strength (Phil 4:13). Each of His children can say as well: ‘I do not have a demon but I honor My Father.’ Nevertheless, who can say ‘I do not have a demon’ but still lives in the graves and among the dead?<sup>155</sup>

Or who can say: “**I honor My Father...**” [49] and who considers himself a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ while he honors things other than God, His Word, and the commandments in His Word? How can a person make such a claim while he honors someone else instead of offering honor to Him who is worthy of honor? (Rom 13:17)<sup>156</sup>.

The words “**...you dishonor Me...**” are relevant to all those who dishonor Him, and not only to those who heard Him on that day. They are relevant throughout all time as they indicate those who dishonor Him by behaving in contradiction to the upright Word of God. These dishonor the Lord, who is Justice, through their unjust deeds. They dishonor the power of God, who is the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior (1Cor 1:24)...by their weak and hideous deeds<sup>157</sup>.

\* The words “**...you dishonor Me...**” point relevantly to anyone who despises wisdom; for Christ is Wisdom as well (1Cor 1:24)<sup>158</sup>.

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<sup>150</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:332-334

<sup>151</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:334

<sup>152</sup> St. Augustine, On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 43:3

<sup>153</sup> Essay 7:5

<sup>154</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:339

<sup>155</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:340-341

<sup>156</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:342

<sup>157</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:344

<sup>158</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:345

\* Anyone who does wicked deeds dishonors the Lord Jesus Christ, for by his deeds that person dishonors the Light<sup>159</sup>.

\* God, who gave us His Son, seeks the glory of the Lord in all those who receive Him. He finds glory and honor in all those who guard themselves and seize the opportunity to practice the virtue that is sowed in them. However, God does not find glory in those who behave without virtue. Indeed, honor cannot be found in persons who have two masters and who not honor the Son. He says to these: “Because of you, My Name is constantly dishonored among nations”<sup>160</sup>.

**Origen**

**“...And I do not seek My own glory;  
there is One who seeks and judges...”(50)**

**“...I do not seek My own glory...”**, therefore I turn away from judging you. However, I take it upon Myself to urge you to persevere and advise you to honor God. In this manner you will not only avoid judgment but will earn eternal life as well<sup>161</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord says: “For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son....” How does He say that, while in this verse He says: “...I do not seek My own glory, there is One who seeks and judges...”? The answer is found in the holy Word, for the Bible tells us that there is judgment and condemnation ‘...he who does not believe is condemned...’ (Jn 3:18); and “...for the hour is coming in which all those who are in the graves will hear His Voice and come forth...those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation...” (Jn 5:28-29). Therefore you know how He judges to condemn and to punish. If we always equate judgment with condemnation, then we will hear the words ‘Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause.’ In the first part, the Psalmist is aware of the painful judgment (‘Vindicate me, O God’); ...then he makes the distinction in the second part (‘and plead my cause against an ungodly nation’) (Ps 43:1). In the same manner, the Lord says: “I do not seek My own glory, there is One who seeks and judges.” How is there ‘One who seeks and judges’? There is the Father who distinguishes between My glory and your glory. You are glorified in the spirit of this world; whereas I am glorified in a different manner...What distinction does the Lord make here? The glory of the Father’s Son lies in the glory of devoted men. This is clear in the following words: ‘...Your God has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions...,’ (Ps 45:7). This means that though the Lord became incarnate yet He cannot be compared with us. We, as human beings, are sinners; whereas He is without sin. We, as human beings, have inherited sin and death from Adam; whereas He received a body that was dead from the holy Virgin Mary but He had no sin<sup>162</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

Some may wonder again: How does the Lord say: “there is One who seeks and judges...”, but then states: “For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son...” (Jn 5:22)? Origen explains this as follows: [‘Meditate on these words as an answer to such objections: “I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me...”’ (Jn 5:30). Now, since our Savior judges according to what He hears from the Father; and does not seek His own

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<sup>159</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 20:348*

<sup>160</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 20:350*

<sup>161</sup> *Homilies on St. John: 55:1*

<sup>162</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 43:4,9*

will, but rather seeks to do the will of the Father who sent Him...then judgment proceeds from the Speaker (the Father) to the Listener (the Son) and not vice versa<sup>163</sup>].

## 7- The Messiah, the Giver of Life

**“Most assuredly, I say to you,  
if anyone keeps My word,  
he shall never see death” [51].**

Moses received the promise of long life and prosperity for himself as well as for all those who keep the divine commandments. Here the Lord Jesus Christ offers eternal life and victory over death to those who keep His word: death cannot dominate the soul of a true believer.

In order to enjoy eternal glory, it is worthwhile for us to accept the divine Word, and apply and abide/ be steadfast in it. That is the meaning of ‘keeping the Word.’ He who lives according to the Word enjoys a new understanding of death. He/she realizes that it is a passing over into another life. Therefore true death has a new significance as it indicates the soul’s deprivation of God’s presence- while God is the source of the soul’s existence and life. This kind of death has no power over a believer.

\* The Lord speaks, in this passage, not only about faith but also about sanctified living. Earlier in His teachings, the Lord said “...may have everlasting life” (Jn 6:40). Here He says: “shall never see death...” [51]. At the same time, the Lord is giving the Jews a hint that they would not be able to take any action against Him: If all those who keep His word will not die, then how much more truly does this apply to the Lord Himself <sup>164</sup>.

## St. John Chrysostom

\* In the same manner that there are different kinds of life, so there are different kinds of death. There is a wicked and violent death which is antagonistic to the One who says: “ I am the life ...”(Jn 11:25). This kind of death is described in 1 Cor 15:26 which says that: ‘...the last enemy which is destroyed is death.’

We need to think of this death in the light of St. Paul’s words: “...just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned- (‘For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigns from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam’”: Rom. 5:12-14). A few lines farther on, St. Paul adds: “for if by one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of One Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many...” (Rom 5:17)...and therefore he who keeps the words of the only Son, the firstborn over all creation (Col 1:15), will not see death; for it is the nature of the Word to destroy the power of death<sup>165</sup>.

\* At the same time, everyone should protect his inner life that is inseparable from him. This life is the very same light that shines upon those who live in darkness. In this manner the darkness will never defeat them (1 Jn 1:4-5)<sup>166</sup>.

\* Truly, no one will see death as long as he keeps the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, we will see death as soon as we stop observing them<sup>167</sup>.

\* You say “ **I have a demon...**”[48]; whereas I invite you to life. Keep My words so that you do not die. They had heard Him say: “...**if anyone keeps My word, he shall never see**

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<sup>163</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:352-353

<sup>164</sup> Homily 55. PG 59:322

<sup>165</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20: 363-367

<sup>166</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20: 370

<sup>167</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:373

**death” [51].** Indeed, the Lord knew of another death and He had come to save us all from it- the second death, the eternal hellish death, the death of condemnation with Satan and his angels. This is the real death, whereas the other death is merely a transition. What is the other death? It consists of abandoning the body, dismantling its heavy burden and putting it away so that it no longer drags a person downwards into hell. The Lord speaks about real death in these words: **“If anyone keeps My word he shall never see death”<sup>168</sup>.**

**St. Augustine**

**‘Then the Jews said to Him:**

**“Now we know that You have a demon!**

**Abraham is dead and the prophets; and You say ‘If anyone keeps My word he shall never see death’?”[52].**

\* Those present and heard the Lord’s words **‘If anyone keeps My word he shall never see death’** thought that He was speaking about physical death; for Abraham and the prophets had died<sup>169</sup>.

**Origen**

\* Abraham and the prophets had died. However, their death was not the kind of death that the Lord wished them to understand. These had died, and yet were alive. Whereas those seeking to kill Him were dead; even though they believed they were alive. On another occasion, the Sadducees had questioned the Lord about the resurrection, and He answered: “But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham; the God of Isaac; and the God of Jacob’? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matt 23:31,32; Lk12:4-5). Therefore if these godly men are alive, then let us struggle to live, so that we might live with them after death<sup>170</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“Are you greater than our father Abraham, who is dead?**

**And the prophets are dead. Who do you make Yourself out to be?”[53]**

\* When the resistance of the wicked increases, we should not cease from witnessing. Indeed, we should double our efforts to spread the Word. This is the example that the Lord sets before us on this occasion ...just as resistance could change a good person into a better one, so do the trespassers get worse when they are gently treated. After the Jewish leaders had heard the Lord’s teachings, they repeated their words “...you have a demon...” [52]. They adhered to eternal death without questioning if what they upheld was death itself. They were preoccupied with physical death; and they were blinded to the implications of the true Word. Besides, in order to honor Abraham and the prophets, they had placed them above the Truth Himself. It becomes evident to us that those who do not know God will honor His servants in an incorrect manner<sup>171</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

\* It would have been adequate if they had said ‘Maybe you are greater than God?’ or ‘Maybe those who are listening to You are greater than Abraham’? However, they did not say so for they believed that the Lord Jesus Christ was of a lower rank than Abraham. Earlier on they had told the Lord “You have a demon” [52]. In contrast, the Samaritan woman did not use that language, and her words were: “Are You greater than our father Jacob?” (Jn 4:12). These Jews were insulting, whereas the Samaritan woman was curious and wanted to learn who He was.

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<sup>168</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 43:10-11

<sup>169</sup> Commentary on John, Book 20:380

<sup>170</sup> St. Augustine: *On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 43:13

<sup>171</sup> Hom. 16. Forty Gospel Homilies, 116-Pl76:1150

When she felt confused, she was on her guard as she said: “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet” (Jn 4:19).

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Abraham had died, yet he was alive (Matt 22:23): he did not see death, for he saw the Lord Jesus Christ and was glad and rejoiced [56]. We believe that this is the reason why our Savior responded to their words that ‘Abraham is dead’ by saying: “Your father rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad” [56]. He said this to teach them that Abraham is alive<sup>172</sup>!

\* He is the God of the Living and not of the dead (Matt 22:23), the God of Isaac and Jacob, besides the God of all the other prophets- for they all kept the word of the Son of God which came to Hosea, Jeremiah, and Isaiah. The Word of God that came to each one of these is the same One who was with God from the beginning: His Son, God the Word<sup>173</sup>.

**Origen**

**‘Jesus answered: “If I honor Myself,  
My honor is nothing.  
It is My Father who honors Me,  
of whom you say that He is your God” [54]**

Through the oneness of the Essence, each Entity/Being honors the two others. That is why we read that God is honored by the Son, while God honors the Son at the same time (Jn 7:33).

**“...of whom you say that He is your God” [54]:** while they claim that God is their Father, here they appear as His enemies in their spirits and deeds.

Is His honor of no importance? It does not appear important to them. The Lord echoes their response when He says: “...My witness is not true...” (Matt 31:5); for He knew that this was their opinion. However, He adds: **“...It is My Father who honors Me...”[54]**<sup>174</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

Is there any doubt here that the Son is honored by the Father, and that the Father is honored by the Son? To underline this oneness, the union of the Trinity, the Lord also says in the following verses that He is honored by the Holy Spirit: “He (the Holy Spirit) will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine...” (Jn 16:14). Therefore the Holy Spirit also glorifies the Son of God. Then why does the Lord say: **“If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing” [54]**? Is the honor of the Son of no importance? If we said so, we would be blaspheming, unless we are referring to His body only. The Son here had the body of a human being; and if the honor of the body is compared to the honor of the divine One, then it is without honor<sup>175</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* The Lord Jesus Christ was telling the Jews that He is honored by the Father whom they called God- since He honors the Son and the Son honors Him, then may the obstinacy (of Arius and other heretics) be renounced and may they acknowledge this unity and correct their delinquency<sup>176</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“Yet you have not known Him,  
but I know Him.  
And if I say: ‘I do not know Him’,**

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<sup>172</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 20:394-395*

<sup>173</sup> *Commentary on John, Book 20:398*

<sup>174</sup> *Homilies on St. John 55:2*

<sup>175</sup> *On the Holy Spirit, Book 5:8:113*

<sup>176</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 43:4*

**I shall be a liar like you,  
but I do know Him and keep His word. [55]  
“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day,  
and he saw it and was glad” [56]**

Because the Jews boasted that they were Abraham’s descendents, the Lord underlined that Abraham, their father, yearned to see and honor Him. Besides, Abraham foresaw His coming. Since the Lord was before Abraham was, then His teachings were not new: He was there before Moses who is the recipient of the law.

**When did Abraham see the Lord’s day and so rejoiced?**

- A- St. Paul says that Abraham saw the day of the Lord when he received the promise that the Lord would be his descendant (Gal 3:16). The promise was that the Lord will come to bless all the tribes of the earth (Acts 3:25-26).
- B- Origen states that Abraham saw the day of the Lord after he had walked for three days. Then he lifted his eyes and saw the place for the burnt offering at a distance (Gen 22:4). He experienced the path of the resurrection on the third day and after a three day walk. Consequently, he enjoyed a new meaning for the offering: the offering of the only begotten Son.
- C- St. Ambrose believes that Abraham saw the day of the Lord when God swore to bless him and multiply his descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand on the seashore (Gen 22:16).

\* The One who swore by Himself is the very same One whom Abraham saw<sup>177</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* We believe that Pelagius missed the fact that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ was not obscured in the days of our fathers, even though it was declared much later on. In fact, our fathers were saved through the grace of God. In the same manner, all members of the human race can be saved through God’s incomprehensible and mysterious decision. That is the reason why the apostle says: “They had the same spirit of faith....” Consequently, there can be no doubt He is the same One that our fathers believed in- it is written: ‘I believed and therefore I spoke. We also believe and therefore speak...’ (refer to 2 Cor 4:13; Ps 115:10). That is why the Intercessor Himself said: “Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad” (Jn 8:56). Similarly, Melchizedek, when he offered the mystery of the Lord’s table, he knew that that this was a forerunner and a symbol of the eternal priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ (Gen 14:18)<sup>178</sup>.

\* Abraham was not frightened, but was glad to see the day of the Lord This was because he had the love that casts out all fear (1Jn 4:18). The Lord did not say ‘he rejoiced because he saw’; but said “he rejoiced to see.” This indicates that Abraham believed under all circumstances. He rejoiced because he hoped to see and comprehend: therefore “he saw it and was glad”...if those whose physical eyes were opened rejoiced, how much more is the joy of the person who gains inner sight and sees this indescribable light? How much is the joy of those who perceive the Light of the Word abiding in the Father; the brilliance that dazzles the minds of the pious and which proceeds from the Wisdom that never fails; and God abiding in the Son? At the same time, they see Him coming in the flesh without ever abandoning the Father’s embrace. Abraham saw all that<sup>179</sup>.

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<sup>177</sup> *Of the Christian Faith*, 2:8:72

<sup>178</sup> *Letters*, 177

<sup>179</sup> *St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John*, tractate 43:16



**St. Augustine**

\* **“My day”** refers to the day of the Crucifixion which Abraham saw in the symbol and offering of the lamb and Isaac<sup>180</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* It is enough for you to know rightly- as we have said earlier- that God has one only Son who came through a natural birth. Yet the day of His birth did not mark His beginning for He existed before time ever began. Listen to the words of Micah the prophet: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrath, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be the ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2).

Therefore do not think of the One who has just come out of Bethlehem (and do not consider Him to be new); but worship Him as He is the One born of the Father before all time...

Do you wish to know that the Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal King? Listen to His words: **“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad”** (Jn 8:56). The Jews found this hard to accept, but the Lord explained that it was not hard as **“...before Abraham was, I AM”** (Jn 8: 58).

He also says: “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was”; and He also said: “ ...for You have loved Me before the foundation of the world” (Jn 17:24). With these words the Lord Jesus Christ revealed that He is eternal<sup>181</sup>.

**St. Cyril the Great**

The prophets were called ‘seers’ (1 Sam 9:9) as they saw what others could not. Abraham saw the day of the Lord and rejoiced (Jn 8: 56).

The law is spiritual (Rom 7:14), yet there is a need for a proclamation to help us understand it. This comes when God reveals His face so that we might see Him and His glory...

The heavens which were sealed to the rebellious nation were opened to Ezekial<sup>182</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

**‘Then the Jews said to Him,**

**“You are not yet fifty years old,**

**and have You seen Abraham?” [57]**

**Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM” [58]**

\* Why did the Lord not say: ‘Before Abraham was, I was’; but rather said: “I AM”? The Lord used these words to indicate the continuity of His Being before and above all time. That is why these words were considered to be blasphemous<sup>183</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Evaluate the words and comprehend the mystery: **“...before he was (created, was made) I AM.”** Note that ‘created’ (was made) refers to the creation of mankind; while ‘I AM’ refers to the Divine Essence. The Lord did not say ‘Before he was, I was’ for He is the One created by no one other than ME who is from the beginning. The Lord did not say ‘Before Abraham was created, I was created’ in order to allow us to distinguish between the Creator and the created<sup>184</sup>.

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<sup>180</sup> Hom55.PG 59:323

<sup>181</sup> Essay 11:20

<sup>182</sup> Letter 53:4

<sup>183</sup> Hom 55:PG59:324

<sup>184</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 43:17

**St. Augustine**

\* “I AM’ is expressed in the present tense for the Divine has no past or future. He is continuously ‘being.’ Therefore the Lord does not say: ‘I was before Abraham’<sup>185</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

**‘Then they took up stones to throw at Him;  
but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple,  
going through the midst of them, and so passed by.’[50]**

The Lord was accused of blasphemy; therefore they considered, according to the law, that He deserved to be stoned (Lev 24:16). It was necessary to take Him outside the temple in order to do so; but He passed through them and they were unable to see Him. The Lord departed silently. In the same manner, the Lord enters the heart silently; or departs silently from those who reject His kingdom. The Lord departed from Samson silently while he was not aware (Judges 16:20).

\* The Lord appeared to accept stoning; but woe to them whom the Lord has forsaken and escaped from their stony hearts<sup>186</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* Why did God hide Himself? Our Savior became incarnate and lived among men to teach us through His words and His example. What does He convey through this example other than that we should humbly avoid the anger of the proud. We need to do the same whenever we have to resist opposition. In this context St. Paul tells us: “...do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath...” (Rom 12:19). No one should be angered due to resistance directed against him. Harm should not be the response to harm. It is more honorable to imitate the Lord and escape silently from humiliation, rather than get engaged in responding to it. Haughty persons resent such passive behavior as they believe in their hearts that it is shameful to be silent. They do not understand that you are demonstrating patience; and imagine that by being silent you admit the accusation brought against you. However, this manner of thinking results from our thoughts that are geared to earthly matters. When we seek honor on earth, we are not concerned with pleasing God who sees us from heaven<sup>187</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

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## **Addendum to Chapter Eight**

### **Commentary On the Story of the Adulterous Woman**

Some scholars consider that the story of the adulterous woman has no place in the Gospel

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<sup>185</sup> Hom 16. Forty Gospel Homilies, 116-117

<sup>186</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 43:18

<sup>187</sup> Hom 16, Forty Gospel Homilies

of St. John. In spite of the wonderful spiritual meaning that the story conveys; and its harmony with the thoughts and deeds of the Lord Jesus Christ according to the other holy gospels; they have the following reservations:

**First:** Some of the early fathers did not include the story in their interpretation of the Gospel of St. John; although they referred to it in their other writings. Among those who did not mention it are Origen , St. John Chrysostom, and St. Cyprian.

**Second;** The story that is told in the Greek language contains some words that do not occur in the rest of this gospel, or occur very rarely.

**Third:** The ‘scribes’ were mentioned as well as the Pharisees. However, St. John does not do so in the rest of his gospel. Moreover, he mentions Mount Olives and that the Lord taught while He was sitting, etc....

**However, other scholars find that the story is authentic as an event as well as in its place in the gospel. They base their opinion on the following:**

**First:** The story has been included in many of the interpretations by fathers of the Western churches such as St. Jerome, St. Augustine, and St. Ambrose. They included it because the Latin version of the Vulgate mentions that the story is told in many of the Greek manuscripts.

**Second:** The story occurs in more than one manuscript, especially in Latin ones. Besides it occurs in the Memphitic, Ethiopian, and Armenian versions.

**Third:** The reservations of some Eastern fathers could be explained as a concern towards those who had been converted. They avoided the subject of the adulterous woman, and they did not interpret it while they worked on the rest of St. John’s Gospel. They feared that the converts would find in her story an unwarranted flexibility toward the sin of adultery.

**Fourth:** The story with all its details occurs in the book ‘Apostolic Constitutions’<sup>188</sup>. It occurs in the section dealing with the acceptance of penitents into the church; as well as with the response to those who respect the repentance of sinners.

**Fifth:** However, from a theological and spiritual aspect, the story occupies a most meaningful place in the St. John’s Gospel. It comes right after the Lord’s teachings on the last day of the feast. He had invited the thirsty to come and drink of the living water so that rivers of living water would flow out of their hearts (Jn 7: 37 etc...). It also comes just before His teachings about Himself as the Light of the world. In this story, the Lord Jesus Christ exposes the souls of those who have filled themselves with the water of pleasures in this world. These therefore deserve to be stoned. They have become subject to condemnation even by mankind. However, the Lord waters souls with His divine love and transforms them into His brides, making them worthy of fellowship with Him. At the same time, these souls preach repentance and are witnesses for the amazing power of the Mediator! The adulterous woman had spent her life in darkness. She wished to die and be burned rather than be stoned. Yet the divine Light shone upon her and she found the Father’s embrace waiting to receive her!

Truly, this woman has become a symbol for all miserable mankind: she became the happiest being in the world when she had met with the Savior of mankind!

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<sup>188</sup> *Apostolic Constitutions: 2:24*

Inspiration Drawn from Chapter Eight

May Your Light Shine Upon Me  
And  
May My Judgment be Transformed into an Eternal Wedding!

\* May You shine upon my heart with the light of Your love  
And may You enter with me into the violent judgment court of the Pharisees  
Instead of bringing me to judgment, prepare me for the eternal wedding!  
I no longer fear their stony hearts that throw stones at me  
For You pour Your sublime love into my depths.  
There is no lawyer to defend me:  
You are my Mediator, Savior, and the Liberator of my soul!  
You hold my hand and bring me into Your Kingdom, O holy One!

\* The world sought to condemn me, but has condemned itself  
Grant me the will not to condemn anyone, lest I fail and be condemned by You  
May I condemn myself, then you will save me by Your Blood, O Savior of the world!  
You alone can renew my life with Your Holy Spirit  
You transform adulterers into saints  
O holy One who has changed the nature of the furnace into coolness for the three youths  
And the nature of the hungry lions into friends of Daniel the prophet!

\* You have commanded me not to go back and sin  
Who can fulfill that without Your grace?  
It is a divine commandment, indeed, it is a divine promise fulfilled in Me  
You are the Light of the world: You are My light  
As I walk in Your light, the darkness of sin cannot creep into my being.

\* You are the Source of living water that overflows within me  
You are the Light of the world, changing my inner depths into a shining lamp!  
You are the Son of God, granting me the spirit of adoption through Your Holy Spirit  
You carry me from slavery to the glorious freedom enjoyed by God's children!

\* I boasted of my lineage to Abraham, the father of the fathers  
But I willfully did not follow his example  
I became a slave to sin, and a child of Satan the deceiver.  
I became a stone with no spiritual feelings.  
Now, You have transformed me into a child of Abraham  
You tear away my slavery to sin and make me a servant to Righteousness  
You carry me into the fold of the adopted children of God Your Father!  
Now I truly rejoice at the Lord's Day with my father Abraham!  
Glory be to You, O Giver of liberty to all mankind  
O Source of true joy!  
When will I see You face to face, and so join all my fathers and become as a bride  
sanctified to You

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**THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO**

**ST JOHN**

PART TWO

CHAPTERS 9

2006

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**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT  
ONE GOD, AMEN**

**INEXPRESSIBLE HEIGHTS OF GLORY**

During the writing of this book, a certain thought crossed my mind and I often hesitated to document it. I felt sad that I had not begun to enjoy the Gospel of St John earlier on in my life. Had I done so, I would have spent the rest of my days soaring in the glories that this Gospel offers. These are glories that are hard to communicate in any human language.

As I studied the Gospel of St John, I came to understand the meaning of what Origen, the scholar, meant when he wrote his meditations and sermons on this Gospel. He stated that he believed he could not complete his interpretation of St John until he had passed into heaven. Only there would he be able to complete that task! Indeed, I feel that no one can achieve a full understanding of the depths of St John's writing; and that all would be revealed only as we meet with our glorified Savior and as we partake in His heavenly glory. Only then will we comprehend the amazing implications of this Gospel, and in a way that transcends all that can be said here.

May the Holy Spirit carry every soul into God's divine embrace. May He enlighten the inner vision so that the soul may enjoy all the divine glory and understanding that our amazing Lord wishes to offer to us. Only then we will be ablaze with divine love and longingly seek to meet with our Savior.

## **A MAN BORN BLIND RECEIVES SIGHT**

### **THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD**

In the previous chapter, we have read the Lord's proclamation that He is the light of the world (8:12). The Lord tells the Jews that He has come to denounce and dissipate darkness. In this manner, He would pull away those walking in it and carry them unto the light of His glory. The children of Satan (8:44) are in need of the real liberator who would grant them inner enlightenment. They would consequently rejoice with their father Abraham because they would see the amazing day of the Lord (8:56). However, they sought to stone Him. Therefore he disappeared from among them; and appeared to the man born blind in order to grant him sight. This probably occurred a few days or months after that earlier confrontation with the Jews. They should have tried to open their hearts and minds to the One who grants sight. Then they would have realized that He grants insight and understanding as well.

This is the only chapter in all of the Old and New Testament books where there is any mention of opening the eyes of a person born blind. In the Old Testament we read that the light of sight granted to the blind is one of the deeds of the awaited Messiah: "And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness," (Is 29:18); and "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped," (Is 35:5). It is also said of the servant of God (the Incarnate Word): "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light to the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes," (Is 42:6-7). The Psalmist also worships the Lord and says "The Lord openeth the eyes of the blind," (Ps 146:8).

By mentioning the deed of granting sight to the blind and specifically to this one who was born blind, it is as though the evangelists are proclaiming the fulfillment of these prophecies. They are being fulfilled through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, as He is the awaited Messiah. He is the Lord who opens the inner eyes of the heart as well as the physical eyes. In Him the prophecies have been fulfilled; for through Him such acts are achieved that no one else could perform, except God alone or through His name.

The healing of the blind man proclaims the person of the Lord and the reason for His coming: to open the inner sight so that believers would comprehend the mysteries of God. At the same time, the blindness of the proud and hypocritical leaders would be exposed. Sadly, they could not discover their spiritual blindness and sinfulness!

Although this unique miracle is greatly significant due to the creation of the eyes of the man born blind, yet the Evangelist does not mention the name of the man. Neither does he provide any details. Rather, he presents the arguments that were raised as a result of the miracle. We are informed of the dialogue between the Lord and His disciples; that between the Lord and the blind man; and that between the Lord and the Pharisees.

St. John does not underline the highly miraculous act of healing because he is more preoccupied with the blessings mankind enjoy as a result of the Lord's divine work in their lives and thoughts.



The Lord used clay to create the eyes of the man. This serves as a confirmation that He is the Creator and Savior. By asking the blind man to go wash in the pool of Siloam, He indicated the need for baptism as it allows us to enjoy the Light of the Holy Spirit through the new birth. The Jews responded by throwing out the enlightened man. However, he found a place in the Lord Jesus Christ: **The Messiah of the rejected and of the despised.**

Some of the Jewish people realized their blindness, besides many of the Gentiles. These two groups were better than the Pharisees who claimed they had sight in spite of their blindness. By such claims, they had no hope through their own stupidity. In contrast, the tax collector and the adulteress confessed their blindness. Therefore the door of hope was opened to them and they enjoyed ultimate insight and eternal life with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Through confession, it is possible to gain insight; **which progressively enables a person to get acquainted with the Lord Jesus Christ:**

- \* A Man called Jesus (11)
- \* He is a prophet (17)
- \* A Man from God (33)
- \* The Son of God (35)
- \* He is worthy to be bowed down to and worshipped as He is the Lord (38)

This chapter is read on the 'Sunday of Baptism' as it is associated with the mystery of baptism which represents inner insight and enlightenment.

#### **1- The Healing of the Blind Man.**

#### **2- Dialogues after the Miracle**

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#### **1- The Healing of the Blind Man**

**“Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth.”[1]**

The Lord Jesus Christ passed through the crowd of Jewish leaders and disappeared as they picked up stones to throw at Him (8:59). We then see Him passing by the poor blind man who looks at the Lord. The Lord looked at him in a manner that is different from the way the other people looked at him. He looked at the man with love and compassion. This is a living picture of the Messiah whom the Jews rejected. They took pride in the temple, while the Lord went through the streets seeking the Gentiles. They were disabled to see Him for they had no knowledge of the prophecies, the Divine law, or the symbols. They were like the man born blind whose place was on the roadside and who was poor and begging in a state of misery. Accordingly, Job says

“Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery and life unto the bitter in soul;” (Job 3:20).

The Evangelist does not provide the name of the place through which the Lord was passing by or where He was. However, He was passing by as the Bearer of sufferings and He saw this man begging. The man was sitting in a place where charitable people could give him something to help him survive.

The man was known in the city as the one born blind. No one around him, not even the Lord’s disciples, asked or prayed that his eyes would be opened. May be this was because no one expected that it could happen.

The Lord looked at home so that the poor blind person would find Him. Accordingly, the holy Word states in Is. 65:1: “I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, ‘Behold me, behold me’, unto a nation that was not called by my name.” He first loved us, and He loved us before we knew Him. The apostle says in this context: “when ye knew not God,” (Gal. 4:9).

\* The Lord truly loves mankind and is concerned with our salvation. He wishes to bridle the mouth of the stupid and will not cease from working even though no one listens to Him. The prophet knew that and said, “that you might be justified when you speak, and be clear when you judge,” (Ps. 51:4). Consequently, in this chapter, we find the Lord leaving the temple and healing the blind. He does so after the Jews had rejected His words, accused Him of being possessed by a demon, and had tried to kill Him. He did the miracle to pacify their cruelty and violence and to underline the facts. He did a supernatural miracle that had no precedence. Listen to the healed person who states: **“Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind,”** [23]. May be some physician had opened the eyes of someone who had become blind, but this never happened to one born blind. Upon leaving the temple, the Lord intentionally went to work. This clearly indicates that it is He who saw the blind man and not vice versa. The Lord looked at him jealously and the disciples understood His compassion<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* This blind man represents the human race. Such blindness found a place in the first man through sin. We all have our origins in this first man and therefore have inherited not only death but evil as well. Now if lack of faith constitutes blindness and faith is enlightenment, then who is the believer that the Lord will find at His coming? The apostle, who traces his origin to the family of prophets, states: “...were by nature the children of wrath, even as others,” (Eph. 2:3)... since evil has found roots for itself within us, then every person has been born mentally blind. For if a person could really see, he would not have needed a mentor: but since he needs someone to guide and enlighten him, then he has been blind ever since his birth.<sup>2</sup>

**St. Augustine**

**“And his disciples asked him, saying,  
Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” [2]**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 56:1

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:1

The Lord left the temple (Jn. 8:59) accompanied by the disciples who did not forsake Him during His trials. They enjoyed getting acquainted with Him and they were having tremendous new experiences. They noticed how the Lord turned His eyes to the poor blind man. He did not look at him in the usual manner for His eyes were full of love. They too, therefore turned their eyes to the blind man. Yet instead of praying the Lord to heal him, they questioned Him for the reason why he had been born blind.

\* We might wonder: where did this question come from? Our answer would be: when the Lord healed the paralytic man earlier, He told him “Look, you have been made well, sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you” (John 5:14). Therefore the disciples remembered that the man had suffered paralysis due to his sins. However, this could not be applied to this blind man for he was blind since birth. So had his parents sinned? This too cannot be concluded because the child does not suffer punishment due to his parents... the disciples here wondered because of their own confusion and not because they searched for information.<sup>3</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom.**

There is a popular rabbinical saying (quoted allegedly by the rabbis) ‘There is no death without sin and no pain without evil.’ This saying was justified by them as they based it on the words cited in Ezekiel 18:20, and Psalm 89:32. These words were imprinted in the minds of the Jews, including the Lord’s disciples who did not ask if this blindness was due to sin or not. In their opinion, this matter did not need to be questioned or debated. So the question they asked was: ‘who was the one who had sinned and therefore brought this terrible calamity on that person.’ What confused the disciples was: ‘how could the man have sinned before birth and was consequently born like that? Could this be the result of his parents’ sin?’

Some believe that the soul of a person could sin before it is embodied in the flesh. **Origen the Scholar** believed that some suffer pain before they act wrongfully after birth. Others have depended on human logic to explain Divine Justice and how some are born poor while others are born rich, or why one person is born with sharp intelligence and another could lack it altogether; or why one is born physically strong while another is suffering many ailments. Besides, some have depended on affirming the potential to commit error before birth based on the story of Jacob and Esau when they were still in the womb: “...the children struggled together within her...” (Gen. 25:22).

In the writings of the rabbis they deal with what befalls the sons due to the mistakes of the parents. In the context of the need for a man to avoid gazing at a woman, one rabbi states: ‘A man who gazes at the heel of a woman will have a handicapped son born to him.’ Another rabbi says that this happens to someone who approaches his wife during her impurity. Still another says that a man who has a marital relationship while his wife still has menstruation would have children who would suffer of epilepsy. There are numerous sayings similar to these and which underline the conviction of the rabbis that the sins of the parents are punished by appearance of flaws in their children and of which the children suffer throughout their lives.

This clarifies that what the disciples said was not inspired by their imagination, for it was the result of teachings strongly imprinted in the minds of many Jews. These ideas were the result

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<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St John, 56:1

of the rabbinical writings and teachings.

Some believe that the disciples had heard about the Pythagorean ideas. These claimed that the soul pre-exists the creation of its body. The Pharisees might have adopted that line of thought too. This is evident in their words to the man born blind: **“... you were completely born in sins,” [34].**

Many nations believe in the transmigration of souls. Hinduism is still interested in defining the sin a person had committed when he lived in another body before birth. **Origen the scholar** borrowed a speech given by Jacob that is found in the unofficial Book to the Hebrews where he says: “I am the angel of God, one of the first ranks of the spirits. People call me Jacob, but my true name given me by God is Israel. Plato believes that the air is full of spirits; and that some of these bind themselves to bodies due to their naturally active inclinations. Other spirits detest such a union.”

**Jesus answered:**

**“Neither this man nor his parents sinned  
but that the works of God should be revealed.” [3]**

Rather than condemn the man born blind or his parents, the Lord directed the disciple’s attention to the supreme care of God and His hidden plan. God had allowed this blindness in order to grant that person spiritual insight. Consequently, he would testify to the Divine truth before the violent Jewish leaders and would glorify God.

The Lord Jesus Christ did not say that the man born blind or his parents had not sinned. All mankind had fallen into sin. What this blind man was suffering of was not related to any particular sin. What the disciples and all believers should do is to be preoccupied with God’s works and His plan for man. He wants us to enjoy inner sight, to get acquainted with the mysteries of God, and to receive fellowship in His eternal glory.

God’s hand works incessantly and through hard and happy times. Under all circumstances, He seeks our salvation. Believers have not been promised a life with no trials or sufferings that afflict all other beings. Conversely, they are faced with more tribulations. However, what comforts them is their understanding that God has a plan for everything. Besides, because they enjoy Divine grace they feel they are fully content. This is what God has promised us through St. Paul’s words: “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor. 12:9)

The believer does not complain in the midst of trials. His eyes are fixed on God his tender Father; and his heart is receptive and comprehends God’s plan for him.

\* The Lord Jesus Christ is the Savior and He mercifully does what He has not granted in the womb. Surely when God had not given eyes to that blind person, it was not due to some error He (the Creator) did. Rather, the plan was to postpone it until the time would come to do a miracle..... **“Neither this man nor his parents sinned...”** God did not grant what He could have granted. He did not grant what He knew He would grant when the time would come for that

need.

The blindness was not due to sin committed by the blind man or his parents; ‘but **that the works of God should be revealed in him.**’ For when we were born, we were all bound with the original sin. Yet in spite of that we were not born blind. Nevertheless, search carefully for we have been born blind. So who has not been born blind? I mean blind in the heart. Yet the Lord Jesus Christ, who has created both heart and body, heals both of them.<sup>4</sup>

**St. Augustine**

The Lord’s words about the blind man: “**Neither this man nor his parents sinned**”, do not clear his parents of sin. He did not just say, “**Neither this man nor his parents sinned**”, for He added “but **that the works of God should be revealed in him.**” Indeed this man and his parents had sinned; however the blindness was not a result of that. It is not valid to punish a person for a sin committed by someone else. This fallacy has been rejected by Ezekiel the prophet who says: “The word of the Lord came unto me again, saying, “What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die,” Ezek 18:1-4. In this context, Moses the prophet also says: “The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin,” (Deut 24:16).

If someone says: How did God tell Moses the prophet “for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;” (Ex 20:5)? Our response would be:” Because this cause cannot be generalized; for it was said of people who had come out of Egypt. This was what it meant: When the Jews left Egypt; they became more experienced through many miracles and wonders. In spite of that, they became more evil than their parents and grand parents who had not seen such miracles. Therefore they were to suffer the same calamities that their predecessors had suffered if they followed the same course of action.

\* The Lord says these words not as someone who wants to indicate that they have not sinned since both that person and his parents have sinned. However, his blindness is not the reason of that.... But it is intended for the proclamation of the Glory of God through him. Someone may say: ‘Why should that person suffer for the glory of God? How unjust, explain to me? Then what if God had never created that man?’ Our response is: ‘The man has benefited from his blindness for he received the healing of his inner vision.’ What benefit do the Jews enjoy as they have eyes yet their condemnation has become greater. They saw yet were incapacitated. What is the harm that befell that man as a consequence of his disability... indeed, because of it, his eyes were opened? Therefore the evils of this present life are not evil, neither are the blessings beneficial. Only sin is evil, whereas disability is not evil.<sup>5</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom.**

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<sup>4</sup> Sermon on N.T.Lessons, 86:1

<sup>5</sup> Hom. 56.PG 59:327

**St. Jerome** wrote to Castrutrus of Pannomia to comfort him due to his physical blindness and said:

\* I write to ask you not to consider the physical calamity that has happened to you as the result of a sin...do we not see many idolaters, Jews, heretics and those who adopt different thoughts just wading in the mud of lust. They swim in a sea of blood and violence and are worse than savage wolves and stealthy hawks. In spite of that, they have not been inflicted with this epidemic. They are not inflicted like others and they grow in their arrogance towards God, raising their faces up to heaven. Conversely, we see the saints afflicted with sickness, pain, and need ...If you imagine that your blindness is due to sin; and that your sickness which doctors are often capable of healing are proof of God's anger, then you seem to consider that Isaac is a sinner. You think that is why he was afflicted with blindness, was deceived, and gave the blessing to the one whom he had no intention to give. We accuse Jacob of sin when his eyesight weakened so much he could neither see Manasseh nor Ephraim (Gen. 48:1). Yet, with his inner vision and prophetic spirit he could foresee the distant future, and that the Lord Jesus Christ would come from a royal line (Gen. 49:1) <sup>6</sup>

**St. Jerome**

It is not appropriate for believers, having comprehended the supreme mysteries of God, to condemn anyone or to consider that matters that befall others are divine punishments inflicted for some hidden sin. If we do so we belittle others even though their sins are apparent. The Jews fell into this error as they considered the righteous One who is without sin, as deserving to suffer and be crucified for some evil or blasphemy he had committed. The Psalmist says: "For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded" (Ps. 69:26). Isaiah the prophet also says: ".....we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement for our peace was upon him and by His stripes we are healed" (Is. 53:4-5)

**"I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day;  
the night is coming when no one can work" [4]**

These were critical moments when the Lord turned His eyes to the man born blind. They were moments dedicated not only to heal the man born blind but also to reveal the person of the Lord Jesus Christ: He is the light of the world and the giver of inner vision. In spite of that, no one could discover what lay behind this blindness. Until these moments, even the disciples could not read or understand the book of Divine care. However, the time came later on when it became possible to comprehend this Divine mystery and the supreme Divine work.

The Lord did not perform works in order to underline his power to do miracles. Rather He did so to perform the works of His Father who sent Him. However, He does not say I do the work that My Father has commanded Me to do but He just performed the same deeds of His Father. We notice here the following:

**First:** The Lord came into the world on a mission. He came in the form of the Son of man to

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<sup>6</sup> Letter 68:1

fulfill His Father's will and in complete obedience to Him. The Father's will is identical to the Son's will. That is why any person who is obedient shares the feature of obedience with our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Second:** The Lord performs the same works as the Father. This is what He affirms in the Gospel of St. John: the unity of Divine work. This will become evident in the rest of this Gospel.

**Third:** In a spirit of love for humanity and in obedience and union with the Father, the Lord finds pleasure in accomplishing His work. Committed by love, the Lord says: "I must work...."

**Fourth:** The Lord works while it is day; and before the Jews move to kill Him as they are driven by envy and hatred. The period of His service is an opportunity to work openly even if that is done on the Sabbath. This is an invitation for us to move and work and to seize every hour of our lives; lest our work remains unfinished when the day of our lives comes to an end. The Lord has granted us the day so that we may labor (Ps. 104:22-23). Therefore it is appropriate that we do not spoil and idle away the days of our lives. Indeed, we should struggle in obedience to God our Father so that when the night comes we could rest.

**Fifth:** The Lord invites us to work through Him and with Him. The apostle says accordingly: "For we are fellow workers..." (1 Cor. 3:9). For in working with Him, we find peace, honor, and glory. We share with Him in service as long as we are alive and before the night sets in.

\* What do these words convey? What are the ultimate conclusions based on these? So many. What the Lord says implies this: 'As long as there is light, the nation could believe in Me; and as long as this life goes on, I need to work.' The night is coming: that is, 'it is bound to come in the future when no one would be able to work.' The Lord did not say: 'I cannot work' but rather 'When no one can work.' This indicates that there will not be any more time for faith, or service, or repentance<sup>7</sup>.

\* Why had St. Paul called this life 'the night' (Rom. 13:12)? But here the Lord calls it 'the day'? St. Paul is not contradicting the Lord for he is saying the same thing. Even though the words are different, yet the meaning is the same. He says: "the night is far spent. The day is at hand." St. Paul calls the present time 'the night' since he compares it to the forthcoming day. The Lord called the future 'the night' as no time will be left to perform acts of repentance, faith or obedience in the next world if we neglect any sin done in this world. As for St. Paul, he called this present life 'the night' because anyone who persists in evil and disbelief exists in darkness. Therefore he directs his speech to believers saying: 'The night is far spent, the day is at hand.' Believers need to enjoy that light, and St. Paul calls the old life as darkness: 'Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light'<sup>8</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

In this manner, the Lord directs His words to unbelievers. Their lives here are considered to be 'day' if they are compared with their lives in the world to come. Now, they could enjoy the light of the sun of righteousness in the inner hearts, through living faith and true repentance. As for the world to come, they will be enveloped in darkness where there is no way they could return to the Lord and offer repentance. In contrast, St. Paul directs his words to believers. He considers their previous lives as 'darkness' since they performed acts of darkness. Now, the time had come to travel into the future world where they would enjoy the eternal light of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>7</sup> Hom 56. PG.59.328

<sup>8</sup> Hom on St John, 56:2

Coming into His presence, our present life appears as the darkest night...

\* Dear brothers, if we always bear in mind the condemnation we have inherited, then we will know that the whole world is blind. Now the Lord Jesus Christ, who grants enlightenment, has come. Satan causes blindness and he has caused all mankind to be born blind, as he is the one who deceived the first man. Let all run to Him who grants light. Let all run and believe and receive the clay made of spit.....let all wash their faces in the pool of Siloam ...This is Siloam: wash your face, be baptized. In this manner you will be enlightened and see while you could not see before<sup>9</sup>.

\* First: Open your eyes to Him who says: 'I must work the works of Him who sent Me' (Refer to John 9:4). A follower of Arius would immediately respond: 'As you see, the Lord did not perform His works but rather the works of the Father who sent Him.' Are these works not His works? What does He say who is Siloam and the Messenger Himself, the Son Himself, the only Son, the one to whom you complain and belittle His status? What is the response of the Lord? 'All things that the Father has are mine' (John 16:15)... He did not say: 'all that the Father has, He has given Me.' Yet, had He said that He would also have revealed His equality with the Father... Hear His words in another verse: "and all Mine are yours, and yours are Mine" (John 17:10). So the doubt ends here: for what the Father and the Son have are in harmony and consist of the same thing. Therefore there is no conflict: what the Lord calls 'the work of the Father' are His works too since all that are 'Yours are Mine'... "For whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner (in the same way) (John 5:19).<sup>10</sup>

**St. Augustine**

Thus the Lord offers Himself as a model. Indeed, He acts on our behalf so that when we disappear within Him we are enabled to perform the same deeds through His Spirit. He did not have to struggle since He performed His Father's work with inner joy, and in spite of the constant resistance of those around Him. He will continue to act even through our union with Him. Therefore we should not cease to struggle and we should be committed to serve. We need to do so before the night of death comes upon us and the days of our lives come to an end on this earth.

**"As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." [5]**

The Lord Jesus Christ works as long as it is daytime. That means that He works as long as we are able to enjoy His redeeming deeds. For when the day ends and the night of the grave prevails, it will be impossible to benefit any longer of His service. The opportunity to repent and return to Him will have passed away. During the days of our lives, He shines upon us, as He is '**The light of the world**': The light of righteousness who gives light to our souls, our minds and all our inner depths.

Earlier, the Lord had proclaimed that His mission involves bringing His light to those sitting in

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<sup>9</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 85:1

<sup>10</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 85:3



the darkness (John 8:12). As He is the light of righteousness, He grants enlightenment and healing through the rays of His love or with the scope of His wings. As the Head of the Church, He transforms his believers into 'the light of the world.' They just have to be fervently fired by divine love to serve others.

\* The Lord said these words so that we may believe that He was speaking about the incarnation; and that it was valid as long as He was a human being. He was in the world for a while, yet as He is God and therefore He is present at all times. In another context, the Lord says: "... I am with you always, even to the end of the age," (Matt. 28:20)<sup>11</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* Here the Lord reveals that even after His crucifixion, He will grant His tender care to the wicked and attract many to Him because it is still day. However, when the day is over, He will abandon them completely. He proclaims this by saying: **'As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'** He also told others. "...while you have the light, believe in the light..." (John 12:36)<sup>12</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom.**

The only incarnate Son is the light of the whole heavenly creation and not only of the whole world<sup>13</sup>.

**St. Cyril the Great.**

\* He is called "The light of the world" due to His act of giving light to the world: what lies within Him is the light.

He is called the resurrection since He tears away that which is dead and sets up the fullness of life within all those who come earnestly to Him.

On account of other acts, the Lord is also called 'The Shepherd' (John 10:11-12); 'The Teacher' (John 13:13); 'The King' (Zech 9:9; Matt. 21:5; John 12:15), 'the chosen Arrow' (Ps. 44:6; Is 49:2); 'The Slave/ Servant' (Is 49:3); 'the Mediator and Sacrifice' (1 John 2:1-2; Rom 3:25) He is also called the 'Logos' as He strips away all that which is illogical 'alolon.' He truly transforms us into wise beings acting always in a manner that glorifies God even as we eat and drink (1 Cor. 10:31) Due to such wisdom, we are enabled to fulfill completely and generally all our acts in this life to the glory of God. Through fellowship with Him, we are enabled to awaken and be enlightened. Besides, He watches over us and directs our lives. Clearly, we walk wisely and divinely as He destroys every irrational and deadly matter within us since He is the Word and the Resurrection (John 1:1; 11:25)<sup>14</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

\* What is this night in which no one can work as soon as it sets in? Listen to what 'the day' stands for; then you will comprehend the implication of 'the night'...let the Lord tell us: **"As**

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<sup>11</sup> Of The Christian Faith, 3:7 (48)

<sup>12</sup> Hom. 56 PG:59:330

<sup>13</sup> Explanation on the Gospel. PG 73: 601B

<sup>14</sup> Commentary on John, Book 1:267-268

**long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”**[5]. See how He Himself is the day. ‘Let the blind wash his eyes in the day so that he might see the day... Then the night, in a certain manner, corresponds to a person’s lack of recognizing Me. Thus when the Lord is no longer there, no one can work’<sup>15</sup>.

\* It is the night of the wicked. The night of those to whom it will be said at the end of time: ‘Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.’

Now faith works through love. Therefore if we now work- then it is now daytime for the Lord is present now.

Listen to His promise and do not imagine that He is absent; for He Himself has said: “I am with you.” Until when? May we, who are alive, never experience anxiety. As long as we have full faith that His words stand throughout all generation, this is possible.

The Lord said:” I am with you always, even to the end of the age,” (Matt 28:20). There is a time to work, and a time to collect wages. The Lord will reward everyone according to his deeds (Matt. 16:27).

Go on working as long as you are alive.... For the terrible night will come when all the wicked will faint. In the present, every unbeliever who dies enters into the night where it is impossible to do any work. In this kind of night the wealthy one keeps burning, suffering, and repenting. However, he could not get any relief. He tried to be good when he told Abraham: “Father Abraham, send Lazarus to my father’s house...that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment” (Luke 16:27-28)

What a sad person! When you were alive you had time to work. Now you are in the night where no man can work<sup>16</sup>!

**St. Augustine.**

**“When He had said these things, He spat on the ground,  
and made clay with the saliva;  
and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. [6]**

The manner of healing the man born blind is unique. It is well known that mud would damage a healthy eye. So how does the Lord make mud with His saliva and anoint the eyes of that man? And why did He not heal him in secret in order to avoid arousing the hostility of the religious leaders? Besides why did He not wait till after the Sabbath and then heal him?

**First:** The Lord confirms that He performs His work in accordance to his divine thought and not according to our wishes and human means.

**Second:** His prime concern is to grant the blind man sight to his eyes and insight to his heart. He is not concerned with the resistance of the Jewish leaders against Him.

**Third:** He did not wait until the Sabbath had ended because it was as a day of rest.

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<sup>15</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate44:5

<sup>16</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate44:6

Therefore the spirit of the Lord finds rest in doing divine acts and in granting enlightenment and rest to others.

**Fourth:** He sets an example so that we may not postpone doing good works to the next day. Indeed, we should seize every chance to hurry in doing good deeds lest the opportunity is no more there tomorrow.

**Fifth:** The Lord made clay out of spit and anointed the man's eyes with His hands. In doing so He confirms that the secret of that power lies in Christ Himself and in the work of His hands. Everything that proceeds from the Lord Jesus Christ possesses power, life and enlightenment. Indeed, His arm is almighty.

\* Notice that when the Lord sought to heal the blind man, He did so in a manner that could make his blindness even worse, as He applied mud<sup>17</sup>.

\* The Lord took earth from the ground and that is just the same thing He did when He created Adam. It would have been true if He had said: "I am the one who took soil from the ground and formed man." But this would have been very hard on His hearers, as well as too unbearable and repulsive to them. Therefore He chose to reveal His identity through a practical event, which nothing could hinder. By taking earth and mixing it with spit, He proclaimed His hidden glory. Indeed, it was not easy for the crowds to comprehend and believe that they stood before the glorious Creator Himself<sup>18</sup>.

\* If you wonder: 'Why did the Lord not use water in the mud but rather used spit?' Our response is: 'So that the spring of water would not be considered the source of healing. Besides, it is intended to indicate that the power evident in His mouth is responsible for creating the eyes of the blind man and opening them.'

**St John Chrysostom**

\* He granted him new eyes<sup>19</sup>.

**St. Paulinus**

\* He formed eyes from clay.

Light emanated from the soil

This is how it happened in the beginning...

He ordered that there be light, and it was born out of darkness.

Similarly, here too.

He made clay out of His spit,

And he offered perfection to that which was lacking in nature and that was the case since the beginning.

This was intended to reveal that what He held in His hands was the power to bring perfection to what was imperfect in nature...

As they refused to believe that He was there before Abraham came, He proved to them, through

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<sup>17</sup> Hom 4. PG 61:27

<sup>18</sup> Hom56.PG59:328

<sup>19</sup> Poem 23. ACW 40:219

His deeds, that He is the Son of the One whose hands had shaped the first Adam out of the earth<sup>20</sup>.

### St. Efram the Syrian

\* He made clay out of the spit and anointed our eyes with it (John 9:6, 7). He made us see clearly (Mark 8:25). He opened the ears of our hearts (Mark 7:33-35) so that we could hear. Therefore we could smell His sweet fragrance (Eph 5; 2 Cor 2:15), and distinguish His name as the aroma of a spilled sweet ointment (Song of Sol 1:3; Phil 2). Now we could taste and see how great the Lord is (1 Peter 2:3; Ps 34:8). Now we can touch Him in the manner that St. John describes: ‘That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the work of life’ (1 John 1:1). Consequently, we have become enabled to kill the Lamb, eat it, and as a result come out of Egypt<sup>21</sup>.

**‘And He said to him,  
“Go; wash in the pool of Siloam (which is translated, Sent).  
So he went and washed and came back seeing’ [7]**

**‘Siloam’:** It is also known as Shiloh, Silo, and Shiloh. This is a natural spring that lies beneath the strong citadels on the east of Jerusalem, in between the city and the waters of Kidron. Some consider that Siloam is the same as En Rogel, which is mentioned in Joshua 15:7; 18:16; 2 Sam 17:17; 1 Kings 1:9. The waters of this spring were gathered in a great storage for the consumption of the city. A stream flowed out of it that fed the pool at Bethesda.

The pool of Siloam got its water from a spring that originated in mount Zion thus the waters of the Tabernacle “were streams that make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle the most high”(Ps 46:4). These are living and healing waters (Ezek 47:9).

**(Which is translated Sent):** The name is derived from the Hebrew ‘Shalach’ and means ‘Sent.’ This was due either because they considered this spring as a blessing granted by God in order to water the city; or because its waters were channeled through canals or pipes to different regions. Some believe that the name refers to a prophecy by Jacob to Judas that the Messiah would be his descendant: “..... Until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people” (Gen 49:10). Thus it is a symbol for the Lord Jesus Christ, sent from the Father to enlighten and heal souls.

The Lord Jesus Christ is called “the Messenger” for He is the carrier of the covenant (Malachi 2:1). He repeatedly says in the Gospel of St. John that the Father had sent Him. Thus when he tells the blind man to go to the pool of Siloam or Sent, He is calling every soul in need of enlightenment to go to Him. He is the messenger who purifies man from sin, and shines with His light upon him. Consequently, he/she enjoys heavenly understanding, and darkness can no longer have a place in him.

\* Just as the Lord Jesus Christ is also the spiritual rock (1Cor 10:4), so is the spiritual Siloam

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<sup>20</sup> Commentary on Tatation’s Diatessaron, 28

<sup>21</sup> Peri Pasha 18, 19 (Translated by Robert J.Daly- ACW)

also<sup>22</sup>.

### **St. John Chrysostom**

The Lord Jesus Christ underlined the obedience of the man born blind. On the one hand, he submitted himself to the Lord, whom he had never seen, and let him put clay on his eyes without any objection or even asking how the Lord could use clay to heal eyes?

On the other hand, he obeyed, went and washed in the pool of Siloam. He probably had gone and washed there previously but had not recovered his sight. Besides, surely many others had washed in the pool yet had never heard of any blind person being healed by its waters. Consequently, the Lord proclaimed the virtues of that poor blind man which were evident in his assurance, confidence, and calm.

Note the mind set of the blind man: he was obedient in every way. He did not say: 'If the mud and spit will truly heal me, why do I need to go to Siloam? Or, if I need to go to Siloam, why is there a need for clay? Why does He anoint me with (clay)? And why does He command me to get washed?' He did not think of these matters, as he was ready to do one thing only: he was prepared to obey completely the one who commanded him and he was not inclined to do anything to oppose Him<sup>23</sup>.

### **St. John Chrysostom**

The man born blind came to enjoy the light of which he had been deprived before. It is as though he had been granted a new birth that differed from his previous birth. The pool of Siloam represents the baptismal waters that grant inner vision besides purification and redemption from sin. The waters refer to the Messianic age or the Kingdom of the house of David: "In as much as these people refuse the waters of Shiloah that flow softly...." (Is 8:6)

The blind man returned with his sight restored. He could see intangible things and he praised with all his might the One who had granted him enlightenment. Accordingly Isaiah the prophet says: "...your watchmen shall lift up their voices, with their voices they shall sing together; for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord brings back Zion" (Is 52:8).

\* The Lord told the blind man to go and, wash in Siloam. If you were to ask: 'Why has the Lord not done the miracle immediately? Why did He send the man to Siloam?' Our response would be: 'To test the blind man's faith and in order to silence the arguments of the Jews.' Besides, it was necessary for all who met him to see him going there with his eyes covered with clay. Such a strange sight would attract everybody's attention, whether they knew him or not. Everybody would notice him in every detail. It would not be easy to recognize the blind man after his eyes were opened (for his features would be changed). That is why the Lord intended to have many witnesses testifying in different ways by creating a strange sight that would be definitely remarkable... in this manner people would be unable, after the miracle had been done, to deny that it was the same person.

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<sup>22</sup> Homilies on St John, 57:1

<sup>23</sup> Homilies on St John, 57:1

\* The man washed his eyes in this pool whose name is translated as “sent.” He was baptized in the Lord in a manner that granted him enlightenment. When the Lord anointed him with clay He made him become a believer<sup>24</sup>.

**St. Augustine** believes that in making the clay with spit, the reference is to the Word being incarnated<sup>25</sup>.

## **2. Dialogues after the Miraculous Healing**

### **A. The dialogue between the Neighbors and the Blind man**

The neighbors, who were eyewitnesses to the miracle, knew the blind man very well. Due to the miraculous healing and their great astonishment, they went through three stages of doubt, leading to three questions:

**The first stage:** their doubts in the person of the blind man [8], therefore he assured them he was that same blind man they had known [9].

**The second stage:** Who had made the miracle? And the answer was “A man called Jesus” [11]

**The third stage:** “Where is He?” And the answer was: “I do not know”, [12].

The blind man was completely accurate and faithful in answering all the three questions and according to what he knew at that time.

**‘Therefore the neighbors and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, “Is not this he who sat and begged?” [8]**

The neighbors were astonished as he had been born and had grown among them. They were accustomed to see him blind. Often, he would sit and beg in misery. Suddenly now he could see and his sight was whole for he was walking joyfully everywhere. He had not been able to work on account of his blindness and his damaged psyche. His parents had been unable to support him; therefore he sat by the roadside and begged most of the day. Even his manner of speech and words had become different. Instead of beggars’ words that would be intended to let people give him alms; his words were now full of praise and thanksgiving. All this made his miraculous healing a public event rather than a hidden matter! In spite of that, some were suspicious concerning his identity. There were conflicting views since the healing of a person born blind is something hard to accept. Indeed, according to human knowledge, healing appeared to be impossible in such a case.

\* How tender is God! Wherever He went, He tenderly healed even beggars. In this manner, He silenced the Jews. He did not give special attention to famous or outstanding persons or to rulers.

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<sup>24</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:2

<sup>25</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:2

Rather He attended to those who seemed unworthy to receive His attention. Indeed, He had come to save everyone<sup>26</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Some said: “This is he.”**

**Others said, “He is like him.”**

**He said: “I am he.” [9]**

Probably, those who said: **“This is he”** were the ones who had witnessed what had happened to him for everything had been done in public. As far as the others, they did not believe and said: “He is like him.” This was also because his opened eyes made him look different than how he used to look. By saying: “I am he” he testified that he is the same one who had been begging people; but now he was enjoying God’s supreme blessing.

\* He was not ashamed of his former blindness; and he did not fear the anger of the crowd. Moreover, he did not conceal his identity for he wanted to testify to the One who had been kind to him

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Therefore they said to him:**

**“How were your eyes opened?” [10]**

When the blind man testified that he was the one who received the blessing of healing, the neighbors asked how it happened. They wanted to know and find the Maker of the miracle. The Psalmist accordingly says: “The works of the Lord are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them,” (Ps 111:2).

**He answered and said:**

**“A man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes,**

**and said to me: ‘Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed, and I received sight” [11]**

He presented the truth simply and according to his experience. He said: “A man called Jesus made clay...” He had not seen Jesus before, but had heard of Him. He heard the Lord’s voice when He commanded him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. He felt that the Lord’s hand put something over his eyes. He discovered it was clay after he had been healed; and that the Lord had made it Himself and anointed his eyes with it.

\* Look how he became a preacher through grace. Look how he preaches the Gospel. Having received insight, he became a confessor. This blind man became a confessor and that agitated the hearts of the wicked. This was due to the fact that they had not received in their hearts what this man had received in his eyes<sup>27</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

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<sup>26</sup> Homilies on St John, 57:1

<sup>27</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:8

**Then they said to him:  
“Where is He?”  
He said: “I do not know.” [12]**

Their second question was “Where is He?” Was this question raised due to their doubt in the person who had made the miracle and had broken the law and incited breaking it? On one hand, the Lord had made clay and anointed the eyes of the blind man. On the other hand, He had commanded him to walk to the pool and get washed. May be some asked the question out of curiosity and to find out who was that one that could do such an act; while others could have asked out of a sincere desire to meet Him.

The blind man answered: **“I do not know”** as the Lord seems to have withdrawn immediately after He had commanded the man to go to the pool of Siloam. He did not wait until the man would return to thank Him. This reveals that the Lord finds joy in giving freely and without expecting a word of thanks or praise. When He reprimands on account of ingratitude it is intended to teach others who need to be grateful, to rejoice, and to give praise just as the angels do.

\* Notice the Lord’s humility. He did not stay with those whom He healed as He did not seek to gather a reward. Neither did He want to boast nor draw the attention of the crowds<sup>28</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

## **B. The Dialogue between the Pharisees and the Man Born Blind**

**‘They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees.’ [13]**

We would have expected the neighbors to be looking for the Maker of the miracle in order to get acquainted with Him and enjoy being with Him. However, they laid hold of the blind man and brought him to the Pharisees and as though he had committed a crime. They led him as a guilty man who had agreed to break the Sabbath even though his eyes had been restored on that day.

The matter was greater than just presenting it to one or more priests. It had to do with the whole nation and so they brought him before the Sanhedrin. In the minds of the crowds, the Council was responsible for issuing the final verdict. Most of the council members were Pharisees and most did all they could to resist the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of the crowds had brought the blind man to the Council in order to reveal the truth, and expose to the Pharisees how this One, whom they resisted, had created eyes for the man born blind. Consequently the crowds would be attracted and adhere to Him rather than resist Him.

Some writers believe that the word ‘Pharisees’ refers to a secondary committee under the council of the Sanhedrin. This would be made up of high priests and Pharisees. The Council consisted of two committees, each included twenty three members. Each member had the right to judge a few cases. In the big cities, there were similar committees.

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<sup>28</sup> Homilies on St John, 57:2



**Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. [14]  
Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight.  
He said to them: “He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.” [15]**

The Pharisees posed the same question that his neighbors had asked. It was not intended to get the truth from its original source. Rather, they hoped to find a fault that could enable them to accuse the Lord of guilt. In this manner they would be enabled to damage His image before the crowds who had gathered around him.

Notice how the man born blind did not get agitated. He did not deny or say anything different from what he had said before. The Pharisees and the other people had brought him hoping he would reject the One who had healed him. Consequently, they were faced with disappointment due to his answers. They got to know fully well the miraculous act of the Lord. That afflicted man had beaten them in every way due to the Lord’s miracle.

**St. John Chrysostom**

The answers of the blind man to the Pharisees were identical to those he had given to his neighbors. However, he did not mention that the Lord had “made the clay.” This could be due to the fact that he had not seen Him make it. Even though he could have guessed, he did not want to present to an official council a testimony they could oppose. How could he see the Lord making clay when he was blind? He could have avoided mentioning it since making clay is considered work and he did not wish the Jews to accuse the Lord of breaking the Sabbath. For that same reason, the man did not use the expression “He told me....” Besides, the Lord would be accused of tempting people to break the law since He had told him to go to the pool of Siloam and wash. At the same time, he boldly said: “I washed” and he did not fear them!

**Therefore, some of the Pharisees said:  
“This man is not from God,  
because He does not keep the Sabbath.”  
Others said:  
“How can a man who is a sinner do such miracles?”  
And there was a division among them. [16]**

The creation of eyes for the blind man should have been sufficient to silence the Lord’s opponents. However, there arose a division among them: one party observed worship literally and were preoccupied with false glory, these considered that the Lord had broken the Sabbath and so had broken the divine commandments. Instead of enjoying the presence of the Lord, they persecuted Him as though He were a criminal: **“This man is not from God.”** The other party considered His deed to be a work of supreme love and an execution of the law. Healing, they believed, is a real sign of the Lord’s true mission. However, the second party represented a small minority that could not stand up to the angry majority.

At the end of every teaching or the performance of a miracle, there arose divisions among the crowds. The opponents would go to the Pharisees as they were the judges and

possessed religious power. However, this time, the division was among the judges themselves. Maybe this led to the postponement of the judgment concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

\* **St. John the Evangelist** reports that **“there was a division among them”** as some loved authority and power so much that it prevented them from recognizing the Lord Jesus Christ, while others kept silent due to their cowardice and fear from many of the people.

**St. John Chrysostom.**

The Lord intentionally healed the paralytic at Bethesda on a Saturday. He commanded him to get up, carry his bed and walk (John 5:8). He also intended to heal the man born blind by making clay, and anointing his eyes. In the Book of Gemara<sup>29</sup> it says that whoever applies medicine for the eyes on a Saturday is considered sinful, and the Lord also ordered him to go to the pool of Siloam and wash. As Lightfoot mentions, the Lord Jesus Christ broke the Sabbath in a number of ways. Could he not have healed the man on any other day but Saturday and without all these actions? Why did He insist on healing on a Saturday? The Lord did so to underline the true meaning of the Sabbath, for it is intended for resting in the Lord; and in going about doing the Lord's deeds of love and mercy. He wanted to expose the misconception of the literal interpretation and observation of the law which imposed banning essential daily acts and services of love.

\* Those who threw the Lord out continued to be blind. They encouraged opposing the Lord for working on the Sabbath, making clay from spit, and anointing the eyes of the blind man. When he healed the blind man with a word, the Jews opened the door to arouse oppositions....

The Lord had broken the Sabbath (literally) but He was not guilty.

What do we mean by saying: ‘The Lord had broken the Sabbath?’ He is the Light that came and ended the shadows. The Lord God is the One who instituted the Sabbath. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself was with the Father when He gave the Law. He established it as a forerunner to future events. “Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come.” (Col. 2:16)

Why do the shadows cheer us? Open your eyes, O Jews, for the “Sun” is here. **“We know....”** [24]. What do you know, O you who are blind at heart? **“That this man is not from God because He does not keep the Sabbath”** [16].

O miserable people, the Sabbath has been established by the Lord Jesus Christ whom you claim that He is not from God. You observe the Sabbath in a physical manner. You have not received the spit of the Lord on your eyes, and you have neither gone to Siloam nor washed your faces. Consequently, you persist in your blindness; you are blind to the goodness found in this blind man. He is no longer blind in body or in heart. **“For judgment I have come into the world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind,”** [39]<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Gemara 14.

<sup>30</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 86:3

Clearly, He has observed the Sabbath for there was no sin in Him. This is a spiritual Sabbath: when a person is without sin.

Truly, my brothers, this is what God encourages us to do when He commands us to observe the Sabbath: “You shall do no customary (slave) work on it,” (Lev. 23:8). Now go back to the previous teachings and ask for the meaning of ‘servile work’ and listen to the Lord’s words: “whoever commits sin is a slave of sin,” (John 8:34)<sup>31</sup>.

St Augustine

**They said to the blind man again:**

**“What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?”**

**He said, “He is a prophet.” [19]**

They threw the net before the blind man so that he would deny that the Lord Jesus Christ was the Messiah. He would be thrown out of the Sanhedrin or killed if he did otherwise.

After asking about the manner of healing, the Pharisees asked the blind man about the One who had healed him. They asked for his personal opinion in the Man and his actions. They put on pressure so that he might respond, even negatively and in the manner by which his parents had responded. They wanted him to report what he knew concerning his recovery and to leave the decision in the hands of the religious leaders who would judge the matter. However, he disappointed them as he honored the One who granted healing to him. According to a new law they had set, they issued a decree of exile against the man in order to teach a lesson to others.

This blind man was like the Samaritan woman (John 4:19). Both thought the Lord was a prophet before they became acquainted with the reality of His being the Messiah- **“The Holiest of the holy”** and the One who grants eternal righteousness. The light began to shine in his heart and inner vision just as it shone in his physical eyes. In hearing the man’s words: **“He is a prophet”**, the Pharisees feared the fulfillment of the writings in the Book of Daniel. It mentions that the One who will come from God within three centuries approximately, and while the nation is in darkness and without a prophet, will be the **seal of all visions and prophecies**: the eternal Messiah, whom all generations await: **“Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city. To finish the transgression, to make end of sin, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most holy,”** (Daniel 9:24)

\* Notice the wisdom of the poor man. He spoke more wisely than all the Pharisees. He first said: **“He is a prophet”** [17]. He did not fear the judgment of the Jews or the opposition of those against the Lord and who said: **“This Man is not from God because He does not keep the Sabbath”** [16], and he responded, **“He is a Prophet”**<sup>32</sup>.

St JohnChrysostom

### **C. The Dialogue between the Pharisees and the Parents of the Man Born Blind.**

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<sup>31</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:9

<sup>32</sup> Homilies on St John, 58:1

**‘But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight’,[18]**

Here the word “Jews” is intended to indicate the religious authorities, especially the Pharisees and the members of the council of the Sanhedrin. These did not believe that the man was born blind. Therefore they called the parents to confirm that this was their son and that he had been born blind. They hoped to find some fault that would diminish the value of the miracle in the eyes of the people.

\* Notice the many ways of darkness they used in order to conceal and demolish the miracle. But it is in the nature of truth to work in this manner: it uses the same instruments that evil uses to overcome it. Truth becomes stronger and shines through the same means that were used to blemish or destroy it<sup>33</sup>!

**St John Chrysostom**

**And they asked them saying:  
“Is this your son, who you say was born blind?  
How then does he now see?”[19]**

These leaders could not bear the light of truth. Therefore they posed a question that carried a kind of arrogance and threat to the parents. They were not satisfied with being evil, but also sought to implant fear among the people. They wanted them to share their renouncement of the Messiah and their rejection of divine truth.

\* They did not say: ‘...who was at one time blind.’ Rather, they said: ‘...who you say was born blind.’ They almost seemed to be saying: ‘...whom you have made blind.’

**St. John Chrysostom**

**His parents answered them and said:  
“We know that this is our son,  
and that he was born blind” [20]**

His parents were not embarrassed to admit that this was their son, who due to his poverty and blindness used to beg. As they were not eyewitnesses to his healing, they avoided answering the question concerning the manner he was healed. They also feared to be thrown out of the Temple.

**“But by what means he now sees we do not know,  
or who opened his eyes we do not know.  
He is of age, ask him.  
He will speak for himself.” [21]**

It is true that they were not eyewitnesses, yet they surely knew and were assured by their own son who must have told them himself that the Lord Jesus Christ is the One who had healed him. They used human wisdom and consequently lost the blessing of witnessing for the Lord Jesus Christ. They deprived themselves of offering thanksgiving and testifying the truth for the one

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<sup>33</sup> Homilies on St John, 58:1

who does miracles. They feared mankind so they laid a trap for themselves and their son. In this context, wisdom says: “The fear of man brings a snare but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe,” (Prov. 29:25).

**His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue, [22].**

Being thrown out of the temple meant being isolated from the worshippers. This was known as *nidui* and it is the lowest form of excommunication in Jewish practice. *Anathema and Cheram* were applied to Christians in the period following the Resurrection.

The punishment for confessing that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Messiah was banishment from the Council. Such a person was treated like someone who had denied the Jewish faith. Therefore a person who would witness for the Lord would know that he would be exposing himself to be isolated from worshippers. He would also be considered a rebel and a traitor to the religious leadership. By being banished, such a person was made to realize that he was unworthy of being related to God’s people; and prevented from enjoying the privileges of being one of the chosen people of Israel.

Consequently such banishment had dangerous results: deprivation from joining the people in public worship; being regarded as an outlaw, and consequently being deprived of engaging in commercial transactions. In fact, this would lead to the loss of one’s freedom, and the possibility of sequestering one’s possessions.

\* Being banished from the temple is no longer a wicked matter, for people would expel but the Lord would receive the outcasts<sup>34</sup>.

**Therefore his parents said: “He is of age; ask him” [23]**

\* They asked the parents three questions: Was this their son? Was he born blind? How did he come to see? They admitted to two questions only, while they had no answer to the third one. They did so for the sake of providing the truth. No one else could confess except the one who had been healed.

**St. John Chrysostom**

#### **D- The Second Dialogue between the Pharisees and the Man Born Blind**

**So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him: “Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner” [24].**

They called the blind man a second time and they treated him with great respect and honor. They wanted to win him over, so they said: **“Give God the glory.”** In other words: ‘Swear by the name of God that you will tell the truth.’ Then they tried to dictate what they wanted him to say. They wanted him to say that the Lord pretended to be a prophet and that He

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<sup>34</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:10

had transgressed against the law. In this manner, the blind man would please them and they would honor him. Some writers find that this is a legal religious procedure since they intended to issue a very serious verdict. In other words, there was the threat of being expelled from the company of God's people, or the pronouncement of the death penalty. It is as though they made God a witness against him before banishing or condemning Him to death.

Probably, they intended to convey by their words the following: 'He is a wicked and sinful man. Therefore give more glory to God as He has used this Man as a tool to work through Him.'

They wanted to follow the example of Joshua when he condemned Achan to be stoned, for he asked him first: to 'give glory to the Lord God' (Joshua 7:16) and to hide nothing. He had asked him to confess because there was 'an accursed thing in Israel.'

Earlier, the Lord had loudly inquired: "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" (John 8:46). No one dared convict Him in His presence. However, behind His back they said: **"We know that this Man is a sinner."**

\* They did not say anything to the blind man that would make him ashamed to deny that the Lord Jesus Christ had healed him. Conversely, they wished to mask their renouncement in the robe of piety by saying: **"Give glory to God."** Saying such words clearly indicates their arrogance.

In speaking to the blind man about the Lord and saying: **"We know that this Man is a sinner"**, we ask them: 'How is it that you did not reprimand the Lord Jesus Christ when He said: "Which of you convicts Me of sin" (John 8:46)?! How have you found out that He is a sinner?

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* What is the meaning of: **"Give glory to God"**? Renounce what you have been granted. Such behavior would not glorify God; for this would be blasphemy indeed<sup>35</sup>.

**St. Augustine.**

**He answered and said:**

**"Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know.**

**One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see" [25]**

That poor man did not care to please the religious leaders. Nor did he want to be honored by them. In all simplicity, he told the truth. Thus he became a true witness to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is as though he was telling them that the personality of the One who had healed me is not a valid matter for contention or argument. I do not need such confrontation. His deed is beyond discussion. All I know is that I was blind, but now I see. This is my experience with Him. Or it is as though he is telling them that if you claim that He is a sinner, then this is a matter I know nothing about. What I know is my trust in Him. This makes me reject what you say

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<sup>35</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:11

altogether. Practical experience is greater and stronger than theoretical discussions. This is the living experience of believers. St. Paul accordingly says:” For you were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.” (Eph 5:8)

They sought to transform the work of the Lord into contentions. Then the crowds would be engaged in them rather than enjoy a living fellowship with Him. However the man born blind chose to experience the new enlightened life rather than engage in stupid arguments.

\* Was the blind man truly fearless? This could not be so, or how could he have said: **“He is a prophet”**; and then said: **“Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know.”**

He answered in this manner not because this was his way of thinking, or in order to convince himself. **Rather, he wanted to vindicate the Lord from this accusation through his testimony of the facts and not through his own proclamations about Him. In this manner, the defense becomes strong as the good deed in itself acts as a witness against them.** Therefore after a long discussion, the blind man said: “If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing” [refer to v.33]. They were angered and told him: **“You were completely born in sins and are you teaching us?”** If he had responded like that from the beginning, was there anything else they would not have said? Or was there anything else they would not have sought to do?

**“Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know”** It is as though he was saying: ‘I am not saying anything in praise of this Man. I do not proclaim anything about Him now. However, I definitely know Him and confirm that He would not have been able to do such acts if He were a sinner.’

In this manner, he removed all doubts from his own mind. He neither damaged his testimony, nor spoke with prejudice. Indeed, he presented a testimony backed by facts<sup>36</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Then they said to him again:  
“What did He do to you?  
How did He open your eyes?” [26]**

They pursued interrogating him but used a different method in the hope of finding something contradictory to his earlier responses. They sought to find something they could hold against the Lord Jesus Christ. The reason why they asked the blind man how the Lord had opened his eyes was to discover if He had used some devilish method to open them. However, the young man became irritated by their unseemly manners and did not respond to them. He answered each question by asking another one and inquiring if they wished to become the Lord’s disciples. At the same time he considered himself to be one of the disciples.

**“I told you already and you did not listen.  
Why do you want to hear it again?”**

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<sup>36</sup> Homilies on St John, 58:2

### **Do you also want to become His disciples?” [27]**

His response was delivered in a spirit of candidness and courage. It was a living testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ. Besides, his question to them was a watershed for they had to choose between two issues: becoming disciples of the Lord just as he himself had learned to do; or end the discussion with him since there was no point in further discussion anymore.

\* What was his answer? Having overcome and disappointing them, he no longer spoke submissively to them. When it was necessary to question and discuss, he spoke cautiously in order to present the proof of his testimony. Now that he had overcome them and scored a great victory, he was encouraged to step over them<sup>37</sup>.

\* Do you see how a beggar can speak courageously before the Scribes and Pharisees? That is how truth is strong and falsehood is weak. When ordinary men adhere to the truth they become glorified; whereas falsehood, even when used by the powerful, turns them to weaklings.

What he said implied the following: ‘You have not paid attention to my words. Therefore I will not continue to speak and answer anymore. You have no goal while you interrogate me; and you do not want to listen in order to get informed. Indeed, you only seek to damage my words<sup>38</sup>.’

\* By asking the question: **“Do you also want to become His disciples?”** the man born blind aligned himself with the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is clear that by saying that, he had become a disciple of the Lord. Now he was speaking sarcastically and this annoyed them greatly. He realized how they felt and therefore pursued to hit them powerfully. He spoke words that were powerful and severe. This was the result of a courageous soul that soared in the heights and that despised their madness. It indicated the grandeur of the honor (of being the Lord’s disciple). He was very confident and he revealed that they were insulting the One who deserved admiration. However, he did not care that they were insulting him, and he regarded their reprimands as an honor to himself<sup>39</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom.**

\* What do these words imply: “Do you also want to become His disciples?” As for me, I have indeed become His disciple. Do you want to do the same too? Now I can see, and I see without any fear<sup>40</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**Then they reviled him and said:  
“You are His disciple, but we are Moses’ disciples” [28]**

When they could no longer resist the truth, they turned to the language of abuse. This is what anyone who adheres to the truth expects. The Lord says: “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake,” (Matt 5:11). They

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<sup>37</sup> Homilies on St John, 58:2

<sup>38</sup> Homilies on St John, 58:2

<sup>39</sup> Homilies on St John, 58:3

<sup>40</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:11



possessed hearts filled with hatred against the divine truth; murderous, their words were as sharp as the piercing of a sword (Prov 12:8; Psalm 55:21).

They belittled him by saying “You are His disciple.” Although the man had neither seen the Lord yet, nor heard his sermons, yet they considered him a disciple as he witnessed for Him. As for him, he was proud to be the Lord’s disciple.

They boasted of their relationship to Moses the prophet. He was their teacher and they did not need or seek another. Previously, they had boasted before the Lord that they were Abraham’s children. Now they were proud to be Moses’ disciples. However, they were estranged from Abraham’s children and Moses according to their deeds and thoughts. If they were truly Abraham’s children, they would have seen with him the day of the Lord and would have rejoiced (John 5:56). Moreover, if they were truly Moses’ disciples, they would have adhered to the Lord Jesus Christ whom Moses foresaw, rather than resist Him.

**“We know that God spoke to Moses,  
as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from,” [29]**

It is as though they were saying: ‘We are sure that Moses had a divine mission; but we have no proof that this person has been called to serve. Therefore how could we abandon Moses and follow an unknown person and stranger who is assuming to have a divine mission? They presented proof to justify their pride that Moses was their teacher and that God’s Word came to him. Yet, they did not understand that the Lord Jesus Christ was Himself the Word of God become incarnate. Moses was the faithful servant, who was entrusted with the house of his Master. However, the Lord Jesus Christ is the only Son and Owner of the house (Heb 3:5, 6) whom Moses served.

They sarcastically said: **“...as for this fellow, we do not know where he is from”** [29]. Indeed, they did not and could not know where He came from for they had to search the Old Testament chapters with a real intention to learn. They needed to pray to God to reveal Him to them. If they had searched they would have realized that they lived at a time in which the expected Messiah would come. However, they were like their fathers, who had lived at the time of Jeremiah the prophet who said: “Neither did they say ‘where is the Lord’...” (Jer 2:6)

\* They did not say ‘We heard that God spoke to Moses’, but rather said **“we know [29].** O, you Jews are you sure what you heard is true? You know this, yet you consider what you see is less trustworthy than what you hear? You have heard about one person but you have not seen him; while you have not listened to the other though you have seen Him<sup>41</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Is this how you follow the slave and turn your backs on God? In doing so, you are not following the slave since He himself leads to God<sup>42</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

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<sup>41</sup> Homilies on St John, 58:3

<sup>42</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:12

**The man answered and said to them:  
“Why, this is a marvelous thing  
that you do not know where He is from, yet He has opened my eyes,” [30]**

The blind man was astonished that the Jewish leaders considered the Lord to be a novice or foreigner to divine ministry. Indeed, He had done works that Moses the prophet had not; such as opening the eyes of someone who had been born blind. The whole city got to hear about this miracle as the blind man had sat and begged on the roadside. People from all parts of the land had seen him and were certain that this was the man who was blind in the past.

He was now there, standing and walking and witnessing to the supreme work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The blind man was astonished that the Lord had created and opened his eyes through his care and supreme authority. Now, he was astonished that these blind leaders sat and occupied the seats of judgment yet they could not see the evident truth, although he had presented to them the following facts:

- \* The Lord had opened his eyes and this was a reality and fact that could not be denied.
- \* God does not listen to sinners (Ps 66:18). Yet these leaders claimed that this man was a sinner.
- \* God listens to the pure that do His will.
- \* In history of the world, we do not hear of anybody who has opened the eyes of a blind person. Even Moses did not perform such an act.
- \* If the Lord Jesus Christ did proceed from God then he would have had no power. In this manner they had set up a trap; but they fell into it themselves.

**“Now we know that God does not hear sinners;  
but if anyone is a worshipper of God and does His will, He hears him,” [31]**

The word ‘sinners’ in this verse occurs in the Greek text as ‘*hamartooloom*’ to indicate atheists or unbelievers. Its antonym is ‘*theosebees*’ which means ‘worshipper of God.’ God does not listen to someone who is a lip worshipper and prays to be saved while through his behavior and in his heart he/she insists on adhering to evil and finds pleasure in doing it.

- \* The Lord here does not only reveal that He is without sin; but that He has given God great pleasure as He does God’s will. The leaders considered themselves ‘worshippers of God’ and God fearing. Besides they claimed to do ‘His will.’ It is as though the blind man is saying: ‘It is not enough for people to know God, for they need to do His will’<sup>43</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

- \* Our perception through faith enables us to see that this blind man was also blind at heart

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<sup>43</sup> Homilies on St John, 58:3

because he too had sinned. We will mention in what respect he had sinned:

First: He thought the Lord was a prophet and he did not know that He was the Son of God. Therefore he answered as a sinner: "...we know that God does not hear sinners," [21].

If God does not answer sinners, then what hope do we have?

If God does not hear sinners, they why do we pray? Why do we confess all our sins and beat on our chests?

Besides, remember that tax collector who went up to the temple with a Pharisee (Luke 18:10). While the Pharisee stood boastfully before God and recounted all his personal merits; the tax collector stood in a corner, looked down, beat his chest while admitting his sins. This tax collector who had confessed his sins, left the temple vindicated and better off than the Pharisee.

**Therefore God definitely hears sinners. Indeed, the person who uttered these words (verse 31) had not yet washed the face of his heart in the pool of Siloam.**

The mystery had passed before his eyes, yet his heart had not been blessed by His grace.

When did that blind man wash the face of his heart? When he went to the Lord Himself after the Jews had banished him. When the Lord found him, He said to him "Do you believe in the Son of God?" And the man answered: "Who is He Lord that I may believe in Him?" Indeed, the man had seen the Lord with his eyes; but had not seen Him with his heart? No, he had not yet seen Him with his eyes. Wait and see how he would see Him....

And Jesus said to him: **"You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you."** Did the man doubt? No; he had washed his face now. The man had spoken with 'Siloam', which means 'sent'; and who is that One who has been 'sent' other than the Lord Jesus Christ?...He is Himself Siloam. **The man born blind at heart drew close to Him, heard, believed, and worshipped Him. He washed his face and therefore saw<sup>44</sup>.**

**St. Augustine**

\* Similarly, in the Book of Exodus, the priests, who entered into the Lord God's presence, had to consecrate themselves so that God would not depart from them, (Ex 19:22). This also applied to those who came before the holy altar to serve: they had to have no sin or they would die (Ex 28:43)<sup>45</sup>.

**Caprianus the Martyr**

\* We need to put these matters before us and apply them very carefully. We need to consider very seriously these matters as we anoint priests. It is important to choose only those who are upright and clean. Consequently they would be worthy to offer sacrifices to the Lord in holiness. Such ministers would be qualified to have the ear of the Lord who will hear their prayers. They would offer petitions for the peace of God's people<sup>46</sup>.

**Caprianus the Martyr**

**"Since the world began, it has been unheard that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind" [32].**

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<sup>44</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 86:2

<sup>45</sup> Letter 63 to Epictetus: 2

<sup>46</sup> Letter 69 to Asturica: 2

Since the beginning of all time, before the time of the fathers and prophets, we have not heard of anyone, not even Moses, who opened the eyes of a man born blind.

**“If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.”[33]**

The blind man came to a correct conclusion. That is if this Man were not from God, He would not have been able to do anything. But He is the source of all goodness and no goodness can be achieved without Him.

**They answered and said to him:  
“You were completely born in sins,  
and are you teaching us?”  
And they cast him out.’ [34]**

It is as though they were telling him: ‘It is because of your former sins that you have received a just reward. Therefore you came into the world in a deformed condition and without eyes. You do not deserve to share in worshipping God with other believers. How is it that you take on the role of teacher to the leaders?’ They then issued the order to deprive him of sharing in worshipping God. Because they were unable to answer to his words, they used their authority to deprive and banish him.

They despised and humiliated him by saying: “You are not like other persons who were born with sin. Rather, they said: **“You were completely born in sin.”** You are completely corrupt. You have corruption in your soul as well as in your body. These are the signs of corruption that have left their mark on your deformed body and blindness. Besides, they probably thought that his extreme poverty and need to beg were indications of divine anger due to his sins.

They belittled his words and were surprised: how could this illiterate fool, who could not know even the light of the sun since he had never seen it, and who has been sitting and begging, now assume the place of a teacher and stand before the leaders of thought and knowledge?

Due to their pride, they rejected to learn; especially from someone of lesser rank and learning. However, a good person does not reject to learn on a daily basis, and until the last breath of life. Such a person can learn even from young children. To reject learning is foolishness itself and a form of ignorance.

As he touched their conscience, they could not tolerate him and so cast him out. Probably, they called the guards or soldiers to take him away, by force if needed.

When the learned leaders were unable to discuss, they proudly issued the order to cast him out. They threw him out but they could not isolate him from fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. They imagined that he was not worthy of being a member in the Jewish temple, and they did not comprehend that he was qualified to be a member in the body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They did not realize that their judgment would fire back on them. According to them, the man was completely born in sin because he was born blind. Now he had been cleared of his blindness, and therefore the One who had healed him was also able to tear away and remove his sins. This is the work of God.

\* These matters have been recorded that we may be guided by them.

The blind man and beggar, had not yet seen the Lord. He displayed courage and uprightness before being encouraged by the Lord. He stood up before all the murderers who had listened to the devil and were being driven wildly by him. They wanted to condemn the Lord by any means. But the man did not submit to them or proved cowardly. By his courageous confrontation, he silenced their mouths. He preferred to be cast out rather than betray the Truth.

How much more should we be courageous when we speak with those who accuse Christians, and when we need to silence their mouths rather than submit in weakness? Indeed, we are empowered as we have experienced faith for a longer period; we have seen hundreds of miracles performed through faith. We have received greater blessings than this blind man as our inner eyes have been opened. As a result, we have become acquainted with unspeakable mysteries and have been called to such great honor. We believe that we ought to show courage as we speak to those who attack Christians. We should be able to silence them rather than bow down in submissive weakness.

We can stand up for the truth only if we have courage, are grounded in the Holy Bible, and earnestly follow the Word while abandoning all carelessness<sup>47</sup>.

. **St. John Chrysostom**

\* What does ‘completely’ convey in this verse? Blind to such an extent that even the eyes are blind.

However, He who opened the man’s eyes also delivered him ‘completely’: He who had brought light to his features, would also grant him resurrection and seat him on His right hand<sup>48</sup>.

\* When they cast the man out, the Lord welcomed him. As much as he had been banished, he had become a Christian to the same degree<sup>49</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

## **E- The Dialogue between the Lord Jesus Christ and the Man Born Blind.**

**Jesus heard that they had cast him out  
and when He had found him, He said to him:  
“Do you believe in the Son of God?” [35]**

It is clear that the Lord was looking for the man and wanted to find him. He did find him when the Pharisees had thrown him out and deprived him of being a member of God’s people.

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<sup>47</sup> Homilies on St John, 58:4

<sup>48</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44

<sup>49</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:15

His parents probably had refused to welcome him to their home for fear they would have the same treatment and fate. The God of the banished and abandoned found him. He is the Father of orphans and the advocate of widows. He is the One concerned about all those who have no one to look after them.

The Lord's words: **"Do you believe in the Son of God?"** are synonymous with 'Do you believe in the Messiah?' These are two inseparable elements (John 1:34, 49; 10:36; Matt 16:16; Mark 1:1).

**St. John Chrysostom** believes that the Lord Jesus Christ granted the man the yearning for Him before revealing Himself<sup>50</sup>, because He saw the blind man's courage and love of the truth. That is applicable to everyone who seriously seeks for the truth and is fearless in confronting falsehood. Through love, truth would consequently attract such a person and then reveal himself.

\* Those who undergo terrible persecutions and insults for the sake of the truth and for witnessing for the Lord and Messiah, receive special honor...

The Jews had cast him out of the temple and the Lord of the temple found him.  
He was isolated from destructive companionship and he met with the Source of salvation.  
He was humiliated by those who humiliated the Lord, so the Lord of hosts honored him.  
That is how the Truth grants rewards.

Similarly, when we relinquish the possessions of the world, we will truly gather confidence in the world to come. If we face troubles on earth, we will find rest in heaven. If we are insulted for the sake of God, we will be honored in this life and the one to come<sup>51</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**He answered and said:**

**"Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" [36]**

It is clear that the man had not seen the Lord until that time. However, he had heard His voice when the Lord ordered him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. Now, he discovered that he stood before the One who had healed him and so he believed in Him.

We do not hear of any dialogue between the man born blind and the Lord before he was healed. This is different than when the Lord healed the infirm man of Bethesda. Some explain this by stating that the blind man had not yet seen or heard of the Lord due to his extreme poverty and need to beg. No one had stopped to talk with him, or told him about the Lord Jesus Christ and His amazing deeds. That is why the Lord did not ask him the same question he put to the paraplegic: "Do you want to be healed?" When the blind man was deprived of human friends and suffered for his inferior status and isolation, the Lord came to satisfy his needs and to fill his depths with Divine Love.

Some thinkers confirm that the unbelief of the man born blind was not an intentional choice. It was the result of a lack of opportunity to hear and meet with the Lord. This is why,

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<sup>50</sup> Homilies on St John, 59:1

<sup>51</sup> Homilies on St John, 59:1

after he had been healed and gone through the many debates around him, and after being banished, the Lord found him. Then He asked him: **“Do you believe in the Son of God?”**[35]. The man’s answer revealed his yearning to have faith: **“Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?”** [36]

\* The man born blind asked the Lord: “Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?” because he had not yet recognized Him even though he had been healed by Him. Before he came to his Benefactor, he had been blind. That is why he did not respond and say immediately: ‘I believe.’ Instead his response came in the form of a question: “Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?” These are words that come from a soul that is eagerly yearning for the Lord.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘And Jesus said to him:**

**“You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you”** [37].

A person does not need to travel far in order to meet with the Lord Jesus Christ for the Lord is standing by and is very close. St. Paul accordingly says: “Do not say in your heart ‘...who will ascend into heaven?’- that is to bring Christ down from above- or ‘who will descend into the abyss?’- that is to bring Christ up from the dead-. But what does it say? “The word is near you” (Roman 10:6-8).

The Lord had opened the eyes of the blind man so that he may look and see Him. If receiving his sight brought joy to the man, then seeing the Son of God brought him a far greater joy. This was a joy that surpassed the gift of gaining his physical eyes. Seeing the Son of God brought a greater joy to his heart and was more than all the lights of the world could bring. Here we are, presently, enjoying inner insight and therefore seeing the Lord and comprehending the mystery of His being the only Son of God. Truly, we can join the Psalmist in praise and say:” in your light we see light” (Ps 36:9)

**Then he said:” Lord, I believe!” And he worshipped Him. [38]**

By saying: “I believe”, the man conveyed: ‘I believe that you are the Messiah.’ To prove his true faith, he fell and worshipped Him. He had not seen Him before, and he had met with the religious leaders who had strongly resisted the Lord. Yet he had experienced personally how his eyes had been opened. Therefore he believed in the Lord’s divinity, worshipped Him, and glorified Him as his Savior. His inner vision was opened and he became acquainted with the divine mysteries. In contrast, it was impossible for the members of the Sanhedrin to comprehend or believe these mysteries.

The man born blind believed and confessed his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. There was no need for discussions since he experienced this amazing divine miracle and had gained spiritual insight. He believed in his heart and confessed with his tongue before the Lord, before the people, and even before those who resisted the Lord. In this manner, the rejected reed became a tree planted in the spiritual waters and filled with fruit.

‘He worshipped Him’, and so honored Him in a manner that was different from simply thanking another person. He bowed before Him in a manner worthy of worshipping God. In this

way, he expressed his faith: by publicly and fearlessly witnessing; and by humbly worshipping God. John the Evangelist does not report anything more about this man after he had worshipped the Lord. Yet the words of the Lord indicate clearly that he had become perceptive, followed the light and lived accordingly.

The man born blind bowed down before the Lord and probably in the presence of the Pharisees. Therefore the Lord commented instantly before them about the fruit of His divine mission in this world. Some believe that this speech occurred in another meeting with the Pharisees and did not take place after the man had worshipped the Lord immediately.

The Lord Jesus Christ had come into the world as a Savior and not as a Judge. However, when the wicked non-believers reject His service they fall into condemnation. The Lord's divine mission has split humanity into two parties: one party admits its blindness and consequently believes and accepts the light; the other party believes that they can see already and consequently reject the faith. Rejection keeps them in the darkness while the work of the Messiah becomes a sentence condemning them. In this manner, the world is split into believers and non-believers: This is the clear line of thought in most of the Lord's speeches, which are recorded in this Gospel. His redeeming deeds or His preaching are the essence of life, while they bear the smell of death to the dead. A great light has shone over the Gentiles, granting them light and releasing them from slavery (Is 61:1); but Israel has been stricken with pride and due to its blindness has thrown itself into the circle of death.

\* With his face washed and his conscience purified, the man finally recognized the Lord. He knew Him not only as the Son of Man, according to his earlier knowledge, but as the Son of God who had taken on our body. **So he said, "Lord, I believe"...**<sup>52</sup>

**St. Augustine**

## **F- The Dialogue between the Lord and the Pharisees**

**And Jesus said:**

**"For judgment I have come into the world,  
that those who do not see may see,  
and that those who see may be made blind." [39]**

These were amazing moments that drew the attention of all those standing there. The crowds as well as the disciples and a few Pharisees were amazed as the man born blind bowed and worshipped the Lord Jesus Christ. He proclaimed his belief that the Lord is the Son of God. We believe that such a sight must have drawn the attention of the heavenly hosts as well as those who watched the faith of that person. He was true with himself and faced the resistance against the truth by the highest-ranking religious leaders. Such a sight brings joy to the Lord's heart because He desires everyone to enjoy the heavenly light; and not because He is in need of someone to witness for Him.

The Lord had previously proclaimed that He had not come into the world to condemn it, but had come to save it (John 3:17). By shining on those that are sitting in darkness, those

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<sup>52</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate, 44:15



enlightened by His light become a cause of condemnation to those who have loved the darkness more than the light (John 3:19). They condemn themselves because they stumble and fall into the ditch and because they are blind leaders of the blind (Matt 15:14)

The Gentiles who had been sitting in darkness for ages received the light of knowledge and true vision. However the Jews, who pretended to be the children of the light and the possessors of spiritual knowledge, abused God's longsuffering and mercy. They lost their redemption as they rejected it. They were stricken with spiritual blindness. The blind Gentile was able to become acquainted with the divine mysteries; while the Pharisees, who possessed knowledge, were ignorant of these mysteries. The man born blind had not read the Holy Books. He might have heard some Holy verses and stories about the history of salvation and simply and faithfully accepted the teachings. In contrast, these leaders had studied and researched these verses thoroughly and upheld some interpretations. However, they did not sincerely seek to know the truth. Therefore they were not qualified to comprehend the clear references to the Messiah.

The mystery behind their blindness lay in their arrogance and belief that they could see: they knew Moses and that they were his disciples; they knew the Sabbath and kept its laws; and they also knew that the man was completely born in sin.

\* A serious warning! **'Those who do not see may see,' [39].**

Great! This is the work of the Lord. It is a proclamation of the power of healing!

But what is it that you add in this verse, O Lord? **'Those who see may be made blind?'** [39] These are the Jews. Do they see? According to their claim, they do see; yet according to the truth, they do not see.

So how **may** they **see**? They imagined that they did. So they believed and imagined that they were protecting the law against the Lord Jesus Christ...those who did not admit their ignorance, became more hardened. Truly, the verse says: **'Those who see may be made blind.'** Indeed, those defenders of the law, the professors and teachers of the law and its interpreters crucified the Founder of the law.

O what blindness took hold of a part of Israel (Rom 11:25). What do these words mean: **'Those who do not see may see'**? 'Until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in', (Rom 11:25). The whole world has fallen into blindness, but the Lord has come **'that those who do not see may see and that those who see may be made blind'...**

What serious blindness? They killed the light, but the crucified light has enlightened the blind<sup>53</sup>!

\* Now is the daytime to make the distinction between the light and the darkness!<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 86:4

<sup>54</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:16

\* You have received the law, you want to keep it, yet you are unable to do so for you have fallen due to your pride and you see your weakness. Yearn for the Messiah, confess to him and believe. The spirit has been added to the letter of the law and by this you can be saved. If you tear away the spirit from the letter ‘the letter kills.’ If it is killed, then where is hope? As for the spirit, he gives life (2 Cor 3:6)

**St. Augustine**

**St. Augustine** makes a comparison between the letter and the spirit. The stick that Elijah gave to his servant Hegazi, when the widow’s son was dead, did not revive the dead except when Elijah himself came. The same applies to benefits of the law that we have received from God. We need God Himself to be present so that we may enjoy the power of the Resurrection<sup>55</sup>.

**Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him:**

**“Are we blind also?”[40]**

The Pharisees realized that the Lord was speaking about spiritual blindness. They therefore asked Him if He was directing his words at them. Their question was the result of their arrogant souls that could not enjoy the blessings of the grace of God.

They were preoccupied with their honor before the people. They wanted to appear as the ones who possessed knowledge and who occupied the academic seats. They considered the accusation of blindness- which was the result of their unwillingness to learn- to be a deadly stroke. They revealed their inner blindness through their words ‘**Are we blind also?**’ They revealed what lay in their depths as they considered all the people to be blind. That the Lord would include them among the blind people was something that had not occurred to them. They considered that He had humiliated them and committed an unforgivable mistake. They were not accustomed to hear any criticism from any one.

\* The words of the Pharisees to the Lord: “...are we blind also” echo their words in another verse: “... we are Abraham’s descendants and have never been in bondage to anyone. We were not born in fornication” (John 8:33-41). This was similar to the response here.

**Chrysostom.**

**Jesus said to them:**

**“If you were blind, you would have no sin;**

**but now you say “We see” therefore your sin remains.” [41]**

Had they admitted their ignorance, they would not have fallen into condemnation. However, their mouths testified against them since they claimed they had vision, were able to comprehend the truth, and could distinguish it from falsehood. They claimed to have vision, saw divine truth, and understood the law and the prophets. Consequently, they isolated themselves and their sin remained.

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<sup>55</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 86:5



## Inspired by Chapter 9

### O Lord, Grant Me Inner Vision!

- \* Your eyes behold me lovingly, as to someone born blind!  
We have inherited a blind vision from our father Abraham;  
Therefore we no longer enjoy the beauty of your brilliance!
- \* There are many, even among those who surround you, who condemn me!  
But because of your love, you pray for the healing of my heart and its vision.  
You are the day that does not cease to work; you are the light that dissipates the  
darkness within me!  
May you shine upon me so that I may become the child of the day.  
May my eyes never experience sun set O Sun of Righteousness!
- \* You are the Creator and you have formed me from the earth with mud.  
You grant vision to my eyes.  
Through your word, I come to you, for you are 'Siloam' the 'Sent' from the Father.  
I wash in your blood, consequently my vision is enlightened.  
I see the gates of heaven opened and welcoming me!
- \* My soul is heavy from constant discussions with friend and stranger.  
There are no more places in my heart for more words.  
Your deeds are fully appeasing and witness to your divine power,  
Your practical love silences rebellious tongues!  
Your light shines within me, it cannot be overcome by the powers of darkness.
- \* With the man born blind, I do not fear expulsion  
When all reject me, you appear to me,  
When I am cast out  
I find you bearing the Cross outside the gates.  
You are the God of the banished and the rejected.
- \* May they all be engaged in lengthy talks,  
But I will bow and worship before you,  
And enjoy the fellowship of your brilliance and the everlasting gladness of Your heavens!

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## The Good Shepherd

The Lord's discourse on the good shepherd takes place after the healing of the man born blind. The Lord reveals the clear difference between the shepherd who cares for his sheep and the hired servants. In other words, He indicates the difference between the Lord Jesus Christ who yearns to deliver mankind and the Pharisees who are preoccupied with their personal honor, authority and profit.

In the previous chapter, the Lord reveals how much He wishes to grant to every soul the gift of vision thus enabling it to become acquainted with the truth. And what is the truth other than comprehending that He incarnates the Word of God, and is the good Shepherd who sacrifices Himself for the sake of His sheep? This chapter is considered as the extension of the Lord's discourse with the Pharisees. The Pharisees had displayed at the end of the previous chapter great hostility towards the Lord. They opposed Him as they considered that they were the teachers and shepherds of God's church. Hence there was no place for the One who had broken the law among them. They demanded the people not to follow Him because He had not been sent by God. The discourse in this chapter reveals those groups: The real shepherds, the hired servants, and the thieves that hide under the guise of shepherds.

### **The Lord Jesus Christ Satisfies All Our Needs**

The Jews who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ were banished from the Sanhedrin. They no longer had any right to enter the temple, to participate in Jewish worship, or practice the rites pertaining to purification and feasts, etc.... Therefore this Gospel intends to proclaim that the Lord Jesus Christ satisfies all the needs of those cast outside the temple. In Him, they can fulfill all their needs, for He has come to replace the authority of all Jewish institutions and the privileges attached to them. He does so in a supremely divine manner.

**John 1:** The Jews take pride in Moses, the recipient of the law. As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He is the Word, who is with the Father and One with Him: He grants grace upon grace.

**John 2:** The Jews take pride in the rites of purification according to the law. As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He transforms the waters of purification into a new and unique wine.

**John 5:** The Jews boast of literally observing the Sabbath. As for Jesus Christ, He proclaimed that the true Sabbath is observed when He does the work of God the Father, (John 5:16-18).

**John 6:** The Jews boast that their fathers ate the heavenly manna in the wilderness. As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He is the real Passover, the heavenly manna who saves mankind from the waters (He walked on the water in the same manner as when He crossed the Red Sea with His people).

**John 7-8:** On the Feast of the Tabernacles, He offered Himself as the living water and the true light.

**John 10:** Instead of the Feast of Dedication, He offered Himself since the Father had consecrated Him to bring salvation to the world.

The Evangelist presents this eighth discourse by the Lord Jesus Christ as He focuses on His sacrificial care. It comes right after the healing of the man born blind who had then been banished from the Sanhedrin. The real disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ is banished from the Jewish fold or from the literal slavery to the law. Therefore he enjoys membership in the Lord's fold (because his eyes have been opened to behold the mysteries of the kingdom).

|                                          |              |
|------------------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>1- The Good Shepherd</b>              | <b>1-21</b>  |
| <b>2- Union with the Father</b>          | <b>22-39</b> |
| <b>3- The Lord at the Baptismal font</b> | <b>40-41</b> |

### **1- The Good Shepherd**

In this parable the Jewish nation appears as a fold of sheep, [1]. The Lord Jesus Christ is the good Shepherd who comes through the door designed for that purpose (through the door of the prophecies) and to care for the sheep. The Holy Spirit opens the door to Him and the real fold responds to Him. He heals their eyes and they behold the Shepherd. He leads the fold away from the literal law [3], from apostasy, and from unbelief. At the same time, those who adhere to the literal interpretation of the law reject Him, [4, and 5].

**In this parable, we distinguish the following:**

- A. The Lord Jesus Christ, and not the law, is the door to the fold. He is the new Door [7].
- B. All the literally minded Jewish leaders who reject the Lord are thieves, [8].
- C. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Savior who sacrifices himself, [9, and 10].
- D. The Lord is a sacrifice of love and dies on behalf of His fold, [11-15].

The good Shepherd has another fold that consists of the Gentiles. These will be embraced with the Jewish believers and the Lord will gather and form them all into one fold, which is the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 4:4-6).

E. This one fold will interact with the unique sacrifice and voluntary death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Lack of faith results in failure: failure to offer anything other than confusion and wicked blasphemy.

**“Most assuredly, I say to you,  
he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door,  
but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber,” [1]**

The sheep enter the sheepfold at night. Usually this is built close to the shepherd's house. The sheepfold has one door and it is watched by the guard. Therefore anyone who intends to steal has to creep in by jumping over the wall of the sheepfold.

The Lord Jesus Christ describes Himself as the shepherd who cares for his sheep. The Church in this world is like a pasture that embraces within it the sheep scattered abroad (John 11:52). Within the Church, the sheep are united as one holy fold that is guarded by the holy shepherd. Because of His care, He becomes as a fiery wall protecting them (Zech 2:5). The use of the fold as a symbol for the Church is relevant as the sheep bear the features of meekness, calmness, and submissiveness as they come into the shepherd's embrace. They also adhere to one another.

The Lord Jesus Christ presents this analogy because sheep, characteristically, are unable to defend themselves against any attack. They depend fully on the care and vigilance of their shepherd. They also depend on getting their food and drink from the shepherd who leads them. Even in countries that enjoy heavy rainfall, sheep need someone to lead them for long periods to the drinking spots. They do not search on their own. Besides, they do not begin to enter into the sheepfold, even if they are pursued by danger and threatened by savage beasts, unless the shepherd leads with one or two other sheep and enters through the door. Then the rest would follow behind him or behind these sheep.

\* Dear holy brothers and sisters, we could meet any of these three personalities and we need to determine which are the ones whom we love, the ones we ought to tolerate, and those we should be cautious of. Indeed, the shepherd is to be loved, the hired slave is to be tolerated, and the thief is to be watched and not trusted.<sup>1</sup>

**St. Augustine**

\* Note the characteristics of the thief: first, he enters unannounced. Second, he does not enter according to the Holy Books, for this does not interest him, **“He does not enter the sheepfold by the door”**, [1]. Here, the reference is to those who came before and to those who will come after Him: the anti-Christ and the pretentious Messiahs, such as Theudas and Judas (Acts 5:36) and those like them.

The word **‘door’** in the Lord's words **“(those) who do not enter the sheepfold by the door”** refers to the Holy Books. These are the doors that bring us to God. His Word opens to us the way to be acquainted with God, protecting us and preventing wolves to enter in. As a door, the entrance is shut in the face of newsmongers and maintains us from their deceptions. Indeed, we are embraced so that we do not get deceived. Through the holy Word we get to know the shepherd, and recognize those who are not. That explains why the Lord told the Jews: “you search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; these are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39). This indicates that Moses and all the prophets are witnesses; and the Lord adds: “All those who listen to the prophets come to Me” and “if you believed in Moses, you would believe Me.”..He clearly uses the word ‘climbs’ (goes up) rather than the word ‘enters’ since climbing is the act of a thief who intends to jump over the wall. A thief does so even though it exposes him to danger.<sup>2</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 87:5

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John, 59:2

\* They proclaimed that they were not blind. In spite of that, they could really have possessed sight only if they had become part of the Lord's fold.

How could they claim to see the light whereas they acted as thieves who oppose the light? It is due to their falsehood, pride and excessive haughtiness. That is why the Lord speaks these words. We too are intended to receive valuable lessons from this discourse as we keep the Lord's words in our hearts and think about them. In the daily stream of life, there are many who are generally perceived as righteous good men, women, and innocent people. Those who keep the commandments, honor their parents, refrain from adultery, do not kill or steal, do not witness wrongly against anyone, and obey all the other requirements of the law. Yet these are not Christians and they arrogantly ask: "Are we blind also?"...

They work with no goal in mind, and they do not enter from the door leading to the sheepfold.

The atheists might say: 'We live uprightly.'

Yet, if they do not enter through the door, what good intentions are they displaying and how could they be so arrogant?...

No one can hope to have a good life if he lacks knowledge of life, that is if we do not know the Lord Jesus Christ and if we do not enter the sheepfold through the door!<sup>3</sup>

\* There are philosophers who present excellent discourses on virtues and failings. They distinguish between them and provide their definitions. They conclude by presenting a logical and accurate chain. They fill up books and protect their wisdom by giving long talks. They boldly ask people to follow them and to join their team if they wanted to live happily. However, they do not enter through the door. Such people intend to destroy, kill and murder<sup>4</sup>.

\* Can a Pharisee utter anything righteous?

The Pharisee is a thorn, so how can we harvest grapes out of a thorn (Matt 7:16; 12:33).

O Lord, that is why You have said: "Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works (Matt 23:3).

Do you order me to gather grapes out of thorns when you tell me: "Do they reap grapes from thorns?" The Lord answers you and says: "I do not order you to gather grapes from thorns, but to look and notice well, for often when the grapes hang above the ground they could be entangled with the thorns." My brethren, sometimes we find a vine that has been planted but is surrounded with thorns, and so its branches become entangled with them. The one who wishes to gather grapes does not gather it from the thorns but from the vine that is entangled with them.

In the same manner, the Pharisees were full of thorns. Yet because they occupied the seat of Moses they were surrounded by the vine and the grapes. These are the good words and

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<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:2

<sup>4</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 45:3



commandments hanging from them. May you gather grapes without being pricked by the thorns? When you read “Whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works”, be careful for if you do what they do, then know that you will be pricked by the thorns. Therefore in order to reap grapes without getting hurt by the thorns, “... observe and do what they say, but do not do according to their works.”

Their acts were the thorns and their words were the grapes. Yet, the source of the grapes is the vine, which is the seat of Moses<sup>5</sup>!

\* My conscience is not at ease on account of your praise, for how can you praise what you cannot see?

Yes, may God Almighty, who sees, praise me. Yes, May God mend whatever He finds in me that is displeasing in His sight.

I do not claim to be wholly perfect. I beat upon my chest and pray God: “Have mercy and let me not sin.” I believe that I speak in His presence and pray for your salvation. I ask nothing of you. I constantly rebuke the faults and sins of my brethren; I bear difficulties; my mind torments me; and I constantly reproach but I encourage them as well. All those who remember my words are witnesses that I rebuke those who commit sin without causing any distress<sup>6</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“But he who enters by the door  
Is the shepherd of My sheep.” [2]**

The shepherd of the sheep is the owner of the sheep. He cares for each one of them and brings them into the sheepfold through the door because he possesses authority. He enters inside to help them all: “I will feed My flock and I will make them to lie down,” says the Lord God. “I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong and feed them in Judgment” ( Ez 34:15-16).

**“To him the doorkeeper opens  
And the sheep hear his voice  
And he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” [3]**

\* We do not commit a big mistake when we assume that Moses is the doorkeeper for he was entrusted with keeping the teachings of God<sup>7</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* May we not be confused in understanding His words, my brethren. He does carry the symbols of both the door and the doorkeeper. For what does the door indicate? It is the way to enter in. And what does the doorkeeper represent? He is the one who opens the door. Therefore who is the One who opens it other than He Himself in order to be revealed and seen?<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 87:13

<sup>6</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 87:14

<sup>7</sup> Homilies on St John, 59:3

<sup>8</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 46: 4

St. Augustine.

**“And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them  
And the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.” [4]**

The good Shepherd does not send his sheep into a field where there are no wolves. Indeed, He stresses that He sends them ‘in the midst of wolves’ (Matt 10:16). Therefore, He goes before them so that if the wolves attack they would be attacking Him; and He would transform them into gentle sheep. The Lord has gone before His sheep to the pasture of the Cross and of sufferings so that the sheep would not fear the road leading to Golgotha. Therefore, they will not fear death and for as long as they are in the company of the Crucified Lord.

\* The shepherds would be doing the opposite of that if they were to walk at the back of their flock. However, the Lord indicates in this passage that He is the One who leads His followers to the truth.

St. John Chrysostom

**“Yet they will by no means follow a stranger,  
But will flee from him,  
For they do not know the voice of strangers.” [5]**

The sheep, who are unreasoning creatures, know their owner and adhere to him. Because they do not know the voice of strangers, they flee from them. Accordingly, the Bible says: “The Ox knows its owner” (Is 1:3)

**Jesus used this illustration,  
But they did not understand the things which He spoke to them. [6]**

**St. John Chrysostom** comments that the Lord used this verse to indicate the distinction between Himself and the false Messiahs. He attempted to clarify this in every possible way.

**First:** His teachings from the Holy Books testify to Him. Conversely, false Messiahs attracted people away from God’s word.

**Second:** The sheep obey Him, as they believe in Him. They did so, not only when He walked on earth, but also after His death and ascension into the heavens. Conversely, false Messiahs are forsaken by the sheep. This is what happened to Thaeudas and Judas: their followers ‘were scattered’ (Acts 5:36).

**Third:** False leaders act like rebels and they cause upheavals. Conversely, when they sought to crown the Lord as king, He disappeared from among them. They then asked Him if it was right to pay taxes to Caesar. He ordered them to pay and He Himself paid taxes (Matt 22:17).

**Fourth:** The Lord Jesus Christ came to save the sheep, grant them life, and so ‘may have it abundantly’ [10]. In contrast, false teachers deprive the sheep from enjoying even this temporal life; for they flee to save themselves in times of danger.

The Jews did not understand the implications of the Lord’s parable. They neither

understood that He is the good Shepherd, nor that the hired servants were those who seek their personal profit rather than that of the sheep. Besides, the thieves are those who seek personal honor even if that results in the death of the flock.

The Pharisees were unable to understand the Lord's words. They were the ones who claimed to be the teachers of the people. They claimed they possessed knowledge and did not need to learn anything. They held in their hands the Word of God, yet they misinterpreted it due to the hardness of their hearts and the blindness of their inner vision.

**Then Jesus said to them again,  
“Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep” [7]**

The Lord is the door of the pasture, the door of the Church. He closes the door not with the intention of imprisoning the sheep, but with the intention of protecting them from wolves, thieves and so that they may not perish. He is the wisdom, the power and the righteousness. He who enters through the door enters into the Lord's embrace and enjoys all these gifts. He is the door that is closed to wolves; yet He is the door of love that is open to allow the sheep to enter and go out to meet with Him in the fellowship of brotherly love. That is why the Lord calls Himself 'the door of the sheep.' A wolf cannot pass through Him (the door) unless he becomes transformed into a real lamb.

He is the royal and divine Door that allows us to enter before the divine throne and enjoy the heavenly life.

It is astonishing that the Shepherd was treated as a thief. They came to Him carrying swords and clubs in order to capture Him (Matt 26:55). They did so because He had not entered through those thieves and hungry wolves and He had not taken their permission before ministering to the people. Instead of being His disciples and following in the way of the spirit, they expected Him to be their disciple. They expected Him to follow their spirit, which opposed divine truth and real shepherding love.

When the Lord leads us to the Father, He calls Himself 'the door.' When He watches over us, He calls Himself 'the Shepherd.' So that we might not think that His sole mission is to bring us to the Father, He calls Himself 'the Shepherd'<sup>9</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord Jesus Christ is everything: all the names are appropriate: He is everything that He proclaims<sup>10</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

\* To those who need joy, He becomes a vine. To those who need to enter, He stands as a Door<sup>11</sup>.  
**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

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<sup>9</sup> Homilies on St John, 59:3

<sup>10</sup> Commentarium in Joannem 1.PG 14: 50 S 9

<sup>11</sup> Catech. 10. Pg 33: 665B

\* He Himself is the door. Let us come and get acquainted with Him. Let us enter and rejoice that we are truly in Him<sup>12</sup>.

\* The prophets came before Him: so were they thieves and burglars? God forbid. They did not come as distinct beings from Him for they came with Him. When He came, He sent missionaries yet He occupied their hearts. Do you wish to know how they came with Him who is ever present? Surely He became incarnated in the fullness of time, but what does 'ever present' mean? 'In the beginning was the Word' (John 1:1). Those who carried the Word of God came with Him. The Lord said: "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). Since He is the truth, then those who came with Him are truthful. However, there are many who by separating themselves from Him are thieves and burglars. In others words, they came to steal and destroy!<sup>13</sup>

\* **'...But the sheep did not hear them'**: this is a point of great importance. Before the Lord came to earth, for He humbly came in the flesh, righteous people heard Him and believed that he would come in exactly the same manner by which He came to us.

Times change yet faith does not...there are changing times, yet there is one Door to true faith. That Door is the Lord Jesus Christ, and we see both past and all present believers entering through Him....

The apostle says: "... and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor 10:4). Notice how the faith remained unchanged, but the signs have changed. In the past, the Rock was Christ, whereas for us Christ is on God's altar... many believed in the past - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, all the other patriarchs and prophets- all these prophesied concerning the Messiah. These are the sheep that heard the Lord. They heard only the Lord's voice and not that of anyone else<sup>14</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**"All who ever came before me are thieves and robbers,  
But the sheep did hear them" [8]**

\*The Lord here is not speaking about the prophets as the heretics claim. Many who had believed in the Messiah had listened to the prophets and were convinced by them. The Lord is speaking here about Thaeudas and Judas as well as others who incited rebellion. It may seem as though the Lord was praising the fact that **"The sheep did not hear them" [8]**. Yet nowhere do we hear the Lord praising those who did not listen to the prophets. On the contrary, He reproaches and severely condemns them. He says, "The sheep did not hear them" as He is referring to the trouble making leaders<sup>15</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**"I am the door.  
If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.'**

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<sup>12</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 45:8

<sup>13</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 45:8

<sup>14</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 45:9

<sup>15</sup> Homilies on St John, 59:3

He who enters the pasture through the Lord, the divine Door, not only escapes from thieves and burglars, but also enjoys real liberty. He enters and leaves with full freedom. He enters into the Father's embrace to enjoy His divine fatherhood. He leaves to go into the world in the company of the incarnate Son in order to witness to the divine love, and to attract many others to the divine pasture. He redeems and guides many, through the Spirit, to God who is their salvation. Consequently, He rejoices and is glad with them; and all become filled from the pasture of love: they enjoy the promise of glory and look forward to the day of the Lord. They will have fellowship in the glory of God for they have been saved from the teeth of the lion. They will consequently live in supreme happiness.

The sheep enter through the door and find themselves in the Lord's embrace and feel they are in their Father's house. These are neither strange nor evil sheep. These are the owners of the house who move in complete freedom. When they come in they settle down as though in their father's home. They are able to move about freely and when they come in they settle down as they would in their own homes. In fact, they would have gone out to work for a while, yet only to return and rest!

\* The Lord explains that "...the sheep find safety and security. He uses the word 'pasture' to indicate his care, His provision of food and His power and authority over them. The sheep remain inside the sheepfold and no one can cast them out. This is what happened to the disciples for they entered and went out and became leaders to the whole world. We find that no one could cast them out<sup>16</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

He is not just '**a way**' among many other ways; the Lord is the only way that leads us to the embrace of the Father. In this sense He is the Door and we cannot enter into heaven through any door other than through Him: He is the only Door.

\* Let us elevate our thoughts above those of the Jews. They admit in their teaching that there is one God. Yet what does this mean when they deny Him and they worship idols? They also reject God as being the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this way, they contradict their prophets who confirm this in the Holy Books. The holy Word says: "The Lord has said to Me "you are My Son: Today I have begotten you" (Ps 2:7).

Until today, the Jews collectively set themselves against the Lord and against His anointed (Ps 2:2). They believe they can have the Father as their friend while they separate and neglect to worship the Son. They disregard the principle that no one comes to the Father except through the Son who says "**I am the way...**" (John 10:9; 14:6)

Therefore how can the person who rejects the door that leads to the Father and denies the door qualify to enter in the presence of God (the Father)? They contradict the words of Psalm 88 which say: 'He shall cry to Me 'You are My Father, My God and the Rock of My salvation.' Also 'I will make him My first born, the highest of the kings of the earth', (Ps 89:26, 27)

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<sup>16</sup> Homilies on St John, 59:3

## St Cyril of Jerusalem

\* Truly, we believe that we enter into the sheepfold when we become engaged in training our inner thoughts; and we go out when we get engaged in work outside it. The apostle accordingly states that the Lord enters into our hearts through faith (Eph 3:17).

We enter into the Lord means that we submit ourselves to that good faith and wisdom; and with that same faith we go out with the Lord and work with others in the world. The Psalmist says: 'Man goes out to his work...' (Ps 104:23); the Lord Himself says: "Let your light so shine before men" (Matt 5:16). We believe that the Lord implies that the faithful would lead a blessed life inside the sheepfold as well as an even more blessed life outside... since no one can go out through the door- that is through the Lord Jesus Christ and go towards that eternal life which lies ahead - unless he enters the church through that same door or that same Lord Jesus Christ. This is where his flock lives in this temporary life, which is endured through faith<sup>17</sup>.

\* "...and find pasture" refers to both situations: inside and outside: the faithful will find true pasture as He satisfies those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. This pasture can be found through the One who said: "Today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43)<sup>18</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* The faithful sheep enter to find faith; and progress from faith towards vision. They move from belief to meditation and find pasture (food) to eternal nourishment.

His flock will find pasture because everyone who follows Him with a pure and innocent heart will be refreshed with eternal food.

What do the pastures of these flocks indicate other than the eternal joys of Paradise, which are constantly green?

The pastures where the chosen ones feed are found in the presence of God Himself. When we see Him, our hearts are filled with the food of life to the end.

Those who avoid and escape from the traps of temporary pleasures rejoice in these pastures of eternal perfection. There, the Heavenly hosts sing praise and there the faithful join the heavenly dwellers<sup>19</sup>.

**St. Gregory the Elder**

**"The thief does not come except to steal and to kill and to destroy.  
come that they may have life,  
may have it more abundantly." [10]**

**I have  
And that they**

Deceitful shepherds are the thieves. They do not enter through the door of love but with a deceitful spirit and with wicked intentions. By their deceit, they kill and destroy souls. Whereas, the shepherd offers a better life; the thief is engaged in the killing and murdering of souls. Entering stealthily into the sheepfold causes death; whereas the coming of the good Shepherd,

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<sup>17</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 45:15

<sup>18</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 45:15

<sup>19</sup> Hom 15. Forty Gospel Homilies. PL 76:1127

the incarnate Word, grants eternal life.

The Shepherd has come to His flock in this world in order to redeem, sanctify, and glorify them. He does so to restore to them the life they have lost. They will not return to the condition they were in before sin; for they will find the richness of eternal life, which is invincible by death. That is why the Lord says: **“more abundantly.”**

\* If you asked ‘Tell me, what could be better than life?’ Our answer would be: ‘The heavenly kingdom.’ However, the Lord until that point in time had not used these words but repeatedly used the word ‘life’ since it was the clearest thing known to His hearers<sup>20</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* **“I have come that they may have life”**: That is the faith that works through love (Gal 5:6). **“And that they may have it more abundantly”**: refers to those who patiently endure to the end. They will then go out through that same door: that is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. As true believers they will die and attain a better life when go to the place where the Shepherd abides and where they will die no more<sup>21</sup>.

\* If we consider the world as a great home, then we perceive the heavens as a dome and the earth as a road or passage. The Lord wishes to save us from earthly matters and so say with the apostle: “we are citizens of heaven.” Adherence to earthly matters results in the death of the soul. This is contrary to the life for which we pray and say: “Let me live”!

**St. Augustine**

**“I am the good Shepherd.**

**The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep.” [11]**

The prophets of the Old Testament foresaw the Lord Jesus Christ as the good Shepherd (Is 40:11; Ez 34:23; 37:24; Zech 13:7). The disciples experienced Him as the bishop of our souls (1 Peter 2:25), as the Chief of the Shepherds (1 Peter 5:4), and as the Great Shepherd (Heb 13:20).

That explains why the title of ‘the Good Shepherd’ holds a special attractive power for Christians throughout all generations. Even to those who have not seen shepherds in their lives, yet they feel the warmth of His shepherding and care. Just as the flock of sheep cannot face life without its shepherd, so do Christians feel when they face wickedness and the evil world: they look to the divine Shepherd who protect them from evil, satisfies their needs, and leads them to the pastures of Paradise.

By saying **“I Am...”** the Lord is using the theological language. “I am Jehovah” for He is the only and unique divine Shepherd.

The Greek word for ‘good’ is ‘*kalas*’ and it differs from other Greek words that are also translated as ‘good.’ For example, ‘good’ is also used to translate these Greek words: ‘*agathos*’

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<sup>20</sup> Homilies on St John, 59:3

<sup>21</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 45:15

which indicates an inner staircase; ‘*dikaïos*’ which indicates an upright person. However, the word ‘*kolas*’- according to Abbot Smith’s Lexicon- indicates a goodness that has a special form as it is combined with beauty. E.V. Rieu has translated the expression: ‘I am the good Shepherd’ into ‘I am the beautiful Shepherd.’ In any case, the expression ‘the good shepherd’ is an endearing one, for it conveys a goodness that appeals to the flock. Besides feeling the goodness of the Lord’s care, the flock also enjoys His attractive presence or their attraction to Him<sup>22</sup>.

The care of ‘the good Shepherd’ is unique in quality. It involves not only good care, as the Shepherd is preoccupied with His sheep. It is as though He has nothing else to do in heaven and on earth but to care for them. He not only cares for each soul and especially the one that is gone astray; but He does what is even greater for ‘**He gives His life for the sheep.**’

In the region of Palestine, the shepherds were endangered because of thieves and savage animals. David was faced by a lion and a bear when he was young and watching over his sheep (1 Sam 17:34-36). Amos, the prophet, tells us about the shepherd who saved two legs or a piece of ear from the lion’s mouth (Amos 3:12). At the time of the early fathers, we hear Jacob telling his uncle: “...that which was torn by the beast I did not bring to you: I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, whether stolen by day or stolen by night” (Gen 31:39). That reveals how the work of shepherding involves dangers. However, we never hear of a shepherd who willingly goes to his death for the sake of his flock. It is true that he would be exposed to death but it is for his personal benefit, and as the owner of the sheep rather than for the sake of his flock. In contrast, the good Shepherd willingly and happily faced death to save each lamb of his flock.

The good Shepherd sacrificed Himself in order to offer to us His precious Blood. With that Blood, we may wash our souls and get cleaned of all sins as well as drink it as the mystery of eternal life. The amazing thing is that the Shepherd grants His faithful servants the joy of serving and therefore to spend and be spent (2 Cor 12:15). They do so for the sake of the people and in just the same manner endured by the apostle St Paul.

### **The Analogy between the Lord Jesus Christ and the Shepherd**

The Lord did not choose randomly the figure of the Shepherd as an analogy for Himself, for this carries important meanings:

**First:** The shepherd wears **cheap clothes** when he watches over his sheep even though he may own the flock and however big it is. He does so because he often sits on the ground and his sheep surround him. He also carries in his hands the wounded or unsteady ones, which might be covered with dirt. Similarly, the incarnate divine Word came to share our earth, carry us in His hands. Moreover, He acted as a substitute for us and bore our sins in order to atone for them.

**Second:** To watch over his flock, the shepherd **walks before his sheep** so that they would follow him. Similarly, our Savior opened the way to heaven by passing through the cross. He did so in order to enable us to share in His sufferings and consequently enjoy fellowship in His glory.

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<sup>22</sup> cf Leon Morris, p 377



**Third:** The shepherd often holds **a shepherd's cane** which is shaped as a U at the top. This is intended to lift a lamb if it falls into a hole. Similarly, the Lord holds His Cross, which symbolizes every manner of divine tenderness, and which also indicates the severity and punishment necessary for our constant progress.

**Fourth:** A shepherd often seeks the shade at noontime and sits and **plays on his flute** while the sheep gather around him. One of the features of the shepherd is his joy amid the troubles and heat of temptations. Similarly, we find in our Shepherd the source of real joy.

**Fifth:** The shepherd is intensely concerned about **one lost sheep** more than the remaining ninety-nine. He does not rest until he brings it back to the fold (Matt 18:12-14; Luke 15:3-7).

\* **'I am the good Shepherd'**: the Lord speaks here about suffering and underlines that it brings salvation to the world. He was not obliged to come; therefore He presents the model of the shepherd and the hired servant once more<sup>23</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom.**

\* The Lord speaks of Himself as the **'Shepherd.'** He also says that He is the **'Door.'** Both are mentioned in the same place: "I am the Door" and "I am the good Shepherd." At the head, He is the door and in the body [7, 11]... He is the Shepherd...the one who enters through the door is the Shepherd; whereas the one who goes through another way is a thief and burglar who misguides, scatters, and destroys. Who is the one who enters through the door? He is the one who enters through the Lord Jesus Christ. Who is that one? He is that person who emulates the Lord's sufferings...<sup>24</sup>

\* Were the (apostles) shepherds? They definitely were shepherds. So how can there be one shepherd? As we have stated earlier, **they were shepherds as they were members of the Shepherd.** The rejoiced in that Head and under His Head, they enjoyed full harmony together. They lived with one Spirit and in unity with one Body. Therefore they all belonged as members of that one Shepherd<sup>25</sup>.

\*What is the meaning, therefore, of presenting the only good Shepherd to the good shepherds, other than teaching the concept of unity in the good Shepherd? The Lord has clarified this meaning throughout His service. Here we remind you, our beloved ones, of the Gospel words: "Listen to what I present of you: I have told you **"I am the good Shepherd"** because all the others- the good shepherds- are My members." One Head, one Body, one Savior. This applies to everyone who embraces the shepherds, and the shepherds of the Shepherd, and the flock under their care.

This is exactly what the apostle says in 1 Cor. 12:12: "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ." Therefore, this is all about the Lord Jesus Christ: for a good cause, He embraces within

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<sup>23</sup> Hom 59. PG 59:349

<sup>24</sup> Sermon on N T Lessons, 87:3,4

<sup>25</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 46: 7

Himself all the good shepherds. They constitute the One who says: “I am the good Shepherd.’ I alone and all the others with Me are united together.

He who shepherds without Me, shepherds against Me: “He who does not gather with Me scatters abroad” (Matt 12:30). Let us hear how this unity has brought greater strength, for He says: **“And other sheep I have which are not of this fold”, [16]**<sup>26</sup>.

\* We ask and implore you, in the name of His saints, to love the Church as in a marital relationship. Love the good Shepherd for the Bride is most beautiful. She never deceives anyone and does not seek to destroy anyone. Also pray for the scattered sheep: that they may come and get to know Him; that they may love Him and **become one flock under one Shepherd**<sup>27</sup>.

St. Augustine

\* How could I not love you who have loved me so greatly? Although I am black, **you have laid down your life for the sake of your sheep** (John 15:13). You are their Shepherd.

No one has greater love than this; for you have sacrificed your life to grant me salvation.

Tell me, then, where is your pasture? When I find the pasture of your salvation, I will be filled with the heavenly food. Without this no one can attain eternal life. When I run to you, O Divine Source, I will drink for you have made it to overflow in order to water and refresh all who come to you.

Upon striking your side with the sword, water and blood gushed out immediately (John 19:34). Whoever drinks from it becomes a source of living water springing up into eternal life (John 4:14).

As you shepherd me, I will rest peacefully during noontime and in the light where there is no shade. There is no shade at noon for me as the sun sends its rays straight downwards. Yet you will make the light of noontime a comfort to those you feed and **you will gather your children in your bed** (Luke 11:7).

No one deserves to rest at noontime except the Son of light and day (1 Thes. 5:5). The person, who has separated himself from the darkness of the night until the dawn, will rest at noontime with the Son of righteousness (Matt 4:2)<sup>28</sup>.

St. Gregory of Nicea

**“But he who is a hireling and not the shepherd,  
One who does not own the sheep,  
Sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees;  
The wolf catches the sheep and scatters them.” [12]**

This flock is exposed to savage wolves that deceive, capture and destroy (Act 20:29). It is

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<sup>26</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 88:5

<sup>27</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 88:10

<sup>28</sup> Song of Songs: St Gregory of Nicea. Translated into Arabic: Dr George Nawar, 1993, Sermon 2

also exposed to thieves who capture the sheep to offer them as sacrifices to the enemy of goodness; or who steal their food. Often the wolves appear in sheep's clothing (Matt 7:15)

In both verses 12 and 13, the Lord tells us about careless shepherds. He calls them 'hirelings' because they serve in return for money or reward and not out of true love for God's people. Their greed for money or for food is what drives them to shepherding. Truly, those who serve the altar eat of the altar; those who preach the Bible also live by it. However, their hearts are concerned with the salvation of souls and not with what they could gather as a reward for their ministry.

\* The Lord proclaims that He is just as His Father. He, like Him, is the Shepherd and the sheep belong to Him<sup>29</sup>.

### St. John Chrysostom

The hireling who flees upon seeing a wolf and abandons the flock commits a mistake. The 'Mishnah' states that the shepherd is obligated to face one wolf, yet vindicates him if he is faced by two or more wolves since he cannot deal with such a situation. As a hireling he has no obligation to protect the flock, if he were attacked by two or more wolves, since his life would be exposed to danger.

\* The hireling works as long as he does not see a wolf approaching, and as long as he does not see a thief or a burglar. However he escapes as soon as he catches sight of any of these...

Hirelings ascend through another path... for they ascend an account of their pride...

Those who are not in union with the (Church) have another path: they are arrogant and seek to corrupt the flock.

Now note how they ascend. They state: we are the ones who sanctify, absolve, and choose the righteous...

The wolf is the devil that lies down and waits to deceive. His followers are also deceivers. It has been truly said that they wear sheep's clothing; while they are intrinsically savage wolves (Matt 7:15).

The hireling may find a person engaged in evil conversation, or in soul destructive emotions, or in corrupt and defiling acts; and yet he says nothing to him- such as 'you are committing sin', or reprimanding him in order to save him from losing what is good for his soul. Strangely, that hireling seems to be an important influential person in the Church (who expects to receive benefits since he is a hireling). We believe that this is the meaning of **"the hireling when he sees the wolf coming (he) leaves the sheep and flees**. He does not even tell the wrongdoer: "You act wickedly." This does not constitute merely taking physical flight but a flight of the soul. The one we see physically standing there has, in this situation, escaped in his heart. Seeing a wrongdoer and not telling him "You are committing sin" indicates condoning and agreeing

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<sup>29</sup> Homilies on St John, 59:3

with that person's acts<sup>30</sup>.

\* The hireling here does not possess a good character. However, he is useful in other ways or he would not be called a hireling. Neither would he have received a wage from his employer. Therefore who is that hireling who is blamed and yet is useful too? There are some who serve in the church and St. Paul tells us the following about them: "...for all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:21). What does 'seek their own' imply? It refers to those who do not love the Lord unconditionally; for they seek temporal benefits and profits, and lust to be honored by men.

\* There are hirelings among us too. Yet only God knows about them for He examines and reveals what is in their hearts<sup>31</sup>.

\* Let us be aware of the fact that even hirelings are useful. It is true that there are many within the church who seek earthly benefit. However, they also preach about the Lord Jesus Christ and through them the voice of the Lord is heard. As a result, the sheep follow the voice of the Lord who speaks through the hirelings. In this manner, the sheep do not follow the hirelings, for they actually follow the voice of the Lord who speaks through the hirelings. The Lord Himself indicated the need to listen to the hirelings in these words: 'The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their work' (Matt 23:2-3). What does He say other than that we should listen to the voice of the Shepherd as He speaks through the hirelings?<sup>32</sup>

\* Listen to the apostle as he is overwhelmed by such matters. He states that some preach the Bible out of love, while others out of some 'weakness' and not sincerely (Phil 1:16-18). However, what they preach is the truth, whereas the preachers themselves are not upright.

Why is the person who preaches the truth not upright? Because he is not seeking God and is seeking some other benefit from the Church.

Seeking God is an act of purity as God is the legitimate husband of the soul.

Praying God for other things besides Him indicates an impure intent while seeking God.

Notice, my brethren, that when a wife loves her husband on account of his wealth she is impure. Evidently, she does not love her husband but loves his gold. If she loved her husband, she would have loved him in his nakedness and poverty. If she only loved him due to his wealth, what would happen if he became suddenly poor? She would probably reject him for she did not love the man but loved his riches. Had she truly loved her husband, she would have loved him all the more when he became poor for she would love compassionately as well<sup>33</sup>.

\* We need to love God who created the wealthy man, rather than love the wealthy man: God

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<sup>30</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons: 87:20

<sup>31</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 46:5

<sup>32</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 46:6

<sup>33</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 87: 9

promises to give us Himself and nothing else. Find something that is more precious than Him and He will grant it to you. The earth, the heavens, and the angels are beautiful, yet the beauty of the Lord, their creator, exceeds all beauty.

Therefore, those who preach God as the loving God; and those who preach Him for His sole praise are the shepherds of the flock and not the hirelings.

The Lord Jesus Christ desires this kind of purity from the soul and He accordingly tells Peter:” Peter, do you love Me” (John 21:16). What does ‘do you love Me’ imply? Are you pure? Is your heart free of adultery? Do you seek Me and not personal gain from your church? If you are truly pure, then ‘tend My sheep’ for you can therefore be a shepherd and not a hireling<sup>34</sup>.

\* The shepherd preaches the Lord Jesus Christ in truth; whereas the hireling preaches in pretense (Phil 1:18) as he seeks some other benefit. Yet both preach the Lord Jesus Christ...and Paul, who is a shepherd himself, is glad to have hirelings. Indeed, these work when they can and they are useful as long as they are able to preach... It is rare for the (apostle) to find a shepherd among many hirelings, for the shepherds are few whereas the hirelings are numerous. Yet, what does the Word say about hirelings? “Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward” (Matt 6:2). What does the apostle say about the shepherd?

‘If anyone cleanses himself...will be a vessel of honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work’ (2 Tim 2:26). ... not prepared for certain matters, but “prepared for every good work”<sup>35</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

### **“The hireling flees**

**Because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.” [13]**

**St. Augustine** likens the hirelings to fences covered with thorns and the vines bearing grapes lean on them. These hirelings work as ministers for their own benefit. However, we need to enjoy the grapes of the vine which is supported by the thorns. Indeed, these grapes are the fruit of the vine, not of the thorns.

The apostle presents an example of these thorns which support the vine: “Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife and some also from good will. The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely...only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; in this I rejoice, yes and will rejoice” (Phil 1:15-18)<sup>36</sup>.

\*This is where the difference lies between the shepherd and the hireling: one seeks his safety regardless of the sheep; while the other seeks the well being of the sheep regardless of his own needs.

In the past, Ezekiel reprimanded the (hirelings) and said:” woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?” ( Ezk 34:2 LXX). Indeed, they failed to do so and this is the worst kind of wickedness. It is the root of all other evil as the

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<sup>34</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 87:10

<sup>35</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 87:11

<sup>36</sup> cf St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 46:6

following words reveal: ‘The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost for they looked after themselves and not after the sheep’ (refer to Ezk 34:4).

St. Paul also reveals the following: ‘...for all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus’ (Phil 2:21); and “Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well being (1 Cor 10:21)<sup>37</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* A person becomes an hireling when he occupies the position of a shepherd yet does not seek the benefit of the souls. He aspires to attain earthly benefits and rejoices in receiving the honor of high posts. He follows the temporary tendencies and enjoys the honors offered to him: These are his rewards ... such a person cannot stand and act when the flock is endangered.

As he now receives honors and enjoys temporal benefits, such a person fears fighting dangers which could cost him the loss of what he loves... When a wicked person invades the company of humble believers, he becomes that wolf that attacks the flock as he tears their minds with temptations. Besides, such an hireling cannot endure the responsibility of protecting the flock

The soul is destroyed while such a person indulges in earthly benefits. Such an hireling has no zeal to fight temptations. He has no love that drives him. While all his concern is to get external benefits, he carelessly allows internal damage to happen to his flock<sup>38</sup>.

**St. Gregory the Great**

**“I am the good shepherd,  
I know My sheep  
And am known by My own.” [14]**

The Psalmist interacted with the Lord and good Shepherd in the Psalm of the Shepherd (Ps 23) where he reveals the extent of the Lord’s supreme cares for His flock.

Good shepherding reveals reciprocal love and acquaintance between the shepherd and his flock. The Shepherd knows his flock based on his closeness to them rather than on more regimental knowledge drawn from scholarly books. He relates to his sheep and they relate to Him, and so they become his subjects who are qualified to know Him.

God knew Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, therefore He called Himself “The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.” Paul knew his great Shepherd and considered Him his Lord and God! It is through such loving shepherding that every sheep in the flock hears his shepherd who assures him and says:” I will be his God and he shall be My son” (Rev 21:7).

The Shepherd knows His own sheep for He watches them attentively and lovingly. He knows them, therefore He gladly sacrifices Himself for them. St. John accordingly, says: ‘We love Him because He first loved us’ (1 John 4:19). St. Paul also says: “But now after you have

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<sup>37</sup> Homilies on St John, 60:1

<sup>38</sup> Hom 15. Forty GospelS Homilies

known God, or rather are known by God” (Gal 4:9).

The loving eyes of the Shepherd draw the sheep’s eyes to Him. Just as the shepherd shows his love by his practical acts and union with them, so the sheep get to know Him and find pleasure in uniting with Him. This is the new covenant: The covenant based on love between God and His subjects. Hence they comprehend the words of their shepherd who says: “I know whom I have chosen” (John 13:18). The flock respond with firm faith in the shepherd and say with the apostle: “...for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day” (2 Tim 1:12).

\*The Lord is the good Shepherd. What kind of shepherd was Peter? Was he not a good shepherd? Did he not lay down his life for his sheep? And who was Paul? And who were the other apostles? What about the blessed bishops and martyrs?... What about St. Caprianus? Were not all these good shepherds? Yes, they were all good shepherds. However, it is not merely because their blood was spilled, but because it was spilled for their sheep. They humbly laid down their lives out of love and without any haughtiness.

What do you say, O Lord and good Shepherd? For you are the good Shepherd as well as the good sheep. What do you say? Grant us ears and help us to comprehend. The Lord says: “I am the good Shepherd.” What about Peter? Was he not a shepherd or was he evil? Indeed, he was a shepherd and a good one. Yet he is truly nothing compared to the power of the Shepherd of shepherds and His goodness. Yet, Peter was a shepherd and he was good. Besides, all the others who are like him are good shepherds<sup>39</sup>.

\* The Lord Jesus Christ is the door I pass through to come to you. Through Him I have access to your hearts rather than to your homes. I enter through the Lord. He is the Lord within me and he is the One you desire to hear. Why do you seek to hear the Lord through me? Because you are His flock and you have been bought by His Blood. You know your worth - it is not paid through me; yet I am the instrument that preaches Him. It is He, He alone, who is the Buyer and He has poured His precious Blood- the precious Blood of the One who is without sin<sup>40</sup>.

St. Augustine

**“As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father;  
I lay down My life for the sheep.” [15]**

The Lord did not only desire to sacrifice, even die, for the sake of His sheep; but as a good Shepherd, He also confirms: **“I lay down My life for the sheep.”** He actually fulfilled the plan of sacrifice. He offered His life as a ransom to buy the sheep. He bought the sheep and He was killed as He loved them. The flock is not brought as an offering on behalf of the Owner as in the Old Testament. Conversely, the Owner presents Himself as an offering for the sheep.

\* **“I am known by My own...as the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father.”** The Lord’ words ‘I will relate to My sheep and they will adhere to Me’ indicate how He will relate to His sheep and how they will respond to Him. It all begins with the manner by which the Lord

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<sup>39</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 88:6

<sup>40</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 47:2

and Father knows His true only begotten Son, the fruit of His essence; and how the Son knows the Father, who is the true God. He forms Him out of Himself. Similarly, if we strive to belong to Him, we will be considered part of His family and His children. Truly, we are His offspring (Acts 17:29) and we carry the name of the Son. It is all because of Him who proceeds from the Father and born of God, a true God, who became man and took our nature except for sin<sup>41</sup>.

**St. Cyril the Great**

\* He is the Father who knows that He begat Him. He also knows that He is born of Him. In brief, let us refer to the words of the Bible: ‘No one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son’ (Matt 11:27; John 10:15; 17:25)<sup>42</sup>.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* The Lord Jesus Christ knows the Father Himself and we know Him through the Lord Jesus Christ...for He says: “No one has seen God at anytime. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him (John 1:18). This is how we get knowledge as He reveals it to us<sup>43</sup>.

\* Remember that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Door and the Shepherd. He presents himself as the door in order to be revealed. He is the Shepherd too, who allows us to enter through Him. Truly, my brethren, as a Shepherd, the Lord grants his followers (members in his Body) the power to become like Him. Peter, Paul, all the other apostles, as well as all good bishops were shepherds. Yet, none called himself the “Door.” The Lord distinctly used the term to refer solely to Himself. In short, Paul did the work of a good shepherd as he preached about the Lord Jesus Christ. He could do so because he had already entered through the ‘Door.’ However, the unruly flock began to cause divisions, and to open other doors... then Paul said that he was not a door: “was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Cor 1:12-13)

**St. Augustine**

**“And other sheep I have which are not of this fold,  
Them also must I bring  
And they will hear My voice;  
There will be one flock and One Shepherd.” [16]**

The good Shepherd presents to us in this passage a confirmation of the unique and reciprocal knowledge that exists between the Father and the Son. It is the sign that indicates their unity in thought, will, and work (their oneness in the Divine Essence). This is a model of the knowledge that exists between Him and ourselves: we are His beloved followers who find their eternity by submitting to His will and power; and by working through and by Him! The Lord then speaks about the other sheep that are from other nations. These are the sheep that He will gather with those of the house of Israel to form one flock under One Shepherd.

The Lord confirms His positive role in acquiring the Gentiles as His people. He says: “...**Them also must I bring**” as indeed, He is the One who offers His Blood as the price for

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<sup>41</sup> PG 74. 653 AB

<sup>42</sup> Essay 4:7

<sup>43</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 47:3



salvation. It is He who works, through His Spirit which is within people, to attract them to Himself. Yet, this does not occur against their will. He opens the hearts of His believers and so enables them to love all mankind. All are invited to enjoy the protection of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. At the same time, the Lord confirms His all-inclusive plan in order to destroy the haughtiness of the Jews. They imagined the Messiah would come to them alone, and that they were the unique flock of God. Therefore, they considered the Gentiles as dogs among the flock.

By saying **‘I must’** the Lord confirms the obligation of love. His Divine love obligates Him to offer His life gladly as a sacrifice to redeem His flock.

The Lord will bring everyone from all the nations to the true pasture- to the one holy Church. He will open the heavenly gates of the Church for all to enter in. After having been lost in the desert for so many years, the Lord will claim them all as His own since they are the flock that He has created. He is concerned about their salvation and offers His Blood as a ransom for their redemption. Thus he restores them to honor and glory.

These sheep, whatever their origin, for they will come from many Gentiles nations, will hear the voice of the One Shepherd and believe in Him. Faith is the outcome of listening. Therefore, they will be attracted to Him and be united as members in one body with one Head. The apostle says: ‘There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope in your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, through all and in you all’ (Eph 4:4-6). In this manner, the unity of the flock is achieved, or the unity of the church, through the oneness of the Shepherd.

\* It is as though the Lord is saying: Why are you astonished to see these people following Me. My sheep hear My voice; when you see other sheep following me and listening to My voice, you will be greatly amazed.

\* **‘Them also must I bring’**: the word **‘must’** does not mean **‘necessity.’** It is a proclamation of what will truly take place. It is as though the Lord is saying: ‘Why are you astonished that these people follow Me when My sheep hear My voice? Indeed, you will see others following Me and hearing My voice and their amazement will be greater.’

Do not be confused when the Lord says: **‘not of this fold’** for the difference is in the law only. St Paul says: “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything” (Gal 5:6)

**“Them also must I bring’ [16].** The Lord reveals that both have strayed and intermingled. They were without shepherds for the good shepherd had not yet come. He therefore proclaims their unity in the future when they will become one flock. This conforms with Paul’s declaration: “.. so as to create in Himself one new man from the two” (Eph 2:15)<sup>44</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* **‘Tell me, O you whom I love, where you feed you flock? Where you make it rest at noon? For why should I be as one who veils herself by the flocks of your companions?’** (Song of Solomon 1:7)

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<sup>44</sup> Homilies on St John, 60:2. PG:353

Where do you go to pasture, O Good Shepherd who carries all the sheep on your shoulders? Indeed, you are truly carrying one sheep on your shoulder and that is our human nature.

Show me the green pastures  
Lead me to the still waters (Ps 23:2)  
Guide me to filling food  
Call me by my name (John 10:16) so that I may hear your voice. I am your sheep: Grant me eternal life<sup>45</sup>.

**St. Gregory of Nicea**

\* The Lord confronted the Pharisees in various ways. In this passage, He enables them to perceive that they are about to lose their role as shepherds of His people as He Himself will take charge of their needs. He indicates that the intermingling between the flocks of the Gentiles and those who reveal good will among the people of Israel would be His concern and that His rule would embrace all and not the Jews alone. His light will shine over the whole world. He wants the true knowledge of God to be known, from the beginning, not to Israel alone, but that it may spread to all who live under the heavens<sup>46</sup>.

**St. Cyril the Alexander**

\* There are two boats (Luke 5:2) out of which the Lord called His disciples. These point to the two nations (the Jews and the Gentiles). When they pulled in their nets, they caught a huge amount of fish that almost caused the nets to break. The Bible states: 'They filled both boats.' The boats symbolize the Church. Although she consists of two nations yet they are united together in the Lord even though they come from distinct and different places.

We would like to mention here the two wives who had one husband, Jacob: Leah and Rachel are symbols for these two nations (Gen 29:23, 28). So are the two blind men who sat on the road side and the Lord granted them vision (Matt 20:36). If you search through the Bible carefully, you will find that the churches are really one church. They are not two and there are symbols to indicate this fact in many parts of the Bible<sup>47</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\*Finally, the offerings that are presented to God proclaim that the gathering Christian adhere together through inseparable love. That explains why the Lord called Himself the Bread, whose body is formed out of the union of many grains. This is a reference to His people who are united into one. Similarly, the Lord calls the pressed wine, produced from the clusters of grapes and very small grapes, integrating together as His unique Blood. In the same manner, the Lord indicates that this mixture of sheep constitutes one unified people<sup>48</sup>.

**St. Caprianus, the Martyr**

**“Therefore, My Father loves Me,**

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<sup>45</sup> Song of Songs: St Gregory of Nicea. Translated into Arabic: Dr George Nawar, 1993, Sermon 2

<sup>46</sup> PG 74:656 c.

<sup>47</sup> Sermon on the NT, 87:6

<sup>48</sup> Letter 67 Asturcia....:2

### **Because I lay down My life that I may take it again.” [17]**

Those who believe that the Father possesses the feature of divine Justice, while the Son has divine mercy are mistaken. These imagine that the Son is filled with love for mankind and that He has offered Himself as a sacrifice of love to remove the anger of the Father. Moreover, some Gnostics in the second Century believed that the God of the New Testament (the Son) came to save the world from the God of the Old Testament because He is an angry God! Here St. John confirms that the offering of the Lord Jesus Christ arises from the Father's love to us. It is the fruit of the reciprocal love between the Father and the Son. This is because divine love is a feature of the Holy Trinity and is not solely a feature of one hypostasis to the exclusion of the other two in the Trinity.

The only begotten Son is the object of the Father's love since the beginning of all time. He became incarnate in fact and enjoyed the Father's love as the Son of Man who offered His life as a sacrifice on men's behalf. He willingly became a servant and sacrificed Himself for the sake of the world in order to win and bring men to God, His Father. This is expressed in these words about the suffering and faithful servant: 'Behold! My servant whom I uphold, My elect in whom My soul delights! I will put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles' (Is 42:1).

Through the divine plan, He offered Himself as the 'way.' By entering into Him, we share with Him the feature of practical sacrificial love and trustworthiness. Hence we participate in His crucifixion and death to become a source of joy to the Father through Him. Through his sacrifice, the Lord Jesus Christ redeemed mankind and brought them to his Father. By uniting with him, we are granted the glorious power of being sacrificed and crucified with Him.

The Lord speaks about His death when He says: **“I lay down My life”**; and about His resurrection as He says **“take it up again.”** He has the power and it would have been impossible for all the forces of darkness to act in any manner without His permission. He has the power to lay down His life and to take it up again. In this simple manner, the Lord presents death and resurrection: there is no fear in facing death and no astonishment when we contemplate His resurrection.

\* **“....because I lay down My life”**: may the Jews no longer boast for they cause trouble yet they possess no power. Let them arouse trouble as much as they want; yet if I did not want to sacrifice My life, what would be the result of such disturbance?!

The Jews should not boast that they have won; for it is the Lord who has willingly sacrificed Himself...

You know the words of the Psalm: “I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustained me” (Ps 3:5)...

It is My pleasure to do so...

However, glory must be offered to God the Father; to encourage us to glorify our Creator,

the Psalm says: 'I awake for the Lord sustained me.' Do you think that the Lord Jesus Christ was deprived in any way of His power: whether the power to die or not, or the power to rise up again? These words could be misinterpreted if they are not properly understood... read this verse in the Bible: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." The Evangelist adds and says: 'But he was speaking of the temple of His body' (John 2:19-21)<sup>49</sup>.

\* By the power of the Word, He lay down Himself and takes it up again by that same power of the Word<sup>50</sup>.

\* **"This command I have received from My Father" [18]:** The Word did not receive the command in words, for in the Son -The only Word of the Father- rests all commands. When it is said that the Son receives from the Father what the Son in essence possesses, the implication is that He grants Him the life already indwelling in Himself (John 5:26). Thus the Son has life in Himself. He does not lack any power which the Father has not given to his begotten Son.

The Father has not added any gifts and as though the Son was imperfect at birth. The Begotten of the Father is wholly perfect and He carries all the blessings at His birth. In this manner, the Son has been granted equality with the Father and He was never begotten in a state of inequality with Him<sup>51</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* What other statement could reflect such a level of perfect human features than this. We consider our Lord a beloved One because He died on our behalf? What is the consequence? Was He not beloved before that? Did the Father begin to love Him and we were the cause of the Father's love to Him? They said that He was a stranger to the Father; that He was a deceiver who had come to kill and destroy. That is why the Lord told the Jews: 'There is nothing that obliges Me to love you; yet the Father loves you. Besides, He loves me too because I lay down My life for you.' The Lord wishes to underline a further point and that is that He did not come against his own will. If that were so, how does My act result in love?<sup>52</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

**"No one takes it from Me,  
But I lay it down of Myself.  
I have power to lay it down,  
I have power to take it again.  
This command I have received from My Father." [18]**

He lays Himself down to take it up again, for He is the Holy God who will not see corruption (Ps 16:10). He became incarnate by His own will. He delivered Himself and so offered His Body to be a sacrifice. In this manner, He would receive it from the Father as a glorified Body. As a result, He opens to us the Door of the resurrection since He Himself is 'The

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<sup>49</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 47:7

<sup>50</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 47: 13

<sup>51</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 47:14

<sup>52</sup> Homilies on St John, 60:2

Resurrection.’ Through that, He has granted us the right to enjoy the glorified body that is enabled to share with the soul her heavenly glory. The Lord stresses that His death is achieved by His full willingness. He holds the power to die and to arise. Such a sacrifice is the reason for His joy as well as for the joy of the Father. He submitted the matter into the hands of the Father in total obedience in order to fulfill His will. The Father’s will is one and the same as the Son’s will.

\*The Lord desired to eat the Passover (Luke 22:15); to willingly offer His life as well as take it up (John 10:18). Thus His desire has been fulfilled.

**St. Augustine**

\*He lay down His life in order to glorify us. However, He possessed the divine authority to lay it down and to take it up too... His goodness is evident here: He voluntarily lays His life down- now you also observe His authority to take it again<sup>53</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* As they often sought to kill Him, He told them: ‘Unless I want that to happen, you will work in vain.’ Through the first preposition, He gives proof to the second: Through His death, He gives proof to the Resurrection. This is what makes it all strange and amazing.

Both have been put into a new perspective that defies the norm. Let us reflect carefully on the Lord’s words: “I have power to lay it down.” Who does not possess the power to lay down his own life? Any person has the ability to kill himself. However, The Lord said that this was not so, yet how can it be? “I have the power to lay it down in this manner and no one can do so without My will.” Such an authority does not belong to mankind, for we do not have authority to lay it down by any means other than by killing ourselves. If we were to fall into the hands of enemies and they had the power to kill us; then they would kill us even against our will. This is not true in the case of the Lord Jesus Christ; for even though others conspired against Him, He still had the power not to lay His life down.

Indeed, He is the sole One with the power to lay down His life. He revealed that He possesses that same authority to take it up again.

Do you not observe how He used the first instance to prove the second one: How by His death, He revealed that His Resurrection cannot be questioned?<sup>54</sup>

\* The Lord says: **“This command I have received from My Father.”** If you were to ask the Lord: ‘What is this command’; He would answer: “It is that I die on behalf of the world.”

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord informed us in advance that during His sufferings he would separate His soul from His body voluntarily: **“I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it of Myself. I have power to lay it down, I have power to take it again.” [17,18]**

Indeed, David the prophet – according to St. Peter’s great interpretation- perceived the

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<sup>53</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 2:25-26

<sup>54</sup> Homilies on St John, 60:3

Lord and said: ‘For you will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will you allow Your Holy One to see corruption’ (Ps 16:10; Acts 2:27,31). For His divinity -before His incarnation, after His incarnation, and after His sufferings- is not subject to change. He is, as always, the same at all times- with the same nature. He will remain as He is forever. When he became incarnated, the Almighty completed the plan for our benefit: He temporarily separated the soul from the body. However, this occurred without the separation of the Divine from either of them. Both (soul and body) which were once united, were reunited through Him once more. Hence he grants all humanity a new beginning; and an example of what will occur in the Resurrection of the dead. All the corrupt will be raised in incorruption and all the dead transformed into living beings<sup>55</sup>.

**St. Gregory, Bishop of Nicea**

**“Therefore, there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings.”**  
**[19]**

This is the third time that a division occurs among those listening to the Lord Jesus Christ (John 7:43; 9:6). It is due to the enemy of goodness who is doing everything to spoil the Lord’s work.

The Lord spoke about His practical endeavor to sacrifice all His life for His sheep and to die that they may live. Some could not bear this supreme divine love and so they imagined the Lord was driven by the devil to speak these words, or that He had a deranged mind. While the Lord desires to grant us eternal glory, some resist and abuse Him. The Pharisees led the crowds to reject His words and therefore there was a division among them.

**And many of them said: “He has a demon and is mad.  
Why do you listen to Him?” [20]**

Some accused the Lord of being possessed by a devil and that He was mad. So why listen to Him? He was unaware of His words and was just hallucinating. Until today, this is the same accusation raised against the Lord Jesus Christ. As He speaks through all those who witness to the truth and speak of the heavens and eternity; listeners still regard such speakers as unrealistic and deceptive

The Pharisees even belittled those listening to Him since they encouraged Him to spread His teachings.

Non-believers are not satisfied with merely rejecting the divine word. They ridicule Him and urge others to resist Him. Often, they consecrate their energies to oppose those who listen to Him and say: **“Why do you listen to Him?”**

\* They became ice cold towards the sweetness of His Love and burned with the desire to harm Him. They stood at a great distance away from Him while they were right next to Him<sup>56</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

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<sup>55</sup> Against Eunomius 2:13

<sup>56</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 48:2

\* Every good virtue, and above all gentleness and meekness, purify us and make us to be different from wild beasts. Virtue makes us worthy to compete with the angels. That is why the Lord often speaks about this and commands us to be gentle and humble. He not only speaks about that, for He also teaches us these through His acts... these people called Him a demon and a Samaritan. They sought to kill Him and threw stones at Him... In spite of that, he did not reject them; and although they conspired against Him, He answered them with great humility<sup>57</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Others said:**

**“These are not the words of one who has a demon.**

**Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?” [21]**

This group could not tolerate the subjection of the Lord to humiliation and insult of being a demon; even though they might not have believed that He is the Messiah, the Son of God. Indeed, His teachings did not embody the violence and corruption of Satan and his kingdom. Moreover, Satan would be unable to do His Miracles and deeds.

\*The Lord does not deny that He is possessed by a demon. He remained silent as He had already presented through His deeds the proof of who He is. Therefore, there was no need to reprimand them especially that there were those who opposed the others. So the people were split and confronted each other. That is not the only reason why the Lord remained silent. He also tolerated their insults with great gentleness in order to teach us the degree of His gentleness and patience.

**St. John Chrysostom**

## **2- Unity with the Father**

**Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem and it was winter. [22]**

Here we also find a discussion between the Jews and the Lord Jesus Christ within the temple. It was the **Feast of Dedication**, *Hanukkh*, in the winter. This feast celebrated the memory of Judas the Maccabean and his deeds in 164/165 B.C. He had purified the temple from the corruption that occurred under Antiochus Epiphanies, the Syrian, three years earlier (1 Mac 4:36-59). Antiochus had forced the Jews to worship idols and forbade the circumcision of children, and observation of the Sabbath. This Feast is mentioned in greater detail in 2 Mac 1:18. The Jews regarded the return to freedom as though they had risen from the dead to enjoy life again. In memory of this, they celebrated a yearly feast on the twenty-fifth day in the month of Kisleu. This parallels approximately the beginning of the month of December. The feast extends for nine days amid great lights. This feast is celebrated not only in Jerusalem, as other feasts are, but everyone celebrates in his own area as is the case with the Feast of Purim (Esther 9:19). As the Jews were celebrating the Feast of Dedication of the temple [22], the Lord proclaimed that

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<sup>57</sup> Homilies on St John, 61:1

He is the One whom God had dedicated and sent into the world [23].

**And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch. [23]**

**Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him:**

**"How long do you keep us in doubt?**

**If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." [24]**

The Lord was walking in the temple, in Solomon's porch. This lies in the eastern part of the house of nations, which is the largest house in the area of the temple, it surrounds the inner buildings. This does not mean that it was Solomon who had constructed it since the temple had been destroyed and then rebuilt. However, it continued to be called **Solomon's temple** after the name of Solomon- the first one who had built it- due to his great fame.

The Lord walked alone as one would do who is interested in observing the actions of the Council of the Sanhedrin, They were gathered there; and where we are told: 'God stands in the congregation of the mighty; He judges among the Gods. How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? (Ps 82:1-2). He walked there to offer help to every needy person. He answered all questions in order to open the door to all who wished to walk with Him in the porch. On the eighth day of the Feast, the Lord was asked if He is the Messiah, and He answered:

A- The flock know the real Messiah, His divinity and His mission [25-27].

B- He saves His flock and gives them safety and peace [28-29]

C- The Lord confirms the Oneness of Essence with the Father. The Jews realized that the Lord Jesus Christ was equating Himself with the Father [30-31].

D- He defended His divinity through His works and through prophecies in the Holy Bible [32-39].

E- If the Jews considered their judges to be gods [34-39] because they represented God, then why do they stumble and find difficulty to recognize the true Son of God whom the Father has sent? [36]

He had come to His house and His Father's house. He had come to serve all the souls who sought Him. However, they banded together, as one man, with wicked intention; and asked Him why He kept them in doubt and if He is the Christ to tell them so. Some interpreters consider that the question conveyed an evil accusation.

It is as though they were saying: Why are you drawing people's hearts and encouraging a spirit of cheating and deception? Absalom did that when he rebelled against David his father, and tried to snatch away his throne. Or as though they were saying: why do you deceive the simple-hearted in order to win them as your disciples? The question appeared to be good and as though they really wanted to learn the truth.

They knew that the Messiah would be a king. But they believed, according to their minds, that He would be an earthly king. Therefore, they asked Him to give them a clear answer to that effect. This would enable them to report Him as someone who is a rebel and traitor to the Roman authorities.



The Jewish leaders did not blame themselves for their own corrupt hearts and minds. They blamed the Lord who attracted the crowds and some of the leaders; therefore causing confusion and division in the council of the Sanhedrin. They lay the blame on the Lord and accused Him of leaving them in doubt and confusion. Rather than blame themselves for not accepting the truth, not wishing to learn, they blamed Him. It is as though the Jewish leadership was seeking to pick a quarrel with Him: “How long do you keep us in doubt”? How long will you attract our souls? Be clear and proclaim your Identity! His works bore witness that He is the awaited Messiah. However, they probably needed a clear declaration in order to convict Him once He would state that He is the awaited Messiah.

Some interpreters find that the question was a true reflection of their inner conflict. On the one hand, they sensed His holiness- perceived through His deeds; and they recognized His stature. On the other hand, they feared for their positions; and their corrupt souls prevented them from accepting Him. They wanted a Messiah shaped according to their whims; one who would achieve and grant their temporal aspirations.

They desired to appear as individuals who sought knowledge. Although St. John the Baptist witnessed clearly before them; the heavens declared the Lord’s identity. The Lord also spoke to them and declared that He is the light of the world, the good Shepherd and the giver of eternal life. Moreover, all His deeds witnessed to His Person.

Some interpreters find that the word ‘us’ is used here to denote ‘our lives.’ They draw on the use the Lord made when He said: “I have power to lay **(My life)** down” to convey His death. Some Jews may have felt that the Lord’s teachings about loving and forgiving one another would utterly destroy their lives as a Jewish nation. Caiaphas expressed this when He said: “If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, the Romans will come and take away our place and our nation” [11:48).

\*The Lord perceived their intentions when they asked their wicked question. They had surrounded Him and asked: “How long do you keep us in doubt.” It appeared as though they asked out of zeal to learn. However, their purpose was devious and corrupt and filled with hidden ulcers... they were not asking with the intent to learn which seemed to be their goal<sup>58</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Jesus answered them:**

**“I told you and you do not believe.**

**The work that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me.” [25]**

The Jews asked for a clear and frank answer- a yes or a no- This was impossible since their concept of the ‘Messiah’ was totally different from those in His divine Plan. In spite of that, the Lord Jesus Christ put His finger on the problem: They did not lack the knowledge, but they lacked the will to believe in His works that witnessed to His Person (John 14:11). So the problem lay within them and not in the need to reveal Himself to them. In order to efface their excuses, the Lord indicated that He had informed them previously by words as well as by deeds. He had proclaimed previously that He is the Son of God and the Son of Man who possesses the power of

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<sup>58</sup> Homilies 61. PG 59:361

life within Himself; and that He has the Authority to judge... Does this not refer to the Messiah? They pretended that the Lord had left them in doubt; but He confirmed that they were not willing to believe. He referred to His deeds and His life- for He is the One with no sin- His deeds and His acts testify to the reality of His unique Person.

On the one hand, the Lord desires to present all true knowledge- on condition that the person seeking it is sincere- just as He did with the Samaritan woman (4:26); and with the man born blind (29:35-38). Some of His followers recognized Him from the start (1:41); while others gathered around Him when they realized that He is the awaited Messiah. The Lord had previously proclaimed to the Jews: "... before Abraham was, I am" (8:58), and consequently they wanted to stone Him. They had heard enough about His identity and so they accused Him of blasphemy since He had equated Himself to God (5:18).

\* The Lord here reveals to the Jews that His deeds speak more loudly and more clearly than His voice and words.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**"But you do not believe,  
Because you are not of My sheep,  
As I said to you." [26]**

The Lord puts the blame on them because they had deprived themselves from belonging to his flock. Therefore, how could they recognize Him? They did not belong to His flock due to their lack of faith and not due to lack of evidence to His Person. They had no excuse. There existed a flock that believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as a result of His words and deeds. They recognized His voice which gives meaning to their lives. This flock condemned unbelievers who lacked faith and had not joined the Lord's flock. Moreover, they neither recognized Him as the awaited Messiah, nor His voice. Consequently, they followed other shepherds.

\* It is as though the Lord was telling the Jews the following: 'You have not followed Me because you do not belong to my flock and not because I am not a Shepherd. The Lord said these words in order to encourage them to want to become His own sheep. He wants to wake them up and plant this desire in them<sup>59</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\*The Lord answered and stated that He is the Son of God. How did He answer? Listen:

**Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep" [25-26]...** they are sheep through faith. They are sheep by following the Shepherd. They do not belittle their Savior. They are sheep as they enter through the Door and as they go in and out to find pasture, and they are sheep as they enjoy eternal life. But what is the implication of these words: **"...you are not of My sheep" [26].** The Lord perceived that they had chosen eternal destruction and would not receive eternal life through His Blood!<sup>60</sup>

**St. Augustine**

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<sup>59</sup> Homilies on St John, 61:2

<sup>60</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 48:4

**“My sheep hear My voice  
And I know them  
And they follow Me” [27]**

The Lord presented to them the marks of His flock. These are they that hear His voice and recognize that it belongs to their Shepherd. They know the sound of His love and care. Therefore they adhere to Him and get acquainted with Him in new depths. They qualify to be recognized by Him and as the apostle says: “The Lord knows those who are His” (2 Tim 2:19).

\*This is the pasture- remember the words of the Lord earlier: **“They will go in and out and find pasture.”** We enter into the faith and go out when we die. As we enter through the door of faith, we- as believers- quit the body. By going out through the same door we can find pasture; that good pasture is called eternal life. In this pasture, no leaf is dry for all plants are green and flourishing. There is vegetation that is said to be evergreen and it is found and exists only there<sup>61</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“And I give them eternal life,  
And they shall never perish;  
Neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.” [28]**

In order to convince them of the misery that sets in as a result of rejecting to adhere and belong to Him, the Lord presents the positive aspect. These are the gifts of a blessed life which His flock enjoys. In other words, they enjoy a heavenly eternal life.

In contrast, life on earth is full of fatigue and pain. His flock are protected by the Holy Spirit and the enemy cannot touch them. The Psalmist accordingly says: ‘This poor man cried out and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him and delivers them’ (Ps 34:6-7). The Lord knows His flock well: He knows their needs as well as the resistance of the devil who faces them. However, they are protected in Him.

The Lord offers here the gift of eternal life to those who believe in Him. Besides, He reveals the security that they enjoy in Him; for they are kept safely in His hand. This is something they would not enjoy if they changed to the teachings of the Pharisees. By joining the Lord’s flock, believers are granted protection which they could never get through any other means. St. Paul says in this context: ‘For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable’ (Rom 11:29)

The flock of the Lord are a gift that the Father delivers into the hands of the Son; and they remain safely in His hands as well as they rest in the hands of the Father. In other words, they are protected by the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ as well as of the Father.

The word **‘perish’** is used here to indicate the fearsome eternal destruction. Consequently, being saved from such a destiny cannot be over evaluated. The word **‘snatch’**

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<sup>61</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 48:6

indicates violent action used against a person. No one can protect us from such violence except the powerful Hand that holds and shields us.

\* **‘... shall never perish’ [28]....** what can the wolf do? What can a burglar- a thief do? They can only destroy those who are singled out for destruction. The apostle says of such sheep: ‘The Lord knows those who are His’ (2 Tim 2:19); and ‘for whom He foreknew, He also predestined... whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called these He also justified; whom He justified, these He also glorified’ (Rom 8:29-30). The wolf does not snatch any of these sheep, neither can a burglar steal them, nor can a thief kill them<sup>62</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all;  
No one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand.” [29]**

**St. Ambrose** explains that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of the Father as well as of the Son. He is the Hand of both Father and Son. Hence, the sheep hear the Lord’s voice and no one can snatch them from the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit<sup>63</sup>.

\*The Lord Jesus Christ says: **“... no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand”**: in this manner He indicates that His hand and His Father’s are one in terms of power and in essence for they are the same.

His words **“...neither shall any one snatch them out of My hand, My Father, who has given them to Me...”** are intended for the Jews so that they would not accuse Him of being disobedient to God.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Are the Father and Son one hand, or can we say that the Son Himself is the Father’s hand? If we understand that ‘the hand’ stands for power, then the Father and Son have one and the same power. However, if we understand it in the same way used by the prophet: ‘... to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?’ (Is 53:1); then the arm of the Father is the Son Himself. Yet, we should not understand this as though God had a human form, or that He has human physical members. Indeed, we should comprehend that all things were made through Him<sup>64</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**I and My Father are one.” [30]**

The Lord does not say ‘I and My Father are identical’ But ‘I and My Father are one.’ This indicates a union of love and work as well as a union in the essence. Therefore it is a unique unity which no other creature can attain. Indeed, this union is the supreme model of union to which an adherer to God aspires as he seeks to unit with Him.

This discussion about unity is related to the care of the Son and Father watching over a

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<sup>62</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 48:6

<sup>63</sup> Of the Holy Spirit, 16:114

<sup>64</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 48:7

believer: no one can snatch a believer out of the hands of the Son or the Father.

It is as though divine care is a unique entity of love between the two icons of the Father and the Son. The ultimate purpose of this care is to make believers carry this icon/ hypostasis of unity.

\*The Lord Jesus Christ proclaims: **“I and My Father are One.”** He uses the word **“One”** as there is no separation of authority or of nature. Yet, he uses in another place the word **“We”**: He does so in order to make us realize that the Father and the Son are united in one nature without mingling in the elements/hypostasis: thus we believe that the perfect Father gave birth to the perfect Son<sup>65</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* Understanding needs to come after faith so that it is the reward of faith...<sup>66</sup>

\* The Lord says and that truly: **“I and My Father are One.”** What does ‘One’ imply? That we are one in nature and in essence<sup>67</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* **“I and My Father are One”** [30]. The Lord then adds: **“.. the Father is in Me and I in Him”** [Jn10:38], in order to clarify, on the one hand, the Divine Unity; on the other hand, the Unity in Essence. Hence, both are One. Yet, this is not like a (one) object that can be split into two. Moreover, it is not like someone who is called by two names- once ‘the Father’ and another time ‘the Son’.... for the Father is Father and cannot be the Son and the Son is the Son and cannot be the Father.... Thus they are two beings or hypostasis.

Nevertheless, they are one in nature: for the begotten is not unlike His Father: He is in His image and all that the Father has are the Son’s too (John 16:15). Therefore, the Son is not another God since He did not come from outside... Otherwise there would be many other gods. Both are one in their being, one in nature and one in divine unity. As we have explained, the rays are the light and not a source other than the sun or other than the light. They do not result from participation with the light but they are wholly and intrinsically begotten of the light, so such a child is ultimately one with the light- no one can say that there are two lights. Although the sun and the rays are two things, yet the rays of the sun that give light to everything through the rays are one<sup>68</sup>.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic**

The Jews could tolerate the Lord Jesus Christ so far; but they could no longer bear to hear Him say: ‘I and My Father are One.’ you can see that the Jews understood what the Arians could not. They were angered by this saying and felt that He could not have said these words ‘I and My Father are One’ unless it implied equality between the Father and the Son<sup>69</sup>.

\* The Word of God came to mankind to transform them into gods; therefore, what would the Word of God who resides Himself in God be other than God?

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<sup>65</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 1:1:9

<sup>66</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 89:1

<sup>67</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 98:2

<sup>68</sup> Discourses against the Arians, 1:23 (3,4)

<sup>69</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 48:8

If mankind become gods through the Word of God and if by having fellowship with Him they become gods, then could the one through Him they have access to fellowship be any other but God?

If the lights that shine are gods, could the light source that gives light not be God?

You have been enlightened by the light, therefore you have become numbered as children of God. If you drew away from the light you would fall into doubt and find yourselves in darkness. However, that light does not come near (to be enlightened) for He cannot withdraw from Himself<sup>70</sup>.

\*Sometimes we may say: “We live in God and He lives in us”; but can we say: ‘We and the Father are one?’ We live in God because God embraces us; God lives in us because we have become altars of God... Yet, could you say: “He who has seen has seen the Father” in the same way that His only begotten Son said it (John 14:9)... ‘I and My Father are one’? Get acquainted with the supreme distinction of the Lord and with the gift granted to the servant. **The distinction of the Lord is equality with the Father and the gift of the servant is fellowship with the Savior**<sup>71</sup>.

St. Augustine

### **Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him’ [31]**

For the second time, His opponents wanted to stone the Lord Jesus Christ. According to them, He had blasphemed and so deserved to be stoned. He had claimed His oneness with God. The Jews did not comprehend His real identity and therefore could not bear His words.

The unique unity between the Father and the Son, which is at the core of the divine Shepherd’s work, is the source of our inner enlightenment, of our comfort and our inner peace. This unity was unacceptable to the Jews - indeed they considered this as blasphemy against God.

The sin of blasphemy is a killing and deadly sin in the Jewish faith. There is no need to bring the accused to judgment or to hear his defense and the person is punished immediately. The Mishnah mentions that if a person steals a holy vessel, he can be punished without judgment by those who are eager to do so. The same thing applies if a priest serves before a defiled altar. The Mishnah states that his brothers, the other priests, do not bring him before a court but he is carried out of the temple by the younger priests who then smash his brain with clubs. It is a terrific sin that deserves a horrible punishment. With that same understanding the Jews considered that there was no need to bring to Lord to be judged. Indeed, they went outside the temple building to find stones, picked them up and carried them to stone Him. They did not have any consideration for the holy place itself or that it was not right to execute stoning in its vicinity. Their anger was so strong and their pretense to be zealous for God’s glory drove them to behave in this manner.

### **Jesus answered them**

**“Many good works I have shown you from My Father.**

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<sup>70</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 48:10

<sup>71</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 48:10

**For which of those works do you stone Me?” [32]**

The Lord did His divine acts as a living testimony to His identity. These are stronger than discussing and using words. Indeed, these are an easier means to understand the truth.

What does the Lord intend to use the words ‘**from My Father**’? Would it not be enough to have said: ‘Many good works I have done?’ he actually intended to confirm that He and the Father work together. The same work the Son does proceeds from the Father. If the Holy Son declares that His good acts come from the Father then how much more should the weak creation declare that all goodness found in us to the grace of God that works within us?

The Lord defied them saying: “...which of you convicts Me of sin?” (John 8:46), and no one could answer back. So how could they stone someone whom they could not convict for even one sin?

The Lord says: “**For which of those works**”, in other words ‘which kind of acts’ that no other creature in heaven or on earth can do since they are acts pertinent to God Himself.

**The Jews answered Him, saying:**

**“For a good work we do not stone you,**

**But for blasphemy and because You, being a man, make yourself God” [33]**

The Jews could not deny the works done by the Lord. However, they were unable to tolerate His words as they considered that He had dared to equate Himself to God. They said to Him: “**You, being a man, make yourself God**”; whereas the Evangelist proclaims throughout his whole gospel that the Lord Jesus Christ became Man while He is truly God.

**Jesus answered them: “Is it not written in your law; I said you are gods?” [34]**

The word ‘**your law**’ is used here in its broad sense as it refers to the whole Old Testament. The quote of the Lord is taken from Psalm 82:6; and it is directed at the Hebrew Judges who represented the authority of God. The Psalmist goes on to say: ‘But you shall die like men and fall like one of the princes’ (Ps 82:7). Since this was said about the Judges of the Old Testament, then what could be said about the Lord Jesus Christ whom God has sanctified and consecrated to save the world?

In using the word ‘**your law**’, the Lord does not intend to break away from the law. Indeed, He regards it to be the Word of God which cannot be criticized or dismissed [35].

\* God has not only created us from nothingness, but He has granted us unconditional life with God through the free gift of the Logos. However, mankind has rejected spiritual matters and has become corrupted through Satan’s deceitful lies. Consequently, their corruption has doomed them to die and have become corrupt in nature.

Yet, God planned to open an escape from that natural condition by granting mankind fellowship with the Logos. In this manner, their goodness is being restored.

When the Logos lives among mankind, they will not die on account of their natural state

of corruption. In this context, Wisdom says: ‘When God created us, He did not intend for us to die; He made us like Himself. It was the Devil’s jealousy that brought death into the world...’ (Wisdom 2:23)<sup>72</sup>.

\* The Lord Jesus Christ became Man in order to make us gods. He revealed Himself in the flesh so that we may comprehend the plan of the invisible Father. He tolerated humiliation from men, so that we may inherit everlasting life. While He Himself was untouched by harm in any manner- since He is above all sufferings and incorruptible, as He is the Logos and God Himself, He comforts men who suffer and all those for whom He underwent all this humiliation. He protects them throughout all pain they endure for His sake<sup>73</sup>.

\* Indeed, the Lord became incarnated so that we may become gods. He proclaimed Himself by appearing in the flesh to enable us to comprehend the thought of the invisible God. He accepted shame to grant us the inheritance of incorruption<sup>74</sup>.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic**

\* “You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High”: For this end the Word of God became incarnated. The Son of God became the Son of Man. Hence, when the man enters into the Logos and accepts to be adopted, he becomes the Son of God. There is no other way that we can attain incorruption and immortality. But how could we have acquired incorruption and immortality, unless incorruption swallow up corruption and immortality annihilate death and so enabling us to be adopted as children?<sup>75</sup>

**St. Iraneus**

\* Listen to the words of the Psalmist: ‘I have said: You are gods; all of you are children of the Most High’ (Ps 82:6). God calls us with this intention: so that we do not become human beings. Rather, God wants to be in a better condition when we are no longer human. This is possible if we first recognize the reality that we are human beings, **only then can we humbly progress to such heights**. We need to be cautious and should not believe that we are worthy while we are unworthy. Otherwise, we will not only lose what we are but we will also not attain the stature we do not possess<sup>76</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“If He called them gods, to whom the Word of God came  
And the Scripture cannot be broken,  
Do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world,  
“You are blaspheming”; because I said: “I am the Son of God?” [36]**

\* What are the Lord’s words concerning such an attitude: ‘ If those who receive this honor through grace do not find it wrong to call themselves gods, then how is it that you reprimand Me

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<sup>72</sup> On the Incarnation 4 (5)

<sup>73</sup> De Incarn. 54 (3)

<sup>74</sup> Oratio de Incarnatione Verbi, 54. PG 25:192 BC

<sup>75</sup> Adv. Haer 3:19 (1)

<sup>76</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate1:4



who naturally am the Son of God?’<sup>77</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Someone may wonder: If the Father has sanctified the Lord Jesus Christ, was there a time when He was not sanctified? The Father has sanctified Him in the same manner by which He conceived Him. When He was begotten, He received the power of being sanctified for the Father conceived the Son in holiness. If the Holy One (the Son) had been sanctified before, then how could we say about God the Father “... hallowed be your Name...”?<sup>78</sup>

**St. Augustine**

**“If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe in Me. [37]  
But if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works,  
That you may know and believe that the Father is in Me and I in Him.” [38]**

The Lord Jesus Christ invites His opponents to consider and examine His works so that when they perceive that they are done by His Father, they would believe in Him. By examining His deeds, they will know and believe. The verb occurs in the Greek language and conveys ‘you will begin to know’ or ‘you will come to know.’ Some writers interpret the word ‘you may believe’ as ‘you will continue to know these matters.’ Hence, it is not enough to know the beginning of such knowledge; but it is necessary to continue learning.

\* Believe, therefore, that God’s presence is evident in (the Lord’s deeds). Do you believe in deeds and not belief in the presence (of the Doer)? Then from where do the deeds spring if they are not preceded by His presence?<sup>79</sup>

**St. Ambrose**

\* Do you not see how the Lord testifies and gives proof that there is nothing in Him that denotes that He is less than the Father and that He is equal to Him in every way. The similarity in the deeds, and as they speak for themselves, act as a proof of His uncontested authority<sup>80</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Therefore they sought again to seize Him,  
But He escaped out of their hand. [39]**

Instead of speaking with Him, their only answer was to make another attempt to catch and kill Him.

**‘And He went again beyond the Jordan  
To the place where John was baptizing at first  
And there He stayed.’ [40]**

Of their own full freedom, they were able to accuse Him unjustly, to plan to catch and kill Him,

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<sup>77</sup> Hom 61. PG 59:364

<sup>78</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 48:10

<sup>79</sup> On the Mysteries, 3:8

<sup>80</sup> Hom 62. PG 59:369

and to arouse anger against Him. However, they could not overcome Him and achieve their plan because they had not been allowed by God to do so up to that moment.

\* It was the habit of the Lord Jesus Christ to withdraw quickly after speaking strong words. He did so to alleviate their anger. By distancing Himself, the pan of their fury would calm down. This is what the Lord did at that time.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\*They had failed to catch Him as they had lost their grasp on faith. The Word became flesh, yet it was not hard to save His body from physical hands. In order to grasp the Word in your mind you need to perceive the Lord Jesus Christ correctly.<sup>81</sup>

**St. Augustine**

### **3- The Lord Jesus Christ at the Place of His Baptism**

**Then many came to Him and said:**

**“John performed no sign,**

**But all the things John spoke about this Man were true” [41]**

Due to the hostility they displayed towards the Lord Jesus Christ, He traveled to the other side of the Jordan and to the place where St. John the Baptist use to baptize those who came to him. He went there not out of fear He would be killed. He had come to the world to save the world through the Cross; but that had to be at a specific time.

That place held great memories for the Lord Jesus Christ and his disciples. This where St. John the Baptist had witnessed about the Lord, saying: “Behold! The lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” Probably, those who lived in the area still remembered and repeated St. John’s testimony. St. John had been martyred and passed away, yet the fruit of his testimony appear even after he had left this world: the inhabitants remembered and hade believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. St. John had not done one single miracle, yet they believed his testimony without the need for miracles.

\*Since the Jews had believed St. John the Baptist who had not done even one miracle, then it would be logical to find them believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. Just watching His miracles indicates the sublime nature and greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**And many believed in Him. [42]**

\* Due to His many deeds they were attracted to Him. Moreover, they remembered St. John the Baptist’s words when he said: “He who is coming after me is mightier than I” (Matt 3:11). They had also heard the Voice from the heavens and had seen the Holy Spirit that had appeared as a dove.

**St. John Chrysostom**

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<sup>81</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 48:11

## **Meditations Inspired by John, Chapter Ten**

### **May You carry Me in the Palm of Your Hands and Wash me in Your Blood!**

\* In the midst of the persistent roaring world,  
I see a glowing face; I hear a gentle inviting voice!  
It is Your face, who is fairer than mankind!  
It is Your unique voice that attracts all my feelings!  
You are the good Shepherd, the beloved of my soul!

\* You are the Shepherd, the Door and the Guardian.  
You are the Shepherd who walks before me, in order to kill every savage wolf.  
You are before me to lead me into your unique heavenly pastures.  
You are before me to ascend on the Cross, in order to wash me with Your pure Blood!  
You carry the staff to kill my enemies and with it You punish me tenderly and gently;  
You lead me to come into Your embrace. You carry a flute to proclaim Your joy in me.  
Then Your joy overwhelms me, O source of all happiness.

\* You are the Door and the Guardian  
How can we enter into the Father's embrace except through You?  
O Door of the Divine embrace?  
Is there any other door but You by which to enter?  
You are the Guardian, You lead me to You. You enclose me within You.  
Thus the enemy cannot enter in with me or touch me!

\* How can I repay such unique and supreme care?  
Grant me union with You, and then I will become a shepherd through and with You!  
I will love You and so shepherd Your sheep through and with You!  
My joy will be complete as many will be saved and I will find pleasure in sharing with You the spirit of true shepherding.

\* Your care has made you willing to die and rise again.  
By Your power you sacrificed Yourself and delight those in the graves.  
Grant me the glory of sharing Your Cross with You.  
Grant me the goodness as I enjoy Your Resurrection!

\* On the Feast of Dedication You walked in Solomon's porch.  
Now the porch of the King of Peace is within me.  
May You enter and walk, so that I may walk with You and hear Your voice  
May You celebrate a constant feast of renewal upon Your altar that is within me!

\* May you proclaim within me that You are One and equal with the Father.  
I believe, O my Lord, for I have seen and enjoyed Your deeds!

Your works witness to You  
You have turned my grave into an altar  
You have transformed my heart into Your heaven.  
You have turned my darkness into light.  
You have proclaimed Your presence within me!  
What more could I desire!

\* \* \*

## Raising Lazarus from the Dead

### The Giver of the Resurrected Life

St. John tells us the story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead which probably occurred on the Saturday preceding the Lord's entry into Jerusalem. Thus this event took place a short while just before the last week of the life of Jesus on earth. **The miracle is not recorded in the other three Gospels; and some explain that this is because Lazarus was still alive when these were written. The belief was that such reporting could have caused him many problems. As for St. John, he wrote his Gospel after Lazarus had passed away.** The Evangelist presents the miracle to reveal the person of the Lord Jesus Christ: He is the Resurrection, the Giver of Life; and the Conqueror of death. The Lord was ready to deliver Himself to death and to be buried in a grave; yet He wanted to confirm His authority to lay down as well as raise Himself only when He wanted. The miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead is the last miracle that St. John records; and he gives many details in his account of it.

The event takes place in a small village called Bethany or House of suffering or of pain. There was a family that the Lord Jesus loved very much and who lived there. This family opened their hearts as well as their home to the Lord Jesus. They wanted Him to rest there; and they knew how to talk with Him. In the midst of the bitter and dangerous pain caused by death, the two sisters sent Him a message: "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick" [3]. The sisters did not ask for the healing of their brother. Moreover, they did not ask the Lord to leave His service and visit them in their difficult circumstances.

Lazarus died and the Lord told His disciples: "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." The Lord called death as a sleep for any person who adhered to the Lord Jesus Christ -to the Resurrection- is not touched by death. Death for such a person is seen as a blessing and a time of rest.

Four days after the death of Lazarus, the Lord Jesus Christ came to the Village. Martha met Him and began to reproach Him: **"Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now, I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You"** [22]. The Lord assured her that her brother will rise up again. She proclaimed her faith that her brother would rise again at the last day. Therefore the Lord told her: **'I am the resurrection and the life'** [25].

The Lord could not bear to see the tears of the sisters and **'Jesus wept'** [35]. He sympathizes with us! He is amazing in His love for mankind. He could not bear to see their tears, and He says: "Turn your eyes away from Me, for they have overcome Me" (song of Solomon 6:5). He went to the grave and asked the mourners to roll away the stone that sealed the grave; so Martha said: **"Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days!"**

**St. Augustine** comments that the raising of Lazarus from the dead is not a source of amazement, but rather a source of joy to us. He explains that it is not surprising that the One who has the power to create people into the world is able to raise the dead, yet what makes us rejoice

is that He grants us the resurrection and blesses us with salvation<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Augustine** notes that the three other Gospels mention that the Lord raised three people from the dead. He finds that, these miracles carry implications that relate to our salvation: the Lord raised these bodies to indicate the resurrection of our souls.

The Lord raised the daughter of one of the rulers of the synagogue. She was lying in her home (Mark 5:41-43)...may everyone be concerned about his soul; for in sin there is death: sin is the death of the soul. Sometimes we commit sin just in our thoughts. You might find pleasure in what is evil and agree to go along. You are mistaken; for this agreement brings you death. However, it is an inner death since evil thoughts have not matured or become transformed into committed acts as yet. The Lord proclaims that He wishes to resurrect such souls to life. He raised this young girl who had not been carried out for burial yet. She lay dead at home. It is as though sin was not apparent till that time in her life.

Nevertheless, if you not only embrace a feeling of pleasure in evil thoughts but also engage in evil acts, it can be concluded that the dead one has been carried outside the door. Then you would be carried outside and actually carried to your grave. In spite of that, the Lord still raised such a dead one to life when He restored the youth alive to his widowed mother. Repent when you sin for the Lord will raise you up and restore you to the church who is your mother.

The third example of death is that of Lazarus. This is a serious case of death that is particularly marked by sin turned into a habit of committing evil. Falling into sin is one issue, whereas committing sin out of habit is another matter. A person who falls into sin, but promptly submits to reform, rises up to life quickly for he has not fallen into the net of evil habit and has not been laid into the grave so far. However, a person who has submitted to the habit of evil doing is someone who has been buried and of whom this saying is true: **‘there is stench.’** This is because that person is characterized by bad reputation. All such people have become used to commit crimes and have abandoned morality... in spite of that, the power of the Lord Jesus Christ is no less overwhelming and is able to restore life to them. We know and see people, daily, who become transformed and move away from the most evil habits. They become receptive to a kind of better life more than those who blame them... may no one despair or give in<sup>2</sup>.

\* Out of all the miraculous deeds done by the Lord Jesus Christ, the raising of Lazarus from the dead occupies a rank of first importance in the preaching of His Word<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

|                                                                |               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>1- Informing the Lord that Lazarus is sick</b>              | <b>1- 16</b>  |
| <b>2- The Lord travels towards the home of Lazarus family.</b> | <b>17- 33</b> |
| <b>3- Raising Lazarus from the dead.</b>                       | <b>34- 44</b> |
| <b>4- Effects of raising Lazarus from the dead.</b>            | <b>45- 57</b> |

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate cf. 49:1

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 49:3

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 49:1

## 1- Informing the Lord that Lazarus is Sick

**Now a certain man was sick  
Lazarus of Bethany,  
The town of Mary and her sister, Martha. [1]**

**Lazarus:** Probably the Hebrew name is ‘Eliazer’ that means ‘Jehovah helps him.’

**Bethany:** An Aramaic name that means ‘house of misery’ or ‘of suffering.’ It is the name of a village in the south east of Mount Olives- about two miles from Jerusalem. Today, it is known as Elazaria as a reference to the raising of Lazarus from the dead. We read about Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38 etc... that they lived in Galilee. If this is true, then they probably did not change their residence there at that time. It is clear that that home keeper was Martha, the other sister, who hosted her younger sister. St. John mentions Mary first though she is the younger one. The reason could be that Mary was the better known in the early church. She is the one who washed the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ with sweet smelling oil (12:3). Besides, she is the one who chose the ‘good part which will not be taken away from her’ (Luke 10:42).

**Mary:** A Hebrew name that means ‘rebellion’; **Martha:** The feminine word for the Aramaic word that means ‘educator/lady’

**It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil  
And wiped His feet with her hair,  
Whose brother Lazarus was sick. [2]**

\* This Mary is not the adulterous woman mentioned in the Gospel of St. Luke (7:37-50); for the one mentioned there is one who had committed many bad deeds. The Mary mentioned here by St. John is an honorable woman steadfast in virtue. She persevered in hospitality to the Lord<sup>4</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying:  
“Lord, behold, he whom you love is sick.” [3]**

No prayer could be simpler than this short prayer. It is full of confidence and submission of the matter into hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were satisfied to present the case to Him without asking for anything, without requesting the Lord to come to solve the matter and support them. Probably, they did not ask Him to go to them because of what they had heard a little bit earlier (in the previous chapter) how the Jews in Jerusalem had tried to stone Him; and how He had gone beyond the Jordan to disable them from achieving their intentions. Therefore the sisters did not wish to put Him in a dangerous, life threatening situation. At the same time, Lazarus was a friend of the Lord’s and so they were satisfied with informing Him of their brother’s sickness. They were confident that the Lord would definitely do something.

The sisters neither mentioned the kind of sickness, nor their relationship to Lazarus who was their brother. They just indicated that he is the one ‘**whom You love.**’ We know that the

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<sup>4</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:1

Lord loves all mankind; everyone could sense His gentleness, tenderness and love. However, the expression used by the sisters reveals that the Lord Jesus Christ devoted a special loving relationship with the sick. The sisters did not indicate in their message if the sickness was serious. They might have done so to avoid disturbing Him.

\* Why did they not act as the honorable centurion- He left his sick one and went to the Lord. Why they did not go to Him instead of sending Him a message? They had great trust in the Lord and they had strong family ties. Besides, they were weak women overwhelmed with sorrow<sup>5</sup>!

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* It is enough for you to know, for You are not like those who love and forget. If God did not love sinners, He would not have descended from the heavens to the earth<sup>6</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**When Jesus heard that, He said:  
“This sickness is not unto death,  
But for the glory of God,  
That the Son of God may be glorified through it.” [4]**

The Lord proclaimed that this death was not a final one in this life. It was a temporary one that was allowed so that God may be glorified through His power to raise the dead.

Some scholars consider that the word ‘**glorified**’ is used here to indicate an act that a person willingly does due to his love and wish to serve others even though it appears to be below his actual rank. This word is often used in this sense throughout St. John’s Gospel. Such acts do not impose obligations on others. This is especially true when the Lord speaks about the crucifixion as the glory of the Son and the Father, where the Son sacrifices Himself to grant the redemption and eternal glory of sinners. Our Savior is eternally driven by His love to work miracles. Often the subject of the raising of Lazarus from the dead is associated with the glory of the Lord’s cross for this miracle anticipate and prepared for His eventual crucifixion.

\* We appropriately get astonished at the sisters of Lazarus. After they had heard that their brother’s sickness would not end in death. They found him dead. However, they were not shaken when events proved contrary to that. In spite of everything, they hurried to the Lord and did not utter a bad word<sup>7</sup>.

\* Notice that the Lord states that the glory due to Him and to His Father is one and the same: **‘for the glory of God’**; then Lord goes on to say: **‘that the Son of God may be glorified through Him.’**

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Glorifying God does not add anything to the honor due to Him. Yet it adds to our honor, this is clarified by the Lord’s words: **‘not unto death.’** For even that visible death is not death in itself but rather was used to perform a miracle leading people to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>5</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:1

<sup>6</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 49;5

<sup>7</sup> Hom 62. PG 59:369



Consequently, they would escape from the real death<sup>8</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**‘Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.’ [5]**

The reference here is to the Lord’s love for Martha as she is the older sister, then to Mary and Lazarus. The Lord felt comfortable with the family as a whole. Each member felt he had a personal relationship with the Lord who cared and loved them. Each member felt that he had a special place in the Lord’s embrace and love.

\* If you were to ask: ‘Why did the Evangelist state clearly here that the Lord loved Lazarus?’ Our response would be: ‘So that we may not be disappointed nor abandon the Lord when good men, who are steadfast in virtue and loved by God, get sick<sup>9</sup>’

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* One is sick and two are sorrowful: however, the One who loves them is the Rescuer of the sick. He is even more powerful as He raises the dead and comforts those who mourn<sup>10</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“So when He heard that he was sick,  
He stayed two more days in the place where He was.” [6]**

With the Lord Jesus Christ, there is for everything an appropriate time. It depends on His divine thought and not on our own human timing. At the wedding in Cana, His mother had told Him ‘they have no wine’ (John 2:3). He answered: “My hour has not yet come” (John 2:4). In these circumstances, we would expect that the Lord would hurry and go to Bethany to support His loved ones. However, we find that He remains where He was for two days. **He knows the right time for every work.**

In all the previous miracles, the Lord was concerned with underling His love to all sufferers. Here, He delays as He wishes to underline a certain fact through His love for the whole family. He wanted to confirm that He is ‘the Resurrection’ for the time of His death and resurrection were about to happen. That is why the Lord did not hurry to heal Lazarus of his sickness, and He did not go immediately after his death. Indeed, He let him remain in the tomb until the fourth day and until his body decayed. In this manner, everyone who grants life and resurrection even after the body has decayed.

\* Why did He stay? So that Lazarus may breathe his last breath and be buried. In that manner, no one could claim that he had not died and that he was just in a deep sleep; or that he had fainted but had not died. For this reason the Lord waited for two days when decay takes place and the sisters would state that there is ‘**a stench**’ [39]<sup>11</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

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<sup>8</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 49:6

<sup>9</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:1

<sup>10</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 49:7

<sup>11</sup> Hom 62, PG 59:369

**Then after this, He said to the disciples:  
“Let us go to Judea again.” [7]**

By telling His disciples: **‘Let us go to Judea again’ [7]**, the Lord underlines His mercy even to those who are undeserving. Although Judea was not ready to receive Him, He requests to go another time to those who had rejected Him. The Lord does not cease to offer opportunities to every soul, even though it had rejected Him before, so that it might find pleasure in Him...

\* Why did the Lord inform His disciples here about His destination. Note that He did not do so in any other instances. They were in great fear, therefore He notified them in advance to avoid confusing them should any surprises occur.<sup>12</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

**The disciples said to Him,  
“Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You  
And are You going there again?” [8]**

Just a few weeks ago the Jews wanted to stone Him in the temple during the Feast of Dedication (John 10:31).

\* They advised Him because they wanted to save the Lord from death. Yet, He had come to die in order to save them from death<sup>13</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* They were concerned about His safety, but they were even more so about themselves. They were not perfect and it was on this account that Thomas was shaken with fear and said: ‘Let us also go, that we may die with Him.’ This was because Thomas was the weakest and had the least faith than the others. Nevertheless, see how the Lord encouraged them by His words: **“Are there not twelve hours in the day?” [9]**<sup>14</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Jesus answered:  
“Are there not twelve hours in the day?  
If any walks in the day, he does not stumble,  
Because he sees the light of this world.” [9]**

Our path is full of stumbling blocks. He who walks in the light does not stumble. However, those who remain in darkness will stumble. He on whom the sun of righteousness shines will be enlightened; and he will soar from glory to glory. Stumbling, blocks will appear trivial to such a person. Indeed these will be the cause of his victory and crown. As for those who follow the lusts of their bodies, the thoughts of the evil world, and the pride in his heart, these will continue to stumble. Moreover, they will present endless excuses.

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<sup>12</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:1

<sup>13</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 49:8

<sup>14</sup> Homilies on St John 62:1

The Lord did not fear death for He is the light before whom the powers of darkness will not be able to stand. In the same manner, all those who stay under His wings will walk fearlessly throughout his days of estrangement. They will walk free of fear, confusion and anxiety.

The Jews, like many other nations, used to divide the day from sunrise to sunset into 12 sections or hours that extend or decrease according to the different seasons in the year.

The journey from across the sky does not begin at night when man leaves the earth. It begins in the daytime when he is struggling through life; while he is confident that, through the grace of God, he is moving towards his eternity. God granted us the hours of the day as valuable opportunities to work. These are precious when we spend them appropriately, otherwise they become worthless.

\* The Lord indicates that He is the day. He has chosen 12 disciples and says: If I am the day and you are the hours, do the hours give advice to the day? The hours follow the day and not vice versa. He indicates that He is the spiritual day. May the hours listen to the Day, may they preach in the daytime for you become known and enlightened in the daytime. Through hourly preaching, the world gets to believe in the Day. He has summed it up in His brief words: “Follow Me, if you do not want to stumble”

**St. Augustine**

**“But if one walks in the night, he stumbles  
Because the light is not in him.” [10]**

\* The Lord spoke these words to reveal that anyone, who feels here is no evil within him, will not be touched by any fearful matter. Conversely, those who do evil will be caught in it. Therefore we should not be afraid for we are doing nothing that deserves death. Or He could be saying that those who see the light of this world are safe. And if this is truly the case, then how much safer are those who are with Me and as long as they do not isolate themselves from Me?! The Lord encouraged His disciples by these words and added that the purpose of their trip to Judea was necessary for them since they had to go to Bethany and not to Jerusalem [11, 12]<sup>15</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**These things He said, after that He said to them:  
“Our friend Lazarus sleeps,  
But I go that I may wake him up.” [11]**

The Lord calls a believer ‘**our friend.**’ He did say ‘My friend’ for we have signed a covenant with God by which He has made us not only His friend, but a friend of the whole Church, since He is a member of that Church. The death of Lazarus did not mark the end of the friendship between Lazarus and the Lord and the whole Church. He remains a friend of the Lord and of the whole church throughout all ages.

\*It is as though He is saying: ‘This time I am going there with a different purpose. I was there earlier in order to discuss and struggle with the Jews. However, I am going this time in order to

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<sup>15</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:1

raise our friend, Lazarus'<sup>16</sup>.

### St. John Chrysostom

The Lord speaks about death and calls it '**sleep.**' Sleep indicates physical rest as it helps restore the energy of the body. Thus a person wakes up to start in new day fully active and energetic. This is true as well in the case of the sleep of death; for a believer, when he goes to sleep, rises up into a new life armed with new potentials in a new world.

\* Truly, it is not said about saints that they are dead, but rather that they are laying down or resting.<sup>17</sup>

### St. Jerome

In the eyes of his sister, Lazarus was dead. However, in the Lord's eyes, he was sleeping. He is dead in the eyes of mankind who are unable to bring him back to life; whereas the Lord can very easily raise him out of the grave and as though He is simply waking up Lazarus from his sleep. By His power, the Lord speaks with him as with someone who is asleep. Similarly the Holy Bible speaks to others as though they were asleep and who are most probably dead. In that context, the apostles says: "But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope' (1 Thes 4:13). That is why he also speaks about them as those laying down to rest. The Lord had informed them previously about His resurrection. In that manner, all the dead are resting or laying down - whether they are righteous or wicked<sup>18</sup>.

### St. Augustine

**St. Augustine** believes that all the dead are more like people asleep. However, some may have happy dreams, while other have nightmares. Or they are like people in a temporary storage area. However, some - like Lazarus, the poor man - enjoying being in his father Abraham's embrace; while the foolish rich man suffered great thirst and could not find anyone to grant him a drop of water ( Luke 16:19-31) Everyone will be called out to receive according to his deeds<sup>19</sup>.

\* You might be disturbed when you would be called a 'widow' only because you have lost a good husband. We agree with you that in this world there are few men who are as good as your man. Few are like him: loving, noble, humble, devoted, wise and pure.

Indeed, if he were completely destroyed and altogether beyond recovery, then this would be a great catastrophe and the cause of great sadness. However, what actually happened is that **your husband has sailed to a quiet harbor and has gone on a journey to God to whom he really belongs.** Therefore we should not mourn and instead rejoice.

**For this death is not death. Rather, it is a kind of migration and a transfer what is bad to what is better: from the earth to the heavens; from living among mankind to being with angels and archangels; even better for we will be with God who is Lord of the angels and archangels.**

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<sup>16</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:1

<sup>17</sup> Against Vigilantius, 6

<sup>18</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate cf. 49:9

<sup>19</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate cf. 49:9, 10

When your husband lived, he served the emperor and he was surrounded by the dangers of the wicked and their tricks. Now, he has moved into the other world where nothing like it exists. Therefore as much as you are sad that God has taken such a good and honorable person, you need to rejoice **that he has gone to a more secure and honorable place and is relieved of all the dangers of the present life. Indeed, he is now safe and enjoying great peace.**

Surely, we do not need someone to inform us that heaven is much better than the earth. Therefore, why do we mourn when someone departs from this world to go to the other world?!

If your husband were one of those who lead shameful lives that displease God, you would be justified to mourn and weep. Indeed, you would be justified to do so even while he was here and alive. However, as much as he is among the friends of God we need to rejoice while he is alive as well as when he departs and lays down to rest.

We need to do so as the blessed apostle tells us: ‘having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better’ (Phil 1:23).<sup>20</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Then His disciples said, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.” [12]**

Sleep is often a good sign that a sick person is healing. That is true especially when it is a deep sleep. That is why when the Lord said that Lazarus was asleep, the disciples believed that it was no longer necessary for Him to go to Judea in order to heal him. They considered that he had begun to heal through that deep sleep. The disciples could not imagine they had to take a two or three day trip with the Lord and go to an area that had resisted Him just to wake up a friend out of his sleep.

**‘However, Jesus spoke of his death,  
but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep.’ [13]  
Then Jesus said to them plainly,  
“Lazarus is dead.” [14]**

\*The Lord used the word ‘sleep’ to underline that He rejected boastfulness. Then He added the word ‘**dead**’ when they did not understand!<sup>21</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe,  
nevertheless let us go to him.”[15]**

When Lazarus died and everyone had lost hope he would awake again, the Lord moved in their direction to proclaim that He is the hope of those who have no hope and that He is the helper of those who have no one to help them. When mankind says: ‘Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, we ourselves are cut off’ (Ezek 37:11); then Lord God says: ‘Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, then you shall know that I am the

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<sup>20</sup> Letter to a Young Widow, 3

<sup>21</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:1

Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people and brought you up from your graves.'

\* Why does the Lord say **'for your sakes'**? In order to avoid doubt or suspicious of deception, I am informing you in advance about the death of Lazarus. Do you notice how the disciples were not completely comfortable in their roles and how unaware they were of the power they had? This was due to the great fear that filled their hearts. Besides, they suffered much anxiety and difficulty within themselves. When the Lord said that Lazarus was 'asleep', He added 'I go to wake him up' as He did not wish to inform them about what He would do actually. The Lord constantly teaches us to avoid vain glory, and useless promises. However, He did that in the case of the centurion when the Lord told him; 'go and I will heal him' (Matt 8:7). This was because of the man's great faith. If someone were to say: 'how did the disciples think that Lazarus was asleep? How did they not understand that the Lord was speaking about death when He said: "I go that I may wake him up." It is foolish to understand that the Lord would travel fifteen hundred *stadia* in order to wake Lazarus up. Our answer is that the disciples believed the Lord was speaking in the mysterious manner which He often used when He spoke to them<sup>22</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

The Lord did not say: 'Let us go to console his sisters.' Rather, He said 'let us go to him.' This is because death cannot separate the Lord Jesus Christ and His church from a departed one. Everyone would go to Him in love and meet with him as a living member in the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord said **'let us go'** and not 'I will go.' He intends to include the whole church to go with Him and meet with those who have rested in sleep.

**'Then Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples:  
'Let us also go,  
that we may die with Him" [16]**

**'Thomas'** is the equivalent of the Greek word 'Didymus' which means 'a twin.' The disciples were annoyed because of his words. It was hard to understand his intention- was he showing courage and therefore a disregard for death? He seemed to agree that they should all go with the Lord Jesus Christ and get exposed to the death awaiting Him. It was as though he were saying, like Ruth "where you die, I will die and there will I be buried" (Ruth 1:17). He preferred to be in the Lord's company, even if that would cost him death; rather than live and not be in the company of the Lord. Or did he speak in this manner out of fear or as a kind of objection?

\* The disciples dreaded facing the Jews and Thomas was the most fearful. Therefore he said **'Let us go that we may die with Him.'** In fact, he was the least determined and the least steadfast in his faith compared to the other disciples.

\* Some believe that he wanted to die (with the Lord Jesus Christ). Yet that was not the case as the words come from a person who was scared. However, the Lord did not reprimand him but rather supported him. Later on, Thomas became unvanquished and stronger than all the others. The amazing thing is that we see this weak person before the crucifixion took place. After the crucifixion and his belief in the Lord's resurrection, he becomes more zealous than any other person. Great is the power of the Lord Jesus Christ!

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<sup>22</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:2

That same person who dared not go with the Lord to Bethany, is the same one who could not visibly see the Lord and yet traveled alone the whole world to witness for Him. With that mission, he lived among nations where killing was rampant, and where they sought to kill him<sup>23</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

## **5. The Lord's Journey to Lazarus' family.**

**'So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days.'**  
**[17]**

Other evangelists record some of the events that occurred during this journey towards Bethany. For example, the healing of the blind man in Jericho, the meeting with Zacchaeus and his conversion. Although the Lord loved Lazarus and his sisters and was on His way to raise him from the dead, yet, He did not dismiss the needs of others. Where ever He went, He made good deeds.

**St. Augustine** finds that the four days that elapsed with Lazarus in the tomb refer to human stages. The first day is the day Adam and Eve fell and sinned and so death reigned on Adam and all his children. The second day refers to mankind who have broken the natural law and testimony of God. The third day refers to breaking the Law of Moses. The final fourth stage refers to the period when the Gospel is being preached and the Lord Jesus Christ has granted a new resurrected life to those who have died in sin<sup>24</sup>.

The Jews held a belief that the soul continues to roam around the body for three days after death; and that on the fourth day it departs having lost all hope of returning to the body again<sup>25</sup>. Therefore, on the fourth day all hope for the person to return to the world once is lost.

**'Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away' [18].**

The Lord Jesus Christ had done countless miracles in Galilee. From among all the miracles He did in Jerusalem, St John the Evangelist chooses to recount those with special significance to the people and leaders. For example, he recounts the healing of the paralyzed man at Bethesda who had been infirm for thirty eight (38) years; the healing of the man born blind; and the raising of Lazarus on the fourth day after his death.

Bethany is about two miles away from Jerusalem and the Jewish mile is equivalent to four and half kilometers.

\* The Evangelist intends to mention this to inform us that the village of Bethany is close to Jerusalem. Probably this would explain why so many people had gone there<sup>26</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

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<sup>23</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:2

<sup>24</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate cf 49:12

<sup>25</sup> Leon Morris, p. 409

<sup>26</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:2

**‘And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary to comfort them concerning their brother.’ [19]**

According to Jewish tradition, mourning lasted for about one month. The first three days were known as ‘days of mourning’; followed by seven days, known as ‘days of condolences.’ During the days of mourning the members of the house did nothing and would not even return someone’s greeting. However, during the days of condolence they did nothing more than their needs: they slept on bedding laid out on the floor, they did not wear shoes, and neither washed nor used oil on their bodies. They covered their heads but did not read out of their law or Mishnah or Talmud. During the rest of the thirty days, they did not shave, wear white clothes or new ones; neither did they mend any damage in the clothes they wore to the funeral<sup>27</sup>.

The word **‘Jews’** is used in this Gospel to refer to the opponents of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why some scholars believe that these people, while opposing the Lord, felt the extent of this catastrophe and so came to Martha and Mary. They had not come for a brief visit. Indeed, they intended to stay with the family of the departed one for two or three days. This was observed especially when the departed was the head of the household.

\* How could they comfort the sisters when they knew that the Lord loved them? Had not the Jews declared that anyone who confessed that this person was the Messiah would be banished from the Sanhedrin? Our answer is: they offered condolences either on account of their loss or because the sisters were respected and were more honorable than others. Or it could be that those who had come were not evil since many of them had believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary was sitting in the house.’ [20]**

It seems that Martha was eagerly awaiting the Lord’s arrival. She needed Him to comfort her and her sister. Upon hearing that He was on the way to the house, she abandoned all decorum and traditions of mourning as well as the mourners who were visiting her; and hurried to meet the Lord. She left the house as well as the village and met Him outside. As for Mary, she remained in the house- probably her sorrow prevented her from moving quickly; or it could be that she had not heard of the Lord’s arrival.

Some scholars believe that Martha was the older one who managed the house (Luke 10:40).

\* If we were to say: What was Martha’s intention when she left without her sister and went to meet the Lord? Our answer would be: She wanted to speak to Him privately and inform Him of what had taken place. However, when He revealed great hope, she went and called Mary. At that time, Mary was suffering the deepest degrees of sorrow.

Do you not see how great her love was?

This is the Mary of whom the Lord had said: “Mary has chosen that good part” (Luke

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Adam Smith Comm. On John



10:42)

Someone may say: ‘How did Martha appear more fervent than her?’ She might have appeared as such, but she was not actually. For Mary had not yet heard of His arrival. Indeed Martha was weaker; when she had listened to the Lord’s words, she spoke like a child who was learning to walk: ‘Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days’ [39]. In contrast, Mary immediately believed, and did not speak as Martha, although she had not heard the Lord’s words of hope<sup>28</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Then Martha said to Jesus: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” [21]**

Martha’s words are the same ones Mary said later on. This indicates that they had not yet fully comprehended the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ. They had not yet realized that He is present everywhere. They believed that His presence could have prevented death from touching their brother. Moreover, they trusted His tenderness and gentleness compassion. Yet, their faith was as a shaking reed which the Lord would support and strengthen rather than break it.

**“But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.” [22]**

Martha blamed herself and corrected her words with the Lord Jesus Christ. She believed that if the Lord asked of His Father anything -her brother’s resurrection- even though her brother had died- His request would be answered. She dared not ask Him to resurrect her brother. However, she asked for that indirectly and left it up to Him to decide whether to raise Lazarus or not.

She believed that if the Lord prayed God for anything, He would get it. However, she did not realize that He was Life and that He possessed life in Himself: what He did was done through His own power for He is One with the Father.

\* Do you see their heavenly wisdom (Mary and Martha)? Even though their resolve was weak, yet they did not collapse into wailing when they saw the Lord. They did not indulge in excessive sorrowful expressions of mourning, such as we would if we saw a number of our acquaintances entering our home in such a situation. The sisters considered the Lord Jesus Christ to be a Teacher and so they believed in Him. However, they did not comprehend the extent of His sublime honor and power. This is evident in Martha’s words: **“I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.”** The sisters spoke to the Lord as they would to someone who is steadfast in virtue and therefore all his prayers would be answered<sup>29</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Jesus said to her: your brother will rise again.’[23]**

The Lord’s response to Martha reveals deep humility and compassion, for He tells her: **“Your brother will rise again’ [23]**

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<sup>28</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:3

<sup>29</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:3

\* In this manner, the Lord dismisses her words **‘whatever you ask’** [22], for He did not say ‘I ask.’ What did He say? **“Your brother will rise again.”** He could have said: “Woman, you continue to look down below. I do not need help from anyone, for I do everything by my own power.” However, this would have been a serious stumbling block to her. By saying **“Your brother will rise again”**, the Lord spoke as one who chose to speak in a moderate tone<sup>30</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Martha said to Him,**

**“I know that he will rise again in the resurrection the last day” [24]**

The subject of the resurrection from the dead was deeply rooted in the minds of the Jews. Only the Sadducees rejected it. The holy books that were written after the exile were full of teachings about that subject (2 Kings 7:9, 14, 23, 36; 12:43; 14:46; Eccl 5:1-7, 17; 6:6, 7). Jewish writings such as those by the historian Josephus and other translations speak about that.

**‘Jesus said to her,**

**“I am the resurrection and the life.**

**He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.” [25]**

\* By these words, the Lord revealed His authority. He revealed that He did not need anyone to help Him since He Himself is the life. Had He been in need of someone else, how could He have been the resurrection and the life? In spite of that, the Lord implied this in His words rather than declaring it openly<sup>31</sup>.

\* He demonstrated that He is the giver of all goodness, and that it is appropriate to ask of Him<sup>32</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“And whoever lives and believes in Me**

**Shall never die.**

**Do you believe this?”[26]**

It is as though the Lord was telling her: ‘You say that your brother will arise on the Day of Judgment. Who will raise him up other than Me who grants resurrection and am the source of life? Since I have authority to raise him on the last day, would it be hard for me to raise him now? In this manner, the Lord Jesus Christ opened the door of hope before her. He supported her faith and revealed Himself to her. He is not merely a person. Rather, He is the giver of life and of the whole of existence.

Everyone who believes, even though he dies according to the flesh, will arise and fully enjoy fellowship in His glory. He will no longer die after the death of the body; but will appear in a glorified body with the soul. The believer will thus practice the resurrected life forever. The Lord does not say that the believer will not go through the gate we call death. Rather, He states that the life He grants continues through death: Death cannot delete the life that the Lord Jesus

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<sup>30</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:3

<sup>31</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:3

<sup>32</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:3

Christ has granted to us.

\* Note how the Lord uplifts Martha's mind. It was not His intention to just raise Lazarus; for He wanted Martha and all those present to learn of this resurrection. That is why He spoke these words before He raise up Lazarus<sup>33</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

The Lord asked Martha **“Do you believe this?”** It is as though He were asking her to have the kind of faith that defies nature and death. Her answer came with steadfastness and firmness- there was no hesitation and conveyed affirmation.

**She said to Him, “Yes Lord,  
I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”**  
[27]

Martha declared her confession of faith with all due sincerity: **“You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world”, [27]**. This is the same confession of faith that the apostle Peter declared and for which the Lord praised him (Matt 16:16-17). Her confession of faith includes three main issues:

- Jesus is the Messiah, the One the fathers and the prophets awaited. During the 1<sup>st</sup> century, many of the Jews awaited His coming eagerly.
- He is the natural Son of God (Ps 2:7)
- He came into the world to form it into His holy church: this would include all peoples and not the Jews only.

Since He is the Messiah and Savior of the world and the natural Son of God who had descended to the world to raise it, then He is definitely the life and the Resurrection.

\* The Lord certainly raised her humble opinion of Him so that she would not consider Him to be just someone in the crowd. She did not call Him Lord unknowingly, for she did so to restore the honor due to Him. She spoke these words to honor Him and this is revealed again in the words she spoke later on. She neither laughed nor joked and had no doubts at any point<sup>34</sup>.

\* It seems to us that the woman did not understand the Lord's words. Even though she realized their gravity, yet she did not fully comprehend them. That is why she gave a different response to the question she had been asked<sup>35</sup>.

\* She did not say: ‘Raise my brother.’ Rather, she said: **“I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”**

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called her sister, saying:**

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<sup>33</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:3

<sup>34</sup> Hom. 62.PG 59:181

<sup>35</sup> Hom 62. PG 59:372

**‘The Teacher has come,  
And is calling for you.’ [28]**

Martha did not wait to hear praise on account of her faith. However, she gained new concepts through this meeting with the Lord. In a short while, she had gained a new experience. She then went to call her sister so that she might share the pleasure she had received. The Lord had asked about Mary as she had not come with her sister. Martha called her secretly because she was surrounded by many mourners. Maybe some of them- men or women- were opposed to the Lord and could not tolerate Him. Martha feared her invitation might cause a disturbance that would prevent Mary from coming out quickly to meet with the Lord and enjoy His comforting presence.

We make the following observations about her secret conversation with her sister concerning the Lord’s arrival:

**First:** She called Him **‘Teacher’/ *Didaskalos***. His consolation does not involve more emotions. Rather, He reveals love, tenderness and unique facts of faith. He is able to attract His beloved disciples and friends to divine consolation.

**Second: ‘He has come’:** The One whom we have been awaiting for so long, and whom we often have prayed for His coming.

**Third: “He is calling for you”:** for He has inquired about you by name. This is because He cares for you and seeks your peace and desires to console your heart.

**‘As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly  
And came to Him.’ [29]**

Upon hearing the Lord’s call from her sister’s lips, **‘she arose quickly and came to Him.’ St. John Chrysostom** comments on this noble behavior and credits her for behaving with true philosophy- in other words, with the wisdom that does not seek trivial, unprofitable matters; but rather, that which is truly for her good. On account of her wisdom, she was blessed. Who would imagine that a woman who had lost her brother a few days earlier, and was surrounded by many mourners, who were wailing and weeping, would hurry out at once? Upon hearing about the Lord, she does not wait for Him to come to her and console her? Rather, she ran outside the village to meet the Lord; while the woman around her imagined that she was going to the tomb to weep over her brother!

How badly is our need to divert our eyes from the bitterness that enfolds us in the midst of our tears and trials. We need not be concerned about the burdensome mourners who are unable to offer true peace. Indeed, we need to let our inner depths hurry towards the One who comes to us and fills us with His heavenly consolation. Let us truly avoid all formalities, so that we may lift our hearts with the Holy Spirit of God to our Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is the Healer of our souls and bodies. He is the One who grants life and resurrection. He is the Almighty who constantly initiates love.

How much does the soul need to depart from the midst of the valley of tears, leave all the problems which destroy her and ignore every human comment. The soul needs to do so in order to get away and move in hope towards the One who alone is able to transform her through His

Holy Spirit, satisfy her, and raise her to everlasting life!

The constant preoccupation with our sorrows results in a depression that is far more bitter than actual sorrows themselves. In contrast, meeting with the Lord Jesus Christ grants us the gladness of the resurrected life and its constant rejoicing.

\* Note, for example, how this woman received her reward through her genuinely wise behavior. When there were all those women sitting around her, when she was weeping and sorrowful; yet she did not wait and expect that the Lord should come to her. Neither did she ask for what seemed to be her right (for sorrowful women are handicapped by this epidemic which is that they exaggerate their condition besides they're actual misery). As for Martha, she did not behave that way and as soon as she heard, she rose quickly and ran to Him<sup>36</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**'Now Jesus had not yet come into the town,  
But was in the place where Martha met Him.' [30]**

With divine wisdom, the Lord Jesus Christ moved exceedingly slowly in order to give Martha the opportunity to hurry and call her sister. He also gives Mary the chance to hurry and come to Him. They would then go together with Him to the tomb where He would transform their sorrow into sublime joy. In the same manner, the Lord seems to be slow in solving our problems although He seeks our happiness. He wishes to give us the opportunity to turn to Him and express our inner most thoughts with living faith and steadfast hope. Then we may hurry to Him to discover His sublime and hidden divine plan for us.

\* St. John reports that the Lord Jesus Christ **'had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him.'** He was walking slowly so that no one would think that He was propelling Himself to do a miracle. Rather, He was waiting until they would ask Him for that.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**'Then the Jews who were with her in the house, comforting her,  
When they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out,  
Followed her, saying,  
"She is going to the tomb to weep there." [31]**

Martha called her sister secretly, informed her that the Lord had asked about her [28], she pulled her away from her weeping and away from the mourners, and made her hurry towards the Lord. In this manner, Mary, by her quiet movements, attracted all those who were with her in the house even though they did not know where they were going. Her love to the Savior, which she demonstrated in a practical way, attracted many to come into contact to see the One who raises the dead.

\* She did not go alone, but rather attracted the Jews who were in her house. With great wisdom, Mary called her sister secretly to avoid disturbing those who were gathered in her home. She did not indicate the reason for her conversation. Surely they would have returned to their homes had

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<sup>36</sup> Homilies on St John, 63:1

they overheard. However, now that she went out crying, they followed her. Probably, this would have confirmed the death of Lazarus<sup>37</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Then, when Mary came where Jesus was and saw Him,  
She fell at His feet, saying to Him,  
“Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” [32]**

The Lord did not enter the village, or the home of Lazarus and his sisters. He only met the sisters and then went with the crowd to the tomb. He Loves His work, and He had come to go to the tomb where He would fulfill His task without delay.

\* This Mary was more eager than her sister, Martha. She was neither embarrassed before the crowd, nor of the suspicions which took hold of many concerning the Lord. Many among the mourners were His enemies and these said: **“Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?”** However, when the Master came, she banished all deadly thoughts, and resolved with a strong will to honor the Teacher<sup>38</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

## **6- Raising Lazarus from the Dead**

**‘Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping  
And the Jews who came with her weeping,  
He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.’ [33]**

This situation reveals that the Lord Jesus Christ has indeed become a person with human emotions. He empathizes with those suffering and weeps with those weeping: He is a Man of sorrows (Is 53:3). He was never seen laughing, but he was seen weeping in more than one situation

\* The Lord said nothing to Mary. He did not utter the words He had said to her sister, Martha due to the big crowd who was present. It was not the time to say anything; yet He revealed His human nature humbly for He did not desire them to imagine that He was more than that.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* You may become troubled involuntarily, whereas the Lord Jesus Christ chose to be troubled voluntarily.

The Lord Jesus Christ became hungry. However, this is only because He wanted it to be so.

He was sad. This is a fact; yet it was as He willed it to be. He has the power to be one or the other; to be moved or to be unmoved. That is because the Word had taken on a soul and body. Therefore He carried in Him the same human nature yet this was united with the holy Word and at one with the Lord, Jesus Christ. In this manner, the Word who possesses sublime

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<sup>37</sup> Homilies on St John, 63:1

<sup>38</sup> Homilies on St John, 63:1

power, uses weakness at His will- therefore He was ‘troubled’<sup>39</sup>.

St. Augustine

**And He said: “Where have you laid him?”**

**They said to Him, “Lord, come and see.” [34]**

\* If you were to ask: Why did the Lord ask this question? Our answer would be: He did not wish to make the first move. He wanted to know from them what had happened and to pray Him to make a miracle. This was because He wanted to clear the miracle of all false claims.

St. John Chrysostom

\* The Lord Jesus Christ will come to your tomb. He may find Martha, the woman who offers righteous services and Mary who sincerely holds the word of God. Mary is like the holy church of God that has chosen the good path. They wept and He tenderly shared their grief.

When you will die, the Lord will find many weeping, He will say: “Where have you laid her/ him?” In other words: at what point is she/ he condemned?

What is her/ his rank among the repentant?

I wish to see the one over whom you are weeping, so that I may be moved by his tears. I will find out if he actually has died of sin; then I will treat him with forgiveness.

The people tell Him: **“Come and see.”**

What does ‘come’ mean? That the remission of sins may come, may life and resurrection be granted to the departed one... May Your kingdom come to this sinner as well<sup>40</sup>.

St. Ambrose

\* How amazing! The One who came to raise Lazarus from the dead appears not to know where he had been buried, and He asks **“Where have you laid him?” [34]**. Many of the fathers correctly comment that God, who knows all things, appears as someone who does not know the place of darkness. Neither does He know evil nor evil ones. Accordingly, when Adam sinned in Paradise, God asked: ‘Where are you? (Gen 3: 9). On judgment day, God will tell the wicked: ‘I do not know you’ (Matt 7:23). In this passage too, the Lord asks **“Where have you laid him?”**

\* I do not see you in My light and in the righteousness which I know<sup>41</sup>.

\* What does “see” convey? Be patient: for the Lord perceives and is moved. That is why we ask Him to ‘look at our humility and pain and to Him forgive us our sins’ (Matt 9:13)<sup>42</sup>.

St Augustine

**‘Jesus wept.’ [35]**

In the Greek version, the verb ‘wept’, used in this passage, is used in a form that is different to the form used to describe the weeping of Mary when she was surrounded by mourners. Here, it does not convey the loud wailing like them. Rather, it conveys that tears ran

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<sup>39</sup> St Augustine; On the Gospel of St John, tractate 49:18

<sup>40</sup> Concerning Repentance 2:7:54-55

<sup>41</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 49:20

<sup>42</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 49:20

down His face. It is just a practical testimony to His deep feelings before the crowds; conveys how He shared the pain of the sorrowful who had not yet learned how to deal with death. The crowds saw in the Lord's tears a living testimony of how much the loved Lazarus [36].

**St. John Chrysostom** observes that every thing the Lord did was intended, by His divine wisdom, so that the crowds would benefit as a result of the miracle. On the one hand, he did not tell Mary, who was surrounded by the crowds, what He had told Martha when He met her alone earlier. He had spoken then about raising Lazarus. The crowds heard Him - many of them were hostile towards Him- they would have left and returned to Jerusalem and would have missed the resurrection of Lazarus. On the other hand, He confirmed His humanity in these moments so that the crowds would not resent any words regarding His divinity.

He wept silently. He was troubled and then took a deep breath as someone trying to control His agitation. He asked about the spot where the tomb was.... All this aroused questions in the mind of the Jews. They wished to know what He would do without resenting Him.

\* What did the Lord Jesus Christ do? He did not enter into any form of dialogue with Mary at that time. He did not tell her what He had said to her sister as it was not convenient as there was a crowd. All His acts were measured and done with great humility in order to confirm His human nature. He wept silently and delayed the miracle at that time. It was going to be a great miracle and He was about to make a serious act that would lead many to believe. He did not want to do in the absence of the crowds for then they would find it hard to believe. They would stumble and not benefit by its greatness. He acted in a manner that would not make Him lose His catch. Therefore, He provided many proofs to testify to His humility and confirm His humanity. He wept and was troubled. Normally, sorrow arouses feelings and when He groaned in the spirit- in other words, He controlled His agitation and asked: **“Where have you laid him?”**[34]<sup>43</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord wept for Lazarus whom He would raise from the dead. He undoubtedly set an example to be like Him and to weep over our dead ones. It is true that He did not give us a commandment to do so; besides we have been granted the faith that they would rise up again to eternal life. In the Book of Wisdom, we are told to weep over the dead as one would who has suffered from great harm. However, we are then advised to be comforted as sorrow may lead to death and a sad heart may deplete strength (Sirach 38: 16- 19)<sup>44</sup>.

**St Augustine**

\* To reveal that He has true human feelings, the Lord mourned for the one whom He would raise from the dead<sup>45</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

**‘Then the Jews said:**

**“See how He loved him!”**[36]

When the Jews saw the tears of the Lord, they said: **“See how He loved Him.”**[36]. We too, when we see His Blood dripping from His body on the cross, we worship Him and say: “See

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<sup>43</sup> Homilies on St John, 63:1

<sup>44</sup> Letters, 263

<sup>45</sup> Letter 60:7



how He loves us!”

\* Do you notice how the Lord showed no sign that He would raise Lazarus? He went, not as someone who would raise Lazarus, but rather as one who would mourn over him. That is how the Jews thought that the Lord was going in order to mourn and not to raise him. This is apparent from their words: **“See how He loved him”** [36].

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘And some said,  
“Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?”** [37]

In their ignorance, they imagined that the Lord’s tears indicated disability and incapacity to act. They did not realize that these were tears of love and compassion. Besides, just healing him, they could not understand that He could still raise Lazarus from the dead even after his body had decayed.

\* The Jews in this passage admit that the Lord had opened the blind man’s eyes. However, they denied His power to bring Lazarus back to life.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself,  
Came to the tomb.  
It was a cave  
And a stone lay against it.’** [38]

It should not be understood that when the Lord was troubled He had lost His inner peace. Just as He had descended to take the form of man and live among us as a full and real human being, He voluntarily allowed Himself to feel agitated in order to empathize with the troubled and consequently carry them into His divine peace.

**Jesus said:  
“Take away the stone.”  
Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him:  
“Lord, by this time there is stench,  
For he has been dead four days”** [39]

The Lord ordered them to lift the stone so that all the bystanders would see the dead body lying in the grave. They would also smell the odor and so be assured that he had decayed. Then when Lazarus would walk out of the grave, they would not imagine him to be a phantom but that it was his body indeed.

Martha’s objection probably came after they had started moving the stone and she had smelled the odor.

\*Why did the Lord not call Lazarus while He was farther away from the tomb, and then bring him afterwards before their eyes? Or rather, why did the Lord not raise Lazarus while the stone

still sealed the tomb? The Lord is He who can, with His words, move the body and reveal it in full life once more. Would it have been too hard for Him to roll the stone just with His word?

The One who has the power, with His words, to make him, who was bound and wrapped in grave clothes, to walk... would it have been hard for Him to make the stone move?

So why did He not do so?

In order to make them witnesses of the miracle. Consequently, they would be unable to repeat what they said concerning the miracle of the man born blind: "It is he"; "It is not he." Now their hands and their presence at the grave are truly a witness that this is the person who had died.

If they had not come, it would have appeared as a vision or that this was a person replacing the other one.

Now, they had come to the spot, raised the stone and had heard the command to untie the dead who was bound in grave clothes. The dear ones who had carried him to the tomb knew from the grave clothes who this was. The sisters did not stay behind (away from the crowds), and one of them said: "**There is a stench, for he has been dead four days**" [39]. We believe that all these matters were sufficient to silence those with wicked tendencies for they had become witnesses of the miracle<sup>46</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord will come and order that the stone which has fallen on the sinner's shoulders be lifted away.

He could have moved the stone with a single order; for even mute nature wishes to obey the Lord's orders.

He could have moved away the stone covering the tomb by the power of His silent work. Remember that at the peak of His sufferings many stones moved from over the tombs of the dead and suddenly they became opened.

However, He ordered the men to remove the stone from over the tomb of Lazarus so that unbelievers would believe what they saw as they watched the dead man raised up.

Besides, this miracle carries a symbol that grants us the power to alleviate the burden of sin and the heavy pressure it exerts on the culprit. We have to do our share in moving the burdens, while He resurrects and delivers from the graves those who liberate themselves of their bonds<sup>47</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* The statement: "**He has been dead four days**" truly refers to a condition of the soul that progressively occurs over four stages:

First state: as though a lustful provocation within the heart.

Second: acceptance

Third: transforming it into an act.

Fourth: transformation into a habit.

Some people shake off wicked matters and cast them out of their mind as though they found no pleasure in them. Others find pleasure even though they do not find them acceptable. In this case death does not set in, yet it institutes a certain beginning. Besides the sense of pleasure, there is an added sense of compliance. Condemnation of the person instantly occurs then.

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<sup>46</sup> Homilies on St John, 63:2

<sup>47</sup> Concerning Repentance, Book 2:7:56

Have complied, the sense of agreement progresses and gets transformed into apparent deed.

And deeds get transformed into habits. This leads to a kind of frustration to the extent of being described as **“having a stench for he has been dead four days.”** That is why the Lord came and with Him all things are feasible. In this case, however, there seemed to be a problem. He was troubled in the spirit and revealed the need for great and loud objection in order to resurrect those who had become cruel out of habit. Yet, at the Lord’s cry the bonds of necessity exploded. The forces of hell were terrified and Lazarus returned to life once more. Truly, the Lord rescues even the one who had been dead four days and saves him from wicked habits. Only to the Lord does he appear to be asleep; and he is the one the Lord desires to resurrect<sup>48</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* Even if you were lying in your grave, the Lord raises you up, even though your body has decayed!<sup>49</sup>

**St. Jerome**

**The Scholar Origen** believes that when the Lord Jesus Christ issued the order to **“take away the stone”**, Martha delayed the execution by her words: **“Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days”** [39]. After that, they lifted it away.

These moments- between the order and the delay, convey a sort of lack of faith. The words: **‘...if you would believe you would see the glory of God’** were not fulfilled. **Moments of delay are moments of lack of faith and rebellion**

\* We need to believe that the period of delay in executing a command constitutes a time of rebellion for the person who executes the command later on... Therefore, we need to remember the words: “Come back to the Lord quickly. Don’t think you can keep putting it off” (Sirach 5:7); and the saying: ‘Do not say to your neighbor, go and come back and tomorrow I will give it, when you have it with you’ (Pro 3:28). We have to consider that Martha was guilty and that the words **‘Then they took the stone from the place’** were added later on. These should have been written immediately after the words: **‘Jesus said, “Take away the stone.”’**<sup>50</sup>

**Origen the Scholar**

\* The Lord said: **“Take away the stone”** [39]. Take away the burden of the law and preach grace: “for if there had been a law given which could have given life truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” (Gal 3:21-22). Hence ‘take away the stone’<sup>51</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**‘Jesus said to her:**

**“Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?”[40]**

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<sup>48</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 48:6

<sup>49</sup> Letter 147:9

<sup>50</sup> Commentary on John, Book 28:19 -22

<sup>51</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 49:22

\* Truly, faith is a great blessing! It works great deeds for those who adhere to truth as they enjoy many blessings.

Through faith, people can perform acts in the name of God. The Lord Jesus Christ aptly said: “ if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, move from here to there, and it will move” (Matt 17:20). Again, He says: “... he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also, and greater works than these...” (John 14:12). What does the Lord mean by “greater works than these? The reference is to the deeds done by the disciples, such as the mere shadow of Peter that raised a dead man. In this respect, it revealed more effectively the Lord’s power. It is less astonishing that while He was alive the Lord did miracles than that after His death others could- in His name- do greater works than His. This is an irresistible proof of the resurrection. For people to believe in the resurrection because they had seen in happening is one thing- even though some could claim it is a vision. It is another matter to see miracles happen by merely calling the Lord’s name - that is greater than His deeds when He lived among men. It is impossible to disbelieve in such a case, unless a person is devoid of feelings.

Hence faith is a great blessing when it is the product of sensitive feelings, great love and a fervent soul.

Indeed, faith makes us wise. It hides our human debasement and discards our excuses. It lends us philosophy (or wisdom) concerning heavenly matters. In other words, it explains the matters which human wisdom cannot discover. Faith can fully and successfully comprehend heavenly matters.

Therefore, let us adhere with faith and let us cease depending on presenting excuses for ourselves<sup>52</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying.  
And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said:  
“Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.” [41]**

These are awesome moments, when the stone is moved away and the body is revealed as the terrible stench fills the air. At the same time, the Lord is standing there and addressing the Father, thanking Him for answering. On the one hand, the Lord is confirming His relationship with the Father. In this manner, He confirms His divinity to those present; not that He is Beelzebub, head of devils, who exorcised devils according to the claims of some leaders. On the other hands, He was setting an example to the by- standers.

\* Once more and as always, we comment that the Lord did not seek own to be honored as much as He desired our salvation. **He was not concerned with presenting sublime heavenly statements. Rather, He sought to say what would attract us to Him.** This explains why His sublime powerful statements were scarce and indirect in contrast to His many humble, lengthy sayings and discourses.

He did not utter sublime divine statements to ensure that this would not be a stumbling block or destructive to those who would come after Him. However, the Lord did not refrain completely from uttering such statements completely so that those living in His time would not stumble too. Indeed, those who crossover from debasement to perfection could benefit from sublime individual teachings to become fully knowledgeable. As for those with weak minds, if

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<sup>52</sup> Homilies on St John, 63:3

they could not constantly hear words uttered at a lower level, they would not ever come to the Lord.

In fact, after the Lord had spoken sublime words such as these, the Jews wanted to stone, persecute, and kill Him for they considered Him guilty of blasphemy... when He equated Himself to God, they said: “This Man blasphemes!” (Matt 9:3). And when the Lord said: “your sins are forgiven” (10:20), they called Him a demon. When He preached that anyone who hears His words becomes stronger than death (John 8:51) and that “the Father is in Me and I in Him” (John 10:38) they abandoned Him. On another occasion, they resisted Him when He said that He had come down from heaven (John 6:33, 60)

Now, the Jews could not tolerate such sublime teachings even though the Lord labored rarely presented complicated issues. Had the Lord’s teachings been loaded with sublime teachings constantly, would they have come and listened to Him?

Consequently, He said: ‘...just as the Father has told Me, so I speak’ (John 12:50), and ‘...I have not come of Myself’ (John 7:28). Then they believed.

Clearly, they believed and as the Evangelist reports: ‘As He spoke these words, many believed in Him’ (John 8:30). Therefore if simple, humble teachings do work and attract people to have faith while sublime words scare them away, then the Lord used simple means to reach His hearers<sup>53</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* For our own good, the Lord offered thanks. He intended us not to identify the Father and the Son as one icon and as a result of their mutual involvement in one and the same act. Indeed, He intended to reveal that it was not obligatory for someone deprived of authority to repay His blessings. On the contrary, because He is the Son of God who claims He always possesses divine power. He could cry out **“Lazarus, come forth”!**

This is definitely an order and not a prayer<sup>54</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

\* He prays as the Son of Man, and orders as the Son of God.<sup>55</sup>

**St Ambrose**

\* When someone lifts his eyes towards the heavens, he should do so respectfully. He should also raise sanctified hands especially when offering prayers, without ‘wrath and doubting. ‘(1 Tim 2:8). As a person raises his eyes in meditation and thought and as the hands are lifted to achieve work, the soul is lifted up and is glorified. This is similar to Moses who lifted his hands up (Ex 17:11), and when a person prays: ‘Let... the lifting up of my hands (be) as the evening sacrifice’ (Ps 141:2). As a result, intangible enemies are overcome, while Israelite thoughts (having a vision of God) that are within us become victorious<sup>56</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

**“And I know that You always hear Me,  
But because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You**

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<sup>53</sup> Homilies on St John, 64:1

<sup>54</sup> Of the Christian Faith:4:6:72

<sup>55</sup> Of the Christian Faith:3:4:32

<sup>56</sup> Commentary on St John, Book 28: 36-37

**sent Me.” [42]**

Here, the Lord clarifies that the relationship between the Father and Son does not require such a prayer. It is intended for those present who need to believe that the Lord has a relationship with the heavens.

\* To ‘hear’ does not imply ‘obedience.’ Rather, this is an eternal union. In the same manner, the Holy Spirit is said to listen to the Father and glorifies the Son. The Spirit glorifies as He has taught us that the Son is the image of the intangible God (Col 1:15), the brightness of His glory, the upholder of His power (Heb 1:3)<sup>57</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

\* How would the Lord be more powerful than His disciples if He worked miracles through prayer?

It is appropriate to say that they did miracles through prayer. Indeed, they often did miracles without prayer as they just used His Holy Name. Now, since His name carried that much power, and then He needed to pray, then His name would have had no effect. And what prayer did the Lord need when He created mankind?

The Lord’s equality to the Father is apparent in many instances. He said: “Let us make man in Our image.” (Gen 1:26). What could be weaker had He needed prayer?

Let us study His prayer: **“Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.”** Who prayed these words at any on time? Before saying anything, He said **“I thank You”**: the Lord underlined that He does not need to pray as He says: “that You have heard Me.” This indicates that he does not lack power, but rather that He and the Father possess one and the same power.

If you said: why do his words take the shape of a prayer? Our response would be: hear the answer from Him and not from me - as He says: **“... because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.”** The Lord gives the real reason for His prayer. He does not want people to suspect that He is opposed to God, or to say that He does not come from God<sup>58</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“Now when He had said these things, he cried with a loud voice,  
“Lazarus, come forth!” [43]**

The Lord could have raise Lazarus, His dear friend, with a soft whisper or even silently. However, he shouted with a great voice and called His loved one: **“Lazarus, come forth.”** He did that so that those present become convinced that the Lord has raised him though His own personal power. He did not use another person’s name, but rather gave an order and the dead arose. Probably, the Lord shouted out loud so that those present would realize that the soul of Lazarus was not inside the tomb. Rather, the Lord was calling the soul to come out of hell and out of a seemingly very distant place. Moreover, He wanted them to realize that He is the One who tells Isaiah the prophet: “I am the Lord, there is no other. I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: (Is 45:18).

The Lord spoke to make us realize that He is the One who will come on the last day and speak. Then the dead will hear His voice and come to life (John 5:25).

The Lord called him by his name ‘Lazarus’ as though awakening him from a deep sleep.

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<sup>57</sup> Of the Holy Spirit, Book 2 :12:137-138

<sup>58</sup> Homilies on St John, 64:2

God told Moses that He knew him by name. This was a sign of personal concern and interest. He did not say to him ‘get up’ but rather said ‘come forth.’ The presence of the Lord, the Giver of life, offered him life, but the order was given to him to move.

\* Why did He shout out loud as though He did not wish to act in the Spirit and command silently? He wanted to reveal the implication of the words: ‘...in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet... the dead will be raised incorruptible’ (1 Cor 15:52). Raising the voice is the response to the sound of the trumpet. He shouted **“Lazarus, come forth.”** Why did the Lord use the name but for the purpose of removing all doubt that it is Lazarus who was raised and not any other person, on that the act of resurrection occurred accidentally and not by His order.<sup>59</sup>

**St. Ambrose**

\* The Lord Jesus Christ did not tell Lazarus: “In the name of My Father come forth.” Neither did He say: “O Father, resurrect him.” Why did He not use such expressions though He seemed to pray and had already demonstrated His independent authority? This is again an aspect of His wisdom, His words revealed His humility and His deeds revealed His power... they could bring no charge against Him other than He did not come from God. They deceived many by this accusation.

Therefore He confirmed by His words and by many examples due to their weakness He provided evidence and many teachings to underline this point. He could have used his power in many other ways to reveal how He was in harmony with the Father and at the same time possessed intrinsic honor. However, the crowds had not attained that level of understanding yet<sup>60</sup>.

\* The Lord did not say ‘Arise.’ Rather, He said: **“Come forth”** as He spoke to the dead one as though he were alive. So who could equal this authority?

Had He done that without possessing power, what would have made Him more significant than the disciples who said: “Why do you look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?” (Act 3:12)

Had the Lord not used His power and not said anything more than what the disciples had said about themselves, then the disciples would have really appeared to be wiser than Him as they rejected praise and glory. In another context, they report why they did so. “We are also men with the same nature as you...” (Acts 14:15). They said these words because they did nothing out of their own power and they wanted people to realize and admit that as well. As for the Lord, when they applied this principle to Him, was it not necessary to dismiss such doubts by using His authority in this situation?

However, the Lord did exactly the opposite of that as He said: ‘...**because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe**, [42]... therefore they may believe that I do not need to pray (to ask)<sup>61</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Now, what is the purpose of saying **“Come forth”** other than to reveal that which is hidden? He who confesses is empowered to come forth.

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<sup>59</sup> On Belief on the Resurrection: 2:27

<sup>60</sup> Homilies on St John, 64:2

<sup>61</sup> Homilies on St John, 64:3

To **‘come forth’** would have been impossible if he was not alive and he would not be alive if he had not risen again. Therefore, through confession a person comes to understand himself and glorifies God<sup>62</sup>.

\* Contemplate the condition of Lazarus: he came out but he was all bound with grave clothes. He was truly alive through confession yet he had not become liberated...he was bound up as he was still tied in the cloth. What does the church do in conformity with the words spoken to her ‘what you loosen will be forgiven’? This is exactly what the Lord told His disciples to do in this context: **“let him loose him and let him go”**<sup>63</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* Do you need a stronger evidence that the faith of others can save someone else? Lazarus had been dead and several days had gone by: his muscles had deteriorated and his body had actually decayed. How could someone who had been dead for four days have faith and personally pray to the Lord?

Nevertheless, what the dead one lacked was available in his two real sisters. When the Lord came, on sister worshipped Him; and when He asked: “where have you laid him?” She answered: **“Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.”** The Lord answered: **“If you would believe you would see the glory of God.”** It is as though He were telling her: ‘have faith which can resurrect the dead body.’

The sisters had such strong faith that it retrieved the dead from the gates of hell.

If mankind could have such faith and are willing to vouch for one another, then it is possible for the dead to rise again. Would it not be of greater benefit to yourself if you had that pure faith?

Indeed, even if you were an unbeliever or had little faith, the Lord and Lover of mankind would be merciful to you when you repent.

On your part, it is appropriate to have a sincere set of mind and say: ‘I believe Lord, help my unbelief’ (Mark 9:24). You need to pray like the apostles: “Lord, increase our faith.” Hence if you have a little faith, you will receive a greater share from God<sup>64</sup>.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* Note that ‘ the Lord gives freedom to the prisoners’ (Ps 14:6-7) and grants peace to those of a humble spirit and who humble at His word (Is 66:2). He may be calling me as I lay in the grave of sin: **“Jerome, come forth”**<sup>65</sup>.

\* As I am still lying in the grave of my sins, bound up with the strings of my wickedness, I await the order of the Lord according to the Gospel: **“Jerome, come forth”**<sup>66</sup>

**St. Jerome**

\* O you who rests in the darkness of the conscience, in the corruption of your sins, as someone imprisoned for a crime, come forth. Admit your sins so that you may be vindicated for ‘with the mouth confession is made to salvation’ (Rom 10:10). If you acknowledge the Lord’s invitation, the bars will be broken and the chains will be loosened. Indeed, the dangerous physical decay

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<sup>62</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 17:2

<sup>63</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 17:3

<sup>64</sup> Essay 9:5

<sup>65</sup> Letter 4:2

<sup>66</sup> Letter 7:3



and stench will be removed<sup>67</sup>.

St. Ambrose

**‘And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes,  
His face was wrapped with a cloth.  
Jesus said to them: “Loose him and let him go.” [44]**

How did Lazarus come out though he was bound hand and foot? He came out as someone limping or crawling and he needed someone to remove the grave clothes from his body.

Needless to say that raising Lazarus from the dead resulted in great commotion in all Jerusalem. Many had come there preparing for the Passover feast. This was not a natural event or a miracle that anyone had witnessed before. This was especially astonishing to those who had smelled the stench due to the decayed body.

\* St. John the apostle reports that Lazarus **‘who had died came out’** so that we may see what the Lord has done and to witness to His authority. St. John reports: **‘he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes and his face was wrapped with a cloth’** so that no one would think that this was an imaginary account. The fact that he came out all tied up is just as amazing as his resurrection. The Lord’s words to ‘loose him’ are intended to reveal that this is truly Lazarus since they had to go near him and touch him. To indicate that the Lord’s intention is totally devoid of grandeur appears in His words “loose him and let him go.” He clearly does not follow or lead Lazarus and did not want to walk with him to show him off.

St. John Chrysostom

\* We need to pay attention to that too: we need to present deeds worthy of the Lord. Not only do we need to pray so that the dead come to life, but we also need to search and call the one in the cave and grave to attend to matters outside the tomb.

We need to realize that there are many Lazarus types until today. After they had become the Lord’s friends, they got sick and died. They have become as the dead in the grave in the land of the dead and with the dead. However, through the Lord’s prayer, they have come to life again and they have been invited to come out of the grave by the Lord’s loud voice.

Anyone who trusts the Lord comes out bound up with the clothes of death due to his earlier sins. However, his face is still tied up so that he is unable to see, or walk, or do anything because of the bonds of death. He remains in this situation until the Lord Jesus Christ commands the able ones to release him and until He tells him to walk<sup>68</sup>.

\* Such a person comes out in response to the Lord’s voice, yet he is still tied up in his sins. He is alive because he has repented and has heard the Lord’s voice yet he has not been liberated from the bounds of sin. He still cannot walk immediately with freed feet. He is not yet liberated to fulfill sublime matters, since his hands and feet are tied up with straps like those grave clothes.

Due to the death that adheres to the straps tying his hands and feet and covering his face with ignorance, such a person remains surrounded with bonds.

That is why the Lord does not only wish that person to live and still remain in the grave and be tied up away from the issues of life outside... Therefore the Lord tells those who are able to

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<sup>67</sup> Concerning Repentance, Book 2:7:57-58

<sup>68</sup> Commentary on John, Book 28:54

serve Him: **“Loose him and let him go”, [44]**<sup>69</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

## **7. The Effect of the Miracle of Raising Lazarus from the Dead**

**‘Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary  
And had seen the things Jesus did,  
Believed in Him.’[45]**

Many of Mary’s Jewish friends believed in Him [45]. Most of them had come from Jerusalem which is the nearest city to the village of Bethany. The people of Jerusalem were known for their opposition against the Lord Jesus Christ. Some presented a report of these events to the Pharisees [46], who gathered a council of the Sanhedrim and planned to kill the Lord. Caiaphas, the high priest foretold that one man should die for the whole nation [49-52].

As usual, the fruit of this amazing miracle lends a fragrance of life to life and the smell of death to death. Many believed in the Lord when they saw what He did, while others went to the religious leaders and Pharisees. They went either to arouse them, or to present a testimony of what had occurred, or to invite them to the faith. The response of these leaders and Pharisees was rebellion and opposition towards the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first group of mourners found that there was no need to consult with the priests and Pharisees. They felt that opposing the divine truth should come to an end. Thus the visit to the sad home became the reason that converted them to real faith. They experienced the truth of the wise man’s saying that ‘it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting (Ecce 7:2). They had come with a sincere intention to comfort Mary and Martha. Therefore they came out comforted by the work of God and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Giver of resurrection. Indeed, ‘he who waters will also be watered himself’ (Pro 11:25). That is why no one should cease to do good works as long as he has the power to do so (Pro 3:27).

Why does the Evangelist state that ‘they had come to Mary’? Why did he not also say ‘to Martha’? It could be that Mary was better known in Jerusalem so that most of the people had come to comfort her. Some scholars consider that Martha tended to work and move around while Mary was inclined to join calm gatherings (Luke 10:38-40). A person who tends to work does not find time to meet with the mourners, whereas the one inclined to calmness desires to sit with them.

**‘But some of them went away to the Pharisees  
And told them the things Jesus did.’ [46]**

This group represents those who worship superficially. The truth is obvious, and the divine deed is tangible; yet they went to report the event despite their knowledge of the leaders’ antagonism towards the Lord.

**‘Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said:  
“What shall we do? For this Man works many signs” [47]**

The chief priests and Pharisees recognized that they could not oppose or deny the truth for the miracle just shouted it out. Therefore they gathered a council. They realized that the

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<sup>69</sup> Commentary on John, Book 28: 57-59

decisions of the Sanhedrim would not be fruitful. The people had gathered around the Lord and such danger threatened the safety of the whole nation. The council was gathered to take practical steps by which they could get rid of the Lord Jesus Christ rather than to deliberate or issue instructions to the people.

They colored the issue with a dangerous political aspect. They analyzed the situation in a manner that defied the truth. Actually, the Lord Jesus Christ had not ceased in doing many unique miracles such as healing the man born blind and raising Lazarus from the dead. These deeds attracted people to Him. They believed in Him and accepted Him as King and the awaited Messiah who would left up the fallen tabernacle of David. In this manner the Sanhedrim would lose its power and the religious leaders would lose their authority. If the Romans would sense that the people had crowned a kin, they would invade the land with an army, seize Jerusalem and destroy the temple. There would be no one to oppose or object to that. In this manner, the Romans occupied the land politically and religiously.

\* These leaders disguised their envy and jealousy under the screen of protecting the Jewish nation and the temple. To them, this was the most holy place in the world. Besides, it was the grandest and greatest building.

Notice how the Jews acted: they should have been astonished and amazed at the resurrection of Lazarus. However, they wished to kill the One who had resurrected the dead.

How could they be so foolish and imagine that they could send to death the One who conquered the death present in the bodies of others.

Note how the religious leaders and Pharisees spoke of Him as they would of any person and said: **“What shall we do? For this Man works many signs?”**...and yet you ask what to do? You should have believed in Him and sought to His forgiveness. You should have worshipped Him and not have thought that He was a person.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him  
And the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” [48]**

**The Scholar Origen** wonders if those who reported to the Pharisees did so in order to allow them to repent and believe, or to arouse them against the Lord so that they would hurry up and plan to discard Him. Origen is inclined to agree with the second possibility.

\* What the high priest and Pharisees feared came to be fulfilled in a symbolic way. The high priest represents the lusts of the body that oppose the lusts of the spirit. Therefore, it was impossible for him to conquer the greatest High Priest who is the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, the Lord has occupied the seat of the high priest but on a heavenly and eternal level. Instead of adhering to the Pharisees’ literal teachings, we experience the joy His of His Holy Spirit. There is no more place for the Pharisees. Concerning the Romans and their occupation of the Jews, they represent the church of nations that has become the New Israel. This Church has become the occupant of the seat of old Israel and constitutes a sanctified nation and priesthood as well as owner of divine promises<sup>70</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

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<sup>70</sup> cf. Commentary on John, Book 28:86-97

\* ‘The heathen have been snared by the destruction of their own hands and their feet have been caught in the net they had hid (Ps 9:15). This is the condition of the Jews.

They said that they would kill the Lord to prevent the Romans from coming and occupying their nation and positions. When they killed Him, these consequences happened to them. When they executed what they thought would prevent such consequences, they were unable to escape what they feared. The One who was killed lives in heaven and those who killed Him met their reward in hell<sup>71</sup>.

\* It is as though they had said: If the Romans saw that the Lord Jesus Christ created anxiety in the nation, they would suspect we rebelled against them and they would destroy our city. We would then ask one of them: when did you hear the Lord teaching rebellion? Did He not recommend the payment of the tribute to Caesar? When you tried to crown Him king, did He not escape? Has He not led a simple life without any boasting? He neither owned a house nor any other kind of property?

These claims did not reflect their expectations. They just made them out of envy. Indeed, the One who had healed the sick and taught about the virtuous path in life and recommended submission to the leaders, did not arouse rebellion. On the contrary, He destroyed rebellions and dismantled it

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘And one of them, Caiaphas,  
Being high priest that year, said to them:  
“You know nothing at all.” [49]**

According to the law, the high priest is ordained to serve for life (Ex 40:15). They inherit the office which runs down from Aaron and his children. However, the Romans authority interfered and took the authority to exile and appoint a high priest whenever they wished and at any time. Moreover, they did not observe the law except for the rule regarding the lineage of priesthood. The historian Josephine records that Caiaphas is the name by which he was popularly known; that his real name was Joseph. He was a high priest for eight or nine years. He was deposed by Vitellius probably and was exiled in Judah<sup>72</sup>.

The Romans did not consider that the Lord Jesus Christ opposed their empire. They were not concerned about His popularity because he recommended submission to the authorities and the payment of the tribute to Caesar. Indeed, he asked St. Peter to pay the tribute for both of them. When He was judged, we find Pilate exerting several times an effort to release Him.

**‘Nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people,  
Not that the whole nation should perish.’ [50]**

\* The high priest had to wear the breastplate of judgment the ‘Urim and the Thummin’ (Ex 28:30); to pray God to grant him righteous judgment. This matter seemed to have been neglected completely. Thus the high priest presented his advice to the council dictated by his wicked envy and not by consulting God. He presented what seemed to be logical and truthful according to

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<sup>71</sup> Homilies on St John, 65:1

<sup>72</sup> Antiq. 18 c. 3

human philosophy. His words seemed to be based on correct thinking. However, the truth was that it was all based on wicked sentiments. He driven by a strong desire to get rid of the One who had revealed their wickedness and seized their popularity. Isaiah the prophet says: ‘Justice is turned back and righteousness stands afar off; for truth is fallen in the street and equity cannot enter’ (Is 59:14).

**‘Now this, he did not say on his own authority,  
But being high priest that year,  
He prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation.’ [51]**

\* Caiaphas did not speak out of his own resources and he was not aware of the meaning of his own words even though he uttered a prophesy. In the writings of St. Paul, ‘we meet teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the thing which they affirm’ (1 Tim 1:7). This is not the condition of a wise person whom king Solomon describes in the Proverbs: ‘The heart of the wise teaches his mouth and adds learning to his lips’ (refer to Pro 16:23)<sup>73</sup>.

#### **Origen the Scholar**

\* Do you see how the leadership of the priesthood is powerful? Caiaphas qualified to be the head of the priesthood; even though he actually lacked the traits that would qualify him, he prophesied without realizing what he was saying. His mouth was touched by Grace, but He did not touch his unclean heart. Many others foretold matters before they occurred even though they had failed in being qualified for that role. Examples of such people are: Nebuchadnezzar, Pharaoh, and Balaam. Notice the power of the Holy Spirit and how He could use a sly mind to utter words carrying amazing prophecies<sup>74</sup>.

\* What is the implication of the words ‘**being high priest that year**’? Like many other matters, this too had become corrupt since these offices were bought (with money). The high priest was no longer a life time office and lasted for one year only. However, in this case the Holy Spirit was present. Yet, when they lifted up their hands against the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit abandoned them and switched to work in the disciples. This was proclaimed by the veil of the temple being torn in two and as the Lord breathed His last (Mark 15:38); when the voice of the Lord saying: “See! Your house is left to you desolate” (Matt 23:38). Josephus, who lived a short time after that, says that certain angels, who had remained with them in the hope that they would relent from their wickedness, abandoned them<sup>75</sup>.

#### **St. John Chrysostom**

**“And not for that nation only,  
But also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were  
scattered abroad.”[52]**

These two verses are provided by St. John the evangelist to show how God uses even the evil of the high priest to give testimony for the truth. Moreover, his words predict the redeeming work of Christ for the Jews as well as for God/s children all over the world: both Jews and

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<sup>73</sup> Commentary on John, Book 28:172-174

<sup>74</sup> Homilies on St John, 65:1

<sup>75</sup> Homilies on St John, 65:1

Gentiles.

Who are the children of God who are scattered abroad? They are the believers from all nations. They will come together as members of the one Body of Christ. **Origen the Scholar** considers that Israel, according to the flesh, after being scattered, will also accept to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Then they too will come to join and be one with Him<sup>76</sup>.

‘Then from that day on they plotted to put Him to death.’

\* They really sought to do so before for the Evangelist reports: “The Jews sought all the more to kill Him (John 5:18). The Lord Jesus Christ also asked them: “why do you seek to kill Me?” (John 7:19). Previously, they sought to kill Him, but now they decided to do what they had set their minds upon and they moved to fulfill it.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Therefore Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews, But when from there into the country near the wilderness, to a city called Ephraim and there remained with His disciples.’ [54]**

**Ephraim** is a small village near Bethel. The Holy Bible mentions it again in 2 Chronicles 13:19. It is also mentioned by Josephus<sup>77</sup>.

It is believed that it is the same village mentioned in 1 Kings 5:46; 2 Kings 12:27. Joshua had given it as part of the lot of the tribe of Judah (Joshua 15:9). Both Josephus and St. Jerome state that Ephraim was about 20 miles away from Jerusalem. Some Scholars believe that the Lord Jesus Christ stayed there from January 24 to March 24: that is for two months<sup>78</sup>.

\* We believe that these words and similar ones have been recorded as the Word wishes to warn us against sudden and irrational deeds in an attempt to struggle with death for the sake of truth (Sirach 4:28), and martyrdom.

On the one hand, it is right not to avoid confession. Besides we should not hesitate to die for righteousness sake whenever we are involved in a struggle and confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. On the other hand, it is not less important to avoid falling into a great dilemma. Indeed, we need to avoid that as much as possible not only because the result is not clear to us, but also so that we do not become responsible for arousing those who do not actually wish to spill our blood. Otherwise, these would commit a crime and become worst sinners and more evil. That would be the case if we sought our own profit and did not care about those who plot against us and our death. Because of us, they would be sentenced to greater punishment- that is if we focused on ourselves and give no consideration to others. Then we would have saved ourselves by our death while there was no imperative need for that<sup>79</sup>.

\* **‘Ephraim’** means ‘giving fruit.’ He was the younger brother of Manasseh, which means ‘forgetful’ who left the people behind him ‘as in forgetfulness’ and this gave rise to the Gentiles. When the Lord ‘turns rivers’ into a wilderness and the water springs into dry ground, it is because of the wicked who live there (Ps 107:33-38). However, the Lord transforms the wilderness which belongs to the Gentiles into wells of water and their dry

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. Commentary on John, Book 28: 185

<sup>77</sup> War, b4, c8, s 9.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Adam Clarke Comm.

<sup>79</sup> Commentary on John, Book 28: 192-194

land into sources of life<sup>80</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

**‘And the Passover of the Jews was near**

**And many went from the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves. [55]**

\* The Jews wanted to paint their feast red by the Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. On that day, the lamb was killed and it has become a feast for us through His Blood. The Jews had planned to kill the Lord: the One who have descended from heaven to suffer. He wanted to go near the place where He would suffer because His hour had come.<sup>81</sup>

**St. Augustine**

\* What an amazing purification while harboring a determination to commit a crime, with murderous intentions and hands that would spill Blood!<sup>82</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Then they sought Jesus and spoke among themselves as they stood in the Temple,  
“What do you think - that He will not come to the feast?”[56]**

The people of Ephraim probably looked for Him where He left their city. He might have gone to Jericho or its suburbs. Maybe those who were looking for Him had been sent by the high priest and were trying to find out so that they would notify him as to where the Lord was staying during the feast celebrations.

\* They seized the Feast of the Passover to plot against Him. Besides, they considered this was a good time to commit a crime. He would fall into their hands since He would come to celebrate the feast<sup>83</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Those who were looking for Him and those who were not doing so are to be blamed. Therefore, may we look for Him so that we might have and hold Him for ourselves and not so that we may kill Him<sup>84</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**‘Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a command,  
That if anyone knew where He was, he should report it, that they might seize Him.’[57]**

\* Let them come to our church to hear from us where He is. Let them hear this Gospel... He has left (and has ascended), He is present here. He has returned yet He has not left us. He has carried His body to heaven yet He has not withdrawn His glory from the world<sup>85</sup>.

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<sup>80</sup> Commentary on John, Book 28: 214

<sup>81</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 50: 2

<sup>82</sup> Homilies on St John, 65:2

<sup>83</sup> Homilies on St John, 65:2

<sup>84</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 50:3

<sup>85</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 50:4

**St. Augustine**



## **Meditations Inspired by St John, Chapter 11**

### **May You shout my name with a loud voice and say: Come Forth**

\*Mary and Martha sent You a message concerning their brother  
“The one whom You love is sick’!  
Now my faithful fellows plead for me before You and my brothers who rest in Paradise intercede  
before Your throne  
Who can lift me up from my sickness but You, O Healer of souls and bodies!

\* Sickness has struck in my whole being, it occupies my thought, heart and all my senses.  
Corruption occupies my inner being.  
Who will rescue me of this corrupt body but You, O You who is the Resurrection!

\*May You hurry to my grave!  
For I have caused trouble even to You!  
For I am the subject of Your love  
May You shout with Your divine voice and call my name and may You say: “come forth”  
By coming to my grave, You have granted me the resurrection after being dead.  
Death is neared in the presence of the Resurrection!  
I admit my sin and I enjoy the apostolic absolution according to Your promise (Matt 16:19)

\*Through You, I enjoy the rejoicing resurrected life!  
Indeed, You have restored to me the joy of Your Salvation!  
And the mourning has become transformed into an eternal feast!  
My brethren on earth and in heaven glorify You.  
For You are the Deliverer of souls from the corruption of death!

\* I do not possess the words  
Yet my life has become a living testimony for Your sublime works.  
May many believe in You.  
As they see You glorified in my weakness!  
May the enemy of righteousness and his army go wild  
For they cannot tolerate the light of the Resurrection in me!

\* Finally, allow me to pass by the graves with You so that You may call each one by name.  
How sweet is Your voice as You shout saying: “Come Forth”  
O what an enjoyable celebration.  
As the souls come out of their graves, shining with Your glory!  
And so many are transformed into heavenly brides  
Decorated and ready for the eternal and perpetual marriage!

AMEN

## **SUPPER IN BETHANY**

The previous chapter closed on a depressing picture. The Jewish leaders began a dangerous war against the Lord Jesus Christ. Together with the scribes, they believed that the Lord had betrayed the Sanhedrin. However, we find in this chapter that there are faithful believers who will witness for the truth. They will glorify the Lord and witness for Him in spite of an overwhelming atmosphere of hate and hostility.

The testimony of such believers glorifies the Lord on all levels: on the personal level- as in the case of the sister of Lazarus; and on the communal level- as displayed during the Lord's entry into Jerusalem. Moreover, the heavens witness to Him; and so do the Old Testament prophets; some leaders; and finally the Lord testifies for Himself.

|                                                     |                    |                |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| <b>1- Anointing the Lord's Feet with Spikenard</b>  | <b>Chapter 12:</b> | <b>1-11</b>    |
| <b>2- The Lord's Entry into Jerusalem</b>           |                    | <b>12 -19</b>  |
| <b>3- The Greeks Honor the Lord Jesus Christ</b>    |                    | <b>20 - 26</b> |
| <b>4- The Heavens Glorify the Lord Jesus Christ</b> |                    | <b>27 - 36</b> |
| <b>5- The Prophets testify to His Glory</b>         |                    | <b>37 - 41</b> |
| <b>6- Some Leaders Witness to His Glory</b>         |                    | <b>42 - 43</b> |
| <b>7- The Lord Witnesses for Himself</b>            |                    | <b>44 - 50</b> |

### **1 - Anointing the Lord's Feet with Spikenard**

**'Then Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany,  
Where Lazarus was which had been dead,  
Whom He raised from the dead.'** [1]

After the Lord had raised Lazarus from the dead, He went to make a friendly visit to his home. It was six days before the feast of the Passover. The home in Bethany was close to Jerusalem, and the Lord's visit seemed to be a preparation for the celebrations of the feast. The Lord wants us to prepare ourselves for spiritual events.

Another factor was that the hour of His crucifixion was drawing near and so He went to Bethany as He knew they would set up their nets to catch Him. He could have escaped and destroyed their nets. However, He had come specifically to offer Himself on our behalf and as a living sacrifice of love.

It was a friendly visit to the home of Mary and Martha whom he loved greatly. He knew that He would be physically separated from them soon. Therefore this was a farewell visit which would be marked by His love and comforting words. Such farewell words would provide support on the day of His trial which was drawing near.

Finally, the Lord had also come to Bethany, after having raised Lazarus, in order to follow up the effects of His deed. It is as though He had come to water what He had planted, and to sanctify it so that it would yield adequate fruit.

The Lord came on the Jewish Sabbath and the feast of the Passover was to be celebrated six days later. Now was the time when each family would choose the lamb which they were going to offer on the day of the Feast. They had to isolate the lamb in a shed for five days and then offer it as a sacrifice on the sixth day which would mark the day of the Passover Feast. Now, here was the Lord who is the true Passover and the Lamb of God. He had come of Himself in order to isolate Himself. He delivered Himself into the hands of His loved ones. They would anoint Him with spikenard and tears on the day following His arrival. Voluntarily, He dedicated His life to be a sacrificial offering on behalf of the whole world. After His visit to Bethany, the Lord He would enter into Jerusalem on the day that would be marked as the Christian Sabbath day (Palm Sunday).

**‘There they made him a supper;**

**And Martha served:**

**But Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him.’ [2]**

The family offered thanksgiving in a practical manner. The Lord was the One who had raised the head of the family from the dead. They made dinner and each of the three members of the family played a different role. Lazarus sat among those who were gathered around the Lord and he witnessed for the One who had granted Him life. Martha served, while Mary proclaimed her love by anointing the Lord’s feet. Some scholars believe that this was the same event that took place in the house of Simon the Leper (Matt24:6). Others believe that these were two separate events. The dinner here takes place in the house of Lazarus and his sisters. The fact that Martha was serving proves that point. The dinner mentioned in the Gospel of St Matthew took place on the third day of the Passover week, whereas this dinner occurred six days before the Feast. The two occasions may have occurred in Bethany: during the first dinner, Mary used about one measure of the spikenard; while she used all the spikenard she had on the second occasion (Mk 14:3).

Martha served at the table to express her great appreciation. She considered it to be an honor to serve the Lord in any manner she could. Previously, the Lord had compared her service to that of her sister Mary who had been sitting at His feet. In spite of that, she did not quit the service she did.

**But Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him’ [2]...**the presence of Lazarus testified to the resurrection that the Lord had granted him. He sat down to confirm that the Lord had truly restored him to life.

\* The Lord was eager to visit the person He had raised from the dead. He wished to rejoice on account of the gift of a renewed life. Similarly, the Lord comes to the meal that the Church prepares for Him to celebrate the One who has risen and is now sitting on high<sup>1</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

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<sup>1</sup> Concerning Repentance, 2:7:60

\* It is clear that the dinner was held in Martha's home as those who loved the Lord received Him in their homes.

The Evangelist tells us that **'Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him'** as this proves the reality of his being restored to life. After so many days Lazarus was there, actually alive and eating with those present<sup>2</sup>

**St John Chrysostom**

\* Every time that the Lord raised someone from the dead, He asked for food to be offered to that person. In this manner, no one would imagine that the event is an imaginary one. For this reason, after Lazarus had been raised, he is reported to be present at the table and sharing a meal with the Lord<sup>3</sup>.

**St Jerome**

**'Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly,  
And anointed the feet of Jesus,  
And wiped his feet with her hair:  
And the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. [3]**

**'The pound':** a Greek and Roman measure equivalent to about 200 Draohmas.

**'Nardine'/ spikenard:** a kind of expensive fragrance that people of the ancient world competed to possess. It is mentioned in the Book of the Song of Solomon (1:12; 4:13, 14). The quality of its purity indicated that no wax or resin was added to turn it into a cream.

Mary expressed her love by pouring a pound of pure and costly oil, rubbing the Lord's feet with it and drying it with her hair. Consequently, the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. She had offered the most valuable thing she owned in order to honor the Lord. With great love, she anointed His feet. It was common to anoint the head but she did not do that. Surely some oil must have run over the Lord's clothes as she poured a whole pound of it. She is like the human soul who speaks to her Bridegroom and King and says: "While the king sits at his table, my spikenard sends forth its fragrance" (Sg of Sol. 1:12)

Mary had poured the fragrance of her love and its smell continues to fill the House of the Lord across all generations. The Father smells it as it carries the sweet smell of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor 2:15). We, the believers, smell the fragrance after so many centuries and desire to offer our whole life as a sweet fragrance of love to Him who has loved us first.

\* Martha served. This fact indicates that the meal was served in her house...Mary did not serve for she was a disciple. On this occasion she acted spiritually and not as though she had been called to serve. Moreover, she did not offer her services to all the guests in general. She honored the Holy one solely. She approached Him as her God and not as a person. Consequently, she

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<sup>2</sup> Hom. on St John, 65:2

<sup>3</sup> Against Jovinianus, 2;17

anointed His feet and wiped them with her hair. She did those things as she believed in Him and in that her concept was different from many others<sup>4</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* The spikenard is a symbol for righteousness. It weighed one pound. However, it was a rare and costly fragrance. In the Greek language the word ‘faith’ has its origin in the word ‘faith’ and is synonymous to it. One prays to act righteously for ‘the just shall live by faith’ (Rom 1:17).

Wipe the feet of Jesus...in other words, walk in the Lord’s footsteps to reap the fruit of a righteous life.

Wipe His feet with your hair: offer whatever you have which exceeds your needs and give it to the poor. In this manner, you will be wiping the Lord’s feet. Hair seems to be an unnecessary addition to the body, therefore present something that is in excess. Even though it exceeds your needs, yet it will be of value when offered at the Lord’s feet.

It could be that the Lord’s feet on earth are needy; or could He be talking about something other than the members of His body when He says: “Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me” (Matt 25:40). Therefore offer whatever exceeds your needs; and yet you will be offering what would be welcome to His feet<sup>5</sup>.

\* **‘...And the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment’ [3]:** The world is filled with the fragrance of the Lord’s personal reputation of righteousness; for a good reputation is like a refreshing fragrant smell. Those who walk in wickedness and bear the name of Christ actually bring dishonor to His name. We are told that because of such people ‘the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles’ (Rom 2:24). If through the wicked people are led to blaspheme against the Lord, then it is through the righteousness that the name of God is honored.

Listen to the Apostle when he says: “For we are the fragrance of Christ in every place.” In the Song of Solomon, we find these words: ‘Because of the fragrance of your good ointments your name is as ointment poured out’ (Sg of Sol 1:3).

**St Augustine**

\* This fragrance is not different than the one which the bride used and whose fragrance reached the bridegroom: ‘While the king sits at his table, my spikenard sends forth its fragrance’ (Sg of Sol 1:12).

The Gospel mentions that when the oil was poured over the Lord its fragrant smell filled the house where the meal was being served. It appears that the woman who had poured the oil had predicted the mystery of Christ’s death. The Lord proclaimed the act she had done by saying: “For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial...” (Matt 26:12).

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<sup>4</sup> Hom 65. PG 59:391

<sup>5</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 50:6

The Home which became filled with the sweet odor is symbolic of the whole creation and the whole world for **“...wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman has done, be told for a memorial of her.”** The fragrance of her act would spread as the Gospel is being preached **‘for a memorial to her.’** In the **Song of Solomon**, we are told that the smell of spikenard spreads out from the bridegroom to his bride. In the Gospel too we are told that the sweet smell of the Lord filled the whole house. That sweet fragrance will fill the whole Body of the Church everywhere all over the world<sup>6</sup>.

**St Gregory of Nicea**

**‘Then one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son,  
Who would betray Him, said...’ [4]**

\* As the sweet smelling aroma of the Lord spread, it brought to some the breath of life, whereas it brought the smell of death to others (2 Cor 2:14-16). This sweet smell became the smell of death for Judas.

**St Augustine**

\* [in a speech addressed to the emperor, Theodosius wrote the following:]

‘Therefore, O emperor, I address my words not only to you but they also are about you. Notice how God seeks to judge severely. Therefore as much as you have been glorified, it is fitting that you accordingly submit to your Creator. It is written: ‘when the Lord your God brings you into a strange land, and you eat and drink of the fruit of others, do not say: ‘Because of my strength and righteousness I have received this’; for it is the merciful Lord who has granted you these things.’ Therefore to show your love for His Body (that is, for His Church) offer water for His feet and kiss them. In this manner you will forgive those who have fallen and committed sin. Besides, you will have corrected and comforted them through your love for peace.

**Pour oil over His feet so that the whole house where the Lord Jesus Christ sits becomes filled with your sweet odor. Then will all those sitting there enjoy your fragrance. In other words, honor the humiliated. Then will the angels rejoice because they have been pardoned because they rejoice when one sinner repents (Lk 15:10). Moreover, the apostles rejoice, and the prophets are filled with gladness<sup>7</sup>.**

**St Ambrose**

**“Why was this fragrance not sold for three hundred dinarii,  
And given to the poor?”[5]**

In the middle of this heavenly scene where the sweet aroma of the Lord attracted all hearts towards the heavens, there was the stench of persistent greed, treason, and betrayal that came from the heart of a disciple who seemed to belong to the Lord’s party. His heart could not tolerate the sweet smell of the Lord which grants life: it became the aroma of death to death (1 Cor 2:16).

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<sup>6</sup> Song of Solomon: St Gregory of Nicea. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar: Sermon 3

<sup>7</sup> St Ambrose: 50:26

The woman's deed made Judas uncomfortable as he considered it was an act of squandering a big sum of money. He calculated that the value of the spikenard was about three hundred denarii. It could have been spent on the poor. He was unable to comprehend the invaluable price of love which cannot be calculated. Judas was a disciple who preached the good News; yet he did not love the spirit of preaching and of love. For him, preaching became his official career and job. It did not bear the sweet smell of love which fills the 'Church' which the 'House of God.'

By seeming to care for the poor, Judas had found the excuse that would enable him to attack that act of love. The devil too transforms himself to appear as an angel of light. He used human wisdom to calculate the service of the poor versus the proclamation of love to the Lord Jesus Christ. All the while, he concealed in his depths his greed and love of money for he was a thief and stole from the treasury box.

That traitor could not tolerate that act of love. How could Mary pour fragrance that could have been sold for three hundred denarii? Yet he was able to sell his Master for thirty pieces of silver. She put three hundred denarii under the Lord's feet and considered this as nothing. As for Judas, he put his Master under thirty pieces of silver and considered his Master as nothing when measured by that trivial amount.

**'This he said, not that he cared for the poor;  
But because he was a thief,  
And had the bag,  
And he used to take what was put in it.' [6]**

Some scholars explain that the name 'Iscaiot' means 'bearer of the money box.'

Judas had no feelings for the poor had he did not care about them. The ministry for the poor was only an opportunity for him to steal the money. Why did the Lord trust him with the money box? Rather, He could have given that task to Peter or John who were trustworthy. It could be that Judas sought to get the job and attained what he wanted. It could be that the Lord permitted that to happen so that he would have no financial need that would drive him to sell his Master.

Throughout generations, the Church continues to have a very small number of sanctified members who lay and offer all their possessions at the Lord's feet. As a result, the sweet aroma of the Lord who lives within their hearts fills the whole Church. The Church also includes those who hide behind formalities and money boxes in order to steal what belongs rightfully to the Lord, and to sell Him for the price of a slave. However, the Lord does not expose them for He gives them the chance to examine their depths, discover their wickedness and renew their lives by repentance. Then they would go back to their Savior.

\* The Lord was very patient with Judas who was a devil, a thief, and a traitor. He permitted him to be accepted among the innocent disciples. These faithful ones knew that such an

honor was a reward for loving Him (that is, being united with the Body and Blood of the Lord)<sup>8</sup>.

\* Watch and learn how this Judas had not become corrupt only when he accepted the bribe to betray His Master to the Jews...he did not perish at only that moment. Actually, he was evil and a thief from the time he became a follower of the Lord. He followed Him physically but not sincerely. He became the twelfth disciple; yet he had no share in the apostolic blessing...and when he died, another was appointed so that the number of apostles was then met<sup>9</sup>.

\* He is the One that angels serve... so why did He have a money box? He intended to demonstrate clearly that His Church would be obligated in the future to have a money depository.

Why did the Lord delegate a thief to hold that responsible job other than to teach the Church to be longsuffering towards thieves?

Nevertheless, the one who has the habit of stealing the money box did not hesitate to deliver his Master for the sake of money<sup>10</sup>.

**St Augustine**

\* The Love of money is a terrible issue. It corrupts the ears and eyes; and transforms a human being into something worse than a savage beast. It strips a person from his conscience and of any ideals of friendship, brotherhood, or thoughts of personal salvation. His greed attracts him away from all that as it becomes like a fierce woman who subjugates all those she captures...

Greed transformed Gehazi into a leper instead of being a disciple and prophet. It destroyed Ananias and Saphira with him; and it turned Judas into a traitor.

Greed corrupted the Jewish leaders...it caused hundreds of wars, and filled the streets with blood and the cities with wailing and mourning<sup>11</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**‘Then said Jesus,**

**“Let her alone: she has kept this for the day of my burial”.’ [7]**

Judas condemned her, and considered that Mary had acted unwisely. He judged that she had wasted money on something useless; and the money could have gone to the poor. In contrast, the Lord proclaimed that she had performed a sublime prophetic as she had predicted His burial

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<sup>8</sup> Letters, 43

<sup>9</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 50:10

<sup>10</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 50:11

<sup>11</sup> Homilies on St John, 65:3



and the rituals involved. Through her love, she could perceive the Lord's sufferings, His death, and His burial; and her deed proclaimed the sweet aroma of redemption.

We have never heard of someone whose body was anointed and prepared for burial while he was still alive. Yet the Lord considered the spikenard as burial material for His body which would not see corruption. He had delivered His Body as a sacrifice and a spiritual food when He instituted the Eucharist on Holy Thursday. On that day, and as he willingly offered his Body, He acknowledged the procedure for His burial. In this manner, the Lord confirmed His free and holy will to accept death and burial for the sake of the world, thereby granting us the power and joy of His resurrection

\* The Lord indicated the motive for Mary's act when He said: **"Let her alone: she has kept this for the day of my burial"**

**St John Chrysostom**

\* Note, dear ones, that the Lord did not say: 'You speak those words because you are a thief.' He knew Judas was a thief; yet the Lord tolerated him and did not condemn him. In this manner the Lord sets the example for us to show tolerance towards evil people within the Church<sup>12</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**"For the poor you have with you always;  
But Me you do not have always." [8]**

These words carried a hidden significance and they referred to two acts. On the one hand, there was a purpose hidden behind Judas' pretense of loving the poor. While claiming to help them, He was delivering His Master to death in a horrible deed of betrayal. On the other hand, there was the amazing act of Mary. She embraced and honored the Body that had been delivered up to die. She gave Him the costly spikenard which was the most precious thing she had. The Lord secretly admonished Judas because he claimed to love the poor. He then turned to Mary and praised her because she seized upon an opportunity that would not recur for **'Me you do not have always.'**

Mary prepared the Body of the Lord for burial while He was still alive. Therefore she was praised by the Lord Himself. Nicodemus and Joseph prepared the Body after His death. They were honored too, though this is not comparable to the honor given to Mary. She had offered one pound of precious oil, while they offered hundreds of pounds. Nevertheless, the first offering to the living Body was far more superior to the second one.

Mary continues to invite us today to anoint the living Body of the Lord Jesus Christ. We can do so by serving His members: the poor, the suffering, those who have been banished, and those who have no one to look after them. Indeed, God has said: "You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land," (Deut 15:11). Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea invite us to honor the Lord's Body by honoring the members who have passed away, i.e. the saints and martyrs.

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<sup>12</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 50:11

It is unwarranted to carry out one task at the expense of another. Our love for the poor should be in harmony with our love for the saints who are still alive. Through prayer and constant thanksgiving, these saints express love towards God as well as towards all mankind.

\* The Lord Jesus Christ sought to limit the evil in Judas. He did so by treating him with great humility. By not speaking about His knowledge that Judas stole from the money box, the Lord made a statement that would become an obstacle to the wicked desire of Judas. Moreover, the Lord's words would strip Judas of any form of self defense<sup>13</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

When we speak about His divine presence with us, the Lord Jesus Christ is with us constantly. When we speak about His physical presence, He is the One who told His disciples: **"Me you do not have always", [8].**

**St Augustine**

**'Then people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there:  
And they came not for Jesus' sake only,  
But that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead.'** [9]

Many of the Jews had heard about Lazarus being raised from the dead. It was the talk of the whole city. Therefore people came not to see the Lord but to see the one who had been raised from the dead. They did not come to hear the Lord, but they came to see and verify the story about the one resurrected from the dead. These people had come to honor Him rather than to arrest Him or report Him to the authorities. Some had come to confirm their faith in Him by listening about the miracle of the resurrection from the mouth of Lazarus himself. Others had been driven to come out of curiosity. How could a person arise from the dead, what had he seen when he was dead, and what news can he tell about the other world? During these days of feasting, Lazarus became an amazing center of attention for many wanted to see and hear him.

**'But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death;'**  
[10]

**St Jerome** wrote a letter to *Marcella* in which he praises *Blaesilla*, the daughter of *Paula*, whose husband had passed away seven months after their marriage. She then suffered from a dangerous disease. This drove her to have faith and she dedicated all her energy towards serving the Lord. This caused a tide of strong attacks against her. **St Jerome** considered her to be the new Lazarus because she enjoyed what was similar to being resurrected from the dead.

\* Her previous life had been characterized by a kind of carelessness. She was bound by the ropes of wealth and she seemed to be like a dead person lying in the grave of this world. However, the Lord was greatly disturbed and troubled spiritually and cried: "*Blaesilla*, come forth." She arose at His call, came out, and sat and ate with the Lord (Jn 12:2). The Jews angrily threatened her and demanded that she be put to death because the Lord had raised her from the dead (Jn 12:10). She

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<sup>13</sup> Hom. 65 PG 59:391-392

was content as the apostles offer glory to God. *Blaesilla* realized that she was indebted with her life to the One who had restored life to her. She could now embrace the feet of the One whom she had feared as a Judge just a short while ago...what greater comfort could she find to help her face the words of her opponents...these seemed lighter than smoke?<sup>14</sup>

**St Jerome**

\* Did not the Lord have the power to raise those who had been killed since He had the power to raise those who were dead? (In other words, could He have raised himself when the Jews sought to kill Him)?

When you were plotting a violent death for Lazarus, were you disarming the Lord of His power?

If you thought that those who had died a natural death were different from those who had been murdered, than just stop and think again. The Lord went through both these situations: He raised Lazarus who had died a natural death, and He raised Himself after having been murdered<sup>15</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**‘Because on account of Him, many of the Jews went away,  
And believed on Jesus.’ [11]**

As more hearts were fired up with the desire to see the Lord Jesus Christ, and as faith in Him increased, so did the jealousy of the chief priests become more intense. They consulted together; and could find no other means to solve the situation other than by killing Him. They exerted every effort to distort His image before the crowds so that they would abandon Him. Their attempts were futile due to the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. There could be no better proof that the Lord Jesus Christ was the Messiah than raising someone from the dead. The Lord had granted Lazarus life because He is real Life.

## **2-The Lord’s Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem**

**‘The next day a great multitude had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus  
was coming to Jerusalem’ [12],  
‘Took branches of palm trees,  
And went forth to meet him,  
And cried out:  
“Hosanna:  
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!  
The King of Israel!” [13]**

The palm tree branches are symbols of victory. That is why Cicero who had won many trophies was called ‘the man of many palm branches.’ The Lord overcame the powers of darkness through His death. That is why He was worthy to have bearers of palm branches pave His way.

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<sup>14</sup> Letter 38:2

<sup>15</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 50:14

Besides, carrying palm branches played an important role during the Feast of Dedication. It was a sign of rejoicing. Similarly, the Lord is our reason to celebrate- He is our Feast as He brings joy to our hearts.

King Solomon states that the soul loved by her bridegroom- who is the Lord Jesus Christ- is similar to a palm tree: “I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of its branches...” (Sg of Sol: 7:8).

Coptic (Egyptian) Christians observe the tradition to compete in buying palm branches, weaving, and decorating them with flowers. They often place a specially cooked loaf (Korban) in the shape of a Cross as part of the work. All this has the purpose of expressing the joy of the soul as she prepares to receive her victorious Bridegroom. It indicates a heart that is glad because of her heavenly King, the Savior of souls from all corruption. Many people continue to preserve the woven palm branches from one Palm Sunday until the next Palm Sunday is celebrated. This indicates the continued expression of welcome to the King within the hearts, as well as within the family inside their home.

The people shouted words of welcome taken from Psalms 118:25-26. This reveals how the people’s welcome was in harmony with the spirit of the Holy Bible. It was the result of their perception that He was the awaited Messiah; whereas the religious leaders were struck with spiritual blindness.

Although He came as a poor person lacking glory, yet the crowds welcomed Him as a King and Savior of Israel. They perceived that He was the righteous King who came in the name of the Lord (Ps 2:6). They accepted His kingdom wholeheartedly, and they expressed their feelings by shouting **“Hosanna!”** or ‘Hoshaana’ which means ‘He has redeemed us.’

The crowds opened their hearts to receive the Lord of glory, and they seemed to sing with the Psalmist, saying: “Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in: the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle” (Ps 24:7, 8).

Palm tree branches are also a symbol of praise and a sign of victory. The Lord came to conquer death by dying. With the power of His Cross He defeated the prince of death.

The word that the crowds used to cheer the Lord was **‘Hosanna.’** Some writers who know the Hebrew language believe that the word indicates a positive state of mind. This is similar to our use of certain expressions. For example, to indicate grief, we say “How sad”; to indicate joy, we say “Ha!” surprise-“Wonderful”; and astonishment- “Oh.” ‘Hosanna’ belongs to that same class of words and cannot be translated into Latin or Greek. There are many such expressions, like: “He who tells his brother ‘Rakka’” as this is a tool of astonishment and expresses anger<sup>16</sup>.

**\* “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!” [13].**

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<sup>16</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate, 51:2

We get a better meaning of the words “...**in the name of the Lord**” when we realize the implication to be ‘... in the name of the Lord God.’ It is also appropriate to understand that He comes in His own name for He is the Lord<sup>17</sup>.

\* What kind of intellectual dilemma must the Jewish leaders have suffered as they heard such great crowds proclaiming that the Lord Jesus Christ was their King!

But what Honor does the Lord receive by being king of Israel?

What is the great thing for the Lord of Eternity to become king over mankind?

The Lord’s reign over Israel is not intended for the collection of a tribute, or for the exchange of swords among soldiers, or to defeat His enemies in a declared war. Actually, He is King of Israel as He rules with kingly power over their inner natures; as He plans their eternal concerns; and as He attracts those who have faith, hope, and love to focus on Him and His divine kingdom. Being the Son of God and equal to Him, His act is one of humiliation that does not involve any elevation or grandness. He is the Word and by Him things were made. He willingly became the King of Israel. It is an act of tenderness and does involve any addition of power. Indeed, the One whom they called the King of Israel on earth is called the King of angels in heaven<sup>18</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**‘Then Jesus, when he had found a young donkey,  
Sat on it; as it is written, [14].**

The Lord was used to walking when going from one place to another. However, He was now riding on a donkey with astonishing humility. He was not riding like king Solomon- in a carriage (Sg of Sol 3:9-10) decorated with ‘pillars of silver, supports of gold, and covered with purple.’ The Lord’s glory was not a materialistic one. Since His kingdom was not of this world, He did not carry any appearance of grandness.

He **‘sat on it’**: we are not told that ‘He rode it’ as the Evangelist wished to underline the Lord’s status as He sits on the throne.

What is briefly reported in this passage has been reported with elaboration by the other three evangelists (Matt 21:1-16; Mk 11:1-11; Lk 19:29-48).

**“Fear not, daughter of Zion:**

**Behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt.” [15]**

The prophet asks the daughter of Zion to look up and see her humble and meek King who fills her life with the joy of victory. Therefore he invites her to rejoice and be glad for her King has come to tear away her fear and anxiety. The prophecy of the prophet Zechariah has been fulfilled: ‘Rejoice greatly (do not fear), O daughter of Zion; ... behold, your King is coming to you: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding on a donkey, and upon a colt the foal of a donkey’ (Zech 9:9). He did not come to take revenge of His enemies- Jews or Romans. Rather, He came so that His heavenly peace and sublime glory may fill them. This is what St Luke expressed in these words: ‘Peace in heaven and glory in the highest’ (Lk 19:38). St Augustine comments on that and says:

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<sup>17</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate, 51:3

<sup>18</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 51:4

\* She was told ‘Fear not...’ as she would get to know the One whom she would glorify now. She was encouraged to dismiss fear for He had come to suffer. By pouring His Blood, He will erase your sins, and restore you to life. Concerning the colt who had never had someone sit on him before (according to the other evangelists), that was a reference to the Gentiles who had rejected the law of the Lord. As for the donkey...he was a symbol of His people, who came from Israel, and submitted to learn about the manger of their Master<sup>19</sup>.

**St Augustine**

“Fear not, daughter of Zion...” for most of those who ruled over the Jews were cruel and unjust. They delivered the people to their enemies and put a ransom to stimulate their attackers...this was not the case with that humble One. It was evident as He rode on a donkey, and did not lead an army as He entered the city. He just sat on a donkey<sup>20</sup>.  
St John Chrysostom

**‘His disciples did not understand these things at the first:  
But when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him,  
And that they had done these things to him.’ [16]**

The disciples were unable to comprehend the real implications of the unfolding events and what they entailed. They could not see how the prophecies of the Old Testament were being fulfilled. It was only after the Lord was glorified upon His resurrection that He opened their hearts with love and their minds with the spirit of knowledge. Only then did they realize how they had been granted the joy of the new covenant, and which the prophets had longed for in the old times.

The Evangelist reports this observation about the disciples to indicate their disability to understand that these events fulfilled the prophecies. He states that they remained in this state until the Lord was glorified through His crucifixion and resurrection. Then they understood. Before that, they were like young children who acted without understanding the context of the events unfolding around them. As soon as they reached a stage of maturity, they were able to perceive the divine mystery which lay behind these events. They finally realized that this was God’s plan for salvation

\* Do you notice how the disciples did not know most of the prophecies about the Lord Jesus Christ as He had not revealed these to them? Moreover, they did not understand His words: **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,”** (Jn 2:19). In another Gospel, we are told that: **“...this saying was hidden from them”** (Lk 18:34); and they did not know that He would rise from the dead...

Note the philosophy of St John the Evangelist and how he did not shrink away from revealing how the minds of the disciples were dim at first.

**St John Chrysostom**

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<sup>19</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 51:5

<sup>20</sup> Hom 66. PG 59:395-396

\* St John was not ashamed to admit the ignorance of the disciples. Later on, he reveals their knowledge. However, he was not concerned with honoring people for he preached to glorify the Spirit.

**St Cyril the Great**

People have held different perspectives concerning this unique procession:

1-**The Lord Jesus Christ** viewed it through the Cross and considered it to be a procession of glory. The hour had come for the Son of Man to be glorified by offering Himself as the Passover Lamb sacrificed on behalf of the world. Then He would carry believers over from slavery to Satan into the heavenly Canaan.

2- **The people of the Old Testament** looked on this procession while they were in hell and found it to convey the fulfillment of the symbols and the prophecies. The time had come which they had so longingly anticipated for years. They had awaited the One who would carry them into Paradise and bringing them heavenly treasures.

3- **The disciples** watched the procession but understood nothing! They experienced a condition of great confusion!

4- The chief priests and the Pharisees watched and saw the procession as a great threat. It would cause utter destruction to their position and personal desires.

5- The crowds conceived the procession as a herald to a new age, for that One had come who would free them from the Roman occupation and grant them temporal glory!

6- Finally, the heavenly hosts watched the procession with amazement at the humility of the incarnated Word of God. The One who owned heaven and earth sat on a donkey and was being proclaimed by weak human beings...what were the implications of His humility and His love for mankind?!

**‘Therefore the people that were with him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb, And raised him from the dead, bore witness.’ [17]**

The reason why all these crowds had come out to meet Him was the miracle He did when He raised Lazarus from the dead. At the same time, it was an opportunity to speak about this miracle, Therefore many got attracted to Him. This increased the envy of the Pharisees all the more. They lost all hope of restricting the Lord’s popularity and power. They could find no other solution to get rid of Him but to kill Him. The Lord had preached often, and had done countless miracles; yet raising Lazarus from the dead attracted the crowds to Him. Nothing could overwhelm and destroy a person like death; and nothing could bring a person more joy like the resurrection from death.

\* Many had resisted being converted immediately until they believed in this miracle<sup>21</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

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<sup>21</sup> Homilies on St John, 66:2

**‘For this cause the people also met him,  
Because they had heard that he had done this sign, [Jn 12:19]  
The Pharisees therefore said among themselves:  
“You see that you are accomplishing nothing?  
Look, the world has gone after him.” [19]**

At this time, all the fears of the religious leaders became real. The chief priests and Pharisees felt especially threatened as matters seemed to slip beyond their control. Indeed, all the people had joined together in a procession that shook the city. On the hand, the Pharisees were faced with the reality of their inadequacy “...**you are accomplishing nothing...**” [19]. On the other hand, they felt that the whole world had gone and followed the Lord. In this context, the reference is made to the Jewish world- that is every one had become attracted to Him just as a disciple would be. Therefore the Pharisees felt that any further delay in getting rid of Him constituted a danger that would be hard to remedy.

\* The Pharisees were referring to the crowds when they said: “...**the world has gone after him.**” The Holy Bible usually uses the expression ‘the world’ to refer to the creation and to those who walk wickedly. The Lord had told His disciples: “**The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil,**” (Jn 7:7)

**St John Chrysostom**

### **3- The Greeks Honor the Lord Jesus Christ**

**‘Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast.’ [20]**

Some pagan converts, who were Greeks, desired to see the Lord Jesus Christ. This incident could have taken place a day or two after the Lord had come into the city for the Lord had spent the first day doing general services.

Some scholars believe that these were Jews who had been dispersed and had adhered to the Hellenic culture and were therefore called Greeks, like for example Cornelius and the eunuch of Kadago. Besides, the Jews accepted some Gentiles who were naturally inclines to worship God yet were not familiar with the law of Moses and the prophets. At the same time, there were Gentiles who respected righteous Jewish people and allowed them to worship while they lived among them. They even allowed them to attend their religious gatherings within the established limits. Such Gentiles were the ones whom the Jews considered to be foreigners.

Other scholars believe that these pagans were Gentiles. They note that the Jews in older times had allowed some Gentiles to travel to the temple during the feasts. It is as though they foretold the destruction of the veil that separated the Gentiles from the Jews through the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. These Gentiles used to come to the temple to worship without eating the Passover.

At the Lord’s birth, He attracted the magi from the east. They worshipped Him and offered gifts. They also witnessed for Him in one way or other in the royal palace and among the priests and high priests. When He was crucified, He attracted the Greeks from the west who for the pleasure of seeing Him. It appears that the Lord had come to bring together the east and the west so that all may become one fold under one shepherd. By His birth and death, He opened the



way of faith to the Gentiles so that all may enjoy Him. The Macedonian man became entitled to appear to the apostle Paul in a dream and cry out: “Come over...and help us” (Acts 16:9).

These Greeks did not participate in the procession that took place when the Lord made His entry into Jerusalem. It could be that only the Jews were allowed. However, they were able to find out how to participate spiritually as they proclaimed their sincere desire to see Him. It was as though they joined in their own language and shouted with the Jews, “Hosanna (Redeem us) in the highest”!

Although there was a great crowd around the Lord Jesus Christ, these Greeks did not lose their hope of fulfilling their heart’s desire and wish to see Him.

\* They were potential converts (i.e. accepting the Jewish faith) and therefore had come to the feast and requested “...to see Jesus”<sup>22</sup>, [21].

**St John Chrysostom**

**‘Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee,  
And asked him, saying,  
“Sir, we would see Jesus”’, [21].**

Some writers believe that these Greeks knew Philip, and that they lived close by in Bethsaida- the Gentile area of Galilee. They had probably attended some of the Lord’s gatherings and had seen Philip sitting next to Him.

Their message to Philip conveyed their special appreciation of the Lord and their eagerness to meet and speak with Him separately. They had come to the feast, yet they were not impressed with the grandness of the temple, or with the great throngs coming for the feast. Moreover, they had not come to see the wonders and miracles that the Lord did. All they wanted was to have Him for themselves as they yearned to see Him and speak with Him.

Sadly enough, during the Christian feasts- especially during the big feasts of Easter and Christmas- many Christians are so preoccupied with the preparations for the feast that they do not yearn to see the Lord Jesus Christ and to meet personally with Him.

Some scholars believe that these people came from Phoenicia or from Syria. They were probably inhabitants of the Decapolis which is close to the Pool of Genasereth and Bethsaida.

\* Note how the sought to kill Him, whereas the Gentiles sought to see Him.

Nevertheless, there were also Jewish people who shouted: **“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!”**

We find in the crowd some who belonged to the circumcised as well as others who belonged to the uncircumcised. This is like two walls in a house, each having a different

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<sup>22</sup> Homilies on St John, 66:2

direction. Yet they meet and exchange the kiss of peace and share the one faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us therefore listen to the voice of the Cornerstone: **“The hour has come that the Son of Man be glorified” [23]**. Some may think that the Lord was referring to Himself and that He would be glorified as the Gentiles wanted to see Him. But that is not the case for the Lord was actually referring to His vision of the Gentiles. They were going to come into the faith from all nations. This would occur after His suffering and resurrection. The apostle accordingly says: “that hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in,” (Rom 11:20). When the Greeks came to see Him, the Lord seized the occasion to announce the future fullness of the Gentile. They would believe after His hour had come; and when He Himself would be glorified in heaven, then the Gentiles would come into the faith<sup>23</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**‘Philip came and told Andrew:  
And in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus.’ [22]**

It is so wonderful when servants work together! They both came to the Lord to present to Him the souls that yearned to know Him. Philip probably debated with Andrew what they should do. He had often heard the Lord say that He had come to save the lost sheep of Israel. Together they agreed to bring the matter to the Lord.

\* Philip went to Andrew as he was his senior. He presented the matter to him and did not act with authority as he had read: ‘Do not go into the way of the Gentiles,’ (Matt 10:5). That is why he spoke and sought the advice of the disciple, then brought the matter to the Lord<sup>24</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**‘But Jesus answered them, saying,  
“The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.” [23]**

**St John Chrysostom** states that the Lord had previously told the disciples: “Do not go in the way of the Gentiles” (Matt 10:5). However, as the hour of the crucifixion drew nearer, the door to the Gentiles would be opened and the time for preaching to the Gentiles had come.

The Lord accepted to see them. His words that “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified”, are intended to encourage the Gentiles to come and get acquainted with Him. The Lord saw that the fields were white and ready for the harvest. It is a moment of glory for Him as the doors of His Church were opened to receive all mankind. It happened as a reaction to the Jews who had rejected Him and had departed from the fold of believers. The Lord’s vision would be fulfilled through His death and resurrection. It would be like a mustard seed placed in the earth to bring much fruit.

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<sup>23</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 51:8

<sup>24</sup> Homilies on St John, 66:2

The disciples and apostles were the first Jews to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. These Greeks were the first Gentiles to believe in Him after the Cross tore the veil which separated heaven from earth- and the Jews from the Gentiles.

It was necessary for the Lord to be glorified through His death and resurrection in order to establish His glorious Church consisting of Jews and Gentiles. His love obligated Him to die. In order to redeem the world which had been destroyed by corruption, it was necessary to wash it from sin, sanctify it, and glorify it in heaven. These are the many mustard seeds and the harvest of His redeeming act.

The hour had come and no one would ever comprehend the depth and mystery of that time except God alone. This was the hour of glory to the Father as well as to the Son. Three years had gone by while the Lord was performing His wonderful deeds and preaching to the crowds. Now the time had come when the seed would fall into the earth, get buried, and die. The time of the winepress had come. The prophet Isaiah had a vision of it earlier and he had heard the Lord's words: "I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me" (Is 63:3).

The hour had come when the Lord would stretch out His arms on the Cross and accomplish the reconciliation between the Father and mankind. Moreover, He would embrace the Jews and Gentiles together as members of His one Body.

\* Do you want to be convinced that He willingly suffered? Others do not know what will happen to them and they therefore die involuntarily. However, the Lord had foreknowledge and said: "The Son of Man will be delivered and crucified." Do you know why? Why did that 'Friend of Man' not prevent death? In order to prevent the whole world from being destroyed by sin. "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed...and they will condemn Him to death." So 'He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem' (Matt 20:18; Lk 19:38).

Do you really want to know how the Cross brought glory to the Lord Jesus Christ? Listen to His words and not our words. As Judas the traitor was about to betray the Lord of the house, he sat at His table and drank of the cup of His grace which grants salvation. He then left to shed the innocent Blood: 'Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his head against me,' (Ps 41:9). Judas was still holding in his hands the gift of His grace when he planned to betray the Lord and receive a price for delivering Him to death...As soon as he heard the Lord's words, "You have said it", he went out (Matt 26:25). Then the Lord said: ""The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified." That indicates, my beloved one, how the Cross came to stand for the glory due to the Lord.

Isaiah was not ashamed of being hacked in pieces. Would the Lord be ashamed of dying on behalf of the world?!

**"Now the Son of Man is glorified" (Jan 33:32).** This did not mean that He was without glory previously. In fact, He had been crowned with the glory due to Him even before the creation of the world (Jn17:5). He has been eternally glorified for He is God. Now He would be glorified as He suffers patiently.

The Lord was not forced to offer His life up. Moreover, He was not obligated to accept death but voluntarily accepted it. Listen to His words: “I have power to lay it down, and I have power that I may take it up again,” (Jn 10:18). In other words: ‘I deliver Myself willingly to My enemies; otherwise this would not have occurred.

The Lord came with a plan that He put down Himself in order to suffer. He was pleased with that noble deed, and smiled at His crown of glory while taking pride in bringing salvation to mankind. He was not ashamed of the Cross for it was intended to be the salvation of this world. He was not an ordinary man- in fact, He was the incarnated God<sup>25</sup>.

**St Cyril of Jerusalem**

**“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, It remains alone:  
But if it dies, it produces much grain...” [24]**

However much the world progresses, it is still unable to comprehend the mystery of harvesting much produce from one mustard seed; or how the harvest gets transformed into flesh, blood, and bones of a human body and of animals. Similarly, the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection, which constitute the foundation upon which the glorious Church is built, will remain to be an incomprehensible mystery to mankind.

The Greeks had come to see the Lord. Why did the Lord tell them the parable of the grain of wheat? He intended to underline that they could not see Him as He is unless He would come over to them by way of His death and resurrection. He would then enter their world, and would carry them in Him. He is the Way that would attract their hearts to Him. He would carry them over so that they would speak through Him and cross over with Him into the Father’s embrace. They would become ‘of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones,’ (Eph 5:30).

\* If you wondered what the Lord meant when He said: “...unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain...” our explanation would be as follows: The Lord was speaking about His crucifixion. It is as though He was saying: ‘This is what will happen with the grain: it will die and then it will bear much fruit. If this happens to seeds, then it is much more appropriate and essential for this to happen with Me.’ However, the disciples were unable to comprehend the words of the Lord.

\* Our present life is beautiful and full of pleasure. However, this not true for everyone, and it is only valid for those who cling to it. Therefore, if someone looked up at the heavens and perceived the beauty there, he would hate this life and disregard it immediately. This is because the beauty of any object attracts someone who has not seen something more beautiful than it. However, when something better appears, that person will hate the earlier object. Therefore if we choose to look up and see the beauty and sublimity of the Kingdom up there, then we shall liberate ourselves of our present bonds...for our present emotional inclinations are a form of bondage straps...Listen to these words: ‘If you are unable to tolerate my death bravely, or rather, if you do not die, then you will attain nothing’<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Essay 13:6

<sup>26</sup> Homilies on St John: 67:1

## St John Chrysostom

The grain of wheat became a rare object in the field of Judas for it had died there. In contrast, the oil overflowed like streams in the house of the pagan widow<sup>27</sup>.

## St Jerome

**“He who loves his life shall lose it;  
And he who hates his life in this world shall keep it for eternal life.” [25]**

A person who loves himself more than he loves the Lord Jesus Christ, or who loves his temporal life more than his eternal glory destroys himself. In contrast, a person would surely enjoy eternal life if he destroys himself like the grain of wheat; glorifies the Lord and shares His suffering and death.

The Lord’s death has changed the meaning and values of death. It has also altered our view of life. Death has become a requirement that is necessary to the promotion of a full and fruitful life. Where there is no death, there is no real life. When a person buries the ego, the Lord who is ‘life’ proclaims Himself in him. When a person seeks ‘himself’ then the Lord does not find a place for Him within. Consequently, that person loses the Source of his life.

A new life in the Lord Jesus Christ becomes evident in anyone who dies to his old life and crucifies the world. Such a person experiences the warranty of eternal life.

\* If you asked: ‘How does someone who loves his life destroy it?’ Our answer would be: ‘Whoever indulges in the lusts of the soul and allows her to cross over the appropriate limits represents such a person who loves his soul and destroys it. That is why Wisdom warns us and says: “Don’t be controlled by your lust, keep your passions in check. If you allow yourself to satisfy every desire, you will be a joke to your enemies’ (Sirach 18:30, 31). This is because lusts obstruct the path that leads the soul to virtue.

The Lord’s words: “...he who hates his life in this world shall keep it for eternal life” carry the same meaning. If you asked: ‘What does ‘he who hates his life’ imply? We would answer: ‘It is someone who neither submits to life nor obeys it when it commands him to do evil deeds.

The Lord did not say: ‘He who does not submit to it’; rather He said: “he who hates his life.’ Just as we find ourselves unable to tolerate hearing the voice or seeing the face of someone we do not like, so we need to step away immediately from our soul if she commands us to disobey God’s commandments.

## St John Chrysostom

\* If you love, then be ready to suffer loss. If you wish to attain life in the Lord Jesus Christ, then do not fear to die for His sake<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Letter 54: 16

<sup>28</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 51:10

## St Augustine

This is surely a deep and strange proclamation. It defines the degree to which a person loves his life to the extent of wanting to destroy it. Moreover, this would drive him to hate his life in order to preserve it! If you love your life in a sinful manner, then you truly hate it. However, if you love your life in a righteous manner, then you actually love it even though you hate it. O, how happy are those who despise their lives and so preserve it: for their love does not result in the destruction of their life<sup>29</sup>.

## St Augustine

**“If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me;  
And where I am, there my servant shall be also:  
If anyone serves Me, him will My Father honor.” [26]**

First, the Lord presented a new meaning for death and life in the light of His Crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Now, He presents to us a new meaning for service and the ministry. Being a minister does not involve the mere offering services to others. It implies achieving union with the true and unique Servant- the Lord Jesus Christ- and joining and following Him on the road to Gethsemane.

When someone desires to serve and witness for the Lord, the first step he needs to take is to follow Him. That means he needs to become a disciple, learn, obey, and walk with the Lord on the path of the crucifixion and burial. As a result, he would arise and produce much fruit. May a minister/servant forsake worldly pleasures as he focuses on eternal happiness. May he get to be united with the Eternal One and so receive eternal glory from the Holy Father Himself.

Having this new meaning gives a minister the reward for his services. Indeed, he finds himself in the company of His Lord- sharing in His suffering as well as in His joy. Truly, whoever enjoys fellowship with the Lord, and devotes his life to witness for Him, is honored by Him in ways neither he nor others can ever imagine: ‘Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever,’ (Daniel 12:3). The Lord also says: “Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me may be with me where I am” (Jn17:24). As he serves, a servant finds the unique opportunity to speak with the true Servant- the Lord Jesus Christ. On his way and during a minister’s service, the Lord reveals Himself and the Father and so grants His servant divine knowledge.

Anyone who preserves the honor of God and works through Him, the same is honored by God Himself: “...he who waits on his master will be honored” (Prov. 27:18).

By saying this parable, the Lord intended to lead the Greeks, who had come to see Him, to focus and adopt His view of working for His Kingdom. His words reveal the glory which is prepared for those who work in His vineyard. In this manner, He transforms the beautiful yearning to see Him into a serious task. By working for His kingdom, they would be enabled to see Him in His eternal glory. At the same time they would enjoy this glorious fellowship.

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<sup>29</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 51:10

\* The Lord was speaking about death and the requirements made on those who followed Him. They had to work, and to follow up those they served constantly... “If any man desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt16:24). In other words, He says: ‘Be always prepared for dangers, for death, and for departure from this world.’ Having stated the difficulties of serving Him, the Lord presents the rewards. What kind of rewards are they? ‘Being His disciples, and being there- wherever He may be found, and underlining that the resurrection always follows death<sup>30</sup>’.

\* But where is the Lord Jesus Christ? He is in the heavens. Therefore may we transport our souls and minds to the heavens even before we the resurrection. Why does the Lord indicate that the person who serves the Lord Jesus ‘... him will My Father honor; rather than saying ‘I will honor him’? The reason is that the disciples had not yet attained the correct concept concerning the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, they did comprehend deeply all that concerned the Father<sup>31</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* What honor could be greater for the adopted son than to be in the company of the only begotten Son? It is true that he does not attain the rank of a deity, yet he becomes a partner in eternity?!<sup>32</sup>

\* The Lord wishes us to understand that those who serve Him should not be seeking their own interests. Rather, they should be seeking to serve and please Him (Phil2:21). He seems to be stating the following: “He who does not follow Me does not serve Me.” This is the implication of the words “Let him follow Me.” It means: Let him walk along My path and not in his own way. In another passage, it is written: “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1John 2:6)<sup>33</sup>.

\* Everyone is a minister of the Lord just as the Lord is a minister Himself. By serving in His footsteps, a servant will be greatly honored by the Father who will grant him fellowship with the Son. Consequently, such a minister’s joy will be complete for evermore<sup>34</sup>.

\* My brothers, when you hear that “Where I am, there My servant will be also” do not think that this applies to good priests and bishops only. Rather, it is intended to encourage you also to serve the Lord within your own means: by living uprightly, by offering donations, by preaching in His name and spreading His teachings as much as possible ...<sup>35</sup>

**St Augustine**

#### **4- The Heavens Glorify the Lord Jesus Christ**

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<sup>30</sup> Hom 67. PG 59:401

<sup>31</sup> Hom 67. PG 59:401

<sup>32</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 51:11

<sup>33</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 51:12

<sup>34</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 51:12

<sup>35</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 51:13

**“Now is my soul troubled;  
And what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour:  
But for this purpose I came to this hour.” [27]**

The Lord spoke about the need for Him to suffer and to die. As the Son of Man, He lifted His heart and said: “Now My soul is troubled”[27]. Indeed, these are strange words coming from the Lord especially after the disciples had witnessed Gentile strangers seeking to meet Him. Then they heard Him say “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.” However, because He had truly become incarnated, it was natural that His soul got troubled in the face of all that cloud of suffering that enveloped Him. He probably saw through that cloud the sins of all humanity. It appeared before Him so that He would carry them upon His shoulders; and offer Himself as a burnt sacrifice and redemption for our sins.

While the Lord comforted His disciples, and told them “Let not your hearts be troubled” (Jn 14:1), yet He says “Now My heart is troubled” [27]. His troubled heart releases our hearts from being troubled: His pains constitute the mystery of our eternal peace. By His own will and pleasure, the Lord carried the burden of our sins. In spite of His joy, it was inevitable that His heart got troubled due to the immensity of our sins. He carried the weight of our weakness in order to grant us a Spirit of power.

His troubled heart is the expression of holy sadness that generates joy in the hearts of believers. It gives joy to the Father as it reconciles Him with mankind. It causes angels to rejoice as well. His heart got troubled as He entered the narrow path leading to the Cross. In this manner, we are enabled to share in His pain and enter with Him into the heavenly glory. His pains would endure for an hour and it had now come, and then they would pass away. These would be replaced by eternity which is infinite. Some scholars explain that the Greek word used indicates anxiety rather than fear<sup>36</sup>.

The Lord’s words to the Father reveal the joy He finds in carrying the Cross. He says: “...for this purpose I came to this hour...” [27]. In order to carry us to a life of submission and humility, He cries: “Father, save Me from this hour...,” [27].

\* These words do not reflect His divinity. Rather, they reflect His human nature which rejects death and holds on to this present life. In this manner, the Lord underlined that He was not exempt from human suffering. He revealed that holding on to this present life is not a sin, just as hunger and the need for sleep do not constitute failings. The Lord had a body that was untainted by sin, yet it was not released from natural physical needs. That was the wisdom for giving Him a body.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord took the form of human weakness in order to teach us, that when we are sad or troubled, to say: “...O, my Father, ...not as I will, but as You will...,” (Matt 26:39). In this

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<sup>36</sup> Leon Morris, p. 450



manner, a person is transformed from being human to being divine as he prefers to do the Father's will rather than his own<sup>37</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**"Father, glorify thy name."  
Then came there a voice from heaven, saying,  
"I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." [28]**

The incarnate Son submitted to the Father's will by offering Himself as a sacrifice. The Father proclaimed His acceptance through the resurrection which also brings glory to the Father. At this point the Lord indicates the link between death and glory (the resurrection). Although His soul is troubled, He does not ask that this sentence of death be removed. Indeed, the passage into the resurrection brings a reciprocated glory: the glory of the Son and the glory of the Father.

The Lord refers to God Himself as well as to all His characteristics by using the words 'Your Name.' The Father Himself is glorified, as well as His wisdom, mercy, love, holiness, righteousness, etc...All that is achieved through the redeeming act of the Lord.

The Voice of the Father is heard saying: "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again," [28]. It is as though He was saying: 'I have achieved My plan through You. I have sent You to be atonement for the sins of the world. I have executed justice which will never be void of My love and mercy. You have completed My work. That is why You offer Your Blood on the Cross, and I accept it as a sacrifice of love. Your death and resurrection glorify Me and fulfill My mission towards My beloved: Man. I have glorified You and will glorify You at Your death and at Your resurrection.'

The Lord Jesus Christ was glorified through His teachings, His loving deeds, and the wonders and miracles He did. He was glorified when He was tempted in the wilderness when the angels later appeared and served Him. He was glorified at His baptism when the Voice of the Father was heard bearing witness for Him, and when the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove (Mk 9:7). At the time of the transfiguration, He was glorified as He appeared with Elijah and Moses and spoke about His 'decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem' (Lk 9:31). He would be glorified through the astonishing events that were going to take place during His arrest, judgment, and crucifixion. He would be glorified by His resurrection, ascension, and the granting of the Holy Spirit to His disciples. He will ultimately be glorified through his disciples who would successfully preach and spread His Gospel throughout the whole world.

\* The words of the Father: "I have glorified it and will glorify it again" may lead you to wonder: 'Where is His glory?' Our response is: 'The Lord has been glorified throughout the previous ages; and He will be glorified after His resurrection.'

**St John Chrysostom**

\* Although they could not accept the gift of Truth, yet they involuntarily recognized Him. In their ignorance, they spoke mysterious words and this resulted in great testimonials from the Son

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<sup>37</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 52:3

and the Father. In the Book of Job we read: "...the thunder of His power who can understand..." (Job 26:14; LXX).<sup>38</sup>

**St Ambrose**

**\* "...and I will glorify it again," [28]** when the Lord will arise after His death. Then death will have no authority over Him. Indeed, when He ascends into the heavens as God, His glory will cover the whole earth<sup>39</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**'The people therefore who stood by, and heard it,  
Said that it had thundered.  
Others said,  
"An angel has spoken to him." [29]**

Some scholars note that the Voice used a language known to the Jews but not to the Greeks. Consequently, the Jews said that an angel had spoken to Him; whereas the others thought that it had thundered. In St John's book 'The Revelation' the voice of one of the living creatures is likened to thunder (Rev 6:1).

\* You might ask: 'How could they imagine such a thing?' Our answer would be: 'It could be that the Voice could not be identified; or could have occurred too quickly. This could have been a challenge to those who were physically slow, while others were able to hear the Voice clearly.

**St John Chrysostom**

**Jesus answered and said,  
"This voice did not come because of Me,  
But for your sakes' [30].**

The Lord did not need the Voice from heaven to encourage Him. The Voice had come for the sake of those present and so that they would believe that the Father had sent Him. This would sustain the disciples during the Lord's sufferings and keep them from stumbling. They would find comfort in that Voice just as It filled the Lord with joy.

The Voice could have come for the sake of the Greeks who had come to see Him. They had not seen His deeds and miracles. They had just heard about them. Therefore the Voice from heaven was intended to witness for the Lord in their presence.

What did the Father recommend to His Son? To offer eternal life to mankind. This was something no other being in heaven or on earth could do.

\* It is as though He was saying: 'This Voice was not intended to inform Me of something I did not know. Indeed, I know all the hidden matters known to My Father. Truly, this Voice came for

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<sup>38</sup> Of the Holy Spirit, Book 2:6:55

<sup>39</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 52:4

you.’ The Lord then led them to ask Him what the Voice had said. However, they were so astonished that they did not ask.

**St Augustine**

\* Just as the Voice uttered by God was not intended for the Lord but rather directed to those present; similarly, the Lord’s soul was troubled on account of those present and not on account of His own situation<sup>40</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**“Now is the judgment of this world:**

**Now shall the ruler of this world be cast out.” [31]**

\* This is the Voice of the Father whom the Son knows and comprehends His depths. The Voice had come to proclaim the judgment of this evil world, the defeat of the devil- ‘the ruler of this world’-and his eviction after being stripped of all power. Satan loses all his sphere of influence as believers proclaim their victory in the arena of battle. Satan exits in great weakness and utter defeat after having won many rounds earlier. That is how Satan loses in his struggle with the Lord Jesus Christ. His defeat continues as he wrestles with believers who are members in the victorious body of the Lord.

St John writes in the certitude of faith and says: “I have written to you young men because you are strong, and the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one,” (1John 2:14). He also says: “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world- our faith” (1Jn 5:4). Those who enjoy the redeeming act of God also sing praises and say: “Now salvation and strength and the kingdom of our God and the power of His Christ have come; for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; and they did not love their lives to the death,” (Rev 12:10-11).

Through the Cross all those things, which human beings plotted against the Lord Jesus Christ and all what Satan devised in an attempt to get rid of Him, ended in the defeat of evil and the destruction of Satan’s power. The ruler of this wicked world cannot stand before the Ruler of life. The apostle says appropriately: “But you denied the Holy One, and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, and of which we are witnesses,” (Acts 3:14-15). St Paul also says about the Lord Jesus Christ: “...that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,” (Heb 2:14).

The Lord spoke with the certainty of being victorious over death. He knew that His death would restore the light of knowledge to many souls and liberate them from the bonds of Satan.

Note that the word ‘judgment’ is not used with a definite article. This is because the Lord was not referring to the final judgment. Rather, He was referring to the judgment that would begin with

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<sup>40</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 52:5

His redeeming act. Simeon the elder prophetically says: “Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel; and for a sign which will be spoken against” (Lk 2:34).

\* If you wonder: ‘What does glory mean?’ Our answer is: According to the Lord Jesus Christ, it is that “...now the ruler of this world will be cast out.”

\* What do the words ‘the judgment of this world’ imply? According to the Lord: “It will be a condemnation and disaster.” How and in what manner? Satan had killed the first Man as he led him to sin and so was condemned as a criminal. However, there is no sin in the Lord Jesus Christ. So why was delivered to die? Why was the mind of Judas set on destroying the Lord? Why then is the world to be condemned through the person of the Lord? In the court of justice, the charge against Satan will be: ‘Well, you caused the death of all mankind as they have all been found guilty of sin, but why have you killed the Lord Jesus Christ? Is that not due to your wrong doing? Therefore the whole world will be avenged through Him<sup>41</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* Speaking about the judgment that was about to take place, the Lord says these words: “Now is the judgment of this world”; whereas the final judgment would be withheld until the time when the living and the dead would be judged.

That is why Satan has taken hold of mankind and possesses them since they have been charged of sin. Therefore all mankind stand as criminals waiting to be condemned. He rules over the hearts of unbelievers, deceives, and enslaves them. He tempts them to forsake the Creator and worship the created. However, thousands of believers, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, have become liberated from the power of Satan. Through the Lord’s death, His resurrection, and the Blood He has poured for the remission of sins, believers have become united into His body. As a result they have become followers of the Head.

This is what the Lord intended when He spoke about the ‘judgment.’ This is the true distinction. It indicates the separation of those who belong to Him and therefore have become liberated from Satan.

\* Now the Lord informs us of what He knew: after His sufferings and glorification. Many of the Gentiles spread throughout the world would become believers. Satan had ruled over their hearts but they would reject and cast him out. Through faith they would renounce Satan<sup>42</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**“And if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.” [32]**

Satan will be cast out and thrown into hell. In this manner, He would lose the kingdom he had set up among mankind on earth. While the Lord ascends above the earth through the Cross, the

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<sup>41</sup> Hom 67: PG 59:403

<sup>42</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 52:6

enemy descends. The Lord ascends through the Cross in order to enable His followers to ascend with Him into heaven.

We have previously stated that St John the Evangelist looks up to the Cross as a means of elevation (3:14; 8:28) since it is the crowning glory of the Lord.

Here the Lord attributes to Himself the task of drawing “...**all peoples to (Himself).**” In another passage, the Lord attributes this to the Father (Jn 6:44). He draws the soul through the attraction of love and not by forceful subjugation or violence. Accordingly Hosea says: “I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love, I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them,” (Hosea 11:4).

The souls that were estranged from Him could not tolerate meeting with Him due to their darkness. Now it became possible for them to enjoy His light and be attracted to Him. He would be lifted up to heaven and would attract the souls of those who love Him to join and share the heavenly joys with Him.

The Lord uses the expression ‘**all peoples**’ to stress the efficiency of the Cross in attracting the heavenly and earthly members to join into one Body. The Blood poured on the Cross would reconcile them all to Him. All will be united in the Lord Jesus Christ. We read that: ‘...all things (will be reconciled) to Himself...having made peace through the Blood of His Cross,’ (Col 1:20). The ultimate Plan is to “gather together into one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth...in Him,’ (Eph 1:10). Moreover, the Lord underlines His attraction to all mankind- Jews and Gentiles- yet He does not seek to attract any against their wishes or through forceful subjugation.

\* This means that the Lord attracts those who believe even if they are of the Gentiles. He says that He will ‘**draw all peoples.**’ It is as though these were being arrested by a tyrant and were unable to come to the Lord on their own. These peoples seem unable to escape from the hands of the tyrant who holds them. In another passage, they are considered ‘exiles’ as the Lord says: ‘...how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man...,’ (Matt 12:29). He spoke these words to confirm His power, and to indicate here that those attracted Him are the same as those whom he had considered earlier as being exiled.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord Jesus Christ had become a curse on our account in order to redeem us from the curse of the Law. Then why does it amaze us that He submits to the Father on our account too? Accordingly, He wishes us to submit to the Father, and according to His holy words: “...No one comes to the Father except through Me,” (Jn 14:6). He also says: “And I, if I am Lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself,” (Jn 12:32). The Lord is perceived to have submitted to the Father when His believers are taken into account; for all believers- and indeed all

mankind- are considered members of His Body. However, He is considered as insubordinate when unbelievers are taken into account; for they are members of His Body, yet they do not submit to faith<sup>43</sup>.

**St Jerome**

**“This He said, signifying by what death He would die,” [33].**

The Lord Jesus Christ was lifted up upon the Cross and the whole world looked upon Him. Hanging there between heaven and earth, He was seen as someone who deserved such punishment.

The crowds had heard His sermons and seen the thousands of miracles He had made; yet few remained loyal to Him and remained as His disciples. However, once He was crucified He attracted the whole world to Him. Many became believers and continued to love Him loyally.

**‘The people answered Him:**

**“ We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever,**

**And how can You say: ‘the Son of Man must be lifted up?’**

**Who is the Son of Man?”[33]**

The people of Israel expected something different than what the Lord proclaimed. They had heard the Voice from heaven, and the words of grace that he had spoken with His mouth; yet they could not believe that He would ascend, or in other words that he would die. They would not believe even though the Old Testament had foretold His death, still He was the Priest for evermore (Ps 110:4); and the eternal King ( Ps 89:29). In the Book of Daniel, we are told about the Lord that: “...to Him was given domain and glory and kingdom. That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed,” (Daniel 7:13, 14). In the Book of Ezekial, we read the following: ‘David, My servant, shall be king over them forever,’ (Ezek 37:25). The people remembered the words about His immortality; yet they forgot the prophecies concerning His death, and how He would sacrifice Himself to die (Is 53:12), and how His feet and hands would be pierced.

**“Who is this Son of Man?” [34]** They did not ask this question in order to find out His identity. Rather, it reflected their belief that He was the Messiah, the priest and the eternal king. Now they were surprised to learn that He would die. They became doubtful because He proclaimed that His death was imperative.

\* They knew that the Messiah would be eternal and would possess eternal life. Had they not also read, in the same context, about His suffering and resurrection in many other passages in the Holy Bible?

Isaiah the prophet places the two issues side by side, and says: ‘He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep

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<sup>43</sup> Letter 55:5

before His shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth,' (IS 53:7). David also links the two issues in the second Psalm as well as in many other passages. Moreover, Jacob- the father of the holy fathers, revealed His sufferings and resurrection, and at the same stated that: 'He bows down, He lies down like a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse Him?' (Gen 49:9). Nevertheless, the Jewish leaders imagined that they could silence Him and prove that He was not the Messiah. They would use the same issue – that the Messiah would reign eternally- to make their point.

Notice how they handled the matter craftily. They did not say: 'We have heard from the law that the Christ will not suffer or be crucified.' Rather they said the following: "We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever..." Yet what they said did not constitute any real objection since the Lord's suffering did not obstruct His immortality. That is why we believe that they understood many matters which they claimed to be suspicious; and which they intentionally chose to handle deceitfully. Therefore they asked: "Who is this Son of Man?" They said so slyly and the implication was: 'We ask you not to believe that we say this about you. Do not think that we oppose You due to any enmity between us. Rather, we do not know about whom You are speaking. We are just expressing our opinion<sup>44</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**Then Jesus said unto them,**

**"A little while longer the light is with you.**

**Walk while ye have the light,**

**Lest darkness overtake you,**

**For he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going."** [34]

The Lord indicated that His death was temporary through His words: "Yet a little while is the light with you..." It is like the sun whose light does not end but just gets hidden for a while and then shines again. His words to the Jews to "...Walk while ye have the light lest darkness overtake you ..." are intended to motivate them to believe in Him.

He also told them that "...he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going." How many things had the Jews done up till that moment without being aware of their deeds. They seemed as someone walking in the darkness. They thought they were on the right path whereas they were walking in the opposite direction: they observed the Sabbath and protected the law; they avoided certain foods yet they did not know the right path to take<sup>45</sup>.

**"While you have the light, believe in the light," [36]:** What was the time frame that the Lord was indicating? Was He referring to the present life as a whole; or was He referring only to the time before His death? We believe He meant both for many came to believe in Him even after His death. On account of His inexpressible love for mankind, He uttered these words to encourage people to believe<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> Homilies on St John, 68:1

<sup>45</sup> Hom on St John, 68:1

<sup>46</sup> Hom. 68 PG 59:405

## St John Chrysostom

**“While ye have light, believe in the light,  
That you may become sons of light.”  
These things Jesus spoke,  
And departed, and was hidden of them. [36]**

The Lord was concerned with their salvation, therefore He asked them to be preoccupied with their inner depths. This would enable them to walk in the light as long as they had the light, and avoid becoming sons of darkness. Rather than engage with them in worthless arguments, the Lord directed them to issues that would lead them to salvation and growth. He asked them to enjoy the light since He had become incarnated and dwelled among them. Consequently, He would carry them into the eternal heavenly light.

Our life consists of few opportunities which may not come again. Therefore it is appropriate to capitalize on every chance that comes our way to live in fellowship with the Lord. Our Gospel is the light that enlightens the soul. Anyone who rejects its light stumbles into darkness. As for those who enjoy its light, they become children of the light (Lk 16:8; Eph 5:8); and of the sons of daylight (1 Thes 5:5).

The Lord warned them that they would yearn to see just one of the days of the Son of Man but would not be able to see Him (Lk 17:22). He also told them that the kingdom of God would be taken away from them and given to the Gentiles (Matt 21:43).

\* **“While ye have light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”** In other words, ‘that you may become My sons.’ Note that the Evangelist had reported from the beginning of his Gospel that those who believe ‘were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God,’ (Jn1:13). Here the Lord said that He was the One who gave birth to them. He intended to make them realize that the deeds of the Father and the Son were one and the same<sup>47</sup>.

\* St John the apostle reports that the Lord Jesus Christ **‘departed, and was hidden of them.’** If you asked: “What was the Lord’s intention by being ‘hidden of them’? They neither carried stones nor blasphemed against Him as they had done before. So why did He disappear?” Our answer would be: “The Lord knew how much their hearts were filled with anger and rebellion. He did not wait for that anger to be vented into the sphere of action, but He disappeared to calm their evil.

**St John Chrysostom**

The Lord concluded by giving them advice to seize the opportunity of His presence so that His light would shine and dispel their darkness. He explained that time was short and the period left before His departure was very near. He then disappeared to avoid entering into further arguments, and to provide them with the chance to think seriously about their attitude towards Him.

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<sup>47</sup> Homilies on St John, 68:1



## 5- The Prophets Testify to His Glory

**‘But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him.’ [37]**

St John the Evangelist presents the testimony of Isaiah the prophet for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ; and the Jew’s rejection of Him because ‘they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.’[43]

The Evangelist tells us that that the Lord **‘had done so many signs before them’ [37]**, yet in spite of that ‘they did not believe in Him.’ On the contrary, the Lord’s deeds drove them to be envious and to resist Him. They had not only heard about His miracles, but He had done these ‘before’ them. The Lord had not acted secretly but openly and there were many witnesses. Nevertheless they did not believe for their inner eyes were struck with blindness, and their lusts had hardened and corrupted their hearts.

**‘That the word of Isaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke, “Lord, who has believed our report?  
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” [38]**

The prophecy of Isaiah was therefore fulfilled as the Jews did not believe the prophetic testimonies and divine proclamations. Moreover, they rejected the ‘arm of the Lord’ which was revealed in His power, authority, and miracles<sup>48</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**‘Therefore they could not believe, because Isaias said again, [39]**

St John the Evangelist reveals the condition of the Jews who were characterized by stubbornness and opposition towards God and His prophets. Ever since they lived in Egypt, and even when they left that land and traveled through the wilderness, they rebelled against Moses and Aaron. They did not spare one prophet, and as Elijah the prophet told the Lord God: “...for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, thrown down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword; I alone am left; and they seek to take my life...,” (1Kgs 19:10). St Stephen the Martyr said: “You stiff necked and uncircumcised in hearts and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit, as your fathers did so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold to coming of the Just One, of whom you have now become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels, and have not kept it” (Acts 7:51-52).

An endless chain of rebellion against the work of God, and a constant persecution of prophets have blinded their inner sights and disabled them from seeing. Their hearts had become hardened and they could no longer enjoy the blessing of faith!

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<sup>48</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 53:2

\* Note, once more, that the words ‘for’ and ‘said’ do not refer to reason for the lack of faith but they do refer to the situation itself. Isaiah did not say that this was the reason for their unbelief. Rather, he said these words because they did not wish to believe. Therefore why has the Evangelist not say this, rather than show that their lack of faith was due to the prophecy and not that the prophecy sprang from their lack of faith? St John chose to deal with the subject in a positive manner, therefore he wrote: “Therefore they could not believe, because Isaias said again” [39]. He wished to underline the lack of error in the divine Word in many varied ways; and that what Isaiah had predicted earlier had become fulfilled and had not fallen away<sup>49</sup>.

\* ‘Therefore they could not believe’ was used to replace ‘They did not want to believe.’ Do not be astonished...he did not say that it was impossible for them to be virtuous; but that due to their unwillingness they lost the capacity to believe<sup>50</sup>.

### **St John Chrysostom**

\* In defense of free will, no one would venture to deprive us of praying and asking God to ‘lead us not into temptation.’ However, no one denies the role of the will and ventures to make excuses for sinfulness. Let us turn to God attentively as He issues His commandments and offers His support. In both cases He informs us of our commitment to obey and His support as we apply them. Some become ever so lofty and vain due to an exaggerated sense of confidence in their own will; while others stumble into negligence due to an exaggerated sense of lack of confidence.

The first group says: ‘Why do we ask God and not strive ourselves to conquer temptation since we are capable of everything?’

The second group says: ‘Why do we need to struggle to live righteously when it is all in God’s hands?’...

On the one hand, we need to thank God for the power He grants us. On the other hand, we need to pray that our limited power does not fail us completely. This is similar to faith that works through love (Gal5:6). God grants every person a certain measure, so that we should boast about God and not about ourselves<sup>51</sup>.

\* No wonder they were unable to believe: they had so much pride in their own will. This led them to ignore the righteousness of God and seek their own righteousness. The apostle comments about them saying that they ‘have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God’ (Romans 10:3). They were proud of their power rather than of their faith, and so they fell against the stumbling Stone. That explains why the expression ‘they could not believe’ is used, while the implication is that they did not want to believe. In the same manner, we are told the following about the Lord our God: ‘If we are faithless, He remains faithful, He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim 2:13). This has been said about the Almighty One: ‘He cannot...’<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Homilies on St John, 68:2

<sup>50</sup> Hom 68. PG 59:406

<sup>51</sup> St Augustine: on the Gospel of St John, tractate 53:8

<sup>52</sup> St Augustine: on the Gospel of St John, tractate 53:9

\* These Jews ‘could not believe.’ It did not mean that these people could not change into better people; but that as long as their thoughts continued along that path then they would be unable to believe. As a result, they were blind and hardened in their hearts: by denying their need for divine help, they could not get help<sup>53</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**“He has blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart;  
Lest they should see with their eyes,  
And understand with their heart,  
Lest they should turn so that I should heal them.”[40]**

They could not believe because they did not want to believe. They neither asked God for His help nor for His grace to support them. Therefore the grace of God did not open their eyes to see the truth and to enjoy salvation. This is the meaning of the words: “He has blinded their eyes...” Their resistance damaged their inner vision and they were not granted healing from the Physician of the heart and body. They became similar to those whose eyes God had blinded. Their persistence and lack of desire to enjoy the truth disabled them from attaining the living faith. This is the subject of Isaiah 6:9, where the reference could be about the judgment that would be pronounced upon them as a nation.

\* Consider how the sun dazzles the weak sighted. It is not due to its normal nature. This also applies to those who are inattentive to God’s words. In the case of Pharaoh, we are told that God hardened his heart. Similarly, all those who continue to resist God’s Word will be in that same condition

This is the style of the Holy Bible: it is written: ‘God gave them over to a debased mind’ (Romans 1:28)...The Bible does not present God as the One who inflicts such conditions, but reveals that these happen through the evil in others. The Bible intends the hearer to be in great fear as the Word says: ‘God hardened’ and ‘gave them over.’

In order to underline that God does not deliver or forsake us unless we want it to be so, we need to hear what the holy Word says: ‘But your iniquities have separated you from your God.’ (IS 59:2 LXX). Hosea says: ‘Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children,’ (Hosea 4:6 LXX). The Lord Himself said: “How often have I wanted to gather your children...but you were not willing?” (Lk 13:34)

Having known this, may we exert every effort not to abandon God. Indeed, let us be greatly concerned about our own souls, and love one another. May we not amputate our members, for this is the action of mad men. As we see them in wicked situations may we deal with them all the more gently<sup>54</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**‘These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of him. [41]**

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<sup>53</sup> St Augustine: on the Gospel of St John, tractate 53:10

<sup>54</sup> Homilies on St John, 68:2-3

Isaiah the prophet said these words when he saw the Lord's glory. He spoke about the Lord when He saw Him seated on a high throne and His train filled the temple. The glory that Isaiah saw was the glory of Jehovah. In this context, St John the Evangelist said that this was the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ as he perceived Him to be Jehovah. In the Aramaic translation, it is written: 'My eyes have seen 'Shakinnah' the Lord (Is 6:5). As 'Shakinnah' denotes the divine light or the divine presence, then what Isaiah saw was the light or the brilliance of God: the rays of His glory and the image of His essence (Heb1:3).

\* If you asked: 'Whose glory did Isaiah see?' Our answer would be: 'He saw the glory of the Father.' You might say: 'Then how does Isaiah speak about the glory of the Father, while John the Evangelist speaks about the glory of the Son, and while Paul the apostle speaks about the glory of the Spirit?' Our answer would be: 'They were not like those concerned with the hypostatic (compound) nature. By speaking in this manner, they intended to clarify one essence or rank present in them. As proof of that, the features of the Father are identical to those of the Son, and those of the Son are identical to those of the Spirit.'

**St John Chrysostom**

\* What Isaiah saw was not God as He really is but it was a symbolic means that was within the scope of the prophet's vision and comprehension. Moses had also had a vision of God, but in spite of that we find him telling Him: "Now therefore I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You," (Ex 33:13); for Moses had not seen God as He really is... "Beloved , now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is,' (1Jn 3:2)<sup>55</sup>.

**St Augustine**

## **6- Some Leaders Witness to His Glory**

**'Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in him;  
But because of the Pharisees they did not confess him,  
Lest they should be put out of the synagogue': [42]**

Some of the leaders, like Nicodemus for example, believed in Him (Jn3). They considered Him to be a teacher sent by God. Joseph of Arimathea is another such example, and he was the one who later went to Pontius Pilate to take the Holy Body. He received the blessing of burying the body in his own newly built grave. There were also many others who believed in their hearts but did not dare to proclaim their faith publicly. We will discuss the Sanhedrin at the end of this chapter God willing.

Elijah thought that he was the only one who worshipped God. He did not realize that there were thousands of people who had not bowed to any idol; but God saw them whereas they were unknown to men. This happens in every generation: there are a few undisclosed faithful ones who are esteemed by God but not by men.

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<sup>55</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 52:12

**‘For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.’ [43]**

Some did not proclaim their faith as they feared losing their temporary honor. That was due to their love of receiving honor from people more than seeking the glory of God. The Lord Jesus Christ therefore told them: How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?

\* These were the Lord’s words: “How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?” (Jn 5:44). In this sense they could really be considered as slaves and not as rulers; since they had strayed away from the faith and followed their lust for vain glory.

**St John Chrysostom**

**7-The Lord Witnesses for Himself**

**Then Jesus cried and said,  
“He who believes on Me, believes not on me,  
But in Him who sent me.” [44]**

This was the final point which the Lord made in the sermon directed to those wicked ones who persisted in their lack of faith. It is the continuation of the sermon that was interrupted in verse 37. The Lord cried out loudly to underline His great zeal for their salvation.

In this situation, the Lord confirms His mysterious unity with the Father: anyone who believes in the Son believes in the Father who sent Him. He who sees the Son also sees the Father as well; and he who honors the Son honors the Father too.

\* The expression “believes not” implies that belief is not limited to the physical form or to the limits of the person seen by the eyes. The Lord here indicates our need to believe that He was not a mere human being. It is vital for us to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as being both God and man (at the same time).

**St Ambrose**

\* It is as though the Lord was saying: ‘Why are you afraid of believing in Me? Having faith in Me is transmitted through Me to the Father. In the same manner, your denial of Me affects Him too. Note how the Lord uses every means to clarify that there is no difference in the Essence<sup>56</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* Honoring the Father includes honoring the Father, and this does not diminish His divinity<sup>57</sup>.

**\* Now, when the Lord says: “He who believes on Me, believes not on me,**

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<sup>56</sup> Hom 60.PG 59: 408-409

<sup>57</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 90:5

**But in Him who sent me” [44]**, what can we understand other than that He appeared as a person to mankind whereas He remained being the Invisible since He was God? So that no one would imagine that He was nothing more than that which they saw, the Lord indicates the need to believe in Him as being equal to the Father in rank and in character...for he who believes in the Father needs to believe that He is the Son; and he who believes in the Father needs to believe that He has a Son. In such a manner, he who believes in the Father needs to believe in the Son<sup>58</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**“And he that sees Me sees Him who sent Me.” [45]**

\* What does all this mean? Does it mean that God has a body? This is impossible! The vision that the Lord is speaking about is in no way associated with the body. Vision here implies mental vision and the Lord indicates that His essence is the same as that of the Father. Here the Lord proclaims fellowship in one and the same Essence<sup>59</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord said these words [44] so that no one would believe that He was a mere person, that is, that he was just the Son of Man. In the next words [45] He intended everyone to believe that He was equal to the Father...

The Lord Jesus Christ sent out His apostles...yet it was impossible for any one of them to say: “He who believes on Me, believes not on me, but in Him who sent me.” This is because there was no basis to validate the words: ‘believes on Me.’

We believe the apostle though we do not believe in him. This is because there is no apostle who can redeem sinners. However, we do believe in Him who does redeem sinners and this ‘faith is accounted for righteousness,’ (Romans 4:5).

The apostle may say: ‘Any one who accepts me accepts Him who has sent me’; or he may say: ‘Any one who hears me, hears Him who sent me.’ Indeed, the Lord says: “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me,” (Matt 10:40. That is how the Master is honored through the servant, and the Father through the Son. As a result the Father is honored in the Son and the Lord in the servant.

Truly, the only begotten Son has rightly said: “...you believe in God, believe also in Me,” (Jn 14:1). Here He also said: “He who believes on Me, believes not on me, but in Him who sent me.” The Lord did not intend to divert the faith of those who believe in Him. However, He does not want a believer to be confined to the status of a slave while having faith in Him. Every one who believes in the Father immediately believes in the Son for without Him the Father would not exist as a Father. In this manner a person achieves belief by equating the Son with Father. This would agree with the words: “...he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me.”<sup>60</sup> [45]

**St Augustine**

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<sup>58</sup> St Augustine; On the Gospel of St John, tractate 54:2

<sup>59</sup> Hom 69. PG 59:409

<sup>60</sup> St Augustine; On the Gospel of St John, tractate 54:3

**“I have come as a light into the world,  
That whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.” [46]**

Before the Lord, the Sun of Righteousness, came into the world, everything was covered in darkness. By His coming, the darkness faded away. However, only those who possessed healthy eyes were able to see the Sun of Righteousness. He shone on all mankind so that believers could find in Him light and peace. With His light there would be no place for darkness in them; their fears and despair would end; and heavenly joy and hope in eternity would be granted.

\* In both the Old and New Testament, the Father bears the same name. The Lord Jesus Christ used that same name too. Therefore St Paul called Him ‘the Brightness’ (Heb 3:1). He learned to do so from the same sources. In this passage the Lord also revealed the strong relationship between Him and the Father, and how there does not exist any separation between them. This is evident when He said that believing in Him did not constitute believing in Him since it was passed or got transmitted into belief in the Father. He called Himself ‘the Light’ because He redeems sins and destroys mental darkness<sup>61</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* How good is He who has lifted the earth up to the heavens?! Even the twinkling planets reflect His heavenly glory as in a mirror. The hosts of apostles, martyrs, and priests also shine as glorious planets and grant light to the world<sup>62</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

\* The Lord did not say to His disciples: ‘You have come as a light to the world so that all who believe in you will not live in darkness.’ We believe that such a statement would have been impossible to accept for He is the One who gives them light. Light is an integral part of Him and therefore can never be isolated from His own self. Indeed, He is not vulnerable to change! Consequently, all the saints are lights and they have attained light through faith in Him<sup>63</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**“And if anyone hears My words, and does not believe, I do not judge him: for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.” [47]**

The Lord Jesus Christ came to save the world and not to judge it. The words of the prophets who have prophesied concerning the Lord will condemn unbelievers.

\* Now is the time for mercy. Later, the time of judgment will come for it is written: ‘I will sing of mercy and justice to You, O Lord,’ (Ps 101:1)64.

**St Augustine**

**“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words,**

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<sup>61</sup> Hom 69. PG 59:409

<sup>62</sup> Of the Christian Faith, 2:2:24

<sup>63</sup> St Augustine; On the Gospel of St John, tractate 54:4

<sup>64</sup> St Augustine; On the Gospel of St John, tractate 54:5

**Has that which judges him: the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.” [48]**

The Lord desires the salvation and not the condemnation of everybody. On the last day, His words will condemn unbelievers as these words will be a witness against their crimes. Every word that He has uttered, every kindness He has shown, and every gift He has granted will act as a witness against those who have disregarded them carelessly.

\* The words: **“the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” [48]**, sufficiently proclaim that the Lord is Himself the Judge who will appear later on. It is He Himself who had spoken and proclaimed that. He is the One who has raised Himself to act as a door through which He can enter as a Shepherd to His sheep. Therefore those who have never heard His words will be judged in a manner that is different from those who have heard but disregarded them. In this context, the apostle says: ‘...for as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law,’ (Romans 2:12)<sup>65</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**“For I have not spoken on My own authority;  
But the Father who sent me gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.” [49].**

Being the Messiah, the Lord fulfilled the mission of salvation that He had received from the Father. He had to preach and fulfill that mission as the agent of the Father. All His deeds were done for God who has so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son on its account.

The first Adam had failed in his mission. He had rebelled against God and was no longer fit to represent the heavenly One. Therefore the second Adam came filled with the spirit of obedience to fulfill the task delegated to Him: a task of God’s ultimate and divine love. In Him we are enabled to practice the obedience which we lacked due to our kinship with our father Adam.

\* The Lord surely spoke these words for their good...Do you not observe how He spoke with great humility in order to attract His hearers and silence those who came after them? That is the reason why He spoke in a manner appropriate to simple men. He knew that His words had no reference to His nature, and that they were fitting for weak hearers<sup>66</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* Only the Son is the Word of God and His wisdom. In Him is found all the commandments of the Father and at no time did the Son not know them. This made it necessary for Him to acquire at a certain time what He had possessed earlier. What He received from the Father was that He was begotten and so He acquired them at His birth (the Immortal One)...the Father did not give

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<sup>65</sup> St Augustine; On the Gospel of St John, tractate 54:6

<sup>66</sup> Hom 69:PG: 410



the Son a commandment which He did not know. Rather, we believe that all the commandments of the Father are found in the wisdom of the Father, and the Word of the Son<sup>67</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**“And I know that his commandment is everlasting life.  
Therefore, whatsoever I speak,  
Just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.” [50]**

\* Since the Son Himself is everlasting life and He is God’s commandments, then what do these words convey other than: ‘I am God’s commandments’? Indeed, the Lord says: “Therefore, whatsoever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.”[50]

We should not interpret the words “...the Father has told Me” to mean that the Father uses words when He speaks solely to the Word; or to mean that the Word of God needs words to proceed from God.

The Father spoke to the Son in the same manner that He gave birth to the Son. It is not like someone who knew one thing but lacked the other (lacked life). Since He is the Son...He is the Righteous One who gave birth to the Truth, so what can He say to the Truth? Truth that is so perfect has no need for additional truth. Therefore the Father spoke with the Truth for He gave birth to Him<sup>68</sup>.

**St Augustine**

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<sup>67</sup> St Augustine; On the Gospel of St John, tractate 54:7

<sup>68</sup> St Augustine; On the Gospel of St John, tractate 54:8

## Addendum to Chapter Twelve

### The Council of the Sanhedrin

In this Gospel we often read about the high priests and the Pharisees. However, we rarely read about the scribes. Here we wish to present a quick picture of the members of the Council of the Sanhedrin.

The word ‘Sanhedrin’ is the Aramaic word for the Greek term ‘*sunedrion*’ which means ‘council’ or ‘gathering’ (legal).

This council was considered the top authority in the high court of law in Jerusalem. At the time when the Lord Jesus Christ ministered, and when He was judged, this court was presided over by the high priest of Israel.

### Historic Setting

The history of this Council dates back to the period of Greek dominion and rule. However, rabbinic scholars attempt to trace its formation back to the Council of the seventy elders which was established in the days of Moses (Numbers 11:16, 24).

The first time this gathering was referred to as ‘geraousia’ occurred in the days of Eustachius the Great, 223-187 A.D.

The **Greek emperors** granted freedom in matters pertaining to internal affairs to the local government. Therefore Israel governed itself internally through an aristocratic council of the elders (1Kgs.6:12; 2 Kgs 1:10, 11:27; 18). This council was headed by the chief priest who acquired the position by inheritance.

When the Roman rule took over under Pompey, the chief priest retained his position as ‘ruler of the nation’<sup>69</sup>. This explains the presence of the council of the elders during these days.

**Gabinus** implemented the division of the Jewish region into five districts or five councils<sup>70</sup>. In this manner, the council in Jerusalem was no longer sole arbitrator in the judicial court.

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<sup>69</sup> Josephus: Antiq. 20:10:1

<sup>70</sup> Josephus: Antiq. 14:5:4

After ten years, Caesar reinstated Hyrcanus II to his former position and the power of the council of Jerusalem became extended to the region of Galilee<sup>71</sup>. That was the first time for the council of Jerusalem to be called 'the Sanhedrin.'

Herod began his reign by ordering the slaughter of all the members in the council of the Sanhedrin<sup>72</sup>. He then appointed members who were loyal to him.

After the death of Herod and his son Archelaus, the authority of the Council became extensive. By the time the Lord began His ministry and during the age of the apostles, this Council became the high legislative court of justice.

Undoubtedly, this role came to an end when Jerusalem was totally destroyed in the year 70 A.D.

### **The Members of the Council**

1-The Chief Priests: These were considered the aristocratic party in Jerusalem. It comprised former priests as well as current ones- such as Hannaniah the father-in- law of Jaffa and Caiaphas, as well as some other family members of their children. The office of the High Priests became diverted from its main role which was to handle only religious issues; for they used religion to veil their political ends.

2- The Sadducees: These were either called priests or elders. They were not priests in the religious sense and as indicated in the Books written by Moses. They were more like a judicial authority or party and they worked closely with the high priests. They harbored enmity towards the Pharisees which they tried to disguise.

3- The Pharisees: These considered themselves to be the guardians of the law and of Jewish traditions. They adhered to literal interpretations in an extreme manner, and they had immense authority in the local committees. They mixed among the crowds to arouse questions and arguments directed to the Lord Jesus Christ as they sought to accuse Him before the Sanhedrin. They would report how they believed the Lord had abused the law.

4- The Priests: They were scholars in the Law of Moses (Matt 22:35; Lk 7:30). They were called the teachers of the law or *nomodidashalos* (Lk 5:17, 34). This class began to appear after the days of Ezra the scribe who used to read the law (Neh. 6-10).

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<sup>71</sup> Josephus: Antiq. 14:8:3-5

<sup>72</sup> Josephus: Antiq. 14:9:4

The role of the scribes evolved to being teachers from being interpreters of the law and enforcing it. Therefore people were required to honor them more than parents since the children and the parents were obligated to honor their teachers.

### The Council of Jerusalem and the Local Councils

According to Jewish customs, there were two types of councils or *sunedria*: the high Sanhedrin of Jerusalem which comprised seventy- one members, and the preparatory Sanhedrin found in the other countries. Each local council- preparatory Sanhedrin- consisted of twenty three members who were appointed by the high Sanhedrin.

Based on the Mishna, the high Sanhedrin comprised seventy members including a president, vice president, and court guards as well.

It is believed that membership continued for one's lifetime. New members were appointed by current members or by a high political authority.

### **The Authority of the Council**

In the days of the Lord Jesus Christ, the authority of the Council was confined to the twelve Jewish regions. Consequently, it was not possible to issue a judicial criminal sentence against the Lord as long as he dwelled in Galilee. It would only be possible when ever He would enter the boundaries of Judea.

Legally, the Council had no authority over the Jews. However, local councils and the Jews in general- wherever they were- tended to obey the decisions of the high Council of Jerusalem. These local councils were not obligated to take their cases to that high Council unless they needed an opinion concerning issues specifically related to the law.

### **The Meetings of the Council**

The local councils usually met on Monday and Thursday each week, excluding feast days and Saturdays. The Sanhedrin met in the place called Xystos or Xistus which is found on the east side within the house of the high priest.

### **Legal Procedures**

According to the Mishna, the members sat in a semi circle so that they could all see each other. Two court scribes sat before them, one on the right and one on the left side, and their task was to count the votes that would specifically indict or clear an accused person. Facing these scribes, educated students sat in three rows. Every accused had to appear in humble clothes to indicate his grief.

In cases involving a death sentence, the process began with hearing those who pleaded innocent so that they could present their arguments. The students were not allowed to say one word against the accused. However, they could speak if they could find any point to his favor. Whereas those who presented accusations could also present issues to their benefit, those who presented arguments for innocence could not also present arguments against the accused.

Voting began by the youngest of the members, though it sometimes began with the most important member. The vote for the innocence of a person was decided by a majority vote. The vote for the guilt of a person was decided by the majority vote plus two additional votes.

It was illegal to issue a sentence on the same day of the trial; for it was necessary to discuss the case and then issue a verdict on the next day. The exception to that was made in a case where the accused had misled or deceived the public. Then it was possible to judge him on the same day or on the same night. Other than such a situation, it was forbidden to discuss a case deserving a death penalty on a Friday or the day before a feast day. These had to be postponed till after a Saturday or after feast days.

The religious, civil, and criminal authority of the Council was restricted by the ruling foreign body in Israel. This differed from one period to the other and according to current ruler.

When a person was led to his death, he would be announced by a forerunner proclaiming the verdict and saying: "This named person, son of such a named person, has been found to deserve death. Therefore if anyone wishes to contest the matter, let him come forward and proclaim that"<sup>73</sup>.

The person sentenced to death was required to confess his crime so that he may have a share in the life to come.

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<sup>73</sup> Sanhedrin 6:1

**Meditations Inspired**  
**by**  
**The Gospel of St John, Chapter Twelve**  
**Your Fragrance is the Mystery of My Life**

\* Grant me to cross over and come to You  
In the company of Your beloved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus,  
For wherever You go, You set up a joyful heavenly feast!  
With Mary, I pour pure spices at Your feet.  
It is not the work of my hands  
And I have not purchased it with my money...  
What I offer is the fruit of Your Holy Spirit!  
I pour out the spices and I smell its fragrance...  
Your fragrance has invaded my inner home and has filled my whole being.  
Your fragrance is the mystery of my life!

\* Truly, Judas the thief smelled it as a fragrance of death to death.  
Hence he lost love, for he did not comprehend anything but betrayal.  
He counted giving to be a loss;  
For the love of money blinded him.  
As for me, I smell and live by your fragrance...  
Allow me to join Mary and rub Your feet with my hair...  
Let me offer all that the world considers to be glorious to serve Your needy children  
The poor and needy stand before You, and I carry them and walk to You.  
By honoring them, I honor them, I give honor to Your hands.

\* With Martha, my hands stretch out to serve Your Body,  
For You receive in Your hands every offering made to Your brothers.  
Grant me to see Your hand working in and through me in all my actions.  
May Your hands embrace my whole being as I work tirelessly!

\* With Lazarus, I sit silently:  
My life, which You have resurrected, is a living testimony of Your love and glory.  
My silence is greater and more powerful than any word can express!

\* Here are the foreign Greeks seeking You:  
They could meet with You yet they could not rise up upon the Cross.  
How could we enjoy the divine Fruit unless we got buried?  
You arose, so resurrect us with You!

\* See how the heavens witness to You!  
You are the subject of all prophecies,  
You are the achiever of the Father's will,  
You are the Savior of the world!  
The fragrance of Your Cross has filled heaven and earth...  
The Father joyfully received it,  
And the heavens hosts smelled it and comprehended its hidden mysteries.  
Mankind recognized Your fragrance and became angels...  
The fragrance of Your Cross is the mystery of my life!

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## **The Lord's Farewell Speeches St John Ch 13 -16**

### **The Lord's Farewell Teachings John 13-16**

In the previous chapters (1-12), the Evangelist presented the story of Divine Love. In it the Word of God became incarnated and took the form of a human being. This is God's plan in order to save fallen mankind, and to announce the supreme love and care for every needy person. He wishes to direct the eyes of all mankind to Him who loves them. He wishes men to recognize Him as the One who has the power to renew, satisfy, heal, and educate them. Now the time had come to reveal the height of divine love as the Lord walks in the road of suffering, and ascends on the cross for the sake of every human soul. Some scholars have called chapters 13-17, "the Gospel of Love." In these chapters, the Lord meets with His disciples in the upper room, and then takes them with Him to Gethsemane. The Evangelist recounts the service of the washing of the feet, which the Lord undertook all on His own. He did so in order to attract them to participate in His love by washing the feet of their fellow men. The Lord also established, on that day, the mystery of the true Passover which all generations had been anticipating. He had yet to speak about the subject of the praise offered by the heavenly hosts; and finally the Lord gave farewell speeches which have come to be a living legacy for the church.

The Evangelist uses the word "love" as a noun or verb nine times throughout chapters 1 and 2. In contrast, He uses this word 20 times in chapters 13-17. The story of the upper room is essentially marked by its theme of love.

In His farewell speeches, the Lord Jesus Christ revealed many of His mysteries to His disciples. These had to do with the way the Divine Spirit works in their lives. Therefore He reveals the following:

- 1- God's Divine Plan:** In order to prepare a place for them in the great heavens, His plan anticipated the coming of all humanity into the joy and fellowship of eternal glory. The Lord revealed to His disciples that all He had gone through including pain and crucifixion was planned by the Father: through the Son His love for mankind would be fulfilled, and He would carry them unto the Father's embrace
- 2- His Divine Identity:** He is one with the Father, therefore He fulfills the Father's will joyfully. Whatever the Lord says or does are actually the words and deeds of the Father, who is the lover of mankind.
- 3- He is the New Core:** And disciples and believers are the branches of the Divine Vine. Although man was banished from the Garden of Eden, now he had the Lord as His true vine. Indeed, man had become a branch bearing great fruit into nature. The Lord becomes greatly pleased with the fruit, that is the work of His hands.
- 4- Their New Potentials:** Sacrificial love for others. The believer considers himself unqualified to sacrifice his life for his fellow men. Yet, he joins

the Lord and shares with Him the glory of the cross and of the sacrificial love.

- 5- **The Role of the Disciples in the World:** Disciples need to love mankind even though the world rejects them. They offer what belongs to their kingdom, the kingdom of light and love. In contrast, the evil world offers darkness and hatred, which belong to the kingdom of darkness and of this world.
- 6- **The Divine Support:** God would send the Holy Spirit, who would guide the Lord's children through and above the anxieties and sufferings which they face. They would smell the Divine Love as well as experience love towards mankind, glory, and honor, since they are partakers with the Lord in His sufferings. Indeed, they would smell the fragrance of the crucified Lord. The Holy Spirit would raise them above suffering; therefore nothing could trap or bind them. Such hardship would be seen as the path of Golgotha leading them to the crucified Divine One. With Him, they would rejoice in His heavenly kingdom.

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## **The Service of the Washing of the Feet**

When the Lord had completed delivering His teachings, He began to hold private conversations with His disciples. This was just before He was arrested and His aim was to comfort them throughout the time of His suffering. Moreover, the Lord desired to reveal His mysteries and offer His final advice to them. He spoke to His disciples as a Father would speak to His children. For His wisdom would be an inheritance that would enrich and support them.

|                                                       |              |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>1. The washing of the disciples feet</b>           | <b>1-17</b>  |
| <b>2. His words about His betrayer</b>                | <b>18-30</b> |
| <b>3. The glory of the Son of Man</b>                 | <b>31-33</b> |
| <b>4. Brotherly love</b>                              | <b>34-35</b> |
| <b>5. Warning to Peter and his denial of the Lord</b> | <b>36-38</b> |

### **1- The Washing of the Disciples Feet:**

**‘Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end’[1].**

**St. John Chrysostom** comments that the Lord Jesus Christ did great acts from the very beginning of His ministry. Now that the time had come for Him to leave them and ascend to the Father, the Lord embraced them with His ultimate love through the cross. This would support them after His ascension.

We too need to offer sacrificial love to all those around us every second of our lives for we do not know when we will depart from this world. Then we would leave an inheritance of love and memories of unforgettable loving deeds.

Many scholars question the exact day of the Jewish Passover. Was it on Holy Thursday when the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of the true Passover, established the mystery of the Christian Passover? Or was it on Good Friday when the true Passover was fulfilled, and which occurred on the same day of the Jewish Passover, in order to cancel the symbol?

There have been so many writings on this subject, yet there is no doubt that there were some groups that embraced a different calendar than the one the Jewish religious leaders officially used in Jerusalem. This explains why the events reported in the three Gospels reflect a calendar that the Lord Jesus Christ used when He celebrated, with His disciples, the Passover on Holy Thursday. Yet, the Sanhedrin and their followers celebrated the Passover on Friday, so it was not possible to kill the Passover lamb except on Friday. On that day the lamb was presented to the priest on the official Passover day.

The Evangelist is preoccupied with the True Passover: the killing of the **Lamb of God** who carried the sins of the world on the Cross. This is the Passover that encompasses all ages, it is the one that engages the heavens and the heavenly hosts. Therefore St. John is not concerned with the time when the Christian Passover was instituted, although he states that it was **“before**

**the feast of the Passover.**” In the book of Revelations, the Lord Jesus Christ is called the Lamb more than fifteen times. The Evangelist had a vision of the **“Lamb as though it had been slain.”** He also saw the glorified church as the “Bride of the Lamb” and how the heavenly life is “the marriage of the Lamb” who has come, and this wife had made herself ready (Rev 14:7). St. John saw the Lamb, the heavenly Holy of Holies or the eternal Tabernacle and Light (Rev 21).

In Chapter 13, the Evangelist reports the **‘washing of the feet’** as a ministry of love and sacrifice. This took place while the mystery of the Eucharist was being prepared, not during the meal itself. It was the custom of the Jews to wash the feet before supper.

St. John the Evangelist did not report the events of Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of the last week in the life of the Lord. These were reported in detail by the earlier three Evangelists. He also does not speak about the institution of the Holy Eucharist (Matt 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19).

Because the Lord Jesus Christ is all omniscient, He allowed the enemy of goodness to have power according to God’s set plan and timing. The Lord allowed the enemy to act and to instigate his followers to resist Him. Accordingly the Lord said: “This is your hour, and the power of darkness,” (Luke 22:53).

St. John’s words that **‘His hour had come’** do not indicate that certain things were bound to be fulfilled over which the Lord had no control. In fact, this would be the Lord’s hour when the salvation of the world would be fulfilled through His Divine power. He would convert the evil of the wicked into goodness without forcing the wicked to pursue their evil acts. If there was anything inevitable about the events of this hour, it had to do with God’s sublime love, which demanded the salvation of the world. In proclaiming that His hour had come, the Lord revealed that He had come of His own will and at that very hour.

Two complimentary issues are related to this hour- or it could be considered as one issue with two facets: His departure or ascension to the Father and proclamation of His infinite love for His followers. It appears that His ascension is not planned solely for Himself, rather it is planned so that His loved ones too would enjoy ascending and meeting with the Father.

In this manner, the Lord accepted all the sufferings leading to His crucifixion in a spirit of sublime love. His sufferings were the source of His joy, as St. Paul explains in Heb. 12: 2: “...for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

\* St. John the Evangelist says, **“Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come.”** Actually, the Lord knew about this hour, from a very long time ago, not only when it was about to come.

The Evangelist proclaims, loud and clear, that the death of the Lord is merely relocation as He was going to **‘...depart from this world to the Father...’**

The words **‘He loved them to the end’** indicate that the Lord continued to love them in a constant manner.

\* What is intended by: He loved them to the end'? It is as though He were saying 'My love will never cease',<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* He has crossed over to the Father in order to feed us: so let us follow Him in order to get nourished.

\* We can enjoy the sufferings of the Lord and His resurrection by passing over from this death-prone life into the other immortal life. In other words, pass from death into life<sup>2</sup>.

\* This prophetic symbol now gets fulfilled in the Truth when Christ is led, as a Lamb, to be sacrificed (Is. 53:7). Consequently the utmost pillars of our heart are sprinkled with His blood. By making the sign of His cross on our foreheads, we are saved from the destruction awaiting this world. This is similar to Israel when it was saved from the slavery of the Egyptians who were ultimately destroyed (Ex 12:23). This perfectly planned Passover is what we practice as we cross over from Satan into the embrace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and from this unsettled world into His well established kingdom. This is definitely how we cross over or 'Passover' and belong to the eternal God.

The apostle glorifies God for this grace that has been granted to us by saying: this word '**Pascha**' means 'passing over' in the Latin language. Therefore this explains how we have a Pascha and a Passover. From where and to where does He cross over? From this world and into the Father's embrace.

He has granted hope to the members through the Head. In that manner they will trustfully follow Him as He passes over and takes the lead.

What about those unbelievers who stand apart at a distance away from the Head and the members? Clearly, they are crossing over. However, there is a great difference between those who are crossing over from the world and those who are crossing over with the world. It is a difference between someone moving to the Father and another moving to the enemy. The Egyptians too were crossing over; yet they were not crossing from the sea and into the Kingdom. Rather, they were crossing from the sea into destruction<sup>3</sup>.

\* '**He loved them to the end**' [1]. He is our end and in Him we pass over, this conveys that His own love is what drove Him to death<sup>4</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**'And supper having ended, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him,' [2]**

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<sup>1</sup> Hom 70 PG 59:413

<sup>2</sup> Letters 55

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 55:1

<sup>4</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 55:2

The Lord Jesus Christ announced that the time of His death was drawing near, and that one of His disciples would betray Him; another would deny Him; while others would abandon Him. To Him, He perceived that all such events were planned by God to enable Him to fulfill salvation.

At the same time, Satan was preoccupied with dominating the heart of Judas. He planned to move him to betray His Lord. In so doing, Satan imagined he could smother the Divine Light and corrupt the eternal infinite love. However, God, the ever-righteous, transforms Satan's evil into benefits for us.

Some may ask: 'Had not Satan planted the idea of disloyalty unto Judas's mind earlier when he met with the Pharisees and made a deal with them?' Some scholars believe the enemy of goodness had sown from 'the seed of the idea' and that he was watering it with the water of greed and betrayal. Then **the enemy of goodness entered in Judas's heart as the established owner and Lord and not just an instigator or tempter of an idea.** When we open the door to evil, the enemy scatters his seeds just as a guest would do who tries to invade areas which do not belong to him. Then, when we accept his thoughts and ideas, and we begin to act accordingly, he daringly invades us to reign as an owner. He gets hold of the steering wheel and commands the direction while we are hopelessly unable to resist him, That is why, whenever we are careless in resisting him, we are exposing our hearts and minds to the enemy. Then he believes he is entitled to come in and take control.

\* His Lord continued, to the last day, to be generous to him<sup>5</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* Referring to Judas, it is written: '**...the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him....**' Consequently, you could apply this to all those who have delivered their hearts to Satan. Satan could put in such a person's heart to commit adultery, or in another person's heart to cheat, or sow a lust for fame...this applies to all the sins scattered by Satan into hearts that are not armed by the shield of faith. Through such a shield it is possible to defeat all the fiery and wicked darts and not just one or two arrows (Eph. 6:16)<sup>6</sup>.

\* '**...the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas**': in other words he had presented the suggestion to his spirit in the form of an idea. Rather than entering through a physical portal like the ears, Satan entered into Judas through his thoughts. Therefore what we consider to be spiritual does not always convey a praiseworthy matter. Notice that the apostle speaks about certain evil spiritual matters- Eph 6:11- that exist in the heavens; and he testifies that we need to struggle against them<sup>7</sup>.

**St Augustine**

Jesus knew that the Father had given all things unto His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God.

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<sup>5</sup> Homilies in St John 70:1

<sup>6</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:24

<sup>7</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 55:4

According to our belief, the Father had entrusted the redemption of believers into the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore when the Lord says, “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father,” (Matt 11:22), He was speaking about that kind of trust. In another passage, the Lord Himself says, “They were Yours, You gave them to Me,” (Jn 17:6). He also said: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him,” (Jn 6:44), and St. John the Baptist says, “...unless it has been given to him from heaven,” (Jn 3:27). The Evangelist means to convey that in all cases the Lord takes no lesser role than the Father. Since He came from the Father and has ascended to Him, therefore He possesses all things. Consequently, when you hear that He was delivered and handed over; do not give that a human interpretation. Rather, this illustrates the honor of the Father and the Lord’s fellowship with Him. Indeed, just as the Father entrusted Him, so does the Lord entrust His Father. This is apparent in the following words “But each one in his own order: Christ the first fruits, afterwards, those who are Christ’s at His coming, then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father,” (1 Cor. 15:23),

However, St. John reveals this manner in a human way to underline the great care of the Lord Jesus Christ towards mankind. The Lord proclaims His ultimate love by caring for men just as He cares for himself. He teaches us them all the righteous ways, such as humility, which He indicated as being the basis and end of every virtue.

It is not without purpose that the Evangelist states that, **“He had come from God and was going to God.”** Rather, it is intended to teach us that the Lord acted appropriately according to His origin as well as His destination. In this manner, He crushed with His feet all forms of pride<sup>8</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* He was not entrusted with just a few matters while excluding other concerns, but He was entrusted with “all things.” Accordingly, when David was in the spirit, he had this vision and said: ‘The Lord said to my Lord. “Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your foot stool”,’ (Ps. 110:1). Even the enemies of the Lord are a part of “all things” and the Lord with His fore knowledge, knew that they had been sent to Him by the Father. However, in order to enable us to understand more clearly the implications, let us study carefully the statement, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ, all shall be made alive,” (1 Cor. 15:22).<sup>9</sup>

**Origen the Scholar**

\* Since the Lord knew what He would do for the sake of His friends, he patiently used His enemies. In this manner, the Father put all things into His hands: every wicked one as well as the righteous were to be used to fulfill the ultimate goal<sup>10</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**“He rose from supper and laid aside this garments,  
Took a towel and girded Himself.” [4]**

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<sup>8</sup> Homilies on St John 70:1

<sup>9</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:26-27

<sup>10</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 55:5

He did not leave His supper, but left His seat at the table after everyone was seated and waited for the supper. The Lord took off His outer garments or coat, and put a towel around His waist to appear as a servant and to get ready to wash and dry the feet of those present.

The washing of feet took place before starting to eat dinner. As the streets and alleys were mostly sandy and the shoes were “open sandals” while socks were not yet known, we can understand why feet got dirty and smelly. This would be especially true of those that had walked long distances in the heart of the land. Therefore the washing of feet was part of the job of the slaves or of one of the least status present at a social gathering.

When David the prophet sent a message to Abigail to marry her, she rose up and said: “Here is your maidservant, a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my Lord” (1 Sam 25:41). Some scholars believe that the Lord started with washing the feet of Judas in the hope that his conscience would reprimand him and make him repent on what he had begun to plan.

Our Lord had humbly told St. John the Baptist: “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt 3:15). At that time the Lord revealed the righteousness of humility which He possessed even before the mystery of the Eucharist was established. So who of us would dare draw near to the Eucharist without first bowing down his soul before the Lord and receiving His blessing and then approach and receive His body and blood that have been sacrificed for each one? It would be a sad day for anyone to approach this mystery with a vain or haughty heart and to come without bowing down to wash even the feet of opponents and oppressors.

\* The words “**rose from supper**” indicate that the supper had been prepared and set on the table before the guests<sup>11</sup>.

**St Augustine**

“Come, O Lord Jesus Christ, remove Your clothes-those that You have worn for my sake. May You be naked in order to cover me up with Your mercy. May you carry a towel around Your waist in order to grant us the grace of eternity. May you pour water in a tub in order to wash our heads as well as our feet-that it may be a cleaning of our souls and inclinations and not just of our bodies. We desire You to take away all the un-cleanliness resulting from our weaknesses.”

**St Augustine**

How great is Your sublimity! As a servant, You washed the feet of Your disciples, and as a God You send dew from the heavens. You wash not only the feet; but You call us to sit with You. Moreover, in accordance with Your generosity, You encourage us and say “**You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, you Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet**” [13, 14]

Consequently, I desire to wash the feet of my fellow men myself. I wish to fulfill my Lord’s command. I do not want to feel ashamed nor do I take lightly what the Holy One did in the first place.

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<sup>11</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 55:3

A great good mystery that no one understands!”<sup>12</sup>

**St. Ambrose**

**‘After that, He poured water into a basin  
And began to wash the disciples’ feet  
And to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded.’ [5]**

The Master waited until all the disciples were reclining on the floor around the table. In those days, it was the custom that people did not sit on chairs around the table. A slave would probably sit on a chair to eat; but free people would recline on the floor during meals. They would be leaning on the elbow of the left arm, their head in the direction of the table, and their feet to the other side.

Usually, one of the slaves would do the washing of feet. If there was no slave, then it was expected that the youngest or lesser in rank would perform the task. However, the Lord Himself undertook this role. In this manner, He elevated the status of slaves. Although slaves are forced to do this task due to their social status, yet the Lord did so wholly and gladly by His own free will and through His humility and love.

Consequently, a slave should not resent doing any task as long as he works for the Lord and not out of the fear of men. St. Paul accordingly encourages slaves, saying “Servants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ, not with eye service, as mean pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with good will doing service, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that whatsoever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free” (Eph. 6:5-8)

**Origen the Scholar** believes that the Lord did not wash the feet of Judas as he could have no fellowship with Him due to his determination to do evil. In contrast, St. John Chrysostom comments that the Lord first began by washing the feet of Judas in order to offer him all the loving acts up to the very last moments before his treacherous deed. The Lord did so to grant him the opportunity to examine himself and withdraw from his evil intentions.

\* It appears to us that the Lord first began by first washing the traitor’s feet for the verse says **“began to wash the disciples’ feet” [5]**

\* Notice how the Lord demonstrated the way to be humble. He did so not by simply washing their feet but through other clear actions: He got up after they were all reclining and He washed their feet after He had taken off His outer clothes and not while He was fully dressed. Moreover, He girded Himself and filled the basin rather than ordering someone else to do so. He undertook the whole task all by Himself, all the procedures of washing the feet, in order to show us how to apply ourselves diligently in all tasks and not just go through them carelessly.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Abraham did not carry water by himself. Neither did he wash the feet of those who had come to him as strangers. Father, he said “please, let a little water be brought, and wash your feet,”

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<sup>12</sup> Of the Holy Spirit 1:1:13-15

(Gen 18:4). Joseph too, did not carry water to wash the feet of his eleven brothers. Rather, it was the man who managed his house who made Simeon bring water to them to wash their feet. In contrast, the Lord Jesus Christ says “I am among You as One who serves,” (Lk 22:27). He truthfully states “**...learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart**” (Matt. 11:29). He Himself poured the water into the basin for He knew that no one could wash the feet of His disciples in the way He could. He would wash them in such a manner that would allow them to have fellowship with Him, [8]<sup>13</sup>.

\* We believe that the water is the Word that washes the feet of the disciples when they come to be washed and the Lord came before them<sup>14</sup>.

### **Origen the Scholar**

The Bible does not say: “He washed the disciples’ feet”, but rather states that He “began to wash the disciples’ feet.” **Origen the Scholar** comments, therefore, that the Lord began and has not stopped the washing since they are in need of being constantly washed. Indeed, they became unclean that very night after they had been washed; “all of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night,” (Matt 26:31). The Lord told Peter “...the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times,” (Jn 13:38)<sup>15</sup>.

\*Why is it astonishing that the Lord poured water in a basin in order to wash the disciples’ feet? Is He not the One who has poured His blood on the earth in order to wash away the dirt of their sins?

Why is it surprising that the Lord used the towel with which He was girded to wipe the feet He had washed? Is He not the One who, with His own body which enveloped Him, establishes the sound path that His own Evangelists would follow?

In order to gird Himself with a towel, He removed His outer garments. However, when He gave up the glory of His divinity in order to take the form of a slave, the Lord did not abandon what He possessed. Rather, He accepted what He did not possess before<sup>16</sup>.

### **St Augustine**

**Then He came to Simon Peter  
And Peter said to Him,  
“Lord, are You washing my feet?”[6]**

It is clear that the disciples were in a state of shocked amazement due to the Lord’s act. None of them had spoken a word until Peter’s turn came. Peter had often witnessed to the Lord’s humility, yet he never imagined it would get to the extent of appearing as a slave undertaking to wash feet.

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<sup>13</sup> Homilies on St John 70:2

<sup>14</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:47-49

<sup>15</sup> Cf Commentary on John, Book 32:52-58

<sup>16</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 55:7



\* It is as though Peter was saying: ‘Is it with those same hands, with which you have opened eyes, healed lepers, and raised the dead, that you will wash my feet?’ He could not pray and beg the Lord with words other than these “Lord, are You washing my feet?” These words were enough to indicate clearly what was on his mind.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* It is clear from these words **‘Then He came to Simon Peter’** that the Lord did not start by washing Peter’s feet. This confirms that the Lord did not think of anyone as the leader of the disciples.

**St. Augustine**

**Jesus answered and said to him  
“What I am doing you do not understand now  
But you will now after this.” [7]**

It is as though the Lord is telling Peter “Allow Me to do this now, and I will soon tell you the nature and purpose of this act.”

\*What do these words imply **“...you will know after this?”** When? When you will order devils to come out in My name, when you will see Me ascending into heavens, when you know through the Spirit that I sit at the right of God. Then you will understand what is going on<sup>17</sup>.

\* This means that you will know the great benefit you gather from this. The benefit of the lesson you learn is how the Lord leads us to all manner of humility<sup>18</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* For Me, washing your feet is a symbol of the essence of your souls. These get purified and prepared to proclaim the message of righteousness (Rom 10:15, Isa 52:7). Besides, you are enabled to touch the human soul by your pure feet. However, you do not know that mystery right now because you have not yet acquired the knowledge pertaining to His person. You will comprehend this mystery later on. You will consequently be enlightened concerning matters that are neither a symbol nor trivial<sup>19</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

**Peter said to Him,  
“You shall never wash my feet!”  
Jesus answered him:  
“If I do not wash your feet, you have no part with Me.” [8]**

It was not possible for Peter, the apostle, to see his awesome Master take the position of a slave and perform the task of washing the feet. Therefore he objected to His Master’s action. He had not comprehended the scope of the Lord’s deed who through His sublime love, had chosen to occupy the status of a slave. Indeed, it even allowed Judas to sell Him as a slave, and permitted the enemy of righteousness to fulfill God’s plan for salvation through the Cross.

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<sup>17</sup> Hom 70 PG 59:416

<sup>18</sup> Homilies on St John 70:2

<sup>19</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:87,88

It is as though the Lord is telling Peter: ‘You cannot be My disciple unless I wash your feet.’ Indeed, if the Lord’s hands do not reach unto the inner soul and wash it, a person would not be able to enjoy salvation or become a disciple of the Lord. A believer needs to be washed in the baptismal font by the action of God’s Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:11, Titus 3:5, 6). Moreover, a believer needs to be washed by the precious blood (1 Jn 1:7). We need to wash the feet based on the premise that our souls get unclean while it walks in this world. This is a task that belongs exclusively to the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone can forgive sins and save the soul from corruption. We are able to enjoy Him through the mystery of repentance and confession. Without Him we are unable to partake of the joy of the Lord’s sacrifice (the mystery of the Eucharist).

What do these words imply: **“If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me”** The Lord points out here that the action of washing is His own specialty. On the great day of the Lord, a person will not appear to be pure or receive his share (of fellowship with the Lord in glory), through His own personal endeavors. This is granted only through the action of the Lord Jesus Himself who washes the souls of the un-cleanliness of sins.

Often we object to the Lord’s acts due to our inner blindness and our inability to comprehend His divine wisdom and plans for us.

\* Peter could not comprehend the mystery and therefore refused the service. He imagined that by allowing the Lord to serve him it would damage the servant’s humility<sup>20</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

\* It is clear that Peter spoke to his own harm, even though he spoke to the Master with respect and good intentions. Life is full of such mistakes that are committed by people who imagine they know what is best. Actually they are ignorant, and speak or do things that lead them to adverse paths<sup>21</sup>.

\* Peter, who said to the Lord “You shall never wash my feet!” was reprimanded and warned against persisting in this attitude so that he might have fellowship with the Lord. Similarly, it is far better for all of you to seek wisdom before taking decisions, rather than rush and make hasty decisions and promises to do one thing or another and persisting on taking the wrong course<sup>22</sup>.

\* If we do not do so (present our feet to be washed by the Lord) we will neither have fellowship with Him nor will our feet become beautiful. This is a particularly important matter as we are eager and jealous to receive greater gifts (1 Cor. 1 2:31). Furthermore, we desire to join those who preach righteousness<sup>23</sup>.

\* We even dare to add, in harmony with the words “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me”, that the Lord did not wash the feet of Judas because he had actually determined in his mind to betray his Master and Lord. The devil found that Judas was not dressed in the full armor of

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<sup>20</sup> On the Mysteries, 6:31

<sup>21</sup> Cf Commentary on John, Book 32:57-58

<sup>22</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:96

<sup>23</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:101

God. He did not possess the shield of faith that would enable him to quench the fiery wicked darts (Eph. 6:13-16)<sup>24</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

**Simon Peter said to Him**

**“Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!”[9]**

Probably Peter felt that he needed a complete spiritual washing. Consequently, he desired to get his whole being washed and not just his feet. Some scholars consider that Peter’s request here reveals some sort of humility even though it carried some sort of pride too. He has not accepted the Lord’s thought but rather intended to fulfill his own. We often want to advise God so that He would act according to our wishes, even though we would be asking sincerely for spiritual matters.

**Origen the Scholar** states that Peter did not want to get his hands washed, and that the Lord does not ask for the deadly application of the literal word. An example of that is the washing of hands before meals (Matt 15:2). Besides, Peter did not need to get his head washed. The Lord did not want that to be covered since the glory of God and His likeness rested on Peter (1 Cor. 11:7)<sup>25</sup>.

\* The apostle Peter, hastily excused himself from washing his feet. He was even more hasty to request that his hands and head get washed. In both instances he was motivated by his sincere love for the Lord Jesus Christ. Why did the Lord not ask him to follow His example rather than threaten Him? Because Peter was not chosen to do so. Had the Lord said “Allow Me, for in this way I encourage you to imitate My humility”, Peter would have made hundreds of promises in order to stop the Lord from washing his feet. However, the Lord uttered words that would frighten Peter and scare him profoundly. He informed Peter that he would be separated from the Lord. Note that Peter’s constant question was, “Lord where are you going?”[36] He also said, “I will lay down my life for Your sake”, [37].

**St John Chrysostom**

**Jesus said to him**

**“He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet,**

**But is completely clean;**

**And you are clean,**

**But not all of you.”[10]**

It was a Jewish custom to bathe twice, therefore the Lord underlines that the washing with the baptismal water occurs only once. The washing the feet refers to the tears of repentance which represent the second baptism.

Eleven of the disciples were pure even though they abandoned the Lord and took flight in the critical hours (Mark 14:50) The Lord described them as being pure and did not reproach them for their weakness. Even though He said “...you will all abandon Me”, the Lord did not intend to reproach them. He merely wanted to confirm that He understands how a person suffers from

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<sup>24</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:19

<sup>25</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:102

isolation in times of trouble. Accordingly, the Psalmist cries, “My father and mother have forsaken me....” Nevertheless, one of the disciples was not pure, for he harbored betrayal in his heart. The Lord had washed his feet though He knew of his deceit. In so doing, He reveals His compassion towards sinners and His desire for them to enjoy His gifts.

No one is without sin-no one in the Old or in the New testaments. No one is without blemish except the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who is ‘without spot and without blemish’ (1 Pet 1:19). It is therefore possible to say that anyone who needs to enjoy repentance, needs to carry the features of his holy Lord. In other words, such a person needs to become holy by adhering to the Lord. He alone can state that “you are clean” (Jn 13:10). This is due to His blood that cleanses us from all sins (1 Jn 1:7). He Himself is the propitiation for our sins (1 Jn 2:2)

\* The eleven disciples who were washed and had become pure, became more so when the Lord had washed their feet. Judas, however, who had actually become unclean-according to the saying: “He who is filthy, let him be filthy still” (Rev 22:11) became even more filthy and impure for Satan had entered into him after he had received a piece of the bread (Jn 13:27)<sup>26</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

\* Since the disciples were pure, then why did the Lord wash their feet? He did that in order that we might learn humility. That is why He came: not just for any member of the body, but especially for all those who are considered to be the most repugnant of the members.<sup>27</sup>

\* He came for the members of the body which are assumed to be the most honorable. Were the disciples pure, even though they had neither been redeemed of their sins nor had received as yet the Holy Spirit? Where sin was still prevalent and no sacrifice had been offered, then how is it that they were described as being pure?! So that no one would assume that the disciples were pure and had been washed from sin, the Lord explained “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you” (Jn 15:3). In other words, ‘you are pure because you have accepted the Light and have avoided falling into the sin of Judas’... these disciples had driven out all evil out of their hearts and had befriended the Lord with their whole pure mind<sup>28</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* “For to everyone who has, more will be given” (Matt 25:29). Since the disciples were pure, the Lord Jesus Christ added to their purity by washing their feet. He neither wishes to wash those who did not wash themselves, nor those who were not wholly clean. In fact, the Lord was speaking about those who had become pure through Him. Indeed, if there was one person among all mankind who was perfect but had not enjoyed being washed by the Lord, then that person would not be considered to be pure...<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:110

<sup>27</sup> Homilies on St John 70: 2

<sup>28</sup> Hom 70 PG 59:416

<sup>29</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:72-73

\* The Lord washed their feet because they were pure according to human standards but not according to God. Without our Lord Jesus Christ no one would be pure in the sight of God. This is true even if a person assumes that he had been washed based on his own specific effort<sup>30</sup>.

\* The Holy Spirit and the power of the Almighty could dwell in those who have become truly pure even in the eyes of men. It is as though such persons were themselves clothes: they had been washed through the baptism of the Lord, and He had also washed their feet<sup>31</sup>.

\* Since the Lord has made the disciples' feet beautiful by washing them, then what could we say about the real beauty that appears in those who are baptized by the Holy Spirit and by fire through the Lord Jesus Christ? (Matt 3; 11)<sup>32</sup>

\* Now the feet of those who preach the good news have become beautiful. When they have been washed, purified, and wiped by the hands of the Lord, they become capable of walking in the Holy path and of crossing over to the One who says, "I am the way", (Jn 14:6). He is the only One; and all those who have had their feet washed by the Lord, can travel on that way. The Lord is the living way and through Him we come to God's presence. That way will not be open to defiled or impure feet. On account of that, Moses removed his shoes since the place he was entering and standing upon was holy ground (Ex 3:5). The same thing applied to Joshua the son of Nun (Joshua 5:15)<sup>33</sup>.

\* As for the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, they needed to walk in the living way that is filled with activity. Therefore it was not enough to travel without sandals as He had ordered them (Matt 10:10). They actually had to let the Lord wash their feet after he had removed his outer garments and put them side. On the one hand, He probably made their pure feet even more pure. On the other hand, He probably washed their feet in order to transfer the dirt on them onto His body through the towel which He solely wore around His waist (Jn 13:4). Indeed, He alone does carry our weaknesses (Matt 8:17; Is 53:4)<sup>34</sup>.

\* Notice that when the Lord decided to wash the disciples' feet, He chose no other time than when Satan had entered the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, and had driven him to deliver his Master (Jn 13:2). This was in fulfillment of the Plan (sufferings) for the sake of mankind. Before that moment, the time had not been convenient for the Lord to wash the disciples' feet. Who else would want to wash their feet in that crucial moment leading up to His sufferings? That time was not yet right...it became right after the fulfillment of the plan (sufferings). The right movement came when the Holy Spirit visited the disciples who had become pure by the washing of their feet. At that moment their feet were prepared and became beautiful. Consequently, they could preach righteousness through the Spirit (Rom 10:15, Is. 52:7)<sup>35</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

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<sup>30</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:74

<sup>31</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:74

<sup>32</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:75

<sup>33</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:80-82

<sup>34</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:83

<sup>35</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32: 84-86

\* What do you think dear brothers? Indeed, **in the holy baptismal font a person is wholly cleaned, every single part in him.** In spite of that a person goes on living in this physical world, and does not cease to walk on earth with his feet. Consequently, our own human feelings do not get separated from our deadened life on earth. These feelings resemble our feet with which we walk and which are directly responsible to our human actions. That is why if we said that we were without sin, we would be deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us (1 Jn 1:8)

Each day the One who intercedes for us (Rom 8:34) washes our feet. We are in need to be washed daily. In other words, we need to plan uprightly the way our steps should go. The Lord's Prayer teaches us to say "...forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." It is also written "If we confess our sins: then truly He who washed the disciples feet is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn 1:9): that is, He washes our feet with which we walk on this earth<sup>36</sup>.

\* The church, as it walks on her way to the Lord Jesus Christ, could be fearful of defiling her feet which she has washed in the baptismal font<sup>37</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**'For He knew who would betray Him,  
Therefore He said "You are not all clean." [11]**

\* If you were to ask "Since the disciples were pure, then why did the Lord wash their feet?" Our answer would be: He did so in order to teach us humility.

**St John Chrysostom**

**'So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again. He said to them "Do you know what I have done to you?"[12]**

The Lord had taken off His outer garments in order to wash the disciples' feet. When He had accomplished the task, He put them on again and reclined like them. The clothes are a reference to the body and the Lord's act is a symbol for His will and His resurrection which were achieved by His own personal power.

At this point, the Lord fulfills His promise to Peter the apostle as He explains to Him the implications behind the act of washing the disciples feet. The Lord presents to them a command expressed in the form of a question.

\* The Lord asks them: **"Do you know what I have done to you?"** He directs this question to Peter and to all the others as well.

**St John Chrysostom**

**"You call Me teacher and Lord  
And you say well,**

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<sup>36</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 56:4

<sup>37</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 57:1

**For so I am” [13]**

This dual title **“teacher and Lord”** corresponds to “Rabbi” and “Lord” and these were commonly used for the official Jewish teachers.

\* The One who sits above the Cherubim washed the disciples’ feet. Do you, O earthly person, proudly and vainly overestimate yourself ever so greatly even though you are made of ashes, dust and earth?

**St John Chrysostom**

**“If I then, Your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet,  
You also ought to wash one another’s feet.” [14]**

\* When we bend over at our brother’s feet, the feelings of humility are awakened and strengthened in the heart if these feelings are truly found there<sup>38</sup>.

\* May each person forgive the sins of his brother, and pray for other sinners. In this manner each person would wash the other person’s feet<sup>39</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**“For I have given you an example,  
That you should do as I have done to you.” [15]**

\* However, there is no parallel, for He is the Lord and Master, whereas you are slaves and each other’s companions. Then what does **“as I”** convey? It is intended to express doing this act of humility with the same enthusiasm as Mine. In order to motivate us to perform even lesser tasks with humility, the Lord presented many examples of great actions. This is what teachers at school do when they achieve writing in beautiful letters; they intend the children to imitate them even though with lesser results....and where do those who distance themselves from their colleagues go? Where are they who demand honors? The Lord washed the feet of the traitor who had defiled all sanctities. The feet of the thief who had reached the moment of betrayal and whose condition was hopeless and incurable. In spite of that, the Lord allowed him to share and sit at His table...do you boast and wink your eyes in the belief that you are better? Someone may say: ‘Let us wash one another’s feet’ Is it a great matter to wash the feet of our servants? For us, ‘slave’, and ‘free’, have two different meanings. However, at this point, practical reality presents itself. According to nature, He is God and we are servants. In spite of that, He did not refuse to do the job. Therefore He has made us indebted to one another as He has first performed this task. He has made us indebted to perform even lesser tasks<sup>40</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**“Most assuredly, I say to you,  
A servant is not greater than his master,  
Nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him” [16]**

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<sup>38</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 58:4

<sup>39</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 58:5

<sup>40</sup> Homilies on St John 71:1

**Origen the Scholar** noted that this custom of washing the feet of others was widespread among the simple and naïve, and that the Lord called for believers to perform this service-whether they were bishops, priests, or officials who occupied worldly offices. Just as we are in need to wash each other's feet, we should accept that others wash our feet too.

\* As their teacher, the Lord washed His disciples' feet. At the same time, these were the feet of His servants too since He was their Master. The dust of the earth, which is a product of the world, would be cleaned through His teachings. In this manner, the physical world would not affect the innermost parts of the disciples. Matters which defile the feet may be torn away by the Lordship and control of the Ruler. He possesses authority over those who continue to accept being generally defiled. These still bear the spirit of slavery (Rom 8:15)<sup>41</sup>.

\* You can see how the Lordship of our Lord and Savior transcends that of other Lords who do not wish a slave to have equal status with his master<sup>42</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

\* The same love that the Father has is found in the Son...and what love does the Son have other than that He sacrificed Himself for our sakes and saved us by His blood? (Eph. 5:2). The Father sacrificed His Son, and the Son offered Himself. He sacrificed the One who was willing to do so before all ages and who offered Himself as a sacrifice. The Father did not sacrifice the Son as a punishment but He offered Him as a blessing<sup>43</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

\* The Lord spoke because He had washed the disciples' feet through His words and by setting the example of a humble Lord. By His help we can apply ourselves to the any task at hand. We need to see clearly and work without delay while seeking to perfect matters that confront us<sup>44</sup>.

**St Augustine**

\* 'Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ' (1 Cor 11:1). It is for this purpose that the Lord put on our flesh: to teach us to have virtue through His incarnation. God sent His Son having taken the form of our sinful body (Romans 18:3). Accordingly, the Lord says "Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Matt 11:29). He has taught us not by words alone, but by deeds as well.

They called Him a "Samaritan", possessed by devils and a blasphemer. They stoned Him and the Pharisees sent servants to catch Him once, and they put Him on trial another time. They insulted Him, and when they could not find any fault in Him He would offer them bread through words and deeds...

Let us watch His actions with His disciples and His attitude towards His traitor. The Lord had chosen Judas to be one of His disciples. He invited him to share His table and His salt

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<sup>41</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:115-116

<sup>42</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:120

<sup>43</sup> Of the Holy Spirit 1:12:129

<sup>44</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 59:1



(which prevents corruption). Judas had seen the Lord's miracles which called for respect. In spite of that he committed a most dangerous act. This was more serious than any other for he did not stone or insult Him: he betrayed the Lord. Although Judas deserved to be hated, the Lord treated him as a friend and washed his feet because He desired to prevent him from doing evil.

Had He wanted, the Lord could have made him to wither like the fig tree. He could have split him in two in the manner of the rocks that got split, or torn apart as the veil in the temple. However, the Lord did not want to stop him from his act by force. Rather, He wanted Judas to choose voluntarily how to act. That is why the Lord washed his feet. In spite of all that, this wicked and miserable Judas felt no shame<sup>45</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**“If you know these things, happy are you if you do them” [17]**

Real blessings are obtained through knowing the Lord in a practical manner and this is revealed in obeying Him. A person does not receive joy on account of his great knowledge but on account of being involved and participating in the divine nature. At this point, knowing the Lord is converted into a practical experience.

**\* Washing the feet is specifically performed by the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One who washes the inner depths and forgives sins. A person who forgives those who hurt him through love and humility applies and shares one of the Lord's greatest features.** Such a person is counted as one who enjoys the new and blessed life in Jesus Christ. When the Lord says **“...blessed are you”**, He reveals His heavenly glory and life which we experience as we practice such acts.

**Origen the Scholar**

**\* “If you know”** is addressed to everyone. However, **“if you do”** does not refer to everyone. That is why the Lord says: **“happy are you if you do them.”** Therefore I always say (repeatedly) the same thing, though you know it, you need to create the sense of duty in you. Even the Jews “know”, but they are not blessed as they do not practice what they know<sup>46</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

## **2-The Lord's Words about His Traitor**

**“I do not speak concerning all of you,  
I know whom I have chosen,  
But that the Scripture may be fulfilled  
‘He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me’” [18]**

The Lord unveils the plan of Judas to betray Him. From the start the Lord had known but covered up for him until this moment. But it was getting serious, and the Lord revealed the plan to His disciples who could never have imagined that such a thing could occur by someone from

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<sup>45</sup> Homilies on St John 70:1

<sup>46</sup> Homilies on St John 71:2

among them. Notice how the Lord did not generalize when He spoke about that sin. Rather, He praised the others for being pure vessels. At the same time He neither gave details about the crime nor revealed the name of the offender. However, the Lord underlines that all these events had been foretold in the Holy Bible (Ps 41:9).

The Lord did not state the motivation that drove Judas Iscariot. It is true that the Evangelists had referred to him when Judas criticized Mary, the sister of Lazarus, for pouring the fragrant oil on the Lord's feet: 'This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and had the money box....' (Jn 12:6). Actually, the other Evangelists are the ones who have recorded the details concerning the betrayal of the Lord, the amount Judas had agreed to receive, how he returned the money after delivering the Lord, and his fall into despair. Still there is no commentary about the inner motives for his act. Scholars have attempted to analyze and elaborate on the reasons and motives for this treacherous deed. However, none of the Evangelists has tried to provide a full presentation of the motives of that traitor

St. John the Evangelist presents this act of betrayal immediately after the Lord had finished the washing of the feet. He reveals the desire of the Incarnate Word to perform the smallest acts in total and sincere humility. Indeed, He offered Himself for the sake of everyone. The Lord served them all even though there was one among them who was plotting a great evil against Him. Judas counteracted the Lord's service in his own manner. He obstinately held on to his own thoughts, and planned for his own profit while he failed to recognize that he was destroying himself.

Our Lord- the true Way, leads us to enter into Him, and work in submission, humility, and sincere love. He is there to raise us, while there is one who seeks to destroy us.

The Lord ultimately stresses that He teaches those He has chosen. It is not that He was uninformed about the personality of Judas when He chose him, but that all events take place by the Lord's consent. The evil in Judas did not indicate he was in control of the situation. Rather, the love of the Lord prevailed. That love transformed that evil into an element used in fulfilling the divine plan of salvation. This grants us total consolation for there is One who loves mankind, who is in control, and who transforms all events so that they work for our well being even when the evil confronts and resists us.

\* Could the Lord know those who belong to Him (1 Tim 2: Num 16:5), and those who do not? He had said about some: "I never knew you" (Matt 7:23). Therefore He told Judas who did not belong to Him: "I never knew you" However, Judas belonged to the Lord but he had failed. It would have been possible to tell him "I do not know you, where are you from?" (refer to Lk 13:27). That explains why the Lord did not say 'I know you all' but rather said **"I know whom I have chosen"**<sup>47</sup>.

\* Judas raised his heel against his Master when Satan entered his heart after he had received the piece of bread, [27]<sup>48</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

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<sup>47</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:154-155

<sup>48</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32: 167

\* The Lord did not say “The one who eats bread with Me will deliver Me.” He said **“He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.”** He wished to indicate the covert and deceptive nature of His assassination.

**St John Chrysostom**

**“Now I tell you before it comes,  
That when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He.” [19]**

The Lord assures His disciples of His presence everywhere. He also underlines His knowledge of everything, to the extent that He informed them in advance about His death and all the events related to that. Consequently, their belief that He is the Messiah was reinforced. That belief became deeper as they realized that He knew all things and that He was the Savior of the world whom their fathers and prophets expected to come.

\* Actually, the disciples had once approached the Lord and asked Him to “Increase their faith” (Lk 17:5). They did not condemn themselves as though they were unbelievers. The word “increase” suggests that they had faith and it could become greater. The word “believe” could be interpreted as “so that you might increase in faith”<sup>49</sup>.

**“Most assuredly, I say to you,  
He who receives whomever I send receives Me;  
And he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” [20]**

The Lord assured His disciples that although there are some people who are ungrateful and disloyal to Him; yet there are those who believe and accept Him. These are therefore counted as having accepted the Father as well.

\* What is the relationship between this and what has been said before: **“...happy are you if you do them” [17];** and why did the Lord add these words **“...receives whomever I send”**? There is a strong link and harmony between both, as the Lord was preparing them to go out into the world. He knew that they would face many difficulties and He was comforting them in two ways. First, He clearly explained, **“If you know these things, happy are you if you do them” [17].** Second, He says **“...he who receives Me, receives whomever sent Me.”** Indeed the Lord had opened before them all the homes they would visit so that they would be dually comforted<sup>50</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* He who accepts the Lord’s messenger actually accepts the Lord Himself. And he who accepts the Lord accepts the Father. Consequently, he who accepts the Lord’s messenger accepts the Father who has sent the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>51</sup>

\* Based on these words, it is possible to accept the reverse implications. He who accepts the messengers of the son of destruction accepts the adversary of the Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover,

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<sup>49</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:174, 176

<sup>50</sup> Homilies on St John, 72:1

<sup>51</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:212

he who accepts the son of destruction accepts Christ's adversary as being the word that appears truthful and that falsely claims to be just. Indeed, this indicates the acceptance of the destroyer himself. Let us beware therefore and act as wise bankers. Let us adhere in our belief in the true messengers and reject the ministry of false ones<sup>52</sup>.

### Origen the Scholar

**Origen** noted that the Lord said: **"...receives whomever I send"**, and did not say instead "whomever believes in you, believes in Me", or "whomever sees you, sees Me" (The Lord wishes us to accept His disciples but He does not wish us to have faith in them too).

**When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit**

**And testified and said,**

**"Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." [21]**

The Lord was accustomed to speak about His sufferings and death without feeling troubled. However, when He mentioned the fact of being betrayed by one of His disciples the Evangelist reports that **'He was troubled in spirit.'** Clearly, sins committed by believers sadden the fatherly heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, God says: **"I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me" (Is.1:2)**. He also says: **"In all their affliction he was afflicted...But they rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit"** Is.63: 9, 10).

The Lord was troubled 'in spirit' [21]: this refers to the human aspect of His spirit since He had truly taken the form of a full human being. Consequently, His spirit would be troubled on account of betrayal committed by one of His disciples. This feeling was not due to fear of death or of the unknown, but due to anxiety and concern for that disciple who had dared to betray his Master and Lord.

\* The one who is going to betray Me is not an outsider or different from My disciples. Neither is he one of many disciples. Indeed, he is one of the apostles who had been honored as I had chosen them.

There are many who have condemned the Lord and who cried out: "Crucify Him, crucify Him" (Lk 23:21)...however, Judas betrayed the Lord even though he had seen and known the Lord. He had known Him as a Teacher presenting many great lessons. He had heard these as he attended the Lord's private meetings with His disciples. He got to know Him as the Lord. Consequently, when he betrayed Him, he betrayed the Lord's greatness which he had come to know...a matter which is inconceivable for someone who has seen the Lord's greatness...

When Judas had learned how great He is; when he had heard the greatness of the Word, the Mind, and the Grace He possessed; then He betrayed the Lord. The weight of his deed was as great as the extent of his acquaintance with the Lord. For this reason it would have been good "... if he had not been born" (Matt 26:24, Mk 14:21). Being "born" could refer to renewal (the second birth) in its deep sense, or to 'birth' in its general meaning<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:213-214

<sup>53</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:235-238

\* Had the wickedness of Judas been apparent to the Lord's disciples, they would have known who it was who would betray their Teacher. He told them **"...one of you will betray Me"**, but the disciples **"looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke,"** [22].

The disciples, in fact, felt embarrassed and would not suspect wickedness in Judas because he had acted so nobly previously. Probably Judas was not inclined wholly to wickedness. Even after the devil had entered his heart...he still possessed the sense of being able to make a choice.

When Judas saw the Lord being judged, then tied and delivered to Pilate the ruler ( Matt 27:2), he repented and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priest and elders. He told them "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood," (Matt 27:4). Judas, who had loved money, threw the money and went and hung himself (Matt 27:5). He did not even wait to see the end of the Lord's judgment as He stood before Pilate.

### Origen the Scholar

The Psalmist testifies that Judas did not feel hostile against the Lord Jesus Christ (Ps 55:13). Indeed, after Judas had delivered the Lord, he praised the Teacher and Lord as he said he had committed a sin by handing over innocent blood. He admitted his fault before the chief priests and elders. Besides, he threw the money on the ground and did not spend or enjoy it. All these beautiful touches indicate that he could have repented and moved closer to the Lord. However, he sadly opened his heart to the devil for a second time by committing suicide. Consequently, he lost hope in God, the savior of the world.

**St. Augustine** wonders why the Lord Jesus Christ got troubled in the spirit and said **"Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me"**? Did the Lord not know before hand, and therefore He was troubled in the spirit? Did not the Lord say a little while earlier: **"He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me,"** [18]? Or did He get troubled because the hour had come when the execution of the betrayal would actually take place? The Holy One, who has the power to lay down His life and to take it up again, was troubled in the spirit. The Almighty was troubled, the Rock and stronghold was troubled. However, it was the weakness of our nature which He had put on willingly that got troubled.

St. Augustine goes on to say: [That is surely the case in point: May the servants never have inappropriate doubts or thoughts about their Lord. May they comprehend that they are members of the One Head who died for our sake. Therefore the Lord was troubled as He stood in our shoes. The One who met death powerfully, was disturbed in the fullness of His power. The One who will transform our humble bodies into the likeness of His glorified body had also transferred into Himself the feelings of our weakness into His own, as well as His sympathy for us. Consequently, when the One who is great, courageous, steadfast, and invincible is troubled, we should not be worried as though He could fail; for He will not perish but will conquer on our behalf!... In His distress, we see ourselves. Therefore when anxiety gets hold of us we should not despair or perish. Through the anxiety of the One who could never be troubled without His will, the Lord grants us comfort when we involuntarily get troubled.<sup>54</sup>]

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<sup>54</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 60:2

\* Through His power, He fully took on our human nature. With that same power, He fashioned Himself human feelings which He controlled in an appropriate manner<sup>55</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**St. Augustine** comments on the Lord's words **"...one of you will betray Me"** and says: 'The Lord here refers to the disciples as physical persons and not as a communal spiritual group. Actually, Judas Iscariot was not one of them and St. John explains, in 1 John 2:19, that: "they went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us," (1 Jn 2:19).

**Then the disciples looked at one another,  
Perplexed about whom He spoke. [22]**

It is clear that the behavior of Judas Iscariot did not arouse any kind of suspicion. No one suspected him at all.

When they heard the warning words of their Master, they knew He would not speak lightly or say anything to deceive them. Therefore they turned and looked at each. They were wondering silently: "Who could that be?" Their looks revealed their astonishment and inner turmoil.

When David wept over his rebellious son, all his followers wept with him (2 Sam 15:30). In the same manner, the disciples became troubled when the Lord was troubled and saddened on account of His deliverer. The troubled spirit of the One who grants peace and joy filled the disciples with great fear. The feast was transformed from a time of joy to a time of great trouble and fear.

**Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. [23]**

In these times, the Jews used to sit in a reclined position at the table. They would lean with their left elbow on a pillow as they sat to eat. This was also the habit of the Greeks and Romans. There would be two leaning on the same pillow. Because St. John was so close to the Lord, he used to sit next to him and his head would be in the Lord's embrace.

**Simon Peter therefore motioned to him  
To ask who it was of whom He spoke. [24]**

St. John was the right person who could put the question to the Lord. He occupied a special place and he sat next to Him and leaned on His bosom. Peter, in his usual zeal, wanted to know who would betray the Lord. However, he did not dare to ask and made a sign to John to ask the Lord.

\* In every situation, Peter stands out as he reveals his zealous love for the Lord. However, he appears to be in great fear at that moment. He neither spoke nor kept quiet, but he needed to find out through St. John the disciple.

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<sup>55</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 60:5

**Then, leaning back on Jesus' breast, he said to Him,  
"Lord who is it?"[25]**

St. John addressed the Lord respectfully, even though he had a very close relationship with the Lord and leaned against His bosom. He uses the title "Lord": our closeness with the Lord Jesus Christ should not cancel our sense of awe and respect when we address Him.

St. John was leaning on the Lord's bosom [23]; and when he wanted to ask Him about the person who would deliver Him, he had to lift his head up. **Origen the scholar** comments that deeds are far more sublime and greater than leaning on the bosom<sup>56</sup>.

\* Their Master just gave them a hint. If you seek to know the reason for that, you would understand that He did so on account of His love.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* The beloved John, who leaned on the Lord's bosom, loved the two breasts of the Word (Jn 13:25). He placed his heart close to the Source of life and enjoyed suckling from the hidden mysteries that are found within the Lord's heart. He absorbed them as a sponge would do.

St. John offers us the breasts that richly carry the Word. Consequently, we can be filled with the same goodness which filled him as he drew out of the Source of goodness. He proclaimed the eternal Word. On this account we can truly say now: **"...we will remember thy love more than wine: We have become like virgins, our minds are no longer childish or under the yoke of childish trivialities, and we are no longer defiled by sin as we draw closer to death due to old age. Therefore let us fully love the wealth of divine teachings..." (Song of Sol 1:4).** John was the disciple whom the Lord loved, and the Lord is the Truth. The expressions used in this passage are far more beautiful and appropriate than those David used when he said, "the Lord is known by the judgment He executes," (Ps 9:16). The Lord here is called the Truth as He makes "the crooked places straight and the rough places smooth" (Is 40:4). This is achieved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to whom is due the glory forever amen<sup>57</sup>.

\* Those who were Jews by birth could not regain the virginity they had lost on that account just through reading the Holy Bible. In spite of that, we are told that St. John, who was the youngest one of the disciples, was a chaste celibate when he accepted the Christian faith. He maintained his chastity and on this account, he was especially dear to the Lord and leaned on His bosom. Peter, who was married, did not have the courage to question the Lord, so he asked John to find out the answer, [25]. After the resurrection, when Mary Magdalene reported to the disciples that the Lord had risen (Jn 20:4), both Peter and John ran to the tomb. However, John arrived before Peter. Also when they went fishing in the lake of Geneserath, the Lord stood on the shore and none of the disciples recognized that it was Jesus. Only the chaste disciple recognized the chaste One and he said to Peter, "It is the Lord," (Jn 21:7)<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32;278

<sup>57</sup> Song of Solomon: St Gregory, Bishop of Nicea. Translated by Dr George Nawaar, 1993, Sermon 1

<sup>58</sup> Against Jovinianus 1:26

**Jesus answered,**

**“It is he whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.”**

**And having dipped the bread He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. [26].**

When the Lord dipped the bread and gave it to Judas, the disciples thought He had done so in order to have him hurry up and accomplish a certain task rather than wait to have supper with them.

Just as John whispered his question into the Lord's ear, so did the Lord whisper His response to him so that the other disciples would not hear. Rather than mention the name of His traitor, the Lord was satisfied to give a sign. By so doing, the Lord wants future generations to understand that God desires us to recognize those who rebel against the truth. We are enabled to do so through their wicked fruits and spirit rather than by knowing their names.

It seems that Judas was so embarrassed that he did not dare dip the bread and eat from the same dish out of which the Lord ate. Yet the Lord dipped the bread and gave Judas who had to put out his hand and eat with the disciples. The Lord wanted to remind him of his sublime equal status among the others.

It is clear from the Lord's interaction with Judas that the latter sat closely to Him. This could have been because Judas was the treasurer. Probably the disciples let him sit close to the Lord so that he would be close by should the Lord need anything for the ministry.

Truly, there are many who get close to the Lord Jesus Christ physically. They elbow their way in the crowds wherever the Lord goes. However, they are far apart spiritually from Him. Besides these, there are others who appear far away, yet they carry the Lord in their hearts and thoughts. Such are embraced by the Lord who carries them within Him as members of His own Holy Body.

**St John Chrysostom** finds that the Lord Jesus Christ used every possible means that would lead Judas to be troubled by his deed. It was common knowledge that even barbarian tribes would not betray those with whom they shared one meal. That is why the Lord used this as the sign that would indicate the traitor. It would be the one who would receive the bread after the Lord Himself had dipped it. He gave Judas to eat of the same food He ate; yet in spite of that, he betrayed the One who offered him food.

\* Even the manner by which the Lord reproached Judas should have embarrassed him. The respect for sharing and eating bread did not embarrass him; yet could he not have become overpowered when he received the bread from the hand of the Lord? Yet even this did not overpower Him<sup>59</sup>!

**St John Chrysostom**

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<sup>59</sup> Homilies on St John, 72:2



\* What he received was good, but he received it to his disadvantage since he received that which is good while harboring a wicked spirit<sup>60</sup>.

\* The focus is not on what is given but on the person who receives the gift. The nature of that person is greatly important rather than the nature of the object offered. This is because even good things could be harmful; while evil matters could result in good things. It depends on the person who receives and handles an object . . . why was the bread given to the traitor? It could be for no other purpose but to serve as a witness to a blessing received by an ungrateful person<sup>61</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him.**

**Then Jesus said to him,**

**"What you do, do quickly." (27).**

The devil had entered into Judas because he had surrendered completely to the evil one. Judas became even more servile and a son of the destroyer as he never stopped to think of repenting and refraining from the plan against His Master. St. Paul speaks about the devil and says that 'he works in the sons of disobedience' (Eph 2:2), and that often he works more powerfully and clearly when a person submits totally to his evil authority.

After the Lord had given Judas the piece of bread, the devil entered into him. If we consider the bread as a symbol of the Lord's tenderness and blessings, then someone who belittles and abuses His gifts sins against God and opens up the door for Satan. That evil one is therefore able to enter and take control.

The Lord's words; "**what you do, do quickly**" [27] is not intended as advice but as permission from the Lord that Judas accomplish his plan. The Lord disrobes him of all blessings because he was resolved to surrender to treachery and evil. It is as though the Lord was telling him: 'You insist on betraying Me and are not willing to open the door to repentance or to return into my embrace. Therefore go and do what you want. As for Me, I do not fear death and indeed I am prepared for it.'

Judas had already laid a plan with the wicked ones. They had agreed on a precise time and place. The hour for the execution of that plan was drawing near. Judas probably did not know how to excuse himself and leave. Therefore the Lord provided his heart's desire and need to leave. We hear the Psalmist say: "The Lord grants you the desire of your heart." Through the Holy Spirit, we need to search our hearts in order to receive what we desire: Is there the desire to see God and have fellowship with Him; or is there a love to be evil and practice it?

The Lord probably told him to hurry and leave before his case would be revealed to the disciples. They would have consequently humiliated him.

Some may wonder: Judas had already planned and agreed with the chief priests and Pharisees to deliver the Lord, therefore why does this passage report that: **." . . after the piece of**

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<sup>60</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 61:6

<sup>61</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 61:1

**bread, Satan entered him"**? Satan had shot one of his fiery arrows at the heart of Judas and discovered an inner response. This opened the doors of his heart and gave access to Satan to enter and reign as king! In the same way, we give access to Satan every time we submit to any evil thoughts and behavior. We would actually be paving the way to a greater evil.

- \* The Lord perceived the one who had entered as well as the one who had received him. He also knew of the whole plan against Him and so focused on the fight. He intended to overcome the wicked one in order to save mankind. Therefore He said: **"What you do, do quickly"** [27]<sup>62</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

- \* St John the disciple speaks about Judas and says "Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him." He is astonished at the traitor's incredible foolishness. The Lord spoke in order to comfort His disciples. He did not wish them to be terrified or filled with sudden dreadful thoughts as this would have added to their anxiety<sup>63</sup>.
- \* As long as Judas remained in the company of the disciples, Satan could not attack him and just played with his mind. However, when the Lord revealed his act and dismissed him from His company, Satan fearlessly jumped into his heart<sup>64</sup>.
- \* **". . . do quickly"** does not sound like an order or an advice. Indeed, it sounds more like a reprimand coming from One who opens the door for a person's reform. However, when it appeared that there was no way for correction, the Lord permitted him to go his way<sup>65</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

- \* After receiving the piece of bread, Satan entered into the Lord's traitor. Judas had submitted to the devil's authority and allowed him full reign over his heart so that he led him to sin.

We do not assume that Satan was not within him earlier and at the time when Judas met with the Jewish leaders. At that time he made the deal concerning the price for betraying the Lord. St. Luke the Evangelist reports clearly: "Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve. So he went his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him to them" (Lk. 22:3-4) . . . **Satan first came in when he planted the idea of betraying Jesus in his heart. Judas was in that spirit when he arrived for supper. Then, and after Judas had received the bread, Satan entered, not to tempt someone who was another's follower, but to claim and rule the one who had become his own**<sup>66</sup>.

- \* Some readers, other than scholars, think that Jesus received the Body of Christ since the Lord had offered to all the disciples present the mystery of His Body and Blood. Judas

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<sup>62</sup> Commentary on St John, Book 32:299

<sup>63</sup> Homilies on St John 72:4

<sup>64</sup> Homilies on St John 72:2

<sup>65</sup> Hom 72 PG 59:424

<sup>66</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 62:2

was there in the room according to Luke's narration in chapter 22:19-22. However, according to St. John, the moment comes when the Lord reveals His traitor by dipping the Bread and offering it to Judas. Probably this was intended to silence other false claims. Indeed, dipping something does not always indicate washing it for it could be done to prevent altering its color. If taken in a positive sense the act of dipping implies ingratitude for receiving something good and therefore deserved to be condemned<sup>67</sup>.

- \* **.” . . do quickly”**[27], not because you personally possess authority, but because the Lords wants you to do so. He is the Almighty One<sup>68</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to Him [28]**

Truly, the Lord knows our inner depths more than we do ourselves. Just as He knows the most wicked-such as Judas-He also knows the weakness of saints such as St. Peter the apostle.

- \* The Lord did not bring Judas' act out into the light. He knew that, if the disciples would get to know, they would have isolated him. Probably Peter would have killed him. This explains why the Lord did not inform any of those reclining at the table, not even St. John the Baptist . . . the Lord did not want to speak badly of Judas for the rest of the days they would spend together. It is our duty to do the same: we should not reveal the sins of others to those around us; even if they are in the same condition as that one who had gone beyond recovery and when there is no hope in healing him.

**St John Chrysostom**

**For some thought, because Judas had the money box,  
That Jesus had said to him: "Buy those things we need for the feast",  
Or that he should give something to the poor" [29]**

The disciples thought that the Lord had asked Judas to "Buy those things we need for the feast" [29]. It is clear that these events occurred the night before the Passover. The disciples knew there would be no selling or buying on Passover Day. Probably, they thought Judas had to go and buy a lamb to offer it on the day of the Passover which was on the following day.

It is clear that no one heard what the Lord whispered in St. John's ear. That is why no one had any reason to suspect Judas. They believed he was doing charitable deeds during the feast. The Lord actually lived like a poor man, yet he put out of the little He had, into the money box. It was as though He obligated everyone, however poor, to donate to others.

- \* If someone were to ask: why did Judas carry a money box whereas the Lord had said: "Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor tunics, nor sandals, or staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food" (Matt 10:9, 10). Our answer would be: Judas carried a money box which was used to serve the poor.

**St John Chrysostom**

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<sup>67</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 62:3

<sup>68</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 62:4

**Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night [30].**

Judas left the house in Bethany and hurried to Jerusalem which was a couple of miles away. He hurried to accomplish his plan at night when his heart was in a state of darkness. In the middle of a cold and dark atmosphere, Judas left so that no one would see him as he did his evil deed which was worse than the dark night.

- \* We would like to ask St. John the Evangelist: ‘Why did you mention the exact time?!’ We know that his answer would be: So that you realize the cruelty of his heart since even the time of day did not prevent him from going ahead with his crime<sup>69</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

- \* He actually ‘**went out**’, not only from the house where the supper was held, but in simple terms, he went away from the Lord Jesus Christ in a final sense. We believe that Judas could not bear to be in the same place as Jesus after having taken the piece of bread and after Satan had entered into him. Indeed, there can be no harmony between Beelzebub (Belial/Satan) and the Lord (2 Cor 6:15)<sup>70</sup>.
- \* For the other disciples (the piece of bread) was intended for their salvation. As for Judas, it condemned him (1Cor 11:27-29), for Satan entered him after he had received the bread . . . as we have said, this was symbolic. The bread, which nourishes fully and in a physical manner, increases the pain of the fever. At the same time it supplies health and energy for a person<sup>71</sup>.
- \* It is appropriate that we understand the symbolic significance of the night in these circumstances. It represents the night that settled upon the spirit of Judas when Satan entered into him. It is the darkness that covered the depths of the world (Gen 1:2) and the darkness God called Night (Gen 1:5) St. Paul speaks about the night and says that we are not children of the night or of darkness, "But you, brethren, are not in darkness. . . we are not of the night nor of darkness" (1Thes 5:4-5). Therefore let us not sleep, we who are of the light (1Thes 5:5)<sup>72</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

- \* The light speaks with the light. In other words, the Lord Jesus Christ spoke with His loyal disciples so that they would obey and love Him as His followers. The night too appeared to recognize the night (Ps 19:2) in the sense that Judas communicated with the unbelieving Jews who plotted to persecute and take the Lord Jesus Christ as a prisoner<sup>73</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

### **3. The Glory of the Son of Man**

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<sup>69</sup> Homilies on St John 72:3

<sup>70</sup> Commentary on St John, Book 32:301-302

<sup>71</sup> Commentary on St John, Book 32:309-310

<sup>72</sup> Commentary on St John, Book 32:313

<sup>73</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 62:6

**So when he had gone out, Jesus said:  
"Now the Son of Man is glorified,  
And God is glorified in Him" [31]**

Until that point, it was hard for the disciples to comprehend what was taking place around them. They were unable to understand what the Lord's words meant concerning His crucifixion, death, and resurrection. However, they sensed some kind of anxiety as events seemed to take an obscure turn.

In the middle of such anxiety, the evangelist announces the exit of Judas who is on His way to betray the Lord. However, the Son of Man would be glorified and God would be glorified too . . . how?

**First:** When the corrupt element left and went away from the center of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ, who grants righteousness, became glorified. It was impossible for corruption to remain permanently within the Church. Corruption condemned itself by withdrawing from the Lord's real Church.

**Second:** When Judas left, the opportunity came for the pure disciples to listen to the Lord's long farewell talks. He spoke to comfort them not only as they were about to go through the events of the Cross; but also to offer divine comfort to the Holy Church through out the ages and until He would appear on the clouds. As that corrupt one, intent on corruption, went out, the opportunity was there for the disciples to witness the great and heavenly Chief Priest as He spoke to the Father. He spoke about the mystery of the divine glory and about granting support to the Church so that she might enjoy fellowship in His glory

**Third:** The Son of Man was glorified because the Father had chosen Him to be the Savior of mankind. The moment had come when His glory would be all the more greatly fulfilled as the people who were to arrest Him started to move. These would deliver Him to be judged and delivered to die on the Cross. This is the glory of His sublime and divine love.

The Lord assures the disciples that the upcoming events would be extremely joyful. It was impossible to separate the role of the Father from that of the Son in achieving the salvation of the world. It is the Father's love that has offered the Cross for us (3:16; Romans 5:8). It is the Father who, through and with the Lord Jesus Christ, became reconciled with the world (2Cor 5:19). It is the Father who has blessed us through the Lord when He chose us long before He laid the foundation of the world (Eph 1:3-4).

- \* By speaking to them, the Lord lifted up their thoughts after they had plunged into anxiety. He succeeded in making them rejoice, besides helping them come out of their depression.
- \* These matters have been recorded to enable us to forgive and not hate those who beat us. We need to reprimand them as well as pray for them. Weeping over sinners is more appropriate than weeping over those in pain. A greedy person, who accuses others falsely and commits evil, brings upon himself a greater evil. At the same time, he causes us to receive greater

benefits if we do not avenge ourselves. For instance, if a person steals something from you, do you thank and glorify God for that? By giving thanks you would receive hundreds of rewards, whereas the thief would have brought on himself an inexpressible fire<sup>74</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* That is why the Lord says: "**Now, the Son of Man is glorified**" [31]. That was the moment when the plan (the suffering) began and it ended by the death of the Lord. . . it all began at the moment when Judas left the room. After receiving the piece of bread, he left to accomplish his act against the Lord. It would have been impossible for Christ to be glorified if the Father were not glorified in Him. Therefore the Lord says: "**God is glorified in Him.**"<sup>75</sup>

\* Glory was fulfilled as a result of the death of the 'Son of Man' on behalf of mankind. His death was an intrinsic part of His humanity and this is completely unrelated in any manner to the Word and only Son whose naturally never dies. Neither was the Lord's death related to Wisdom and Truth, nor to any other designation used to indicate the Lord's divine attributes. Indeed, death was a physical characteristic of mankind, and the Lord was the 'Son of Man' who was born from the line of David according to the flesh (Rom 1:3)<sup>76</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

\*What did the Day say when the Night left?

What did Lord say when the seller left?

**"Now the Son of Man is glorified" (31)**

The Lord spoke these words to reveal that the time for His ultimate humiliation was getting close. The bonds, the judgment, the ridicule, the crucifixion, and death were about to occur.

Is that glorification or humiliation?

When the Lord worked miracles, did not St John comment, 'for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified' (Jn 7:39)?

When the Lord raised the dead, He had not yet been glorified. So would the Father be glorified while He drew personally closer to death?

He was not glorified when He did works that only God could do; so would He be glorified as He walked on the path of suffering as a human being?

**"Now the Son of Man is glorified" [31]:** the Lord said these words to indicate the total withdrawal of the chief of sinners (Judas) from his friends. The ones who remained with the

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<sup>74</sup> Homilies on St John 71: 3

<sup>75</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:321

<sup>76</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:322

Lord were His saints. **We are the shadow of His glory which will be fulfilled when the wicked will be separated completely. Then the Lord Jesus Christ will abide with His saints in eternity<sup>77</sup>.**

\* **"Now the Son of Man is glorified"** [31]: the word 'now' probably does not refer to the sufferings that the Lord was about to face. Rather, it could be a reference to the events that would follow immediately after His resurrection, and as though these have taken place already<sup>78</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**If God is glorified in Him,  
God will also glorify Him in Himself,  
And glorify Him immediately" (32)**

The Lord was glorified promptly and at the moment of His arrest, for all those present drew back at His words. They were unable to arrest Him except when He delivered Himself to them (Jn 18:6). The Father glorified the Lord in His sufferings, and crucifixion when nature herself witnessed that He is the Son of God. As a result, the centurion declared his belief, as well as the thief who was attracted by the love of the crucified.

The greater issue is that the Son of Man was glorified though His death on behalf of mankind. This glory proclaimed the love of the Father who sacrificed His only Son for the sake of the world. Just as the Father was glorified through the death of His Son, so the Father proclaimed the glory of the Son through his resurrection from the dead. Consequently, the Son was glorified in Himself as the One who possesses power and authority. This glory was quickly fulfilled through His resurrection. We will see the fullness of His glory when we meet him face to face. This will also be fulfilled very soon when the great day of the Lord will come.

The glory of the Lord had appeared in the tabernacle, and Moses was unable to enter in due to the cloud which covered it (Ex 40: 34-35). Besides, when the priests came out of the temple they could not go in to continue their service because the glory of God filled the holy house of the Lord (1Kings 8:10-11). Again, when Moses came down the mountain carrying the two tablets of the commandments, he did not know that his face was shining with glory. Therefore Aaron and all the children of Israel were unable to come close to him (Ex 34:29-30). At the Transfiguration the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ was reflected on His clothes which became as white as the light (Lk 9:29-31).

In the Old Testament, the glory of God appeared in the clouds and on the face of Moses. In the New Testament, the glory of God appeared during the ministry of the Lord at His transfiguration. At that event, the brilliance of His face was revealed and He shone as the sun. This glory was reflected on His clothes. On the Cross, the glory of the Father and of the Son was mutually recognized. This has led **Origen the Scholar** to consider that the glory mentioned in this passage implies 'knowledge' which only the Father and the son know, as well as those to whom the son wishes "to reveal Him" (Matt 11:27). This knowledge is not achieved through 'flesh and blood' but by (the) Father who is in heaven (Matt 16:17).

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<sup>77</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 63:2

<sup>78</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 63:3

In these words the Lord Jesus Christ presents four important facts:

1. The Son of Man is glorified through the Cross as He becomes the conqueror over the powers of evil as well as the fulfillment of the divine plan for mankind.
  2. The Father is glorified through the Cross by proclaiming His divine love towards mankind.
  3. The Father glorifies His Son through the Resurrection and Ascension of the Son into the heavens while carrying the Church within Him.
  4. The time had come to fulfill the fullness of His glory promptly and without delay.
- \* What does "**God will glorify Him in Himself**" convey? It indicates that God Himself will glorify the Lord and not by using any other medium. . . . "**And glorify Him immediately**" that is through His crucifixion. This occurred when the veil of the temple got split into two, from top to bottom, and there was an earthquake. The rocks cracked, the graves were opened, and many of the saints who were asleep were awakened (Matt 27:51, 52), this is what is conveyed by these words: "**God will glorify Him in Himself.**" The Lord intended to explain that it would not be long; there was no need to wait for the Resurrection, nor to show His radiance. Rather, His glory would be revealed quickly on the Cross where His glory would appear<sup>79</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**"Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer,  
You will seek Me: and as I said to the Jews,  
Where I am going, you cannot come,  
So now I say to you" [33].**

"My children" or 'My little children' or 'beloved ones'- 'Teknia' expresses great tenderness and feelings. These are similar to a mother's tenderness towards her infant whom she loves greatly.

Now Judas had left and the Lord spoke with great tenderness towards His disciples who were like beloved sons to Him.

The short period indicated in this passage could have been a couple of hours at the most. After that, the disciples were scattered, leaving the Lord Jesus Christ alone throughout His judgment. They could not go into the place where His trial was held. The Cross signified the isolation of the Lord from His enemies as well as from His loved ones. No one could accompany Him on that path and Isaiah heard Him say: "I have trodden the winepress alone" (Is. 63:3). Judas forsook the Lord, and all the wicked ones who were intent on their wickedness went with him. They would come to see the marks of the Cross when He will meet them again. Then they will ask the mountains to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them up from the face of the One who sits on the throne. On the way to the Cross, His loved ones forsook Him too for no one other than Him could participate in the sacrifice on the Cross. However, they would be crucified after He has risen so they would be glorified with Him too. They would find His suffering to be

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<sup>79</sup> Hom 72. PG 59:425



glorious and honorable; therefore they would consider that their sufferings are a blessing they do not deserve. Moreover, His loved ones know that sufferings are a means of being in the eternal and joyful presence of the Crucified conqueror.

\* The Lord Jesus said these words to the Jews as well as to His disciples. It brought terror in the hearts of the Jews, whereas it awakened the flame of anticipation in the hearts of the disciples.

\* **.” . . now I say to you” [33]** . . . when the disciples will run away, and when the Jews suffer beyond description during the siege of their city, and when the wrath of God afflicts them from every side; then the Lord addresses the Jews concerning their lack of faith. As for you, the Lord warns you so that no unexpected trouble would afflict you<sup>80</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* Do not be disturbed by those who say that the Jesus Christ the Savior is the Father of specific person. Indeed, the Lord told the paralyzed man: "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you" (Matt 9: 2). He told the woman who was bleeding. . . "Daughter your faith has made you well" (Matt 9:22). Now, the Lord calls the disciples: **"little children"** and we believe that the intention was to underline clearly their humility. We need to learn humility from the disciples who possessed this feature up to that time<sup>81</sup>.

\* It is necessary to understand that it is not impossible for someone to change from being a child of the Lord into being his brother. On a human level, the son cannot later become a brother to the person to whom he was previously a son.

\* After the Lord's resurrection, those He has called "little children" became His brothers . . . they were as though they have been transformed by the Lord resurrection. This explains the Lord's words when He said: "go to My brethren and say to them . . . " (Jn. 20:17).

In the same manner, it is probably possible to change from being a servant of God. The disciples were servants before they could become 'little children.' The following words explain this point: 'you call me teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am (Jn. 13:13). The following words explain that idea: "a servant is not greater than his master" (Jn13:16) these sayings were expressed before the words **‘little children, I shall be with you.’**

**Note that a servant first becomes a disciples and then changes into a young child. Next, he changes into being the Lord's brother and finally becomes a son of God<sup>82</sup>.**

**Orgen the Scholar**

They were going to seek Him. However, He would spend three days and nights in the heart of the earth (Matt 12:40) when His souls leaves to go to Paradise. The Lord spoke about that when He said: **.” . . today you will be with Me in Paradise”(Lk 23:43).** There He would carry those who had died with hope and bring them from Hades into Paradise. Nevertheless, the

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<sup>80</sup> Homilies on St John 72:4

<sup>81</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:368

<sup>82</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:368-374

disciples could not accompany Him to His Paradise. At that moment in time they were unable to follow Him.

\* The Lord did not want His disciples to think that, being glorified by the Father, he would be unable to have any earthly relationship with them. Therefore He said: **"little children, I shall be with you a little while longer"** [33]. It is as though He was telling them: it is true that I will be glorified through My resurrection. However, I will not ascend immediately into heaven. Rather, "I will be with you a little while longer." Accordingly, we read in the book of the Acts of the Apostles that the Lord spent forty days with them after His Resurrection. During these days, He came, went away, and returned, and stayed in their company, and He ate and drank with them (Acts 1:3) . . . nevertheless, He would no longer share their human weaknesses<sup>83</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**St. Augustine** perceives that this short while which the Lord indicated actually applied to the period between His last conversation with them to the time of His crucifixion, death, and resurrection. After that the disciples would seek Him but would be unable to go to Him. During this short while, the Lord would be sharing their human weaknesses. After that He would no longer share these features with them. An alternative explanation could be that the Lord was referring to the forty days between His resurrection and ascension. In that period, He would be with them but would not share the feature of human weakness with them as He would no longer be subject to death. He would then and would no longer be physically present with them<sup>84</sup>.

#### **4. Brotherly love:**

**"A new commandment I give to you,  
That you love one another.  
As I have loved you,  
That you also love one another."** [34]

Even though Judas, who was so ungrateful, was one of the disciples, yet not everyone was like him. The others were loyal, and the reciprocal love they shared indicated their discipleship. This was an old commandment (1Jn 2:7), yet it was renewed by the Lord Jesus Christ as He gave it greater depths and potentials to apply it. The commandment was extended to embrace lovingly every person: even enemies and opponents. The ultimate aim is to redeem every soul. There are two Greek words used in the Holy Bible for the word 'new': one means recent, the one used here embodies a desire to flourish and refresh. The old commandment occurs in (Lev. 19:18). However, the Cross offers it to us with a deeper meaning. Here it gains a refreshing concept due to the potential of applying it in a new light.

The commandment to love is a wonderful song which fills the Church with joy and gladness. It is a new command which will always remain new. All will practice it even the heavenly ones. It does not get old or obsolete (Heb 8:13). **Tertullian the scholar** informs us that the pagan speak about Christians and say: 'Look, how they love one another!' **Minucius Felix** reports that the pagan Caecillicus says about Christians: 'they love each other even before they get to know

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<sup>83</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 64:1

<sup>84</sup> cf. St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 64:2-3

one another.’ This is a testimony from pagans who resist and attack Christians. **Lucian of Samosata** who never said a good word about Christians, attacked them for being foolish. He said that since they loved one another, it is possible for any pagan to exploit this love and gather from them great wealth.

The Evangelist points to two new topics: the new commandment here and the new tomb where the Lord would be buried (Jn.19:21). By accepting this commandment into our depths, our inner being is transformed into the Lord’s tomb. It is a new tomb where the Lord will rest in the company of His angels. Our inner depths will bear witness to His glorious resurrection, and in this manner the new commandment transforms our tomb into a new heaven!

\* It is as though the Lord was telling them: you have become anxious because I’m leaving you. However, if you love one another you will be the most powerful<sup>85</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* This is a new commandment since the Lord has stripped away the old and has dressed us with the new human being.

Actually, there is no love that has the power to renew those who submit or obey it. Here the Lord is speaking about a love that is distinctly different from physical emotions as He goes on to say: **“ . . . as I have loved you ”** [24].

Our Lord has given us a new commandment and that is that we love one another as He has loved us. That is the love that will renew us and transform us into new beings and into heirs of the new promise and testament. Hence we will praise Him with a new song of praise<sup>86</sup>.

\* Let us love one another with great concern to win each other and to have the Lord live within us. This love is granted through Him . . . for He has loved us with this goal: that we might love one another. By loving us, He has granted us the power of brotherly love. Consequently we join together in loving fellowship and unite as members joined by the ties of joy. As a result, we become one body to the Almighty Head<sup>87</sup>.

\* The Lord seems to be telling us: ‘There are other blessings that those who do not belong to Me share with you. They share nature, life, sensations, reasoning, and security. I grant these as blessings to men and beasts. Besides, I grant all the gifts of language, mysteries, prophecies, knowledge, shelter, faith, generosity, as well as freedom to deliver their bodies even to fire. However, because they lack love, they become as sounding brass; as nothing, they are become good for nothing ( 1 Cor 13:1-3)<sup>88</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

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<sup>85</sup> Homilies on St John 72:4

<sup>86</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 65:1

<sup>87</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 65:2

<sup>88</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 65:3

**“By this shall all men know that you are My disciples,  
If you have love for one another.” [35]**

Sin leads the soul to slip into the path of darkness and death. Conversely the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the word Incarnated leads to resurrection from the grave. He offers divine knowledge and achieves divine wonders. Consequently, through faith the soul adheres to path of righteousness and truth. She shakes away all that is shameful and **expands as it is filled with love to God, to His heavenly hosts, as well as towards all his earthly creatures.**

With such a heart, a person is enabled to walk in the narrow path while carrying a big heart. In contrast, a sinful heart leads its owner into a wide path yet characterized by a restricted heart. The psalmist says: **"I will run in the way of your commandments, for you will enlarge my heart" (Ps. 119:32).**

\* If you wondered: 'what was the Lord's purpose when He said these words?' Our answer would be: 'This love is grater than all other virtues. It transforms people into saints because it is the basis of all virtue.'

If you asked: 'What do you think: Do miracles help to reveal this love in a more appropriate and devoted manner?' Our answer would be: 'It does not reveal it any way.' The Lord Himself said: "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name?' And then I will declare to them, ' I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"(Matt 7:22-23).

Besides, when the disciples were glad that the devils obeyed them, the Lord told them: 'Nevertheless do not rejoice in this. That the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven' (Lk10:20). If the making of the miracles would lead the world into the faith, then love was present even before that. If love does not exist, then the effect of miracles would be short- lived<sup>89</sup>.

\* How great is love! It is more powerful than fire. It reaches to the highest heavens and nothing can hinder it<sup>90</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* It is good to extend and enlarge our hearts as much as possible. This would be a safeguard against limitations such as cowardice or destructive and angry energy. Such limitations would disable us from receiving what the prophet calls '**the large road**' of God's commandments into our limited hearts. Moreover, we would be unable to join the prophet and say: **"I will run in the way of your commandments, for you will enlarge my heart."**<sup>91</sup>

**Fr. Youssef**

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<sup>89</sup> Homilies on St John 72:4

<sup>90</sup> Homilies on St John 73:1

<sup>91</sup> St Cassian: Conferences, 16:27

\* I would be unable to run in the path of your commandments if you do not enlarge my heart. . . can you do that on your own?. . . The answer is "no I cannot." It cannot be done with my own will, and as though I did not need Your help; yet I can because You have enlarged my heart.

An enlarged heart is filled with joy which we have received as we walk uprightly. It is a gift from God which leads us not to resent His commands. We obey not due to fear of penalty. Indeed, the heart opens up through love and joy which we have found in righteousness.

**St Augustine**

\* The road to life is narrow and difficult (Matt 7:14). However, the heart that walks uprightly, that is in the path of the Lord's commands, is opened up and welcomes the divine word. Being sanctified, the heart sees God. In contrast, the wide road leads to destruction (Matt7:13). The heart that walks on that road is narrow and refuses to set up a house for the Father and Son within (Jn.14:23). Through ignorance, such a heart disregards God and restricts itself due to its own cruelty.

Let us meditate on Solomon's teachings. He tells us how to record the divine word on the tablets of our hearts (Prov. 3:4; 7:3; 22:20) He proclaims "Wisdom calls aloud outside; she raises her voice. . (Prov. 1:20) "Outside" refers to the hearts which God intends to enlarge, and not to the streets. .

**Origen the Scholar**

\* The path of the Lord's commandments is narrow. However, the heart of the one walking on that path is opened up and enlarged. This is because the Father, Son and Holy Spirit live within. Therefore that person walks on swiftly and with a big heart . . . whereas the road taken by evil doers is wide and their hearts are restricted for there is no place for God within them.

**Anthimus, Bishop of Jerusalem**

## **5. Warning to Peter and Denial of the Lord:**

**Peter said to Him,  
"Where are you going?"  
Jesus answered him,  
"Where I am going you cannot follow Me now,  
But you shall follow Me afterward." [36]**

The Lord had told His disciples previously that they could not go where He was going [33]. In spite of that, Peter dared to ask: "Lord where are you going?" His curiosity led him into a discussion that was not needed as it ended by a confirmation that he would deny His Master three times. This was something Peter could not accept logically. It would have been appropriate for him to accept the Lord's words and to meditate on the commandment of love rather than to inquire about matters outside his scope.

In spite of Peter's impulsive question, the Lord candidly responded with enough information to support him on the road of suffering: he would eventually die with Him, drink of the cup with

Him. Yet this would happen later on and then would attain the blessing of joining the Lord. The Lord did not give Peter the answer he wanted. Peter wanted to know the place to which the Lord was going. Peter had accompanied the Lord everywhere and he did not imagine he could be separated from Him. Maybe Peter thought that the Lord was getting some temporal glory or earthly status. However, the Lord revealed to him where he could not accompany His Lord to heaven. Peter had not yet accomplished his earthly task, nor was he mature enough to be raised with the Lord into eternal glory.

\* Great love is stronger than fire itself. It lifts us to the heavens. There is no obstacle to hinder its great progression. Peter, the apostle, was so aroused with anticipation when he heard the Lord's words: **'where I am going you cannot come. . . '(33)**, and he asks **"Lord, where are you going?"** He said that to reveal his state of mind and emotions, as he was anxious to follow the Lord, and so was not just seeking for just more information. This explains his hasty response 'I will lay down my life for You.'

**St John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord announced that the possibility of following Him had to be postponed. Yet He did not lead Peter to lose hope. On the contrary, He granted him that hope by saying: **." . . but you shall follow Me afterward"** [36] why are you so impulsive, Peter? The Rock had not yet blessed Him with steadfastness that proceeds from His Holy Spirit. Do not lift yourself up to the heights for **"you cannot . . now": and do not fall into despair for "you shall follow Me afterward"**<sup>92</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now?  
I will lay down my life for your sake." [37]**

Probably Peter thought the Lord was going on a long difficult journey and He could find no reason that could prevent him from accompanying the Lord. He was ready to accompany Him even it entailed death. Poor Peter did not know his own weakness and his inability to follow the Lord without the divine grace. He did not realize that without the Lord Jesus Christ he could do nothing (Jn. 15:5).

\* When Peter heard the words of the Lord, **." . . but you shall follow Me afterward"**, he could not restrain his strong desire and impulsively asked, **"Lord why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for your sake!"** We ask Peter the apostle: 'What are you saying Peter? The Lord told you; you cannot follow Me now.' Do you ask: 'Why can I not follow You?' With experience, you will learn that your love means nothing if it is not accompanied by help from above.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* This trial is a lesson that teaches us not to belittle the weakness of the flesh lest we get tried<sup>93</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* In his mind, he had the desire; however he did not comprehend the measure of his strength.

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<sup>92</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 66:1

<sup>93</sup> On the Decease of His Brother Saytrus, Book 2:28

The weak boasted in his persistence, but the Healer eyed his health. The one promised while the other had foreknowledge. The ignorant was bold, but the all-knowing humbled Himself to be a teacher.

What a great promise Peter made! He only considered his yearning without taking into account his potentials<sup>94</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**Jesus answered him:**

**"Will you lay down your life for My sake?**

**Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow**

**Till you have denied Me three times."** [38]

\* Note the great fall of Peter the apostle! He could have been guilty on or two counts; yet in a short period, he uttered a denial that resulted in three counts of guilt.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* O you who take pride in your ability to die on My behalf, first learn to live and look after yourself. By fearing the death of your body, you open up the possibility of the death of your soul. Acknowledging the Lord Jesus Christ is life giving, while denying Him is death<sup>95</sup>.

\* He who denies the Lord incarnate cannot be reconciled with God through the mediator; for there is only one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1Tim 2:5).

\* Anyone who denies that the Lord Jesus Christ is also Man cannot be redeemed, 'for as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners. So also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous (Rom 5:19). Any one who denies the Lord incarnate cannot be part of the resurrected life. Just as through one man death has entered, so through one Man has come the resurrection of the dead. "For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead" (1Cor 15:21-22)<sup>96</sup>.

**St Augustine**

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<sup>94</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 66:1

<sup>95</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 66:1

<sup>96</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 66:2

## **Meditations Inspired by St John's Gospel, Chapter 13**

### **Allow Me to be daring and wash My Brother's Feet!**

\* Greed opened the heart of Judas so Satan could sow his seeds.  
He put his hand out to steal more than once so the enemy entered into him.  
When he became intent on betraying His Master, the enemy held sway over his heart.  
He entered in as one vested with authority and as master of the house!  
He found a dark kingdom ready to receive the head of the realm.

\* You have chosen him to be a disciple and entrusted him with the money box.  
You granted him to work miracles just as the other disciples...  
In your tenderness, you concealed his name and did not humiliate him publicly.  
Hoping he would retreat from his evil,  
Furthermore, you bowed down to wash his feet.  
You dipped the Bread in the plate and offered to feed him out of Your hand,  
And no one suspected him!

\* Humbly, you carried out the task of slaves.  
You removed your outer cloths, and tied your waist with a towel  
You were not embarrassed to fill the basin with water  
And You were not ashamed to wash your disciples' feet.  
You began to wash their soiled feet with water  
In order to wash our hearts and consciences with Your holy blood.  
Who dares to take your place, O You who have washed the feet of mankind!

\* May I be bold and share your love.  
In your tenderness, allow me to receive this honor  
Allow me to gladly wash the feet of my fellowmen who have wronged me!  
My heart lovingly washes each deed that seems evil.  
With your Holy Spirit, my heart expands to embrace everyone in it  
My heart grooms as it yearns to see all feet pure and sanctified.

\* Purify me wholly with water and the fiery Spirit in the baptismal waters  
When will I see the whole world pure and sanctified in You?  
May Your hand wash me from every daily corruption!  
May You wash, O Lord, all the feet of Your believers.

\* Judas went out at night with a darkened heart to accomplish deeds of darkness.  
The disciples remained with you, O True Light  
They had true love, for they followed Your example  
For darkness cannot invade a heart that is occupied by love.

\* Peter yearned to follow You wherever You would go  
The poor man failed to realize his weak potentials!  
He imagined he could lay down his life on Your behalf



He could not comprehend that he could not make an offering before you had offered Yourself first on his behalf ...

You clearly revealed his weakness to him

And you filled his heart with amazing hope.

You announced to him that he would ultimately follow You

When he too would be crucified with You for the rest of his life

And when he would die as a martyr for the sake of Your Holy Name!

\* You know me, O my Redeemer, more than I know myself!

You are my support,

Fulfilling all the desires of my heart!

May Your hand wash my heart daily, O Lord,

So that Satan's traps would fail to catch me

And the enemy would fail to reign in my heart.

Your Words spread rays of light over me...

Therefore the kingdom of darkness will fail to creep within me.

Amen

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## THE OTHER COMFORTER

The Lord delivered three farewell talks. St. John the Evangelist provides a record of these in chapters 14-16.

The heavenly Shepherd talks with the remaining few that represent His weak flock. The storm is about to strike in all its power; and Satan, the savage wolf, believes he will surely destroy the Shepherd with his sheep. As for the Shepherd, while He is fulfilling the Divine plan, reassures His flock. He asks them not to be troubled and tells them that it is more appropriate for them to comprehend the mystery of Divine love:

**Concerning the Father,** the Lord states that the Father has many mansions that are big enough to receive everyone. At the same time, He finds pleasure to come with His Son and abide within the depths of each believer.

**Concerning the Son,** the Lord states that the storm blowing against Him is just the path that has been prepared to carry His flock through the Cross and onto the Throne. There, they would enjoy the fellowship of His glory. In these talks, we hear the Father speaking with His young children. Even though He would be separated from them physically, He will send His Holy Spirit to comfort them. They would not be left as orphans. Indeed, the Holy Spirit will lead them into the heavens where the risen Lord Jesus has ascended!

**Concerning the Holy Spirit:** The Lord indicates that the Holy Spirit is the other Comforter who will lead the flock to the full Truth, who is the Lord Himself. The Holy Spirit will grant them the power to witness before the whole world: He will judge the world for not believing, and consequently attract unbelievers to believe through the preaching of the disciples. The world will be judged for righteousness as men will come to know that no one can be righteous except through the righteousness of the Crucified Lord. It will also be condemned when Satan will be destroyed and condemned.

These farewell talks continue to constitute the mysterious power of the Church. She finds in them the mystery of salvation which preoccupies the Holy Trinity. This will be the main concern until the salvation of mankind is wholly fulfilled and all come to enjoy what God has prepared.

Chapter 14 is an extension to the conversation which the Lord Jesus shared with His disciples after establishing the mystery of the Eucharist. He had just condemned the act of Judas and predicted Peter's act of denying the Lord three times. The Lord wanted to comfort and support the rest of the disciples since they were troubled and saddened to know that one of them would betray Him, and another would deny Him. In the previous chapters, we saw how the gathering of the disciples with the Lord was more like a conference characterized by open debate

Anxiety is often the result of fear of the unknown, or due to the expectation of a great loss that would affect the soul, body, or possessions. The cure for anxiety is to have faith. This lends insight to the soul that enables her to recognize her eternal resting place. She realizes that through God she is enabled to destroy obstacles. No power could stand in her way as she enjoys

steadfastness in the Trinity of God who governs heaven and earth and all visible and invisible creatures.

|                                       |                    |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>1- Eternal Rest</b>                | <b>verses: 1-3</b> |
| <b>2- Christ is the way of Rest</b>   | <b>4-11</b>        |
| <b>3- Prayer and Rest</b>             | <b>12-14</b>       |
| <b>4- The Other Comforter</b>         | <b>15-17</b>       |
| <b>5- The Lord's Appearance</b>       | <b>18-24</b>       |
| <b>6- The Comforter and Teacher</b>   | <b>25-26</b>       |
| <b>7- The Lord's Joy on Departing</b> | <b>27-31</b>       |

## **1- Eternal Rest**

**St. John Chrysostom** comments that the disciples were greatly disturbed especially after the Lord Jesus Christ had revealed to them what Peter would do. If that disciple, who was known for his fiery zeal, had always accompanied the Lord, and had proclaimed his desire to sacrifice his life for the Lord's sake, would deny his Master three times, then what hope could they have? That is why the Lord spoke to them these words: He sought to remove their anxiety and open before them the gates of hope and heavenly joy!

**“Let not your heart be troubled;  
You believe in God, believe also in Me” [1]**

The Lord warns us against anxiety and confusion. He offers us faith as a practical cure against the pain of anxiety. Anxiety was evident in the look on the disciples' faces. ‘Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke,’ (John 13:22). The Lord not only saw this, but He also saw their hearts that were inwardly bleeding. Therefore He did not ignore their state as He was concerned about our inner peace. He is also concerned about our inner peace. Now, He opened the door of security and peace before them. This door opens up through believing in Him. They had to believe in Him as the Savior who would suffer and die for them. Consequently, He would grant them the power and joy of the resurrection, open the way to heaven, and grant them the right to pass over into the place of eternal rest.

The disciples had begun to lose the hope of establishing a kingdom on earth. Their dreams concerning the Lord began to disappear. As for the Lord, He raised their minds and sights to the eternal spiritual inheritance. He lifted their hearts to heaven so that they would yearn for the things prepared for them over there.

\* Notice how the Lord Jesus Christ comforted them by saying: **“let not your heart be troubled.”** In these opening words He clarifies His divine power as He knew the thoughts that were going on in their minds. Consequently, He incorporated the answer into His words.

By saying: **“... you believe in God, believe also in Me”**, the Lord intends to say that ‘all these difficulties will surely pass away since by having faith in Me and in My Father you become

far more powerful than all the hardships that you will encounter. That faith will shield you from being conquered by any evil.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord constantly confirms this definition of the faith of the Church. It embraces the teaching that there is one God the Father. However, He is never separate from the mystery of the One God. The Father is neither another God nor is He different from the sole Almighty God.

Since the nature of the One God is found in the Lord Jesus Christ, then it is impossible to have a God that is different from Him...for God can neither be separate from the Lord Jesus Christ nor can He be merged in Him. This explains why the Lord spoke carefully and used well chosen words. What He proclaims to be a feature of the Father, indicates in humble terms that these apply to Him too. To illustrate this point, the Lord says: “... **hold steadfastly to faith in God, and believe in Me.**” He and God are equal in honor. We therefore ask: ‘How can He be separated from His nature?’ The Lord says: “...**believe also in Me.**” He also says: “...**believe in God.**” Do not the words “**in Me**” refer to His nature?<sup>1</sup>

**St. Hilary, Bishop of Boitier**

\* You fear death that is about to engulf the likeness of that slave; but “...**let not your heart be troubled**” [1]. Indeed, the likeness of God will raise Him up again<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“In My Father’s house are many mansions;**

**If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.”[2]**

The Lord Jesus Christ calls the heavens His ‘Father’s house’ for He will return to His Father’s house which is His own as well. There, He will prepare places and mansions for His followers. Therefore everyone will feel that he is returning to the house of his heavenly Father or to the home awaiting him/her. By saying ‘**many mansions**’, the Lord assures us that God has many children; and that the heavens are big enough to hold them all. In the Greek language, ‘mansions’ denotes permanent dwelling places or permanent residences.

Rather than a temporary kingdom, the Lord directs their sight to the kingdom of eternal glory. This is a huge kingdom that can embrace all mankind if they want; for ‘... **in My Father’s house are many mansions (places)**’ [2].

Even though the Lord was leaving them physically, He was doing that to bring them to glory: to ‘**prepare a place**’ [2] for them. He was not leaving them to seek His personal comfort and glory. Indeed, His intention was to prepare for each one a specific place in His kingdom.

The Jews boasted that the temple was the house of God and it contained many rooms- (1 Kings 6:5; Ezra 8:29; Jeremiah 35:24; 36:10). However, the heavenly temple consists of many varied houses, so that every believer will find a place there that is ready for him.

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<sup>1</sup> On the Trinity 9:18

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 67:1

**‘If it were not so, I would have told you’:** I am not offering you an invalid hope. I have promised you an eternal inheritance so that you would be in the same place where I am going. If there was no place for you, I would not have spoken these words to you.

\* The Lord supported Peter who he was saddened by His words ‘... you shall follow Me afterward,’ (13:36). In the same manner, the Lord offered to His disciples this glimmer of hope. So that they would not think He had made that promise to Peter only. He told them: **“In My Father’s house are many mansions.”** He also said: **“I go to prepare a place for you.”** This reveals that the place which will receive Peter will receive them as well; for there is plenty of room in these mansions<sup>3</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

Jovinianus comments that these many places in our Father’s house refer to the churches that are spread throughout the world. St. Jerome responds to that by saying that the Lord, in this passage, was referring not to the number of churches but rather to the heavenly houses and eternal residences.

\* In spite of the variety of heavenly glory, yet everyone will enjoy being in one and the same place. The Lord has ascended there to prepare many mansions. Indeed, He will prepare one kingdom and all will have fellowship in it. Consequently all will feel content and satisfied, even though the glory of each star will differ from that of the others<sup>4</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

\* Is it possible for anyone not to be fearful? Peter who was the most confident and bold disciple was told: “...the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times,” (John 13:38).

Beginning with Peter, they all felt doomed to destruction, therefore they became fearful. Then they heard the Lord’s words: **“In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.”** This refreshed and pulled them out of their anxiety. Now they could walk confidently and be assured in the knowledge that, after overcoming the horrors of temptation, they would live with the Lord Jesus Christ and in the presence and embrace of God.

Even though one person could be stronger than the other, or one more righteous than the other, yet **“...in My Father’s house are many mansions.” None of them would remain outside that house for everyone will receive a place according to his merits.**

All workers are similar with respect to the talents which the master of the house commanded to give out to all those who worked in the vineyard. There was no distinction between those who worked more and those who worked fewer hours (Matt 20:9). This payment definitely refers to everlasting life where no one lives for a longer period than the rest. Indeed, there are no variant measurements or discrepancies in eternal life. Besides, the numerous dwelling places indicate the levels of entitlement in the one eternal life. We consider that the sun has a certain glory, the moon another, the stars have yet another. One star could possess a more

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<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St John, 73:1

<sup>4</sup> Against Jovinianus, 2:28

distinct glory than the other. The same will apply at the time of the resurrection of the dead.

The saints are like the heavenly stars. They are granted various places and various degrees of brilliance. However, according to the talents we have referred to, no one is deprived of the kingdom. God will be the All in all (1 Cor 15:41, 42); and in His own very special way, which is expressed by love: for God is love ( 1 John 4:8). Love will achieve this general condition- in a kingdom that will embrace everyone. This is how everyone can truly possess that (kingdom): **each one will desire to see in others what he does not possess... due to this wide variety of brilliance, all jealousy will disappear while the unity of love reigns over all**<sup>5</sup>.

\* May the Lord Jesus Christ go and prepare for us a place. May He leave and not be visible; and may He remain invisible so that we may practice faith. In this manner, He will prepare a place for us. Having faith in Him, we shall live. May we have the desire to believe in that place in order to attain the spot prepared for us. Yearning for love is the means of getting ready to attain that mansion. May you have ready, O Lord, what you are preparing. You are preparing us to receive You; while You are also getting Yourself ready for us. As much as You are preparing a place in us for You; You are also preparing a place in You for us. Accordingly, You have said: "...Abide in Me and I in you" (John 15:4). Just as each one has fellowship in You ...some to a lesser, others to a greater degree- so also will the various rewards be: each according to his different entitlement<sup>6</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**St. Augustine** wonders 'how does the Lord Jesus Christ promise to go and prepare a place for us, whereas He simultaneously states that: "...in My Father's house are many mansions"...which indicates that they have been actually prepared already?' He comments on that by stating that these had been prepared in hindsight for our sake. Yet He would be literally fulfilling all that in a practical manner. In the Gospels, we read how the Lord chose His disciples and called them. However, the apostle reports that "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world," (Eph 1:4). In this manner, the disciples had been appointed before the foundation of the world, and according to His Divine plan. Moreover, He fulfilled it in a practical manner when He became incarnated and called the disciples and apostles to Him<sup>7</sup>.

**"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." [3]**

The departure of the Lord Jesus Christ from our world opened the way. By leaving our world, He prepares the place and grants us the right to pass through Him into the kingdom of eternal glory. He reminds His disciples of the old times when He led the nation to the place where they would find a home (Numbers 10:33). Similarly, the Lord will go before His followers, and He will enable them to walk for three days, that is the journey of the resurrection and the victory over death. Ultimately, all will find places in heaven!

The Lord saw the religious leaders. They were greatly disturbed and desired to get rid of

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<sup>5</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 67:2

<sup>6</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 68: 3

<sup>7</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 68:1

Him. Therefore they joined the crowds and shouted: “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” Therefore He urged His disciples not to allow this confusion to touch their hearts. Whereas the world around the Lord was in turmoil and sought to get rid of Him, He willingly went out to open the door of glory even to His opponents. Truly, He seeks to redeem all mankind!

The words ‘...**receive you to Myself**’ in the Greek language denote great love, yearning, and attraction toward the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the work of the Holy Spirit who pours love into the heart. Consequently, it yearns to meet Him face to face and to be received into His embrace. There the heart will enjoy the warmth of the supreme power of the Lord’s love. The attraction to the Lord Jesus Christ, which we enjoy now, and our steadfastness in Him, is a warranty of what we will attain. Yet, it is impossible to make any comparison.

God the Word accepted to become Man and to live among us. He became a citizen of our world in order to carry us into His heavenly kingdom. He sought to grant us fellowship in His Divine nature so that we might be considered ‘members of the household of God’ (Eph 2:19). Therefore, our heart yearns to say with the apostle: ‘...for me, to live is Christ and to die is gain’ (Phil 1:23). We desire to follow Him wherever He goes’ (Rev 14:4). This is the prayer of the heavenly bridegroom for His bride: that she “...may be with Me where I am” (John 17:24). In other words: that the bride might enjoy the heavenly feast.

\* It is as though the Lord Jesus Christ was telling His disciples: ‘I have taken great pains to fulfill that.’ He intended to underline that they had to trust, have faith, and yearn intensely to be with Him<sup>8</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

## **2- Christ is the Way of Rest**

**“And where I go you know and the way you know.” [4]**

The Lord had told His disciples about the Cross, and He had offered to them His sacrificial Blood and Body. He considered that by then they knew where He was going; and the road He would take through the Cross. As a result, He would open the door for them to enter into the embrace of the heavenly Father.

The Lord offered them the blessed heavenly life. To comfort them in the midst of their pain, He indicated the path leading to that life. His words to the disciples conveyed the following: ‘...you have come to know the heavenly home, the home of your Father which is your resting place; and you have learned of the path that would lead you there. I have repeatedly spoken clearly to you about these things and you should have understood all these matters.’

\* The Lord spoke these words as He knew they would seek to know this information later on. By telling them: “...**the way you know** ...”, He underlined the yearning in their minds!<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Homilies on St John, 73:1

<sup>9</sup> Homilies on St John, 73:2

## St. John Chrysostom

\* The Lord informs us that in our Father's house there are many mansions (John 14:2). In that context, the Lord defines the status of righteousness that every person achieves. Through the rejection of evil and its claim to be a healing prescription, we stay on the Lord's path.

For example, a person who inherits certain talents early on in life, lives according to the truth, and follows the good path, could be equal to another person who has strived and progressed in the pursuit of truth and goodness.

Another person may develop through a desire for goodness. Another may steadfastly persevere in reaching a peak of virtue; while another may have surpassed him in achieving higher levels.

Some may surpass these, while others may struggle hard to progress.

God the Almighty receives every person coming to Him by his own free will. He ranks each according to his merits. Consequently, He grants rewards to persons who are of a nobler status, as well as to those who are less deserving<sup>10</sup>.

## St. Gregory of Nicea

**Thomas said to Him:**

**“Lord, we do not know where You are going  
And how can we know the way?”[5]**

In spite of all the Lord's teachings about the Cross and the Resurrection, the disciples could not comprehend the Lord's words. Probably, they thought He would be taken up in a fiery chariot in the manner of Elijah; or that the angels would carry Him up to heaven; or that He would rest in the bosom of Abraham which was the desire of every Jew. Thomas was at a loss. So were the two disciples as they were on their way to Emaus, and after they had heard the women reporting and confirming to all the disciples that the Lord Jesus Christ had risen from the dead.

The Lord opened the way for a debate with His disciples through His gentle words to them. At least two of the disciples spoke with Him: Thomas and Philip. Thomas questioned the Lord about the path, without apologizing for contradicting His words “where I go you know.” Thomas was not embarrassed to admit that he could not understand the Lord's words. Moreover, he admitted he did not know where the Lord was going and consequently he could not know the way. Peter was different: he supposed he could go with the Lord, even if that would cost him his very own life (John 13:37)

It is good that Thomas admitted his ignorance. However, he is to be blamed for thinking of an earthly kingdom. This made him suppose that the Master was going to leave for another country, and therefore he could not know the way. Thomas did not know if the Lord was going to Bethlehem, Capernaum, or any of the cities of the Gentiles. David had gone to Hebron where he was anointed, and there proclaimed to regain a kingdom for Israel. Did Thomas think that the

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<sup>10</sup> Song of Solomon: Fr Gregory, Bishop of Nicea. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar: Sermon 15



Lord was going to the invisible world of the spirits...we do not know!

\*Peter said these words “Where are you going?” (John 13:36). He asked in order to follow the Lord rather than to get information. However, the Lord rebuked Peter and revealed that what is feasible seemed to be impossible at that time (that the disciples follow the Lord). This obstacle led Peter to desire to know more details. That is why the Lord told the other disciples: “...**the way you know**” [4], but He told Peter ...“you will deny Me” (13:38). Before anyone could say another word, the Discerner of the hearts said: “**Let not your heart be troubled.**” Then He said “... **you know**” to reveal the desire in their hearts. Therefore, the Lord excused them for wondering, and for being at a loss. Note that Peter’s question “**where are You going?**” was prompted by pure love, whereas Thomas’ question was prompted by cowardice.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Jesus said to him:**

**“I am the way, the truth and the life.**

**No one comes to the Father except through Me.” [6]**

Thomas allowed his mind to roam all over as he tried to search, and to find where the Lord would go. Similarly, Martha was troubled, to the last day, when the Lord informed her that her brother would come to life. In both cases, and in most cases if not in all, the Lord Jesus Christ draws the attention of the hearers to Himself by saying: “**I am.**” In this manner, He underlines that He is the way, the truth, the life, the resurrection, the shepherd, the door, and the bread descended from heaven. In Him we have full satisfaction and contentment. There is no path outside Him and no truth without Him. Life can be found only in Him.

He is the way that leads us to the Father without quitting the Son, for the Son is in the Father. Therefore, by uniting with the Son, we enjoy union with the Father. The Lord presents Himself as the way, the truth and the life. These are inseparable, since the Lord is all of that to us. He is the way: we believe in Him and therefore remain steadfast in Him. He lives in us in order to carry us unto the Father’s embrace. He is the truth, whose light shines in our depths and reveals the ultimate knowledge of divine mysteries. He is the life and as we receive Him, He grants life to us. In this manner, we are enabled to enter into the Father’s presence, get acquainted with Him, and rejoice in Him.

The Lord corrected the thoughts of Thomas by revealing to him that He is the way that leads to the Father and to an understanding of His way. The Lord is the way based on His teachings (John 6:24); His life (1Peter 2:21); His sacrifice (Hebrew 9:8-9); His spirit (John 16:13). He is the way, where all the divine promises will be fulfilled (2 Cor 1:20). No one can go to the Father except through Him; and no one can know the Father unless the Son informs that person about Him.

The Lord Jesus Christ is **the way** and Isaiah spoke about that, saying: “A highway shall be there, a road, and it shall be called the highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it. It shall not be found there. But the redeemed shall walk there” (Is 35:8-9).

He is **the way** on which He has offered His Blood in order to carry us into His Holy Place (Heb 9:12). There we will rejoice in the Cross which is the tree of life.

He is **the truth** in whom all shades and symbols mentioned in the Old Testament have been fulfilled: He is the real manna descending from heaven (John 6:23), He is the Holy Tabernacle (Heb 8:3).

He is **the truth** that erases all that is false and all that is incorrect.

He is **the truth** that destroys all deception; for in Him we find true confidence and truth (2 Cor 1:20)

He is **the truth** and the resurrection: "...consider yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:11).

He is **the way, the truth, the life**. He represents the beginning and the end; as well as all that lies in between. Through Him, we start life, travel on the way, and reach the destination.

\* Therefore, the way is itself God's ultimate power. Since the Lord Jesus Christ is our way; and He is the good way, then He is the way that opens up the heavenly kingdom to believers. The Lord is the initiator of our virtue and the beginning of purity<sup>11</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* **"I am the way"**: these words are evidence that "No one comes to the Father except through Me."

"I am the truth, the way, and the life"...due to that, all these matters will be fulfilled. I am the truth and there is no falsehood in Me.

Since I am also the life, then even death cannot impede you from coming to Me.

Besides, since I am the way, you will not need anyone to take you by the hand and lead you. Since I am the truth then My words are not lies; and since I am the life, then even though you will die, you will receive what I have revealed to you...

The disciples were greatly comforted by knowing that the Lord is the way. The Lord seemed to inform them that 'since I have the sole power to go to the Father, then you will definitely come to Him, for there is no other way to get there.' Previously, the Lord had said: '...no one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him...' (John 6:44); and "...and I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:32). The Lord also said: "No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). All these words indicate that He is equal to the One who created Him.

**St. John Chrysostom**

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<sup>11</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 3:7:51-52

\* The Savior Himself says: **“I am the way, the truth, the life”**, [6]. The apostle comments: “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory” (Col 3:4). This is also expressed in the Psalms: ‘Because your loving kindness is better than life’ (Ps 63:3): life is so much richer because the Lord Jesus Christ is the life within each person<sup>12</sup>.

\* This way is the way of righteousness, and it leads a good person to the righteous Father. A person shows righteousness out of his good treasure; and he is the good and faithful servant (Matt 7:14; Luke 6:45; Matt 25:21). However, this way is narrow and the majority, who have material inclinations, are unable to travel through it. The road is also narrow for those who struggle as they travel through it. In fact, the Lord did not say that it was ‘limited’ but that it was ‘narrow’<sup>13</sup>.

### Origen the Scholar

\* Now the way is not susceptible to error. By that we refer to the Lord Jesus Christ who tells us **“I am the way and the life.”** This way leads to the Father, as He says: “No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6)<sup>14</sup>.

### St. Ignatius of Antioch

\* The Almighty and Honorable Father is the Father of truth Himself. In other words, He is the Father of the only begotten Son. The Holy Spirit possesses the Spirit of truth. Therefore, those who worship the Father in spirit and in truth, and hold steadfastly on to this faith, receive great power. The apostle says: “...for we offer glory and prayer through the one Holy Spirit” (John 4:23, 24). The only begotten Son says: **“No one comes to the Father except through Me”**; therefore, those who honor the Father through My name, do so in spirit and in truth, and they are real worshippers<sup>15</sup>.

### St. Gregory Palamas

\* Every person seeks the truth and the life, yet not everyone finds the way<sup>16</sup>.

\* As a human being, He gave joy (for He became the way of our salvation through his incarnation). As a result, we are enabled to come to God: we come with Him and in Him.

Do not look for any way other than Him to get to the Father. Had the Lord not offered Himself to be the way, we would have been lost constantly. He has become the way that leads us to Him.

We are not saying: seek for the way; because the way Himself has come to you. Get up and walk in Him. Walk with Life- not with your feet, for many are able to walk well with their feet- but they take their lives into evil ways.

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<sup>12</sup> Commentary on John, Book 6:41

<sup>13</sup> Commentary on John, Book 6:105

<sup>14</sup> Epistle to the Eph. 9

<sup>15</sup> The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters, Ch 59

<sup>16</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 91:1

Often, even those who walk in godliness run outside the way. Therefore you may find people who live in godliness yet they are not Christians. They run well, yet they are not running in the way. The more they run the more they get lost, for they are running outside the way. However, if such people come and walk in the way, and stay steadfastly on course, their faith would become ever so strong. As long as they pursue godliness, they will never get lost! However, if they do not persevere in the way, how terrible will their suffering be! Those who know how to be godly will greatly lament! **It would have been better had they stopped on the way rather than to have walked steadfastly outside it**<sup>17</sup>.

\* The Lord told His disciples that they knew both matters: (where He was going and the way He would take). However, Thomas declared that he did not know- that is, he neither knew where the Lord was going nor the way to get there. Thomas was not aware that he was uttering lies. Although the disciples knew, yet they were unaware of that knowledge. **Therefore, the Lord convinced them that they actually knew what they thought they did not.** When the Lord said: **"I am the way, the truth, the life"- [6],** they realized that He is the truth and that they knew Him. Since they knew Him who is life, then they knew the way. Notice how they became convinced that they had known but they had not realized that they had known Him already<sup>18</sup>.

\* The Lord Himself was going back to Himself. Therefore to whom are we going other than to Him? What way are we taking other than through the Lord Himself? **Through Him we go to Him.** In the same manner, and through the same way, we, together with Him, get to the Father<sup>19</sup>.

\* The apostle Thomas was granted to see you, O Lord Jesus Christ, in order to ask you questions. **In spite of that, he could not comprehend until he accepted You within himself.**

I ask You because I know You are superior to me.

I ask and search as much as I can in order to extend myself into that place which is so high above me. There I would listen to You, O You who does not use an external voice in order to convince me of Your teachings.

I pray You to inform me, how do I come to You?

Since You have not come from Yourself but from the Father who has sent You; have You abandoned Yourself in order to come to us?

Truly, we know that You have disrobed Yourself by taking on the form of a slave. However, You have neither stripped Yourself of the Godhead to which You need to return; nor have You lost Him as though this needed to be retrieved...**You have come in the form of a slave, yet You were and still are residing where You came from. Moreover, You will be returning there without leaving the place to which You have come.**

Since You have come and have returned in this manner, then You are not only the way

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<sup>17</sup> Sermon on N T Lessons 91:4

<sup>18</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 69:1

<sup>19</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 69:2

through which we will travel to You, but You are also the way through which You Yourself will go and will return<sup>20</sup>.

\* It seems that the Lord is asking us: 'Which way will you take?' **"I am the way."**

Where are you going? **"I am the truth."**

Where will you live? **"I am the life."**

Let us therefore walk confidently in the way. However, let us be on guard due to the nets set up on either side.

The enemy would not dare to set up his nets on the way because the Lord Jesus Christ is the way. Nevertheless, the enemy will not stop from putting them up on the side tracks.

That is why the words of the Psalm say: '...they have spread a net by the wayside' (s 140:5). In another holy verse, it says: 'Be conscious that you are walking among hidden traps' (Sirach 9:13). These traps are not found in the **way but they are in the wayside and we would walk in them if we went there.**

What do you fear? Walk in the way!

Be fearful if you have abandoned the way.

That is why the enemy has been allowed to set traps on the wayside: for through pride you might forget the way and fall into the trap<sup>21</sup>.

\* The humble Lord Jesus Christ is the way: He is the truth and the life. The Lord is the Almighty Glorious God.

**If you walk humbly you will attain glory.**

If you are weak in the way you now are, do not belittle the humble, for you will remain gloriously steadfast and empowered<sup>22</sup>.

\* He is the way: 'The Word became flesh' (1:14)

He holds the way: 'He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a slave' (Phil 2:7).

He is the home to which we are going; and He is the way we will take to get there. May we go to Him and through Him. Therefore we shall not get lost<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 69:3

<sup>21</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons 92:1

<sup>22</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons 92:2

<sup>23</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons 42: 3

**St Augustine**

\* I find that the true way is the One who embraces me. He is the One who obstructs my wicked paths ( Hosea 2:6). He is the One who says in the Gospel: **“I am the way, the truth and the life”, [6]**<sup>24</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

\* The Lord Jesus Christ is not only God, but actually the true God: true God from true God since He Himself is the truth<sup>25</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* It is impossible to have any hope in redemption without knowing both (the Father and the Son) at the same time<sup>26</sup>.

**Caprianus, the Martyr**

\* Look within yourself to see yourself: .’.why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in you own eye?’ (Matt 7:3).

**The soul that exits from herself is invited to enter into it, for by exiting from herself she has exited from her Lord...**

The soul has withdrawn from Him, and does not live any more within herself. She resists herself, has been expelled from herself, and has fallen into matters that do not relate to her...

**The soul has neglected herself due to her love of the world.**

**Now, let her forget herself, but let it be due to her love for the Creator of the world!**<sup>27</sup>

**St. Augustine**

\* Many roads, or ways, open up before those who belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. Under His leadership, they need to travel on these roads before they can enter into the Holy Land. After leaving Egypt, and passing through the many stages mentioned in the Holy Book, they then rested: ‘These are the journeys of the children of Israel...at the command of the Lord’ (Numbers 33:1, 2)

Who is the One who planned the roads that the children of Israel had to take throughout these stages of the journey? Who other than God? He planned them by setting a pillar of fire and a cloud of light...

Now, meditate how the same thing is happening to you spiritually as you walk on your journey. If you have come out of Egypt, and are able to follow the Savior Jesus Christ-(Joshua), He will bring you into the land.

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<sup>24</sup> Letter 122:1

<sup>25</sup> <sup>25</sup> Of the Holy Spirit, Book 1:17:108

<sup>26</sup> Letter 73 to Jubauan: 17

<sup>27</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons 92:3

Moses (the Law) seems to be the Leader. However, Joshua is there at his side without openly leading.

Wait for Moses to lead until the moment when his time is up. Then when the fullness of time comes (Gal 4:4) the Lord Jesus Christ will lead...He takes over the role of teaching the people, and proclaiming publicly His laws. Therefore let us walk in them and pray: **‘Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes and I shall keep it to the end (Ps 119:33).**

We seek to follow Him since there is **“the way of Your statutes”**

It is not an easy way, and it does not need two or three or even ten days. Actually, we need all the days of our lives as we seek to find the way of His statutes.

In the same manner, we need to find **‘the way to witness’**: “I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies as much as in all riches.” (Ps 119:14). Besides, there is the **‘way of commandments’**, “I will run in the way of Your commandments, for You will enlarge my heart” (Ps 119:32)

All these roads are really one way telling us: **“I am the way”** (John 14:6). Let us, therefore, walk in all these roads until we reach our destination. That destination is ‘the Lord Jesus Christ’

. **Origen the Scholar**

\* A person does not become contaminated again with the earth’s dust after having washed his feet: the bride says: “I have washed my feet; how can I defile them?” (Song of Sol 5:3). Moses removed his sandals (made of dead animal hides) because he was walking on sacred ground (Ex 3:5)

The Holy Bible tells us that Moses did not put on his sandals again. He obeyed the instructions that God gave him, when he was on top of the mountain, to make the robes of the priests. They had to be sewed with gold, blue, purple, and red threads; and were to be done of fine linen material so that the beauty of the coverings would throw rays around them ( Ex 28:5,8). Moses did not use any ornaments on his feet, for the feet of priests had to be naked and uncovered. This is because a priest walks on holy ground, therefore he should not use shoes or sandals made of animal hides. This explains why the Lord Jesus Christ forbade his disciples to wear shoes for He commanded them to walk in the way of holiness (Matt 10:5, 6).

You know that road of holiness on which the Lord commanded His disciples to walk when He said: **“I am the way”** (John 14:6). **We will be unable to walk on that way unless we remove the dead clothes of the old man<sup>28</sup>.**

. **St. Gregory of Nicea**

**“If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also;  
And from now on you know Him**

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<sup>28</sup> Song of Songs: St Gregory, Bishop of Nicea: Translated by Dr George Nawar: Sermon11

### **And have seen Him.” [7]**

These are words of reproach uttered by the Lord Jesus Christ. Many of the fathers and prophets had recognized Him through the many symbols and shadows; and had desired to see and adhere to Him. He was their only hope. Sadly, the disciples who had lived with Him, had accompanied Him during His ministry, His journeys, and His retreats, had not come to know Him as they should have. Now, it was time for Him to depart from the world.

The Lord Jesus Christ desires that all believers get acquainted with Him and comprehend their fellowship with Him. This is the prayer of the apostles on behalf of all mankind. St. Paul accordingly wrote to the people of Ephesus: “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...that you may know what is the hope of His calling... 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” ( Eph 1:16-20).

The Lord’s words: **.”.. from now on you know Him and have seen Him” [7]**, indicate that the hour of the Cross had come now. The world hated the Lord and He was crucified because His followers loved the world. Believers see and recognize the all loving Father in the crucified Son who arose from the dead. The hour of the Cross is a divine opportunity offered to believers in order to recognize and see the Father. Through the Cross, they are reconciled to Him and enjoy stability within His embrace.

A person who truly knows the Lord Jesus Christ understands that He is the Son and the divine God whose kingdom is not of the world. He descended from heaven and ascended to it as He lives in the Father’s embrace. Therefore a person who comes to the Lord comes into the divine embrace of the Father, gets acquainted with Him, and His divine mysteries.

**St. John Chrysostom**, as well as other fathers, note that the Lord Jesus Christ sometimes told His disciples that they have seen and known Him; while at other times he told them that they have seen Him but have not known Him. At times, the Lord tells them that they have neither seen nor heard Him. So is there a conflict or contradiction? St. John Chrysostom makes a distinction between seeing the Son as flesh only which the disciples could touch with their hands and see with their eyes; and yet they could not see His essence or comprehend the brilliance of His divine glory. Therefore they looked but did not see. At the same time they did not know Him. **Even the disciples, who had seen and had adhered to Him, were unable to comprehend sufficiently His divinity up to the moment of His ascension and the coming of His Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Similarly, a person could know the Lord and yet not know Him. He would know the Lord without comprehending His true identity.**

A person who sees the reality of the Son, and gets deeply acquainted with Him, sees the Father and gets acquainted with Him.

\* The Lord Jesus Christ was not contradicting Himself. It is true that the disciples knew Him.



However, their knowledge was not as deep as it should have been. They knew God yet they still did not know the Father. Later on, when they received the Holy Spirit, He worked in them and offered them full knowledge.

That was the implication of the Lord's words: 'When you comprehend my essence and stature, you will also come to know the Father and His stature. **You will know and see Him through Me.**' To see indicates knowledge acquired through mental understanding. Often, there are people that we see but do not know. That explains the Lord's intention in saying 'have **seen Him.**' As for those unknown to us, we cannot know or recognize them. We are told in another verse that He is "seen by angels" (1Timothy 3:16). However, the core or essence is invisible; and in spite of that we are told that He is visible... to the extent of our ability to see.

**These words were said to inform you that those who see Him recognize Him who gave Him birth. However, they did not see Him in His revealed essence, for they saw Him in the form of the flesh.**

The Lord seeks **to equate seeing with knowing.** He says: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt 5:8). By pure in heart, the Lord refers to those who have become free of all sin- and not from adultery alone- for every sin defiles the soul.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**St. Augustine** comments on verses (7-10) and says that the Lord Jesus Christ stresses that a person who knows Him, knows the Father. This is because no one can come to the Father except through the Lord. While the Lord confirms His unity with the Father, yet He distinguishes between the Father and the Son<sup>29</sup>.

**Philip said to Him:**

**"Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." [8]**

When the Lord spoke about the Father, Philip yearned to see Him. However, he was not able to see Him yet.

**First:** He was unable to see the Father as He yearned to see the Divinity physically. He wanted to see with his physical eyes and in just the same way he was seeing the Lord Jesus Christ at that time.

**Second:** The cause of his disability to see was that he could not recognize the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He saw the Lord according to the flesh and without recognizing His Divinity.

**Finally:** He could not comprehend the unique unity of the Father and the Son as one in essence. Therefore he asked the Lord: **"...show us the father and it is sufficient for us."**

Philip's request resembles the request of Moses who yearned to see the glory of God (Ex 33:18). It is true that seeing God would be satisfying and sufficient. It is a request that brings joy

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<sup>29</sup> cf. St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, Tractate 70:1

to the heart. However, what was wrong with Philip's request was his ignorance concerning the unity of the Son and the Father. This is because he had not enjoyed the transfiguration like Peter, James and John. Besides, he also could not understand, up to the end, the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ; and he could not see the essence of His Divinity.

\* Philip reversed the order and said: **“show us the Father”** as though he had come to know the Lord Jesus Christ sufficiently well. However, the Lord set him on the right course and urged him to get acquainted with the Father through Him. Philip wanted to see the Father with his own physical eyes. He had probably heard about prophets who had seen God. Yet these cases had occurred as God condescended to appear to them; and the Holy Word says the following: “No one has seen God” (John 1:18); and “everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me” (6:45); and “you have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form” (John 5:37). In the Old Testament we are told: “...you cannot see My face, for no man shall see Me and live” (Ex 33:20).

What does the Lord Jesus Christ say? **“Have I been with you so long and yet you have not known Me, Philip?.”** The Lord did not say: ‘you have not seen Me’ but He said **‘...you have not known Me.’**

Philip could have asked: “Why do I need to learn about you? I am now asking to see Your Father and you are telling me that I did not know You. What is the relationship between this and my question?” Definitely, there is a strong link; for if the Lord is the One who is the Father and He is at the same time the Son, then it will be through Him that we will know the One who gave birth to Him. In order to distinguish between the two hypostasis, the Lord says: **“He who has seen Me, has seen the Father.”** He said these words so that no one would think that the Father Himself is identical with the Son.

Why did the Lord not answer by saying: ‘You are asking for things that are impossible and which are not permitted to any person, yet are possible to Me only?’ Because Philip said: “...it is sufficient for us.” Although he acknowledged that he knew the Lord, he revealed that he had not seen Him. Indeed, had Philip known the Father, he would have been able to see the Son. Therefore, the Lord told him: “...he who has seen Me has seen the Father.” It is as though He was telling Philip: “It is not possible to see Me or see the Father.” This is because Philip had based His knowledge upon his physical vision. Accordingly, he believed he had seen the Son. In the same manner, he wanted to see the Father. However, the Lord revealed to him that he had not seen even the Son Himself.

If anyone wishes to claim that knowledge is vision, then we would not contradict Him if the Lord Jesus Christ had said: “...He who knows Me knows the Father.” However, the Lord wanted to proclaim the fellowship in the essence. He who knows the Essence of the Lord, also knows the Essence of the Father. Is the Lord speaking here about the wisdom of the Father? Or about His goodness? That is not the case. The Lord is speaking about the reality of God, and His intrinsic essence... Indeed, the Lord reprimanded Phillip and said: “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me”? You have enjoyed all these teachings and have seen the miracles that I have done with authority. Besides, you have watched all the divine things that only the Father can do, such as the forgiveness of sins, revealing the hidden secrets, raising the

dead, and creating from the earth (eyes), and yet you have not known Me? The Lord had become incarnate and therefore said: "...yet you have not known Me?" You see the Father, so do not ask for more since you see Me in Him. Once you see Me, you should not become more inquisitive, for you know Him in Me.

\* "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in Me?" In other words: I can be seen in the same essence. **"The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority, but the Father who dwells in Me does the works"**, [10]. How is it that the Lord mentioned the words first and then the works? This resulted naturally as He could have said: 'It is the Father who speaks the words.' However, the Lord placed the two elements together: the teachings and the miracles. Probably the Lord said so because the words represented deeds as well. But how does the Father perform both? On another occasion, He says: "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me" (10:37). But, why does He say in this context that the Father does the works? Again, His intention is to reveal that there is no separation between the Father and the Son. His words convey the following: 'My Father does not work in one direction, while I work in another. In another context, the Lord says: "My Father has been working until now and I have been working" (5:17). In the first instance, the Lord indicates the harmony between the work of the Father and the Son. In the second, He underlines the divinity of the Father and the Son<sup>30</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Jesus said to him,  
"Have I been with you so long and yet you have not known Me, Philip?  
He who has seen Me has seen the Father;  
So how can you say, show us the Father?" [9]**

While the Lord reprimanded Philip, He actually was reprimanding all the disciples as He tells them all: "I will be with you." He did not say: 'you will be with Me', for He has descended and lived among us. He is the One who came to us and took the initiative of loving us. Our part is to progress towards Him and let our inner vision be enlightened. In doing so, we can progress and move towards Him. Let us walk with Him as He walks with us. He has descended to us, so that through His Spirit we may ascend to Him.

The Lord Jesus Christ came and lived with the disciples. It was not a fleeting vision, or a few minutes or hours as He had done in the past. He had appeared to the fathers and the prophets in visions, appearances, and dreams. However, He had come and lived among the disciples 'for a period and known measure of time.' That is why they should have seen both Him and the Father. They should have been able to comprehend the Father and be united to Him through the Lord Jesus Christ Truly, the person who has seen the Lord Jesus Christ has also seen the Father!

Can any creature in heaven or on earth dare to proclaim such a thing? Impossible! The Lord considered that anyone who has seen Him has seen the Father. This is achieved once a person discovers the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why the Lord reprimanded Philip: because he did not get to know the Lord after living with Him for about three years. The Lord reprimanded Philip not because he yearned to see the Father but because he did not comprehend

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<sup>30</sup> Homilies on St John, 74:2

who the Lord Jesus Christ was. Therefore, he had not enjoyed seeing the Father throughout all that time. Philip did not comprehend the full divinity of the incarnated Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 2:9). Indeed, the Father is in the Lord in the fullness of His divinity. Any work done by the Lord is done in unison with the Father and reflects one divine act.

\* Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? Indeed, anyone who looks at the Son sees the image of the Father. Notice what kind of image the Lord was talking about. The Lord Jesus Christ is the truth, the righteousness and the might of God. He is not dumb for He is the Word; He is not without feelings for He is Wisdom; He is neither a delusion nor foolishness for He is power; He is lifeless for He is life; and He is not dead for He is the Resurrection<sup>31</sup>.

\* In church, we know one image and that is the image of the invisible God. In the words of the Almighty we are told: "So God created man in His own image..." (Gen 1:27). This is the image which was spoken about to describe the Lord Jesus Christ: "...the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person..." (Heb 1:3). In the image, we comprehend the Father. The Lord Himself has said: "He who has seen Me, has seen the Father." This is because this image is not a separate one from that of the Father, it truly teaches us the oneness of the Trinity for the Lord says: "I and My Father are one" (10:30). He also says: "...all things that the Father has are Mine" (16:15). Besides, we are told about the Holy Ghost that He is the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. Accordingly, it is written: "...whatever He hears He will speak; He will tell you" (16:14)<sup>32</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* Anyone who becomes qualified to have a vision of the deity of the Son gets to enjoy the deity of the Father. These are not our own words. They are the words of the only Son who has said: **"Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father."** Briefly, do not separate Them and do not cause confusion.

Never say that the Son is different from the Father; do not accept those who say that at certain times the Father is the Father while at other times He is the Son. Such a statement would be bizarre and unthankful, besides being in opposition to the teachings of the church. In giving birth to the Son, the Father did not change and continued to be the Father. He gave birth to wisdom and did not lose wisdom as a result. He created power without becoming weak; He gave birth to God without losing His deity. He did not lose anything as a result of decline or change. Similarly, the One born was not deficient in anyway.

Perfect is the Father, and perfect is the Son.

God is the Father; and God is the One born: God from God. However, He calls the Father as His God without feeling embarrassed when the Lord says: "I am ascending to My Father and your Father and to My God and your God" (20:17)<sup>33</sup>.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

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<sup>31</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 1:7:50

<sup>32</sup> Sermon Auxentius, 32

<sup>33</sup> Essay 11:18

**St. Gregory of Nazinzy** speaks about the mystery of his attraction to the Trinity. For a long time, he had been forbidden to preach about that subject to his congregation, but in spite of that he did not abstain of preaching totally<sup>34</sup>.

\* May the divine Word lead me, at the end of a life filled with tears, to the eternal home. There I will find my Trinity and the brilliance of His combined sublimity<sup>35</sup>.

### **St. Gregory of Nazinzy**

\* Indeed, the Lord reprimanded the disciple, when He looked into his questioning heart, and perceived that he wondered if the Father was in any way better than the Son. This had led Philip to seek to know the Father. It was also why he did not know the Son for he believed that He was inferior to the Father. In order to correct this concept, the Lord told Philip: **“He who has seen Me has seen the Father, how can you say: show us the Father?”**... Why do you seek to create a gap between Two hypostasis who are alike? Why do you seek to get a distinct and separate knowledge of Two who are inseparable? What the Lord said after that was directed to all the disciples and not only to Philip. We should not limit His words to just that context so that with the Lord’s help we can interpret His words most carefully<sup>36</sup>.

\* Philip’s eyes were not wholesome enough to see the Father. Consequently, he could not see the Son who is equal to the Father. The Lord therefore took care of him and healed him with the medicines and creams of faith to strengthen his mental vision which was still weak. His mental eyes were still weak and unable to see such a great Light. The Lord asks him: **“Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in Me?”**

May the person who is disabled get to see what the Lord will reveal to him one day. May he pray not to see but to have faith and to believe. May he believe first, so that his sight, which gives him vision, might be healed<sup>37</sup>.

### **St. Augustine**

**“Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in Me?  
The words that I speak to you, I do not speak on My own authority,  
But the Father who dwells in Me does the works.”[10]**

Our vision of God is achieved in this world through faith and not through sight. That is why the Lord speaks in this passage about ‘faith.’ What kind of faith is it? Faith is believing that the essence of the Son is not complimentary to the Father. Each is within the Other as they are One essence. Therefore, anyone who seeks to see the Father and get to know Him, needs to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ “...is the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (John 1:18). Therefore, it is no surprise that the Lord says: “...he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me” (John 12:45).

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<sup>34</sup> De Vita Sua 1102. PG 37:1106A

<sup>35</sup> Poemata de Seipso, 11. PG 37:1165-66

<sup>36</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate, 70:3

<sup>37</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 38:4

\* There is no difficulty in understanding that the Son is in the Father as though in one source....the Son is in and with the Father. It is not as though He is found outside Him or in another age; but He is within the essence of the Father and shines through Him. This is similar to the shining sun, and the heat of the fire inherent in its essence. In both of these examples we find one element born of the other and yet it constantly shares existence with the other with being separated. One cannot exist without the other yet each maintains His true and natural traits<sup>38</sup>.

**St. Cyril the Great**

\* The Lord of truth says: **“I am in the Father and the Father in Me.”** Clearly the One hypostasis/personality in His totality is actually the Other personality in His totality. The Father does not overshadow the Son, and the Son is not diminished in the Father<sup>39</sup>.

\* The same feature of divinity is visible in both<sup>40</sup>.

**St. Gregory, Bishop of Nicea**

\* The Father has made all things wisely as everything is done through His own wisdom and power. Accordingly, it is written: “In wisdom you have made (your works)” (Ps 104:24). Similarly, God the Word does nothing without fellowship with the Father. He does not work without Him. Without the will of the Father, He who is totally holy would not have offered Himself to suffer and to be slaughtered in order to save the whole world (John 3:16, 17; Heb 10:10-12). Without the will of the Father, God the Word would not arise from the dead and ascend to life<sup>41</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

**“Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me,  
Or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.” [11]**

The Lord witnesses to Himself before His followers; and reveals His divine mysteries to them. He had said earlier: “Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true” (John 8:14). In this passage, the Lord is not speaking to Philip only. He is addressing all the disciples and offering a message to all His followers. The Lord also did many acts as a true testimony to reinforce His words. Indeed, His deeds bear witness that the Lord was doing the works of His Father and was speaking His words. The deeds and the words come from both the Father and the Son together. St. Paul says of the Father: “He has in these last days spoken to us by His Son” (Heb 1:2). Besides, the Lord says this about Himself: **“The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works” (John 14:10).**

\* When you hear the words “Father” and “Son” it is right not to think about anything else except that this is a confirmation of the One Essence and the shared relationship within that Essence. However, if that does not sufficiently convince you of the joint honor and essence, then learn

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<sup>38</sup> PG 73:12 a

<sup>39</sup> Against Eunomius, 2:4

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 6:3

<sup>41</sup> Of the Christian Faith, 4:6:69-70

about them by contemplating the deeds<sup>42</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* You can see that the Son is God and in Him you see God the Father. The Lord used the same expression in the Holy Gospel: **“I am in the Father and the Father in Me.”** He did not say: ‘I am the Father.’ Rather, He said: “...the Father dwells in Me and I in the Father.” He also did not say: ‘the Father and I are Me.’ Rather, He said: “I and the Father are One” so that we would not separate them and become confused concerning the Son of the Father.

They are One as far as honor is due to the One Divinity. God gave birth to God. They are One in their kingdom since neither the Father nor the Son rules separately. The Son does not act vainly towards the Father in the manner of Absalom, because the kingdom of the Father is the kingdom of the Son. They are One. There is no conflict or division between them. The will of the Father is the will of the Son: They are One. The creative deeds of the Lord Jesus Christ are not different than those of the Father for the Creator of all things is One. All have been created by the Father through the Son. The Psalmist says: “For He commanded and they were created” (Ps 33:9; 148:5).

**The Son is the ‘very God’ who has the Father in Him but without being the Father, since the Father did not become incarnate. Rather, the Son became incarnate . . . . The Father did not suffer for our sake; but He sent Him who would suffer . . .**

We do not call the Son as ‘Father’ in order to honor Him. Besides, we do not think that the Son is one of the Father’s created beings in order to honor the Father. Indeed, there is one Father whom we worship; and we worship Him through one Son without making any separation in worshipping them.

The only Son is proclaimed as He sits on the right hand of the Father, on a throne, before the beginning of all ages. This is not a promotion that the Son has received at a certain time after having suffered. Indeed, He has been sitting there since time infinite<sup>43</sup>.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* While we speak, the Lord Himself will not withdraw His presence from us and He is our teacher<sup>44</sup>.

Are His words deeds? Clearly, this is actually true. Certainly, whoever instructs his neighbor through his words does good deeds<sup>45</sup>.

\* The Lord attributes all the deeds He did to the Father who works through Him. The Father is not the God (born) from someone else. Yet the Son is the heavenly God who is truly equal to the Father and yet born of Him. Hence, the Father is God who is not born of God; and He is the

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<sup>42</sup> Homilies of St John, 74:2

<sup>43</sup> Essay 11:16,17

<sup>44</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 71:1

<sup>45</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 71:1

Light who is not born of the Light; whereas the Son is God, is born of God, and is Light out of Light<sup>46</sup>.

**St Augustine**

### **3. Prayer and Comfort/Rest**

**"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me,  
The works that I do he will do also  
And greater works than these he will do,  
Because I go the Father." [12]**

Having revealed His unique unity with the Father, and that what He says and does proceed from the Father who lives in Him, the Lord Jesus Christ clarifies that this reality provides redemption and life. Genuine belief in the ones of the Father and the Son grants the ultimate power to do the deeds of the Lord who lives in the believer. Declaring the Father and knowing Him leads the believer to experience the works of the Father within himself. St. Paul accordingly says: "...that Christ may dwell in your hearts...that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us (Eph 3:17-20). For faith grants knowledge and inspires the experience to take, possess, and act according to the power of God: "...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure..." (Phil 2:13).

This is the key to the comfort granted to the disciples after they had learned that the Lord Jesus Christ was leaving them. They were filled with sadness and felt like an abandoned flock with no shepherd. They felt they had no one to help or support them. This was intensified by their awareness of the extent of hatred the Jewish leaders harbored against them.

That is why the Lord Jesus Christ assured them that He would not leave them in their weakness. He would grant them the power to do great deeds, miracles, and wonders that would support them. In this manner, they could do the same deeds as those the Lord had done, and even greater ones. This would not diminish Him, or create confusion between the Lord's entity as the only Son of God and their stature as being His children by adoption as well as being His very own disciples. Indeed, whatever they would do would be done in His name, through faith in Him, and for His glory. In fact, the Lord is not only the wonder Worker but He is the One who grants His disciples to perform wonders.

**Why did the Lord tell His disciples that they would do deeds greater than what He has done?**

- 1- He did miracles during the three years of His ministry on earth; whereas they would do miracles throughout the ages and to the end of time. The Lord did miracles within the boundaries of the land where He lived; whereas the disciples would do miracles and wonders throughout the whole world and wherever they would preach. They would do miracles that the Lord had not done because there was no need for them in His time: such as the miracle of moving the mountain which Simon the Cobbler did in the days of El Moaz Eldin Allah Elfatimy.

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<sup>46</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 71:1



- 2- The Lord laid the foundations of preaching and paid the price through the Cross. However, He allowed preaching to become widespread after His ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples. Therefore greater works took place. This was evident as the faith spread all over the world and was no longer limited to Judea.

The mystery of the strength granted to the disciples is revealed in the Lord's words: **"...because I go to my Father..."** [12]. The Lord would intercede for them. He would carry them to the Father as members in His body. Consequently, they would be working through the power of the Father; and the Son would send the divine Comforter to them- who is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would work in and through them on His behalf and for His glory.

\* It is God's will to grant His disciples great powers. It is His will that what the Lord did during His life on earth would also be done by His servants in His name... He gave them the power to raise the dead. Though God could have reinstated the sight of Saul, He sent him to His disciple Ananias. Through his blessing, the eyes of Saul recovered the vision he had lost<sup>47</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* The Lord wanted to reveal that He could do not only these works, but greater works than these and many more. He did not say: 'I can do greater works than these,' but what is more astonishing is that He said that 'He could give others the power to do greater works . . . in other words, the Lord was saying to the disciples: 'it is now up to you to work and do wonders because I am leaving'<sup>48</sup>.

\* Do you not see that the Lord is the One doing these works? He said: "...that I do..." He did not say: 'I ask the Father', but rather: **"the Father may be glorified in the Son"**...all the miracles which the disciples did have been done by the Lord and the hand of the Lord was with them (Act 11:21)<sup>49</sup>.

\* Do you not see His authority? What others do is actually done by Him . . . So does the Lord possess no authority to carry out the works He does Himself, and if He does not do them through the Father, how can this be true? So why did He say the rest of the words in that same context? He said them to confirm His words, and to reveal that all His earlier teachings demonstrated His voluntary humbleness. In finishing His words by saying: **"...I go to My Father..."**, the Lord was telling the disciples: 'I am not going to perish for I will retain the honor due to Me in My heavenly dwelling.' He intended to comfort His disciples through these words. They seemed unable to grasp His teachings about the resurrection and considered that to be a morbid matter. In other instances, the Lord had promised to grant them such powers. He had tried to alleviate their situation in every possible manner as He promised that He would be with them always; besides investing them with them a greater power<sup>50</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

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<sup>47</sup> Concerning Repentance, 1:8:334

<sup>48</sup> Homilies on St John, 74:2

<sup>49</sup> Homilies on St John, 74:2

<sup>50</sup> Homilies on St John, 74:2

\* We believe that truly the Lord does ‘**greater**’ works when a person conquers-while he is still in the flesh and liable to be trapped due to frailty- in the war with the demons and evil powers. Then the only weapon which that person has is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and his own personal faith in Him. Such a victory is greater than any other which that person may achieve through his own might.

### Origen the Scholar

\* The Lord has promised that He Himself would do these greater works. May the slave not boast of being greater than the Master. The Lord says that they would do greater works than those He has done already. However, He is the One working in all things, whether within His disciples or through them. It would not be as though they were self empowered. Consequently, the words of praise directed to Him say: “I will love you, O Lord, my strength...” (Ps 18:1).

What are these greater works?

Are they revealed when the shadow of the disciples heal the sick (Acts 5:15)? For healing by the passing of a shadow is greater than touching the hem of the clothes of the One who possesses healing power (Matt14:36). In spite of that, what the Lord recommends is the effective power of His words. Listen to His words: **“The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does the works” [10].**

What works is the Lord referring to other than the words that He has uttered?

The disciples heard and believed, and their faith was the fruit of these same words. When the disciples preached the Gospel with these same words, the numbers and nations converted were far greater in contrast to the few who heard and believed at the time of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no doubt that this was a greater accomplishment<sup>51</sup>.

\* The Lord immediately added these words: **“...because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in my name, I will do it”, [12-14].** What He had said earlier that: ‘...he (the believer) will do...’, He now reiterates and says: “...I will do....” It is as though the Lord was saying: ‘It should not seem impossible because whoever believes in Me cannot be greater than I. I am the One who will do greater works than those that I am doing now. I will do greater works through those who believe in Me more than those works I did without them. However, I am the One working through a believer . . . see what greater works the Lord has done when believers preached. These were greater then the deeds done by the Lord when He was actually addressing His hearers<sup>52</sup>.

\* He works in us, yet He does not work without us<sup>53</sup>.

St. Augustine

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<sup>51</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 71:3

<sup>52</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 72:1

<sup>53</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 72:2

**"And whatever you ask in my name,  
That will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" [13].**

The Lord Jesus Christ stresses that the deeds that the disciples would do would be done through His name. Indeed, He is the doer. This does not leave out the role of the Father, for the Lord directs our attention to pray to the Father. When He tells us: "...**whatever you ask...**," the Lord requires us to ask the Father for sublime matters that are worthwhile and which appear to be of great importance to us. We should ask the Father to make us worthy to be truly His children, bearing the image of His only Son. Consequently, we live in Christ 'who became for us wisdom from God- and righteousness and sanctification and redemption ...,' (1Cor1: 30).

\* The Father works through the Son in order that the Son becomes glorified through the Father. Moreover, the Son works through the Father so that He might be glorified through the Son. This is due to the fact that the Father and the Son are One and the same<sup>54</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**"If you ask anything in My name, I will do it" [14].**

As we pray and present our needs to the Father, we call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We therefore pray to attain His righteousness and holiness; and Lord Himself undertakes the work in us, for He says: "**I will do it...**," [14]. By calling on His name, we reveal that we are invoking His divine presence. That is why- in all the divine mysteries, as well as in our personal prayers, the priest or a believer proclaims: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" and so prays for the presence of the Holy Trinity.

The Lord's physical departure strengthened their position since He would work through them for the glory of the Father. The Father sees the disciples through Him and answers all their prayers. In other words, the Lord's ascension empowered them to work through the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that the Lord would send. His ascension to the heavens would remove all the distances between Him and the Father. Indeed, the presence of the Son in a glorified body reflects their actual presence as members in that body.

They had to pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and through His redeeming deed which gave joy to the Father. Clearly, they would not depend on their worldly power or rights as they brought their requests or prayers before the Father.

#### **4-The Other Comforter**

**"If you love Me, keep My commandments." [15].**

The Lord spoke earlier about faith as a basis for divine knowledge. Now He is forming the building over the foundations, and this consisted of keeping His commandments. The Lord Jesus Christ accepted to carry us within Him and brings us to God who would fund pleasure in believers and answer their needs. On their part, believers need to love Him and obey His commandments. In this manner, they would find great comfort. Indeed, their love would be

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<sup>54</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 73:4

demonstrated in a practical manner through their obedience of His laws. Moreover it would grant them the power to work especially in difficult times.

\* We need to work and practice obedience to His commands at all times. It should never be a mere exhibit of words . . . God requires love that is demonstrated through deeds. That is why the Lord told His disciples: "He who loves Me, loves my commandments." Having told them: "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it"; He did not want them to think that they only had to ask. Therefore He added: **"If you love Me, keep My commandments"**<sup>55</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The Holy Spirit is the Comforter whom the Lord promised to send to His disciples. However, notice the way in which that promise is given: **"If you love Me, keep My commandments, and I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper..."** (15:16). Yet, how can we love in order to receive the One who will enable us to love God (Rom 3:5), unless we obey His commands? . . . let us understand that a person who loves is actually filled with the Holy Spirit, and through Him that person becomes qualified to possess Him who is more perfect. Indeed, by receiving Him who is greater, our love grows greater too.<sup>56</sup>

\* The promise is not invalid to those who have not yet attained the Holy Spirit or to those who have Him. The Comforter is offered to the person who does not have Him so that He might receive Him. He is also offered to the person who has received Him in order to get filled more abundantly. If it was not true that the Spirit could be received in varying measures, than the saintly Elisha would not have told Elijah: "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me" (2kings 2:9)<sup>57</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**"And I will pray the Father,  
And He will give you another Helper,  
That He may abide with you forever." [16]**

When the Lord fulfilled the act of redemption on the Cross, He ascended into the heavens in order to send the Holy Spirit. In this manner, He has granted His Church the sweet fellowship in the Cross, the experience of the powerful resurrection, and the promise of the heavenly life. That is the other Comforter who draws from the treasures of the Lord Jesus Christ and grants them to us.

The work of the Holy Spirit is ever so constant in the life of the Church, and continues to the end of time. Ultimately, He will present her as the bride who carries the hypostasis of her heavenly bridegroom.

The word '**paraclete**' is translated as 'Comforter.' It also means lawyer or advocate, for He stands in defense of the Lord's Church and against her enemies.

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<sup>55</sup> Hom 75 PG 59:438

<sup>56</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 74:1-2

<sup>57</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 74:2

The Lord calls Himself the '**Comforter**' since He calls the Holy Spirit '**another Helper.**' The Targum labeled the days of the Lord's life as 'days of comfort.' Indeed, the Lord comforted His disciples when He physically lived among them. When He departed, He sent to them His Holy Spirit to be another Comforter.

The request or the prayer mentioned here is not mere lip service for the Lord offered Himself as a sacrifice of love on behalf of mankind. This entitles His believers to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit who would dwell in them. Actually, He had not ceased from dwelling in man since his fall into sin. This gift involves actually receiving the Giver of all gifts. It is a constant gift that accompanies a believer until he leaves this life. The Holy Spirit would never abandon a person as long as that person welcomes and responds to Him. Thus the Lord first presented the basis of knowledge and that is faith. Then He built upon the basis (faith) the deeds of love demonstrated in obedience to His commands. Finally, He sent to us the Holy Spirit from the Father who has the sole power to achieve all this.

The Lord Jesus Christ reveals in the passage the integrated role of the Holy Trinity in fulfilling the plan to glorify us eternally. The Father has sent His Son to comfort us, and the Son offers Himself up to redeem the world. Now the Father would receive the Son when He ascends. In this manner, the Father receives the universal Church-from Adam to the end of time-as represented in the Lord who is the head. He received the first Comforter and is greatly pleased with Him as He fulfilled the redemption of mankind. In doing so, the Lord proclaimed in a practical way, the love of the Father. When the Lord is received in heaven, that Comforter remains comforted on behalf of all mankind who are still in the flesh. However, He is always present in the midst of His Holy Church. Besides, the Lord prays the Father to send another Helper who fills, enlightens, sanctifies, and leads the Church. He does so without departing or separating Himself from the Father.

In this manner, the reciprocal relationship of love among the Holy Trinity who work for the redemption and eternal glorification of mankind is revealed.

\* If you wondered: 'Why did the Lord say: "I will pray the Father" . . . ?' Our answer would be: Because if He had said: "I will send Him, people would not have believed Him. Therefore He said: **"I will pray the Father"**, in order to make His words acceptable to them.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**"... even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive,  
Because it neither sees Him nor knows Him;  
But you know Him,  
For He dwells with you, and will be in you." [17]**

When the first Comforter, the Lord Jesus Christ, ascended, He would pray that another Comforter be sent and that would be His Holy Spirit. When He who said: "I am the truth" (14:16) ascended, He sent the Spirit of truth to them. And just as the world rejected the first Comforter, the Truth Himself, so they would reject the other Comforter who is the 'Spirit of Truth' . . . through this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us," (1Jn 3:24). The Holy Spirit grants us to confront the sharp conflict between the spirit of the

world and the Spirit of the Truth. This is because the world cannot tolerate, accept, or see the truth. Indeed, the world resists it, and is unable to see or know Him. Consequently, ‘...if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in Him,’ (1Jn 2:15).

The spirit of the world is a spirit of lies and deceit. The possessions, joys, and pleasures it offers quickly become transformed into neglect, grieving, and bitterness. In this manner, truth cannot find a place in the world just as the love of the world cannot find a place in the eternal divine truth. What God offers is the unchanging truth. That is why the Lord says: "My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give you," (Jn 14:27). " . . . I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, your joy no one will take from you," (Jn 16:22) "Whoever drinks of this water that I shall give him will never thirst," (Jn 4:13). This is the nature of Truth and His gifts and blessings. These are not in harmony with the nature of the world, or its spirit and its passing gifts.

The Spirit of Truth which the world does not know is the basis of knowledge in believers. He dwells and remains with them. He lives in them and they know Him as long as they remain steadfast in Him.

The ‘**Spirit of Truth**’ who testifies that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Truth, attracts souls to accept His message and get acquainted with His mysteries.

.” . . **the world cannot receive Him**” does not refer to those who have loved Him and carried His name. It refers to those who find their pleasure in the lust of the flesh and the eyes, and the pride of life (1Jn 2:16). These are afflicted with spiritual blindness and corrupt minds. They are unable to see or comprehend the Spirit of truth.

“... **but you know Him**”: in the Vulgate and in some transcripts, the words used are “...**you will know Him**.” When they will be armed with belief in the Lord, especially after His resurrection, they would be prepared to know the promised Holy Spirit. Moreover, they would enjoy His dwelling and presence in them. This would occur on the day of Pentecost. The Lord constantly attracts us to that which is higher than ourselves.

\* The Lord said: “... **the world cannot receive Him because it neither sees Him nor knows Him**” in order to prevent them from thinking that there would be another person. These words served to clarify to the disciples that they should not expect to visually see that other “... **Helper**.”

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Some Syrian thinkers comment on the words: ‘...The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters...’ and find that they seem to convey the ‘fostering warmth’ of the Shepherd. In other words, God was preparing the nature of the waters so that it would give birth to living creatures. This in itself provides sufficient response and evidence to some people who question the creative power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>58</sup>

**St Basil the Great**

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<sup>58</sup> Homilia 2 in Hexameron. PG 29:43B

\* The (temporary) love of the world has no other eyes than the visible ones, whereas the Holy Spirit cannot be seen except by the invisible eyes<sup>59</sup>.

\* He is seen in an intangible manner, and it is impossible to possess any knowledge of the Holy Spirit if He does not dwell in us<sup>60</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

## **5- The Lord's Appearance to the Disciples**

**“I will not leave you orphans  
I will come to you.” [18]**

The disciples had become so attached to the Lord. They were just as children who get attached to their father. That is why when He was about to leave them, to go through the Cross, and ascend to heaven, the Lord wanted to reassure them that He would not leave them as orphans. In other words, they would not be like children deprived of their parent's tender love, guidance, and support. The Lord did not want to leave them as a prey to misery and deprivation. By leaving them, as He was going to the Cross and then ascending to heaven, they would suffer greatly as orphans. The Lord would no longer be with them in the flesh. However, He would transform their orphaned state into one of sublime and new adoption by sending His Holy Spirit who would grant them to become the children of God through baptism.

The Jews used to consider teachers as their fathers, and the students as their children. Thus, in leaving the disciples, the Lord seemed to let his disciples become like those who had no father. As He walked in the valley of death, and then ascended into heaven, the Lord would send them another Teacher. He would be their Comforter, defender and leader on their way to attain the joy of the divine fatherhood. They would not feel any deprivation because His Holy Spirit would dwell in them. Concerning Himself, the Lord would come to them, after arising from death, and He would appear to them. In the same manner, after His ascension, He would come at the end of time to carry them into glory. He also comes to us constantly by His Spirit. He is present in our hearts and in our midst.

\* As the disciples did not understand the words spoken to them, and were not sufficiently comforted, the Lord told them: **“I will not leave you orphans.”** They had prayed for that more than anything else. The Lord's words **“I will come to you”** clarify that He would come again to them.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“A little while longer and the world will see Me no more,  
But you will see Me.  
Because I live  
You will live also.” [19]**

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<sup>59</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractae 74:4

<sup>60</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 74:5

The world could see the Lord Jesus Christ due to His incarnation. However, they could not see Him at all due to their inability to comprehend His divinity. Now that He would be crucified and would die, the world could see Him no more- neither according to the flesh nor according to His divinity since He was about to leave and disappear from the world. Nevertheless, the disciples were going to be able to perceive His divine mysteries and experience the power of His resurrection working within them. Therefore although they would be deprived from seeing Him physically, they would enjoy life in its essence and live just as He lives. They would share the words of St. Paul and say: "...God... made us alive together with Christ" (Eph 2:5). Hence "...it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me," (Gal 2:20).

\* The Lord is telling them: 'I will come to you in a manner that is different from my coming the first time. His words: "Because I live, you will live also" indicate that the Cross will not separate us until the end of time. 'It would just make Me disappear for a short while only.' We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ was referring not only to His present life, but also to the life to come.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* We were dead when we did not know Him and lived just for ourselves. However, by His death, He now lives in His own right and for our sakes too. Because He is alive, we are alive as well. Left on our own, we would be overcome by death, for we cannot attain life through our own power<sup>61</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**"At that day you will know that I am in My Father,  
And you in Me, and I in you." [20]**

Just as I will arise from the dead, so will you as well. My resurrection will confirm your resurrection. Being alive, I will intercede for you before the Father. Death will not be able to destroy you. Indeed, you shall live through my grace and you will enjoy the fellowship of my glory.

After the Lord's death, the unbelievers could not see the Lord. Yet He appeared many times to believers. And to this day, believers enjoy beholding Him within the depth of their souls. The Lord Jesus Christ is still alive as He is present in His Church and in the lives of believers. They experience the life of the Lord who lives within them.

By saying: ". . . you in Me", the Lord proclaims that He has taken the form (put on) of mankind through His incarnation. His words: "...and I in You" indicate His presence in us, and this enables us to enjoy fellowship in His divine nature. By setting up His kingdom within us, He has granted us to become members in His Body.

The Lord granted us the mystery of the holy Eucharist when He said: "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him" (Jn 6:56) and ". . . so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me," (Jn 6:57).

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<sup>61</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 75:3



\* These words refer to the Essence (the Divine One). To the disciples, the Lord's words indicate the oneness of thought and the divine support.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Today, too, He dwells in us and we in Him. This is what we believe in today and this is what we will know in the fullness of time. What we now know we hold through faith; what we will get to know will come through actual revelation<sup>62</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, And I will love him and manifest Myself to him,” [21]**

The true testimony of our love for the Lord Jesus Christ is our obedience to His law and commandments. It is evident in a love that is consistent, dignified, and obedient. It results in our will being in harmony with the will of our Beloved, and in our behavior that is in agreement with divine wisdom.

1- The fruits of this practical love is the believer's enjoyment of the Father's love to him, of His tenderness and His embrace; for the Father loves the Son and those whom the Son loves.

2. A believer also enjoys the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for “... **I will love him**”, [21] as a brother and Savior. He will grant the believer forgiveness of sins and the joy of everlasting life.

3. The Lord, moreover, will reveal Himself to the believer: “... **manifest Myself to him**,” [21]; for He will shine on his thoughts as well as on his heart. Hence the believer will enjoy spiritual enlightenment.

In this manner, the Lord Jesus Christ associates the joy of divine love with actual living and experience based on obedience to the Divine law. He also ties it with divine revelation or Divine presence that is announced in the Holy Spirit who grants enlightenment. In this manner, a person who wishes to see God needs to love, and to translate this love into living and applying the divine commandments.

\* It is not enough to just possess the commandments. We need to observe and apply them to the full.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* He who memorizes (my commandments) and observes them in his life: he who says them with his lips and applies them to his conduct . . . he who continues to listen to them with his ears and applies them in his acts . . . he who has deeds and perseveres in them according to My commandments: such a one “**loves Me**.” Love is proclaimed through deeds, whereas literal applications without fruit are mere words (for love)<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 75:4

<sup>63</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 75:5

## St. Augustine

\* Each word that the Lord utters reveals the mercy of God, His righteousness, and His wisdom. His words could be powerful to the ears if they listened obediently. That is why a hard- hearted and wicked person, who listens unwillingly, cannot comprehend the Divine Wisdom. Indeed, such a person would be crucifying the Lord who has proclaimed these teachings.

Therefore we need to find out if we are listening obediently to the Lord's commandments. For He has said: "If you love Me keeps My commandments . . . he who has My commandments, keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him," (Jn 14:15, 21).

**Do you see how the Lord uses His commandments as an instrument through which He manifests Himself?** The greatest commandment is to love God and our neighbors. This is achieved once we reject all temporary matters and our minds become steadfast<sup>64</sup>.

St. Mark the Ascetic

**Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said to Him: "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" [22]**

When the Lord had given these divine promises, one of the disciples expressed his astonishment that the Lord would reveal Himself to the disciples and not to the whole world. This is what Judas (not Iscariot) expressed; and he was the brother of James (Lk 6:16). He was related to the Lord according to the flesh (Matt 13:55) and he wrote the Book of Jude.

Judas was astonished as he felt that he and the rest of the disciples had received a sublime gift and a vision of the Messiah and His deeds. The world did not enjoy these matters. Yet, there remained one question: did Judas realize at that moment what the Lord was proclaiming about Himself, or was he still thinking of the Lord as an earthly king? Did he think he would interact with Him physically only? However, the Lord intended to draw all their thoughts towards heaven.

**St. John Chrysostom** finds that the Lord Jesus Christ had promised to reveal Himself to His disciples; and this made them think that He would appear to them in their dreams. They could not image that He would rise from the dead and truly ascend into heaven. They thought He would appear in their dreams and as part of their imagination. When they did not dare to ask Him, He corrected their understanding by telling them that He would come with the Father and live within them: the disciples would be like a house in which the Father and the Son would dwell.

\* Do you not see how their souls were filled with fear? Judas was confused and frustrated as he thought he would see something like an apparition of a dead one in a dream. In order to remove such imagination, hear the Lord's words: **"We will come to him and make Our home with him," [23]** . . . this is a matter that is unrelated to dreams<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> Philokalia, Book 1

<sup>65</sup> Homilies on St John, 75:3

## St. John Chrysostom

**Jesus answered and said to him:  
“If any one loves Me, he will keep My word,  
And My Father will love him, and We will come  
And make our home with him.” [23]**

The Lord started to address His disciples as well as all those who believed and loved Him. This divine promise is a general one made to all: the Father and the Son would transform the heart into a divine home or temple.

Whereas Judas was astonished by the Lord proclamation, yet the Lord speaks collectively about Himself and the Father combined. It is as though He intends believers to make the mental association of His true status as He ascends to the Father and exists with Him. He seems to be asking them: ‘Do you wish me to proclaim Myself? I am inseparable from the Father! I dwell with Him in heaven; and when I dwell within your hearts, the Father and I will dwell together within you.

**\* The gifts that the Holy Spirit, allocated to each one, are granted by the Father through the Word.** Everything that the Father has is also owned by the Son. Therefore the gifts granted by the Son through the Holy Spirit are the Gifts of the Father. When the Holy Spirit dwells in us, the Word also dwells in us who grants the Holy Spirit, and so does the Father in whom the Word dwells. This is consistent with the words: “We will come to him and make our home with him,” (Jn 14:23). Indeed, where there is light, there are rays as well; and where there are rays there is energy and hidden grace.

This is what the apostle proclaimed when he wrote his Second Epistle to the Corinthians: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all . . ." (2Cor 13:14). This blessing and gift is granted through the Holy Spirit: proceeding from the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit.

Just as the gifts are granted from the Father through the Son, so we cannot enjoy and have a share in these gifts except through the Holy Spirit. **Indeed, when we have fellowship with Him, we are granted the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Himself.**

This fact indicates the unity of the work of the Trinity. The apostle does not intend to convey that gifts are given in small parcels or as a talent granted by each of the hypostasis of the Trinity separately. The gifts that are granted are given through the Holy Spirit and come from the one and only God.

## St. Athanasius the Apostolic

**\* The proof of love is proclaimed in deeds.** That is why St. John writes in his Epistle: “He who says: ‘I know Him’ and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,” (1Jn 2:4). Our love is genuine when we keep our will in harmony with His commandments. A

person who wanders here and there to satisfy his/her wicked lusts does not love God truly, for he opposes God as revealed by his acts and will<sup>66</sup>.

### St. Gregory (the Great)

\* In this passage there is a kind of deeper proclamation of God. It is a matter that is unknown to the wicked who do not accept any revelation about God the Father and the Holy Spirit. This is also true about the Son about whom they know nothing other than His physical aspect . . . therefore it will bring them condemnation rather than joy, and punishment rather than reward<sup>67</sup>.

\* In order to avoid the assumption that the Father and the Son are together and exclude the Holy Spirit as they built mansions for their beloved ones, let us remember what was said earlier concerning the Holy Spirit: **"...the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him, nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you, and will be in you,"** [17].

Through these words, you can learn that the Holy Spirit is also with the Father and the Son; and He also dwells in the saints. In other words, He reigns as the one God in His temple.

The Holy Trinity comes to us just as we go to Him.

He comes to bring support. We come to offer obedience. He comes to enlighten us. We come to receive vision.

He comes to fill us up and we come to enfold and embrace Him. Consequently, our vision of Him will not be an exterior one but an interior revelation.

The indwelling of the Holy Trinity is permanent and is never a temporary one.

The Son does not proclaim Himself in this manner to the world. He has spoken about the world in a previous statement, and He promptly added: "He who does not love Me does not keep My words," [24]. Those who are disobedient will not see the Father or the Holy Spirit. They will see the Son only for a short while: they will see Him as the One who will judge them rather than as a Source of blessings. They will not see Him as God who is equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit and invisible with them. On the contrary, they will only see His human aspect and as the One who voluntarily accepted to be a subject of derision throughout His sufferings. Yet He will be the subject of terror when He comes to judge the world<sup>68</sup>.

\* The kind of dwelling which the Lord promises in the future has specific attributes or qualities . . . it is a spiritual dwelling that is achieved internally in the mind; whereas the other is physical and is externally proclaimed to the eye and ear (and which refers to seeing the Lord Jesus Christ during His ministry on earth).

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<sup>66</sup> Hom.30. PL 76:1220. Forty Gospel Homilies

<sup>67</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 76:2

<sup>68</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 76:4

One dwelling brings eternal blessings to those who accept it. The other involves time and those who await salvation.

In the first case, the Lord will not withdraw Himself away from those who love Him. In the second case, He would come and then depart; therefore He says: **"These things I have spoken to you while being present with you"** [25]. The Lord spoke to them at that time in a tangible manner as He was physically present with them<sup>69</sup>.

**St Augustine**

\* The Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ dwells in those who carry His image. We are talking here about the form and the features . . . for God offers in His promises to the righteous: "I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people" (2Cor 6:16; Lev 26: 12; Jer 3:23, 32:38; Zech 8:8). The Lord also says: **"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our home with him,"** (Jn 14:23)...

In other parts of the Holy Bible, we are told about the mystery of the resurrection. It is addressed to those whose ears have been divinely opened. We are told that the Temple which had been destroyed will be rebuilt by using living and precious stones. This allows us to comprehend how everyone who is led by the word of God to struggle with others on the path of purity would be precious stones in the Temple of the only one almighty God.

Consequently, St. Peter says: "...you also as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ..." (1Peter 2:5). St. Paul also says: "... having being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,"(Eph 2:20). There is also a similar passage to these words in Isaiah that implicitly refer to this subject and where the prophet addresses Jerusalem and says: ". . . I will lay your stones with colorful gems, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of crystal, and all your walls of precious stones. All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children," (Is 54:11-14).

Therefore among the righteous, some are colorful gems, some are sapphires, while others are crystal or precious stone. In other words, there is a wide range of types...<sup>70</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

**"He who does not love Me does not keep My words;  
And the word which you hear is not Mine,  
But the Father's who sent Me." [24]**

Having spoken about His yearning to come with the Father and dwell in their hearts as in holy temples, the Lord warns believers about love for the world. Its futile pleasures would prevent them from keeping His words and which are also the words of the Father. In loving the world they would be proclaiming their love for the darkness and not for the light. As a result, there would be no place for Him and the Father to dwell in them.

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<sup>69</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 77:2

<sup>70</sup> Fr Tadros Y Malaty: The Church According to Origen the Scholar. Translation by Dr George Botros

\* It is as though the Lord Jesus Christ is stating the following: ‘A person who does not observe His words neither loves the Son nor the Father. If observing the commandments are proof of love, and these commandments are My Father's, then a person who observes them loves not only the Son but loves the Father as well.

**St John Chrysostom**

## **5-The Comforter and Teacher**

**"These things I have spoken to you while being present with you." [26]**

The Lord Jesus Christ encourages the disciples to receive the other Comforter as He is the Teacher who does not compete with the Lord. Indeed, the Comforter will remind the disciples of the Lord's words, and will reveal to them other mysteries: **"He will teach you all things"** [26] as He is the Spirit of Wisdom. He will not bring a new gospel but rather will work in them to remind them of the Lord's gospel, and to reveal to them matters they were unable to accept before.

**"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My Name,  
He will teach you all things,  
And bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" [26].**

\* The Lord speaks of the Holy Spirit as the Comforter due to the anxiety the disciples felt at that time.

The Lord spoke these words as He charged them to endure patiently their separation from Him. This difficult experience would bring great blessings to them.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* The Holy Spirit does not dwell in a person without the presence of the Father and the Son too. Neither does the Son come without the Father or the Holy Spirit, nor does the Father come without them. Their indwelling is inseparable. Yet they could reveal themselves separately in symbols borrowed from the creation. Even though they are never separate in their one essence<sup>71</sup>.

**St Augustine**

\* The Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit. The Father sends the Holy Spirit as we are told: **"I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper"** [16]. The Son, too, sends the Holy Spirit as He says: "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth. . ." (15:26). Therefore if the Son and the Holy Spirit send one another just as the Father also does, then none submits to the other or is lower in rank for they all are integrated in one authority<sup>72</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

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<sup>71</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons:21:33

<sup>72</sup> On the Holy spirit, Book 3:1:8

\* The Greek word '**Paraclete**' means in Latin 'a lawyer' or 'comforter.' He is called 'lawyer' for He intercedes before the Father's judgment seat on behalf of sinners.

The One who is of the same essence as the Father and the Son, is said to jealously intercede for sinners. He encourages those He teaches to do so; and that explains St. Paul's words: "...the Spirit Himself makes intercessions for us with groaning which cannot be uttered," (Rom 8:26)...

This Spirit is the same One who is considered as the Comforter for He revives the hope of forgiveness in those who grieve over their sins. He lifts their hearts out of sorrow and despair. He promises to teach them everything. If the Spirit is not present in the heart of the hearer, then the words of the teacher would not be beneficial.

It is not appropriate for a person to attribute to his teacher the things he has come to understand from him: Indeed the apparent and external teacher may vainly exert himself if there is no internal teacher. In that context, St. John says: ". . . the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things . . . just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him," (1Jn 2:27).

No one learns through mere hearing if his heart has not been anointed by the Spirit: "**He will . . . bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you**" as He grants you knowledge. This is possible as He knows things that are hidden, but are not of lesser importance<sup>73</sup>.

**St. Gregory the Great**

The Church embodies the great fellowship in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. She is a blessing of love and life granted by the Father of light. The Lord Jesus Christ is present within her as she calls Him in prayer, remembers His testimony and His powerful ministry with the Holy Spirit. Consequently He leads the Church and her children to perfection through the inner voice of the Spirit.

**St. Isaac of Nicibean** says: [...when the Spirit establishes His dwelling within a person, that person never stops praying because the Spirit never ceases to pray within Him].

\* When we begin to meditate on the One Unity, we are overwhelmed by the brilliance of the Holy Trinity. At the same time that Oneness engages us. When any of the hypostasis of the Trinity appears to us, we perceive that He is the whole Being. He completely fills our eyes and we are unable to look for more. Our very limited mind is unable to retain more! It is because we comprehend one flame as we associate the Trinity as one concept. It becomes impossible to split the one light or to analyze it<sup>74</sup>.

**St Gregory Nazianzen**

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<sup>73</sup> Hom. 30. Forty Gospel Homilies.PL 76:1220

<sup>74</sup> Gregory Nazianzen: Oral XL, IN Sanctum Baptisma 41. PG 36:417 c.

\* The Holy Trinity as one whole speaks and teaches (Jn 6:45; Matt 23:10; Acts 10:20)...for they are inseparable<sup>75</sup>.

**St Augustine**

## **The Church and the Holy Trinity**

The Church is the divine environment where grace works and salvation is offered. According to **St Augustine**, we alone believe that the human being is ‘an extension of the Triune family.’ In other words, when God considers man to be in His likeness, then the Lord Jesus Christ occupies the first place in that respect. Consequently, man is governed by the same dynamics as those of the holy Trinity Himself. These are the dynamics of freedom, love, and unity. We alone know that this image and likeness of God, which gets formed within the divine embrace, makes superhuman demands upon us. We have to surmount the struggle in order to attain life, and we need to bypass our egocentricity. In doing so, we will be able to look forward to a fellowship and essential fulfillment for all humanity<sup>76</sup>.

**St. Gregory of Nazianzen**<sup>77</sup> finds in the Old Testament a clear declaration about the Father, while the statement about the Son is a more mysterious one. In the New Testament, the Son is declared and the divinity of the Holy Spirit is revealed. Therefore the revelation concerning the Trinity occurs gradually. This is intended for the benefit of the people who would otherwise be like those who get heavy with overfeeding; or who get exposed to the sun while their eyes are still too weak. In such a case, there is the danger of losing even the little strength they had. Therefore, according to David the King, they are intended to progress gradually and go ahead and grow from glory to glory. Then the light of the Trinity will shine on those who become enlightened.

\* We observe with all due attention the faith we receive from the Church. It is through the work of the Holy Spirit that we are granted this deposit of great value. Our faith is placed in a good vessel and is renewed constantly, and this in turn renews the vessel constantly. **The grace of God (the Holy Spirit) is granted to the Church just as the breath of life was granted to man when he was created.** Consequently, all members are granted fellowship and life through the Holy Spirit. The Church enjoys fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ- that is with the Holy Spirit - and that constitutes a warranty against corruption, a steadfastness in faith, and a ladder to ascend to God...indeed, wherever a church is found, there we will find the Holy Spirit. Moreover, wherever the Spirit of God is found, a church and every good blessing will be found there as well<sup>78</sup>.

\* Through the prophets, God promised to pour His Spirit into His servants at the end of the ages. For that reason, He descended on the Son of God who became the Son of Man. Then it became a common matter for God to dwell in mankind, remain in their midst, live within God's creatures.

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<sup>75</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 77:2

<sup>76</sup> Declaration of Msgr Joseph Phourde, Archbishop of Ottawa, at the Synod of Rome on October 19, 1971

<sup>77</sup> St Gregory Nazianzen, Oratio 31, Theologica 26. PG 36:161

<sup>78</sup> Adv. Haer. 3:24:1



In this manner, He transforms men from the old into the newness of the Lord and of the Messiah . . . By promising to send the Paraclete, the Lord intends to prepare us to come to God<sup>79</sup>.

\* Just as dry flour cannot become dough or a loaf of bread unless it is mixed with liquid, **we all cannot be united in the Lord Jesus Christ without being sprinkled with the water descending from heaven.** This water was received by the Lord as a gift from God; and He grants it also to those who have fellowship with Him by pouring the Holy Spirit over the whole earth<sup>80</sup>.

\* The priests, who are disciples of the apostles, describe the journey of the redeemed and the stages of their progress: **they ascend by the Spirit to the Son, and by the Son to the Father, and finally the Son delivers his work to the Father.** The apostle speaks of that in 1Cor 15:24<sup>81</sup>.

**\* The Father plans and issues commands; the Son fulfills and creates; the Holy Spirit refreshes and develops; and so man ascends the steps towards the Perfect One<sup>82</sup>.**

\* The disciples are activated by the same feelings and praise God; for the Spirit attracts the tribes and peoples from distant lands to unity. They offer the first the nations to the Father. This too is the reason why the Lord promised to send the Paraclete to us; for He is the One who prepares us to come to God<sup>83</sup>.

\* Just as a barren land cannot produce fruit unless it is watered, so we who were dry wood previously could not have produced living fruit without the heavenly rain overflowing upon us. Now our bodies are enabled to unite with the Incorrupt through the washing of the Baptism, while our souls are washed and unified through the Spirit. That is why both are essential since both contribute to the divine life<sup>84</sup>.

**St. Iraneaus**

\* We still need the other One to reveal to us and proclaim all matters . . . through repentance, which the Lord and Savior preached; through turning away from evil to all righteousness, through the remission of sin that is granted to all believers. All these lead to the fulfillment of goodness. Briefly, all these matters help a **person to be qualified to receive the Holy Spirit.** Nothing can provide righteousness to someone who is void of the Holy Spirit. Only through the Holy Spirit can we comprehend the blessed mystery of the Holy Trinity and attain all goodness<sup>85</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

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<sup>79</sup> Adv. Haer. 3:17:1-2 PG 7:929-30

<sup>80</sup> Adv. Haer. 3:17:2

<sup>81</sup> Adv. Haer. 5:36:2. PG 7:1223 B.

<sup>82</sup> Adv. Haer. 4:38:3 PG 1108 B

<sup>83</sup> Adv. Haer. 3:17:2. PG 7:930

<sup>84</sup> Adv. Haer. 3:17:2PG 7:903 A

<sup>85</sup> In Librum Jesu Nave, Homilia 3:2 PG 12:838 A

**\* Those who are filled with the Holy Spirit are led to the Word- that is, they are carried to the Son. However, the Son carries them and presents them to the Father and the Father grants them a state of incorruption.** Note that without the Holy Spirit, it is impossible to come close to the Father . . . because any acquaintance with the Son is fulfilled through the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the Son grants the gifts of the Holy Spirit in accordance with the pleasure of the Father and His will<sup>86</sup>.

### **A Guide to Apostolic Preaching**

**The Gift of the Holy Spirit is revealed to us in as much as we seek and pray for it.**

\* This gift (of the Holy Spirit) that is in the Lord Jesus Christ is one Being, and is offered in full to everyone-no one is deprived of the Holy Spirit. However, each one receives according to the measure of his own will. The Spirit resides within us to the extent to which we qualify and according to our fervor in praying to receive Him. This gift remains with us until the end of the world. He comforts us as we yearn for Him, and grants us peace through the privileges He grants us. We live in the hope that He becomes the guiding light for our minds and the Sun for our souls. This Spirit requires us to seek Him and yearn for Him. As we do so, we need to hold on to Him steadfastly by keeping the faith and obeying God's commands<sup>87</sup>.

**St. Hilary, Bishop of Boitier**

**\* The path of divine wisdom ascends from one Holy Spirit through the one Son to the one Father.** In the same manner, natural righteousness as well as inherent holiness and kingly honor proceed from the Father, through the only Son, and to the Holy Spirit<sup>88</sup>.

\* When we fix our eyes, with the help of the powerful light of the Holy Spirit, on the beauty of the image of God (the invisible) as seen in the Son; then through that image, we are led to the ultimate and genuine beauty of the Father. Consequently, the Spirit of Truth within us appears indivisible for all those who love to see the Truth. Indeed, that Spirit grants us the power to see the image . . . He does not empower externally but rather leads us to knowledge found within Himself<sup>89</sup>.

\* He does not dwell in them (sinners); for they easily reject the grace they receive<sup>90</sup>.

**St. Basil the Great**

### **7- The Lord's Joy Due to His Departure**

**"Peace I leave with you,  
My peace I give to you;  
Not as the world gives do I give to you.  
Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." [27].**

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<sup>86</sup> Proof of the Apostolic Preaching, 7

<sup>87</sup> On the Trinity 2:35

<sup>88</sup> Liber de Spiritu Sancto, 18:47 PG 32:153

<sup>89</sup> Liber de Spiritu Sancto, 18:14:PG 32:153 B

<sup>90</sup> Liber de Spiritu Sancto, 26:61:PG 32:180 D

What has the Lord given to His disciples who had abandoned everything and followed Him? **“My Peace I give to you”** [27]: He does not leave them feeling sad and bitter, Rather, He leaves them feeling peaceful as He grants them a precious inheritance: which is His peace! Indeed, He Himself is our peace (Eph 2:14). He has given us Himself as our inheritance and our peace.

That peace is not like the one which the world gives to us. It is not just a verbal greeting. Rather, it is a true blessing that is expressed as He offers Himself to those who believe in Him. The world, with all its potentials, cannot offer such peace. Moreover, in spite of all the sadness in the world, nothing can withdraw that peace from a believer. This is because whatever the world grants affects the body and is limited by time and place. As for the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ, it embraces the whole human being. Neither time nor place can restrict it: the Lord's peace draws the human soul to experience eternity.

**“Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let it be afraid...”**: Because the peace of the Lord is eternal, no power can tear it away from a person who holds on firmly to it. The peace of the world may tempt a person to sin, either in the form of lusts or vanity. In contrast, the peace of the Lord is evident in the way abundant grace works and enables a person to lead a life of holiness and righteousness. In order to draw the hearts of His disciples towards eternal joy and heavenly peace, the Lord spoke to them as someone who is rejoicing due to His return to heaven. He grants them His peace so that they would find fulfillment in Him, and rejoice as they are lifted up with Him.

\* The disciples were greatly troubled when they heard the Lord's words: **“I go to prepare a place for you.”** They imagined that His departure would arouse enmity and wars against them. Notice how the Lord dispels their anxiety when He tells them: **“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you.”** He almost told them: ‘As long as My peace embraces you, what harm can the world inflict upon you?’

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* He grants us His peace while He has departed; and He will offer us His peace when He comes at the end of time. He grants us peace while we are in this world and His peace will embrace us in the world to come. He leaves His peace with us and as we dwell in Him we will defeat the enemy.

He will grant us His peace until there are no more enemies to fight; and consequently we would reign as kings.

He grants us peace so that we may love one another here on earth. Moreover, He will grant us His peace when we reach the heights where no conflicts could occur.

He grants us His peace so that we do not judge one another although we ignore one another's private concerns in this world. He will grant us His peace when ‘He reveals the counsels of the hearts and then each one's praise will come from God’ (1Cor 4:5). In spite of that, it is in Him and from Him that we are granted peace. Whether that peace is granted by Him

as He ascends to the Father, or whether it is the peace He will grant us when He brings us before the Father.

What will He leave to us when He ascends other than His presence which He will not withdraw from us? He is our peace and therefore our status in both conditions remains one and the same (Eph 2:4). Therefore the Lord constitutes our peace when we believe that He is the Holy One, or when we see Him as He is; (1Jn 3:2).

Although we exist in this corrupt body that overwhelms the soul, yet we proceed with faith and not by any physical power. We are confident that He will not abandon those who have departed but have remained estranged from Him (2Cor 5:6-7). How much more will that be when we attain that faith, for He will fill us with Himself<sup>91</sup>.

**\* The peace which the Lord grants us in this world could more adequately be considered as our peace rather than His. Since He is utterly without sin, there is no element of conflict in Him. In contrast, the peace we have possesses an aspect that still makes us pray and say: "...and forgive us our debts..." (Matt 6:12) . . . for it is not a perfect peace since we find a different law in our bodies that opposes the law of our minds (Rom. 22:7-23)<sup>92</sup>.**

**St. Augustine**

**"You have heard Me say to you,  
I am going away and coming back to you:  
If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said; I am going to the Father; For My Father is greater than I." [28]**

The Lord presents another reason that would explain why their hearts should not be troubled: although He would depart, yet He would come back to them again. He was departing in order to receive the kingdom, authority, and power on their behalf. Consequently, it was appropriate that they should rejoice due to what they were going to enjoy.

**"For My Father is greater than I," [28]:** The Lord became incarnate, and humbled Himself in order to redeem us. According to the flesh, He became as some one who had lesser glory than the Father. If the pleasure of the Father and the Son require the Son to be humbled for the sake of mankind in order to glorify them, then it is appropriate that believers rejoice with the Son. They rejoice with the Son who finds it an honor to be humbled since His act fulfills their salvation and glory.

**\* It is clear that He became Man while He continued to be God; for God put on the guise of Man. Yet God was not absorbed or dissolved into a Man. Logically, the following would also be true: that the Lord Jesus Christ as a Man had a lower rank than the Father. Yet since He is God then he is equal to the Father, and hence equal to God (John 10:30)<sup>93</sup>.**

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<sup>91</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 77:3

<sup>92</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 77:4

<sup>93</sup> Letters, 170

\* Many matters are reported in the Holy Bible that speak about the Lord Jesus Christ being in the image of God. Other instances reveal Him as a servant or slave. We will use two of these instances for examples; one to illustrate each aspect. As an image of God, the Lord says: "I and the Father are one," (Jn 10:30). As an image of a slave, he says: "My Father is greater than I"<sup>94</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* It does seem odd that He who is the Logos had become incarnated (Jn 1:14); and that He admits that the Father is greater than Him. Moreover, He appeared of lesser glory than the angels, and took the form of man. "For you have made him a little lower than the angels"(Ps 8:5) . . . and "He has no form or comeliness, and when we see Him, there is no beauty," (Is 53:2-3). That is why He is lower than the Father. Indeed He who has loved you has tolerated death and has granted you fellowship in the heavenly life<sup>95</sup>.

**St. Basil the Great**

\* Due to His humility, the Lord spoke these words, and they have been exploited cunningly by opponents who attack Him<sup>96</sup>.

\* They claim that it is written: **"My Father is greater than I"**; and also that "We did not consider it robbery to be equal with God," (Phil 2:6). Moreover, it is written that the Jews wanted to kill Him because He said that He was the Son of God and equaled Himself to God (Jn 5:18). In John 10:30, the Lord says, "I and the Father are one," (Jn 10:30). They quote one passage and not many passages; therefore could He be lower and equal at the same time to the One and same entity? No, since one expression refers to His divinity while the other refers to His humanity<sup>97</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

**"And Now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe" [29].**

The Lord Jesus Christ informed the disciples in advance about His death so that they would not be confused when this would happen. He revealed to them that His death was a necessary requirement for their salvation. In this manner, the Lord tried to relieve their deep sorrow by granting them hope.

**"I will no longer talk much with you,  
For the ruler of this world is coming, and He has nothing in Me." [30]**

Some thought that the Lord was speaking about Pontius Pilate who was the Roman ruler. But most thinkers agree that He was referring to Satan as being the ruler of the world, and this according to Ephesians 2: 2 and John 2:31. He is also called the god of this world in 2Corinthians 4:4.

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<sup>94</sup> Letters, 238

<sup>95</sup> Letter 8 to the Caesareans, 5

<sup>96</sup> On the Holy Spirit, Book 2:8:59

<sup>97</sup> On the Holy Spirit, Book 5:18:224

The struggle of the Lord Jesus Christ is not with man but with the armies of spiritual darkness. Man is not an opponent in the struggle. Rather the struggle is between the Lord Jesus Christ and Satan; while man has the choice to hide in one of them. The Lord Jesus Christ speaks confidently as He states that Satan has no place in Him. Consequently, the Lord will surely overpower and conquer Him.

\* The words of the Lord: **"For the ruler of this world"** refer to Satan. Satan is called the ruler of this world not because he presides over heaven and earth-otherwise he would have toppled and reversed all creatures. Rather, Satan rules those people who have submitted themselves to him.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* We are besieged by hostile armies that surround us on every side. The body is frail and will soon turn into dust. It is one entity struggling against many tremendous armies, until the body is finally dissolved; and until the ruler of the world comes and finds it without sin. Until that time comes; let us carefully listen to the words of the prophet: "...you shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day . . ." (Ps 91:5)<sup>98</sup>.

\* If a bishop is short of a virtue or two out of the list of virtues, it does not indicate that he can no longer be considered as being righteous. Moreover, he would not be condemned for his failings. Rather, he would be crowned for what he possesses. Being perfectly virtuous and having no failings whatsoever are attributes of the Lord Jesus Christ only. Only He is without sin, and He never uttered deceit with His mouth. When He was insulted, He never insulted in return (1Peter 2:22)<sup>99</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

\* With such words the Lord referred to Satan as a ruler over sinners but not over all God's creations. The Lord refers to such sinners as presently being 'this world.' When He uses the words 'the world' with connotations of wickedness, the Lord is referring only to those people who love the world; to those who are referred to in another passage where it says: "Love of the world is enmity to God," (James 4:4). God forbid that we understand that Satan is the ruler of the world, who possesses the authority to control all the affairs of the world, as well as the heavens and the earth, and all things in them. We have spoken about the world when we spoke about the Lord Jesus Christ as the Word: "...and the world was made by Him," (Jn 1:1). The whole world- from the highest heavens to lowest point in the earth- submits to the Creator and not to the fugitive; to the Savior and not to the destroyer; to the Rescuer and not to the enslaved; to the Teacher and not to the deceiver<sup>100</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**"But that the world may know that I love the father,  
And as the Father gave Me commandments, so I do.  
Arise, let us g from here." [31]**

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<sup>98</sup> Letters 22:3

<sup>99</sup> Against the Pelagians, 1:22

<sup>100</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 79:2

Satan cannot find a dwelling in the Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover, he is incapable of fighting Him. Yet the Lord allowed him to engage with Him in a decisive war in order to fulfill the Father's plan of Salvation; as well as to demonstrate the Son's love for the Father.

That was the Father's commandment: for the Son to save the world by His sufferings. This was the reason why the Lord asked His disciples to arise and leave the place: so that He would deliver Himself to death.

\* The Lord spoke these words to lift up the spirit of His disciples. He wanted to let them know that He was going to that death willingly and not due to any coercion.

**St. John Chrysostom**

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Meditation inspired  
By  
The Gospel of St. John, Chapter 14

- \* May your Holy Spirit carry me to your expansive Heavens!
  
- \* When my spirit gets troubled within me  
Due to the multitude of my sins,  
You have revealed to me the extent of your heavens that await each believer!  
You grant us all the same everlasting life,  
Where Your believers will shine like brilliant planets.  
Each one elated and rejoicing on account of the great brilliance of his brother!
  
- \* May I soar, through You who is the Way, to the place where You are found.  
For You are my divine Path, and You are my Heaven.  
Through You I can soar and come to stay with You in the Father's embrace!
  
- \* I wonder: how can I, a human being, remain with You?  
You have granted me Your Holy Spirit to sanctify my depths.  
You have abandoned me physically when you ascended,  
You sent your fiery Spirit to shape me in Your image!  
He grants me the knowledge of Truth.  
Therefore I get to know You, O Truth.  
I see You and so see the Father, for You are One!  
I perceive You in your humility declaring: 'My Father is greater than I.'  
These words do not make me stumble  
For I find in them the spirit of humility.  
O You who became a slave for my sake!
  
- \* I hear Your words and they make me cling to Your love!  
Your love made You descend to me  
So that You would raise me to the Father's embrace.  
Although You are inseparable from the Father,  
You became as one lower than Him,  
So that You would carry me from my degradation  
To the heights of sharing fellowship in Your glory!
  
- \* How I would have desired to accompany You  
When You lived physically on this earth.  
However, Your ascension has lifted my heart to You.  
The gift of Your Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth,  
The giver of all blessings, comforts my soul.



Your grace has comforted my heart,  
And I will not ask the Father for anything else!  
Your blessings have erased my orphan condition  
For I have become the child of the King of Kings who lives forever!  
Your gift is the able Teacher who can penetrate my depths,  
And lead me- not to theoretical philosophy-but to the whole Truth!

\* You shine upon me, O only Son, by the light of the Spirit  
Therefore my life is filled with the brilliance of the Holy Trinity.  
The world is dead to me with all its darkness,  
So that I live in the light of Truth.  
Glory be to You, O Father, the Lover of mankind and the Planner of Salvation!

\* To You we offer praise, O Holy Spirit,  
Who grants holiness and righteousness!  
My Spirit plunges into the depths of the love of the Holy Trinity.  
As it yearns to enjoy a full vision on the great day of the Lord!

Glory be to God forever  
Amen  
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## Chapter Fifteen

### A Farewell Speech

The two chapters (15 and 16) are a farewell speech that the Lord addresses to His disciples on the night He was arrested to be delivered to die. In this speech He makes them ready to face hardship.

In this chapter (15), the Lord speaks to them about:

- |                                                    |              |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>1- The Necessity of Abiding in Him</b>          | <b>1-8</b>   |
| <b>2- That They Must Love One Another</b>          | <b>9-17</b>  |
| <b>3- Confrontation of the Hatred of the world</b> | <b>18-25</b> |
| <b>4- Sending the Helper</b>                       | <b>26-27</b> |

#### **1- The Necessity of Abiding in Him**

**“I am the true vine,  
And My Father is the vinedresser.” [1]**

Having condescended for our sake, He uses temporal metaphors to disclose His identity and His work in us. So He is called the Sun of righteousness that gives light to those who sit in darkness; He is the shining star, and the vine.

No Jewish person could expect the Messiah to liken Himself to a vine. They awaited His coming as their king and savior, having authority to restore dignity to His people in the world and to grant them royal power. On the other hand, the comparison to a vine belonged to the people, or to the church of God.

God planted the Garden of Eden so that Adam and his sons may enjoy its fruits. Nobody was deprived of anything except the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Then man drove himself out of that Garden to live on the earth that brings forth thorns and thistles. But God offered, throughout the ages, divine possibilities to His people to make them a fruitful vine that produces grapes from which is extracted a spiritual joyful wine. Nevertheless, the Old Testament is filled with lamentations over that vine that produced nothing but bitterness.

Thus, in the lamentation of Asaph, he says, “You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it. You prepared room for it, and caused it to take deep root; and it filled the land. The hills were covered with its shadow and the mighty cedars with its boughs. She sent out her boughs to the Sea, and her branches to the River. Why have You broken down her hedges, so that all who pass by the way pluck her fruit? The boar out of the woods uproots it, and the wild beast of the field devours it.” (Psalm 80:8-13) In this manner this psalmist moans because the vine that God’s right hand planted was destroyed as well as the fences that God built around it. Its fruit was not given to God but was plucked by all those who passed by the way, by the boar out of the woods, and by the wild beast.

God Himself declared His lamentation over His vine when He said in Isaiah, “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt Me and My vineyard. What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?” (Isaiah 5:3-4).

Once more in a lamentation over the same vine, God says, “Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto Me?” (Jeremiah 2:21)

This is God’s pleasure that all His people become a vineyard that devotes its life to those around it, gladdens God’s heart with its spiritual fruit, and gives joy to the heavenly beings by revealing God’s work in it. However, what happened? The prophet Hosea says, “Israel is an empty vine, he brings forth fruit unto himself: according to the multitude of his fruit he has increased the altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made godly images. Their heart is divided.” (Hosea 10:1-2) God’s people became not a holy vine for the kingdom of God, but an empty vine that brings forth bitterness, the worship of idols, and the kingdom of darkness. There was no other solution but that the Messiah Himself becomes the true vine feeding the believers so that they bring forth truly spiritual and heavenly fruit.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the vine planted in the soil, for He is the Word that became flesh. With the spirit of prophecy, Isaiah the prophet saw Him without form or beauty (Is 53:2). The fruit of the vine cheers God and man (Judges 9:13). The fruit of wisdom (the Lord Jesus Christ) is better than gold and fine gold (Prov 8:19). He is the vine of Judah that makes Judah rich with the blood of grapes (Gen 49:11). He is also the vine of Joseph whose branches run over the wall (Gen 49:22). And He is the vine of Israel and under Him Israel dwells safely (1 Kings 4:25).

\* He did not mention the vine here for any other purpose but to teach His disciples that without the power of the Lord Jesus Christ they can do nothing. In accordance to this metaphor they need to abide in Him as the branch abides in the vine.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* We are the Lord’s relatives according to the flesh. Therefore, He says, “I will declare Your name to My brethren” (Heb 2:12; Ps 22:22). As branches are one with the vine (the origin) and the vine is of the branches (John 15:1) so are we also one body homogeneous with the Lord’s body and of His fullness we have all received (John 1:16). Christ’s body is the origin of our resurrection and redemption.

**Saint Athanasious the Apostolic**

Saint Augustine observes that the Lord Jesus Christ calls Himself the vine and calls us the branches and the vine and its branches have one nature. Similarly, when He became man He carried our human nature; He thus became the vine and we became the branches abiding in Him since He carried us.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 80:1.

\* He says, "I am." We observe that here the Lord Jesus Christ speaks on a personal level because He came among us as a true vine, truth itself. We are planted in Him as the church of the New Testament that enjoys eternal life and so overflows with spiritual wine that gladdens heaven.

The Father is not only the owner of the vine, but is also the vinedresser who works and cares for the vine. He cares for every branch of the vine. He is the protector of divine steadfastness, meaning our steadfastness as living branches in the vine. When we abide in the vine, the only begotten Son, we abide in the Father and are united in Him and so dwell in His bosom forever. We shall never be taken away from Him.

The Father who brought His people out of Egypt in ancient times to plant them as a vine in the Promised Land, is Himself He who sent His Son from heaven to plant us in Him, as members of His body, as branches of the living heavenly vine. He made His Word Incarnate a vine or head so that we may become branches or members of His body. It is as the Apostle says, "He...gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." (Eph 1:22-23). "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" (Eph 1:19-20)

**"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away;  
And every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit." [2]**

God expects that the vine should bring forth grapes (Is 5:2). He expects that the Christian lives a proper Christian life: observing Christian thinking and behavior and having a Christian heart that loves all human beings. What good is the vine if it produces no grapes? And what benefits the Christian without love?

With the continuous growth in Christian life, and with the bountiful fruit, there is yet always something in us that God does not desire and so He takes it away. God, therefore, does the work of the vinedresser. He prunes the branches of the vine that they may bear more fruit. The Lord said to His disciples when He washed their feet that they are pure. However, they need that He washes their feet with His own hands that they may be clean and purified of what they caught as they walked in the world.

Some commentators think that He hints here at Judas who did not bear fruit and therefore deserved to be cut off from apostleship and deprived of the Kingdom. Judas is like the fig tree which the Lord saw on His way and in which He found no fruit. He therefore cursed it and it immediately withered away.

The promise for those who bear fruit is that they will be cleaned that they may bear more fruit. Or they will be pruned, that is to say every superfluous thing that can stop their growth and fruitfulness, will be trimmed off. In pruning the vinedresser is not violent or cruel; he rather cares and tends the vine that its fruit may increase. Saint John Chrysostom observes that pruning here indicates the persecutions that the believers face, for oppression does not destroy them but rather gives them more strength and productivity.

The believers are the numerous apparent branches that stretch in different directions but are united in Christ. He is the unseen root that grants life and fruit. He is the center of their unity. The believers are like the weak branches of the vine; they cannot exist independently without the

root. The Lord says in Ezekiel, “Son of man, what is the vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest?” (Ez 15:2)

\* Do not wonder then that in this vine that grows and fills all the nations (Ps 79:10) there are branches that are cut off. Those are the branches that refused to bring forth fruits of love.<sup>2</sup>

\* Why did He not say, “you are clean through baptism in which you are washed” but says, you are clean **“because of the word which I have spoken to you.”** [3] That is because in the water, it is the word that purifies. If you take away the word, the water will be neither more nor less than mere water. But when you add the word to the element, the result is the “sacrament” as though it has become a kind of visible word.<sup>3</sup>

\* This word of faith embodies virtue in the church of God. So, by means of him who is present in the faith, blesses and sprinkles it, he purifies even the small baby who is unable to believe with his heart in righteousness and confess with his lips for redemption. All that is achieved through the word about which the Lord said, “You are already clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.” [3].<sup>4</sup>

\* They are not in Him in the same way that He is in them. Nevertheless, both ways are for their good, not for His benefit. For, in the relation between the branches and the vine, the branches do not partake of anything concerning the vine, but they rather obtain all the means of their life from the vine. On the other hand, the relation of the vine to the branches is that the vine gives the branches their vital strength, but takes nothing from the branches. If a branch is cut off, another branch will grow and have life but the branch that was cut off cannot live separately from its origin.<sup>5</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\*The Lord, in saying to His disciples, “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away” He implies that if their lives appear without deeds they do not deserve to be in Him. When He says, “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away” He means that the Lord Jesus Christ cares very much for that branch.

\* He does not say that the origin (the root) needs the care of the vinedresser. He says rather that the branches need that care. He mentions the origin only so that they learn that **they can do nothing without His power and that they must abide in Him in faith as the branches abide in the vine: “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away.”**

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<sup>2</sup> Letters, 52.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 80:3.

<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 80:3.

<sup>5</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 81:1.

Here, He indicates the path of life and reveals that without deeds we cannot be in Him. “Every branch that bears fruit He prunes.” Although the root requires much more care than the branches, since the soil is dug and cleaned for the root, yet He says nothing about that. All He says concerns the branches. He shows that the origin has self-sufficiency. But even though the disciples are eminent, they need great help on the part of the vinedresser. He, therefore, says, “every branch that bears fruit He prunes.” One can assert, here, that this was said concerning the persecution of believers. He cleans, that is to say, He prunes the branch that it may bear more fruit. He, thus, shows that persecutions give people more strength.<sup>6</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* In His zeal to do the Father’s will, He hurried to accomplish the mystery of His physical suffering. But in the next moment He revealed the mystery of His incarnation. Because of His taking the flesh, we became in Him as branches are in the vine. For if He had not become the vine, we would not have been able to bear good fruit. He speaks to us about steadfastness in Him through our faith in the incarnation. Because the Word became flesh, we assumed the nature of His flesh, just as the branches are in the vine. He surrendered the magnificent form of the Father by being humble and taking flesh. He calls Himself a vine, the source of unity of all the branches, and He calls the Father the vinedresser who cuts off the barren, useless branches that they may be burned with fire.<sup>7</sup>

**Saint Hilary of Poitiers**

**“You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.”[3]**

He may be referring here to His discourse on the institution of the Eucharist and to His words about Judas who betrayed Him (John 13:21-30). After that Judas went out, completed his conspiracy with the high priest, and so removed himself from Christ’s body. The pruning of the branches (the Lord’s disciples) thus took place and it was fitting to say about them “you are already clean” [3]. Christ’s words separate truth from falsehood, that which is precious from the counterfeit. Each of the disciples became clean because of Christ’s word of truth (John 17:17), because of faith that purified their hearts and cleaned them from all blemish (Acts 15:9). They were cleansed from the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

His allusion may also be to what is written in the Book of Leviticus (19:23-24) about the trees in Canaan. The trees will remain unclean for three years, then in the fourth year they will be pure to glorify God. Likewise the disciples remained with the Lord Jesus Christ for three years. Now as He carries them over to His cross and His resurrection as the Firstborn from the dead, and for their sake and in their name He presents Himself to the Father, they become pure in the eyes of God. He has carried the vine across for three years; now is the year of bliss during which her fruit will be sanctified to the Lord. The first year presents the human race in the

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<sup>6</sup> Homilies on St. John, 67:1.

<sup>7</sup> On the Trinity, 9 (55).

Garden of Eden. The second year is governed by the natural law until the coming of Moses the prophet. The Law of Moses rules the third year. The fourth is the year of divine blessing when the Savior of the world came and in Him the fruit was consecrated to the Lord.

\* Have you seen how the Lord Jesus Christ shows that He cares for the branches. He indicates that He did not do that act because He needed their service, but that they may succeed.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**“Abide in Me, and I in you;**

**As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine,**

**Neither can you, unless you abide in Me.” [4]**

We often say that the life of faith is a life of clinging to our Lord Jesus. However, this is not enough in the eyes of the Lord. He asks us and promises us a greater aim: that He lives in us and we live in Him. Our living faith is an experience in Christ. This is the expression that the apostles repeat continuously in their epistles.

“Abide” is a word that Saint John loves very much. It recurs 112 times in the New Testament, 66 times of which are in the Gospel according to our teacher John and in his epistles: 33 times in the Gospel, and 3 times in his first, second, and third epistles. For, the Lord Jesus Christ came so that believers may enjoy steadfastness in Him and consequently their relationship with Him may not be temporary but eternal. In the Old Testament we read about the work of the Spirit in the lives of the prophets and kings and others in temporary periods. But in the New Testament, the Lord did not come, nor did He send His Holy Spirit to offer temporary enlightenment as some philosophers claim. He came so that we may abide eternally in Him. He makes of His believers branches to emphasize their place in Him. They abide in Him (1 John 2:6), in the truth (2 Jn 2), and in eternal life (1 Jn 3:15). This is a divine commandment, or rather a divine promise that we must adhere to Him.

A branch shares the nature of the tree, is animated by its juice, and lives by its life. Likewise, it is proper for us to share the divine nature, to be guided by His wisdom, to have His power and possibilities, and to be purified by His righteousness and sanctity.

\* He strengthened their spirits when they weakened with fear, so that they may not be separated from Him because of their cowardice. He attached them to Himself and revealed to them good hopes in the future. For, the origin exists and remains, but the severance or continuance is for the branches. Thus, as He urges them both with the joyful and the painful matters, He indicates first for what we, on our part, need to do.<sup>8</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

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<sup>8</sup> Homiliwes on St. John, 67:1.

**“I am the vine, you are the branches.**

**He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit:**

**For without Me you can do nothing.” [5]**

The Lord offers Himself as the secret of the believer’s life and fruitfulness. For Christ is the Savior and Friend, the Way and Door, the Life and Resurrection. He is the Comforter and the good Shepherd.

He asks us to abide in Him in faith so that He may abide in us through His Holy Spirit and through offering His body and blood a sacrifice, a food and drink for us. We are to rely on Him and trust Him. Through this alliance with Him, we live. We cling to Him and He abides in us through His Holy Spirit. We depend on Him, not like a branch leaning on a wall that supports it, but as a branch that has no value without the root. Thus, our Christ reveals the aim of His divine incarnation, rather from the point of view of man. This aim is that the believer enjoys true life continuously through the divine source.

Abidance in Him is optional but is necessary for the believer. Without this adherence the believer will not enjoy spiritual fruits. This is a final condition: either steadfastness and consequent fruitfulness, or else no fruit at all. There is no middle solution.

\* The saints refer everything to the Lord. Let us then learn that we can do nothing without the Lord. For He says, “unless you abide in Me...you can do nothing.” (See John 15:4, 5)

Someone may object saying, “If I refer everything to the Lord, what concerns me?” Let us examine at every point what concerns us so that it may not mingle with what comes from the Lord.

The Psalmist says, “Teach me, O Lord, the way of Your statutes” (Ps 119:33): what concerns us “and I shall keep it to the end.” (Ps 119:33)

Once more, I ask God, “Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law” (Ps 119:34). Then again, “Make me walk in the path of Your commandments” (Ps 119:35). What concerns me? He indicates what concerns me with these words, “For I delight in it” (Ps 119:35).

Let us ask for what comes from God so that we may obtain it. Let us also promise Him what depends on us and let us not relinquish our promise so that we may not break our covenant with the Lord.

This is what the Psalmist says, “Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness” (Ps 119:36). For he knows that covetousness is a depravity that has a strong influence and gives credit to the profits of the wicked. The Apostle called it, “idolatry” (Col 3:5). We therefore learn that covetousness does not agree with the testimonies of the Lord.

**Origen the Scholar**

**“If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch**

**And is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire,**



### **And they are burned.” [6]**

Here, He warns us against hypocrisy. For there are those who have the name of Christ, but lack partnership with Him. They do not abide in Him, but are like those branches that are a profitless unnecessary burden to the tree. As they practically despise Him, they become despised; and as they refuse partnership with Him, they do not enjoy that secret life in Him. They only deserve to be cast out into the fire. They are dry and fire is the most appropriate place in which they are cleared off.

A branch is not estimated for its wood, for once it is separated from its origin, it is used for nothing but fire. However, by abiding in its origin, the secret link gives it life and makes it flourish and it becomes fruitful. Thus the vinedresser honors it and is preoccupied with it so that it may bear more fruit.

In this discourse our Christ, the true vine, does not terrify us. He rather draws our attention to His true promise that He is responsible for this in accordance to His grace and excessive divine generosity. For, “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (Jn 1:3).

“Is cast out”: When a person separates himself from the Vine, he goes out of that circle and, therefore, does not have Christ’s life. The light of Christ does not shine in him; he does not enjoy the grace and power of Christ; the Holy Spirit does not work in him. This is the case of the Christian who after being a branch in the Vine, he becomes conceited, relying on his abilities, talents, and opinion. He consequently casts himself out and becomes a dry, broken branch that is good for nothing but fire.

The Lord Himself describes the dry branch when in **Ezekiel** He says, “For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourns in Israel, which separates himself from Me (the vine) and sets up his idols (self-conceit) in his heart, and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and comes to a prophet to inquire of him concerning Me; I the Lord will answer him by Myself: And I will set My face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of My people,” (Ez 14:7-8).

\* The Lord Jesus Christ says to His disciples, **“without Me you can do nothing.”** It is a great loss when the branch can do nothing. However, the Lord does not end the punishment at this point but goes further to say, “is cast out as a branch and is withered.” By saying, **“they throw them into the fire, and they are burned”** Christ makes it clear that those who oppose Him will burn.

\* He says, “is cast out” and therefore does not enjoy the care of the vinedresser anymore; “is withered” because he has no root he is in danger. He had comforting grace but is now deprived of all help and life.

And what would be the end? He is thrown into the fire. But this is not what happens to those who abide in Him. He indicates those who abide in Him by saying, if **“My words abide in you.”** To them He says, **“If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.”** Then He says, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” (Jn 14:14-15) Here, He says, **“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.”** He says

this to show that, on the one hand, those who conspire against Him will burn, and on the other hand, He explains to the others that they will not be defeated. He says, **“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”**<sup>9</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* You do not accept a corrupt shield, but rather a spiritual shield!

Even now you are planted in a hidden Paradise!

You receive a new name that you did not have in the past, for you were called a catechumen, but now you are a believer!

From now on you are grafted into the spiritual olive tree (Rom 11:24). You have been cut out of the wild olive tree and grafted into a good olive tree. You have been taken away from sins and defilement to be guided to righteousness and purity.

You are now partaking of the sacred Vine (Jn 15:1, 4, 5)! Good, for if you abide in the Vine you will grow as a fruitful branch, but if you do not abide in the Vine you will perish with fire.

Therefore, would you bear fruit worthily, so that God may not permit what happened to the barren fig tree (Matt 21:19) to happen to you! Christ has not yet come (for judgment) and has not yet cursed us because of our sterility. Would we were able to say, “But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever.” (See Ps 52:8) And here we do not interpret the olive tree in its material meaning, but rather mentally in perfect light.

Since God plants and waters,<sup>10</sup> it would befit you to bring forth fruit. God grants His blessing and you, on your part accept and keep it. Do not despise grace because it is free. Rather accept and treasure it piously.<sup>11</sup>

**Saint Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* The branch is good only for either way: to be in the vine, or in fire. If it is not in the vine, then its place is the fire. For it to escape the fire it must be in the vine.<sup>12</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you,  
you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.” [7]**

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<sup>9</sup> Hom. 76. PG 59:448.

<sup>10</sup> The Apostle says, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.” (1 Cor 3:6) Saint Cyril ascribes the planting and watering to God who works and gives the increase.

<sup>11</sup> Article 1:4.

<sup>12</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 81:3.

The Lord Christ connects steadfastness in Him with steadfastness in His words because through His gospel we enjoy true union. This gospel is interpreted practically by keeping the divine commandments, by practicing them and rejoicing in them [10-11].

Steadfastness in Christ's words is a continuous meeting with the Word and an acquaintance with the person of the Lord Jesus Christ through His words. We, then, abide in Him with all our hearts, thoughts, feelings, senses and will. There is nothing that can separate us ever!

He presents to us a firm promise that all that we desire according to His good pleasure shall be done for us through our abiding in Him. And, what shall we ask for but that we may be His icons carrying in us His will, meeting Him and enjoying partnership in His glory.

Our steadfastness in Christ and in His words, and consequently, His steadfastness in us will cause us to be truly men of prayer, knowing what to ask for and having delight in the certainty of what we desire, because it is according to the good pleasure of God our Father. It is as though the secret of the effectiveness of prayer is in our steadfastness in Christ and His dwelling in us.

\* Do you not see that the Son does not participate less than the Father in caring for the disciples? The Father prunes on the one hand and keeps them in Him on the other hand. Abidance in the origin (the root) is why the branches bear fruit.

If it is not pruned but abides in the origin, the branch bears fruit but not the proper amount. Yet, if it does not abide in the origin it does not bear fruit at all. However, the pruning belongs to the Son, steadfastness in the origin belongs to the Father who gave birth to the Son. Do you not see that everything, whether the pruning or the ability to have delight comes from the origin?<sup>13</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* It is true that we desire certain things when we are in Christ, and we have different desires when we are still in this world. Therefore, if we abide in Him, if His words abide in us, we ask what we desire and it is done for us. But, if we ask and do not receive, it is because the things we desire have no relation to our steadfastness in Him, but are rather the persistent desires of the body and its weaknesses, that are not in Christ and in which the words of Christ do not abide. So, concerning His words, in all conditions, they are those of the prayer He taught us when we say, "Our Father who art in heaven" (Matt 6:9). May we not skip any word of this prayer but meditate on every word in our prayer. Then, everything we ask for we shall be given. However, if His words dwell only in our memory and have no place in our life, we, as branches, will not be considered abiding in the vine, for we do not obtain our life from the origin.<sup>14</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**"By this My Father is glorified,  
That you bear much fruit, so you will be My disciples." [8]**

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<sup>13</sup> Hom. 76. PG 59:447-448.

<sup>14</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 81:4.

Here, the Lord Jesus Christ reveals **the wonderful fruit of steadfastness in Him:**

1-The glorification of the Father as the perfect love of the Father is seen in our life. His splendor is revealed in our inner selves. We truly exercise our sonship to Him “that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

2-Increasing fruit as everything we ask for in prayer is done for us.

3-We enjoy being His disciples; we become men of God witnessing for Him to bring back all people to Him so that all may be “members of the household of God.” (Eph 2:19)

\* Do you see how he who bears fruit is a disciple? “By this My Father is glorified” means that He is pleased when you abide in Him, when you bear fruit.<sup>15</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* Some scholars think that the Greek word ‘doxazein’ means literally ‘more splendor’ or ‘clearer’ to people. It also means, ‘glorified.’

\* From Him (from Christ) is such grace. Therefore, the glory is not ours but His. Here, the Father is glorified that we bear much fruit and that we have become Christ’s disciples. By whom have we become so but by Him whose mercy precedes and works in us? We are His work “created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph 2:10).<sup>16</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

## **2- That They Must Love One Another**

**“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you;  
Abide in My love.” [9]**

The Lord Jesus Christ who is love personified speaks to us about love in four forms:

Love of the Father for Him [9]

His love for the Father [10]

The love of Christ for us [9]

Our love for Him and abiding in Him [9].

Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ shows that the foundation of every divine work is the mutual love of the Father and the Son. This indicates that the love of God for us is not based on temporary emotion but is the fruit of the eternal divine mutual love of the Father and the Son. Then, the

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<sup>15</sup> Hom. 76. PG 59:448.

<sup>16</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 82:1.

believers must on their part abide always in love. So, just as there is nothing at all that can stop the love of God for us, we must have the same characteristic in our love for Him. This is what the Lord Jesus Christ asks for us: “that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them” (Jn 17:26)

He declares His love for them to affirm to them that, though He will leave them physically, by death then later by His ascension, He loves them without limit. He loves them as the Father loves Him, although they are not properly worthy of love.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son whom the Father loves. In the Father’s love for Him, He gave Him everything, because He is One consubstantial with the Father. The Father gave Him the work of the redemption of the human race and Christ’s work of salvation is the object of the love and good pleasure of the Father. Through the mutual love of the Father and the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ advises us to love Him and abide in His love.

Steadfastness in His love implies our disappearance in Him to rejoice constantly for His love and to share with Him the trait of love. We practically get acquainted with the depth of His sacraments by practicing life in Him.

\* So, here you observe the source of good works. Where can we have these works? Are they not works of faith working through love (Gal 5:6)? And how may we be able to love? Is it not because He first loved us?

The Evangelist himself declares quite clearly in his epistle, that “We love Him because He first loved us,” (1 Jn 4:19). However, when He says, “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you”, [9] He does not connote that His nature and ours are equal as His and that of the Father. He rather refers to the grace of the Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus (1 Tim 2:5). For the Father truly loves us also, but in Christ. Here, the Father is glorified that we bear fruit in the Vine, that is, in the Son and thus become His disciples.<sup>17</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love,  
Just as I have kept My Father’s commandments  
And abide in His love.” [10]**

As the Lord Jesus Christ carried the message of salvation, He as the Son of Man through His perseverance in work abode in the Father’s love. **“He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till He has set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for His law.”** (Is 42:4) He kept the Father’s commandments, not only by recording them through the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament prophecies, but also by recording them practically when He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and coming in the likeness of men. He humbled Himself to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Phil 2: 7-8). He kept the commandments in perfect obedience and accepted suffering with joy (Heb 5:8; 12:2). He

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<sup>17</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 82:2.

accomplished the commandment fully when on the cross He announced **“It is finished”** (Jn 19:30). Through our steadfastness in Him and through sharing His characteristics, we keep the commandments, not only in our hearts, nor by meditating on them and studying them, but also by practicing them, being always alert, correct and truly eager that we may enjoy them. For the commandments are not oppressive but bear within them the power of fulfillment with praise and joy because within them is the Word Himself, as **Saint Marcus the Ascetic** says. Keeping the divine commandments is the key to heaven, with it we rejoice in our Christ, the Heavenly Treasure.

The sign of steadfastness in His love is our observance of His commandments, as He has kept the Father’s commandments and achieved His will. Without obedience and surrender we shall not enjoy love.

\* Look how the Lord Jesus Christ strengthens His disciples when He says, “abide in My love.” If you ask how that may be, His answer is **“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.”** Consider how the Lord Jesus Christ speaks to them with authority. For He does not say “abide in the love of the Father” but says, “abide in My love.”

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* “Abide in My love” [9]. How do we abide? Listen to what follows: “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love” [10]

Love brings about the observance of His commandments. But does keeping His commandments bring about love?

Who can doubt that love comes first? He who lacks love has no good foundation to keep the commandments. Therefore, He says, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love” showing, not the source of love but the means by which love is declared. As though He says, “Do not think that you abide in My love if you do not keep My commandments. For only if you keep My commandments you abide.”

Then, let no one deceive himself by saying that he loves Him if he does not keep His commandments. For we love Him in the same measure as we keep His commandments and if keeping His commandments is weak, our love for Him is weak.<sup>18</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

Saint Augustine asserts that Christ’s love for us exists and He desires our redemption. This love is the expectation that urges us to keep His commandments. But not keeping His commandments reveals our lack of love for Him and our lack of steadfastness in His anticipating love.<sup>19</sup>

**“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you,**

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<sup>18</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 82:3.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 82:3.

**and that your joy may be full.” [11]**

In His farewell discourse He repeats these words “these things I have spoken to you” seven times. These are words that **Ezekiel** declares repeatedly, “I the Lord have spoken” (Ez 5:13). It is as though He who speaks to them here is He who spoke to them through the prophets ages ago.

Let us rejoice in the divine promise like branches in the vine. Let us abide in Christ the true vine and abide in His words, His love, and also His joy. The joy of Saint John the Baptist was fulfilled when he saw the Bridegroom coming and heard His voice as He met His bride through the cross (Jn 3:29). Christ rejoiced to give His life for His bride and obtain her a pure virgin bought with the precious blood. And here He calls us to share His joy when we see in our salvation and the salvation of our brethren the fulfillment of heavenly joy.

In the Old Testament redemption was linked with joy. So, **David the Psalmist** repeated “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation” (Ps 51). And the prophet **Isaiah** watched the redeemed of the Lord returning and said, they “shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” (Is 35:10) He saw nature itself: the mountains, the hills, and all the trees of the field singing and clapping their hands (Is 55:12). Also in the New Testament whenever the Church assembled in the Eucharist sacrament, “they ate their food with gladness” (Acts 2:46).

As He was on His way to the cross with gladness, He urged His disciples to abide in His joy as they shared with Him the cross. Thus their joy may be full.

\* The Lord spoke those words to His disciples making it clear to them that the present calamities are not for sadness, but for joy.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* What is Christ’s joy in us other than that He is pleased that He rejoices for us? And what is that joy that is ours, about which He says, “may be full” but that we have communion with Him? For this reason He said to the blessed Peter, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me,” (Jn 13:8). So, His joy in us is the grace that He grants us, which is also our joy.

Moreover, He rejoiced since eternity when He chose us before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4). We cannot say that His joy was not full, because God’s joy was never at any time incomplete.

However, that joy was not in us because it could not be for us who did not exist. And even when our existence began, that joy did not begin in us. But that joy was always in Him who is truly infallible, who in foreknowledge rejoiced that we shall be His and so had full joy in us as He rejoiced in His foreknowledge and in foreordaining us.<sup>20</sup>

\* His joy for our redemption that was always in Him through His foreknowledge and His foreordaining us began in us when He called us. Then, it was befitting that this joy is called our

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<sup>20</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 83:1.

joy because in it we also are blessed. However, through perseverance this joy increases, grows and advances to perfection. Thus its beginning is in the belief in rebirth and its perfection is in the reward when we advance.<sup>21</sup>

\* My joy has always been full even before I called you when you were in My foreknowledge that I will call you. But it found a place in you also when you were reshaped in accordance to My foreknowledge concerning you. “Your joy may be full” when you are blessed; this has not yet occurred as you are now created but you did not exist before.<sup>22</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“This is My commandment  
that you love one another as I have loved you.” [12]**

The last and basic commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ in His farewell discourse is “love.” And in this speech He connects the commandment and love. If we understand the meaning of love in our Christian life, we do not need another commandment. Therefore, **Saint Augustine** says, “love God and do whatever you like.” Indeed, some people have misunderstood this saying and have used it as a license to a loose life. But, whoever comprehends “love” cannot but act in Christ Jesus according to His divine judgment. Let us love as Christ loves the sinners so that they may become living icons, a new creation in Christ Jesus.

The Apostle Paul says, “he who loves another has fulfilled the law,” (Rom 13:8). He also says, “love is the bond of perfection,” (Col 3:14). The Lord Christ Himself, as He speaks about the commandments to love God and to love our neighbor says, “On “these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets,” (”Matt 22:40).

Saint John the beloved recognized love as the sinew of the Law. And, as **Saint Jerome** says, Saint John in his very old age was carried to the public gatherings of the believers and he always said “my children, love one another.” When he was asked why he continued in this manner, he answered, “because this is the Lord’s commandment and keeping it only is enough.”<sup>23</sup>

\* Abidance is realized through love, and love is achieved through observance of the Law. The commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ is that we love one another. Thus steadfastness in our God consists of the love by which we love one another.

He does not mention love simply, but reveals its nature as He says, “as I have loved you.”

Since love is a powerful irresistible matter and not a mere word, let us declare it through our deeds.

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<sup>21</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 83:1.

<sup>22</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 83:1.

<sup>23</sup> St. Jerome: Common Gal, Lib 3.c.6.



He made peace with us while we were His enemies. Now that we have become His friends let us abide so in His love.

He led the way, let us then at least follow Him.

He loved us not for any personal benefit (for He needs nothing), let us then at least love Him for our benefit.

He loved us while we were His enemies, let us then love Him as He is our friend.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* Why does He speak about love as though that were a special commandment? That is because every commandment has relevance to love and all commandments are in one commandment because any commandment is founded on love alone. Just as the many branches of a tree stem from one root, so do many virtues proceed from love alone. The branch that is our good deeds has no sap unless it remains sticking to the root of love.<sup>24</sup>

**Pope Gregory (the Great)**

\* “This is My commandment” [12] as though there is no other commandment but this. So what do you think my brethren?

Let us meditate on the Apostle’s words, “love is the fulfillment of the law,” (Rom 13:10). Thus, where there is love, what may be lacking? And where there is no love what can be useful?

Satan believes (James 2:19), but trembles and does not love. No one loves but does not believe.

Those who have mutual love have God Himself as an aim of love. They, indeed, love one another and the goal of their love for one another is their love of God. There is no such love among men, for few have the motive to love one another, that God may be all in all (1 Cor 15:28).<sup>25</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“Greater love has no one than this,  
Than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” [13]**

These words were said not as a sermon to be examined, but as they were expressed on the eve of His crucifixion, these words declared His gospel in practice. Here, He draws the attention of His hearers toward the cross as a practical declaration of divine love for the entire human race, His dearly beloved are not the righteous but the sinners. The Apostle says, “when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Rom 5:10). Our Christ died

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<sup>24</sup> Hom. 27. Forty Gospel Homilies, PL 76:1205.

<sup>25</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 83:3.

for the sake of even those who persecuted Him on the cross, and those who persecute His body, the Church.

No one can love his friend a greater love than to lay down his own life, everything he has, for him. The great friendship uniting David and Jonathan caused Jonathan to give up his kingdom to David, but Jonathan could not lay down his life for the sake of David. On the other hand, the Lord Jesus Christ lay down His life not only for His friends, but also for His enemies and asked for forgiveness for those who crucified Him. The greatest proof of His love for them is that He sacrificed Himself for their sake as no human being may do on the same level. For He, the Creator sacrificed Himself for His creatures that He loved exceedingly. He died for men when they were His enemies (Rom 5:8, 10).

\* “Love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith” is truly a virtue for it is “the purpose of the commandment” (1 Tim 1:5). It has been truly said, “love is strong as death” (Song of Solomon 8:6). This is either because nothing can conquer it just as nothing can defeat death, or because in this life the evaluation of love is that it is to the point of death. The Lord says, “what love is greater than that a man sacrifices his life for his friends?” (See Jn 15:13). Or rather, as death separates the spirit from the physical senses, so does love take away the spirit from physical lusts. Knowledge, when useful, serves love, for without love “knowledge puffs up” (1 Cor 8:1). Knowledge is not in the same measure as love, for love fills the heart with refinement and leaves no room for knowledge to be arrogant.<sup>26</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* No one persecutes us now to the point of death. How then shall we prove our love for our friends?

There needs be something for us to do at times of peace in the Church so that we may demonstrate whether we are strong enough to die for the sake of our love at times of persecution. Saint John says, “whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?” (1 Jn 3:17). John the Baptist also says, “he who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none” (Luke 3:11). But does he who gives his tunic give up his life?

Maintain the virtue of love during peaceful times by showing mercy. You will then not be defeated during the times of persecution.

Learn first to give your possessions to the Almighty God, then you will give Him yourself.<sup>27</sup>

**Pope Gregory (the Great)**

\* Would we follow His example in this spirit of reverent obedience, not that we dare to compare Him to us.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Letters, 167:11.

<sup>27</sup> Hom. 27. Forty Gospel Homilies. PL 76:1205.

<sup>28</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 84:2.

**Saint Augustine**

**“You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” [14]**

Abraham was called the friend of God (Is 41:8; James 2:23) because he believed God and obeyed Him “and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” Moses also was called the friend of God (Ex 33:11). This is what every believer wishes to enjoy through the living faith.

\* What is more precious than the friendship that the angels share exactly like human beings? Therefore, the Lord Jesus says, “make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home,” (Luke 16:9)

God Himself makes of us friends instead of servants as He says, “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” He thus gives us the example of friendship so that we may follow Him.

We need to achieve the desire of our Friend (the Lord Jesus) and reveal to Him the secrets of our hearts. We must not ignore His trust. Let us show Him our hearts so that He may open His heart for us. He therefore says, “I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.” [15]. So a friend, if he is truly a friend, does not hide anything, but rather pours out himself as our Lord Jesus pours out His Father’s secrets.

Thus, he who does God’s will is God’s friend and is honored by this name. He who has the same mind is a friend because there is oneness of thought between friends. Nobody is more despised than the offender against friendship is.<sup>29</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

**“No longer do I call you servants,  
For a servant does not know what his master is doing;  
But I have called you friends,  
For all things that I heard from My Father  
I have made known to you.” [15]**

He did not stop at sacrificing Himself for them, but He also made a covenant with them that they become His friends who enjoy knowing His secrets, for they are not servants.

His tongue preaches gentle mercy. Here He calls them friends and after His resurrection He says, “go to My brethren” (Jn 20:17) and He also says to them, “children, have you any food?” (Jn 21:5) For they are His beloved children. But on their part, they call themselves His

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<sup>29</sup> Duties of the Clergy, 3:22:135-136.

bondservants (2 Pet 1:1). As He honors us, we on our part, must honor Him more. As we rise in His eyes, we feel even more contrite before Him.

There is no comparison between a servant and a friend. The master may love his servant and may treat him gently, but he does not allow his servant to share his personal secrets. A servant receives orders from his master and has no right to discuss those orders. He must only do what he is told; he knows nothing beyond the order. He does not know the aim of the order, nor does he know his master's mind.. He must obey blindly.

As they are His friends, Christ does not give them commandments from His throne. He comes down to them to speak with them so that they may realize they are in His heart and that they have their special value in His inner self. By descending to them He ends the age of servitude by ending the letter that kills the Law. He brought us to the era of transcendent love as we enjoy being God's children through the blood of the Only Begotten Son, through the work of the Holy Spirit in the water of baptism. Thus, He raised us and renewed our nature so that we may become His icons and have the right to enjoy knowing the Father and understand His divine sacraments.

\* When our Lord Jesus Christ saw that His disciples were about to accept adoption, to know Him, and learn through the Holy Spirit, He said to them, "No longer do I call you servants, but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you." (Jn 15:15)

For, those who realized what they became in Christ Jesus cried out saying, "we did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but we received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father,'" (See Rom 8:15)

If a man fails to show complete readiness and zeal to rise (from sin), let him know that the coming of our Lord and Savior is judgment to him. Therefore, Simeon (the Elder) from the beginning said, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against," (Luke 2:34) The Apostle later said, "To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life," (2 Cor 2:16)<sup>30</sup>.

### **The Great Saint Anthony**

\* He introduces the name 'friends' in a way that eliminates away the name 'servants.' He does not combine the two names in one expression, but rather makes one name take the place of the other.

What does this mean? There are two kinds of fear bringing about two kinds of the frightened. Likewise there are two kinds of service bringing about two kinds of servants. There is fear that perfect love casts out (1 Jn 4:18). There is another fear that is clean and endures forever (Ps 19:9). The Apostle refers to the fear that is devoid of love saying, "you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear" (Rom 8:15), but he refers to the pure fear when he says, "Do not be haughty, but fear." (Rom 11:20)

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<sup>30</sup> Philokalia, Book 1.

In the case of fear that perfect love casts out there is also the service related to it for the Apostle links service and fear together. He says, "you did not receive the spirit of bondage (service) to fear." Such a servant is connected to that kind of service. He is that person who was not before the Lord's eyes when He said, "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing." He certainly is not that servant who is characterized by clean fear to whom is said, "Enter into the joy of your Lord." He is rather that servant whose fear perfect love casts out. About him it is said, "a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever." (Jn 8:35)

Accordingly, as He gave us the right to become children of God (John 1:12) may we be not slaves but children. In a true and wonderful manner that cannot be described, we the slaves have the right not to be slaves.

Indeed, we are servants through clean fear that characterizes him who enters into the joy of his Lord. But we are not slaves through the kind of fear of someone who is cast out and that belongs to him who does not abide in the house forever.

Let us bear in mind that it is the Lord who made us able to serve, not as slaves who do not know what their master is doing, but as children. Let not the servant who does some good work be haughty as though he worked independently and not through his Lord. In that case he, and not the Lord, is glorified and in self-deception he boasts as if he had not received from the Lord anything (1 Cor 4:7).

Dear beloved, may we know what our Master is doing so that we may become friends of the Lord. For it is He who made us, not only human beings, but also righteous. We did not make ourselves what we are.<sup>31</sup>

\* Do not say, 'Before I believed I did good deeds and for this reason He chose me.' For, what good deeds can precede faith? The Apostle says, "Whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom 14:23).<sup>32</sup>

\* Therefore, beloved friends, He did not choose the righteous, but rather caused the chosen to become righteous. "I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain," (John 15:16) Is not this the fruit about which He said earlier, "without Me you can do nothing," (Jn 15:5)? He chose us and appointed us that we should go and bear fruit. So, we had no fruit that made Him choose us. We rather go to bear fruit. He is the Way we take to bring fruit. He appointed us to take that way. This is His mercy for all.<sup>33</sup>

\* Let this love endure, for it is itself our fruit.

This love in the present is concealed in our yearning, not in our full rejoicing in it. Everything we ask for in our yearning, in the name of the Only Begotten Son, the Father grants us. But if we ask for what is not connected to our redemption, we must not think that we ask for

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<sup>31</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 85:2.

<sup>32</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 86:2

<sup>33</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 86:3.

it in the name of the Savior. What we ask for in the name of the Savior is truly connected to the Way of our salvation.<sup>34</sup>

Saint Augustine

**“You did not choose Me, but I chose you  
and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit,  
and that your fruit should remain,  
that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.” [16]**

He chose them not for their efficiency, wisdom, or goodness, but by way of His love and free grace. God took the initiative. He chose them before they chose Him and before they took that decision. As it is written in Deuteronomy: **“the Lord thy God has chosen you to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people; for you were the fewest of all people: But because the Lord loves you.”** (Deut 7:6-8).

He chose them and “appointed” them (hetheka hymas) meaning He put them into the ministry (1 Tim 1:12). He crowned them with this honor and granted them His confidence as His ambassadors who will assume the management of His kingdom in this world. They, consequently, must work “that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.” He asked them to bear the yoke everywhere. They must travel from place to place over the whole world. They must not yield or rest, but they must always act, strive and sacrifice themselves so that they may have fruit as among all Gentiles (Rom 1:13). **Father Theodore, the bishop of Messissa**, interprets the Greek work as meaning “I planted you”, for He is the vine and they are branches in Him.

The secret of success in service lies in the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself chose the disciples and apostles and helped them. He worked in and through them. Therefore, it is appropriate that **whoever serves in the Lord’s vineyard should have the following traits:**

1. That the Lord Himself plants him with His right hand and chooses him for service.
  2. That he abides in the true Vine in order that he may bear fruit and may not be arid.
  3. That he realizes that he is called to work and not to laziness. For, as the Lord Jesus Christ begins lovingly to choose His disciples, the chosen, on their part, must go and declare the perfect love of God to the entire human race. While He asks them to unite, He commands them not to cling to one another, but to depart and preach the gospel sharing in the journey of the Church into the entire world so that all may rejoice in the Savior (Mark 16:15).
  4. That he must wait for the fruit patiently and must not despair. For, He who has chosen him guarantees the lasting fruit.
  5. That he ascribes all fruit and success to the Lord.
- “And that your fruit should remain”: unlike philosophers in general whose philosophy flourishes for sometime then becomes something of the past. The fruit of the disciples is in

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<sup>34</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 86:3.

the Church of God, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. The loving believer is characterized by persistence in all things: perseverance in rejoicing in the Word of God [7], in love of Christ [9-10], in the joy of Christ and in bearing fruit [16].

The indication of His love is not only in that He chose them, appointed them to work, and caused their fruit to remain, but He also granted them the Father's blessing that all they ask the Father in Christ's name the Father gives them.

\* Let us believe that whatever we ask the Father in Christ's name we obtain. For, the Father's desire is that we ask through the Son and the Son's desire is that we ask the Father. This does not mean that the Father is unable to act. It means rather that the One Authority is revealed.<sup>35</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* As though the Lord Jesus Christ says to His disciples: 'I loved you first.'

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* 'I have formed you for grace. I have planted you so that you may willingly go and bring forth the fruit of your work. I say you need to go willingly. For to say you will do something means that you will go with all your heart.' He then added, "and that your fruit should remain." What we do for eternal life remains even after death. Let us work for the fruit that will remain.<sup>36</sup>

\* Why did Paul plead with the Lord three times but did not receive (2 Cor 12:8)? Christ asks the great preacher to demand in the name of the Son!

Why did he not obtain what he asked for?

The name of the Son is Jesus, and Jesus means 'salvation.' Whoever asks in the name of the Savior asks for what concerns his actual salvation. So, if what he asks for is not for his good, he does not ask the Father in the name of Jesus. Therefore, the Lord said to His apostles when they were still weak, "Until now you have asked nothing in My name" (John 16:24). This is the reason why God did not give heed to Paul. If he had been made free of that affliction, there would have been nothing to help him in his redemption.

Examine your requests. Do you ask for the joys of salvation? "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you," (Matt 6:33)<sup>37</sup>.

**Pope Gregory (the Great)**

**"These things I command you, that you love one another." [17]**

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<sup>35</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 1:2:12.

<sup>36</sup> Hom. 27. Forty Gospel Homilies

<sup>37</sup> Hom. 27. Forty Gospel Homilies

The Lord Christ combines love of God and love of brethren [12, 17], and He presents Himself as an example, for He loved us and sacrificed Himself for us [13]. He called us ‘friends’ [14], and revealed to us His secrets [15]. He chose and appointed us [16], and gave us grace so that our appeals in His name to the Father may be answered. All this we may acknowledge by loving our brethren.

\* This means that I tell you that I lay down My life for you, not to rebuke you, nor to say I hasten to meet you, but rather to lead you to friendship.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* This is the fruit that we cannot acquire far from Him, just as the branches can do nothing without the vine. Our fruit is love as the Apostle explains, “from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith” (1 Tim 1:5). This is how we must love one another and love God. For, there will be no true love for one another if we do not love God. Everyone will love his brother as himself if he loves God. On the other hand, whoever does not love God does not love himself.<sup>38</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

### **3- Confrontation of the Hatred of the World**

**“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.” [18]**

Hatred is the characteristic of Satan and the pillar of his kingdom, just as love is the characteristic of Christ’s kingdom. No wonder, therefore, that those who love the world hate the kingdom of Christ without cause, for this is their nature. There would be no comfort for the disciples if the world hated them because they did something evil. But if the world hated them because it could not tolerate their Christ, this hatred is a glory which the believer does not deserve since he shares the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The evil people are called ‘the world’ because they love the world and carry its name and because they are the majority of the world population. We are not amazed that the world cannot tolerate those whom God loves and blesses. For, there has been enmity between the evil world and God’s children since the time the serpent crept towards Eve to seduce her. Since then, Cain murdered Abel because Abel’s deeds were righteous. Esau also hated Jacob because Jacob obtained the blessing. Likewise, Joseph’s brothers envied Joseph because his father loved him, and Saul hated David because the Lord was with David and gave him success. In all these examples, the saints had no hatred for anybody, nor did they do any evil to deserve such hate.

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<sup>38</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 87:1.



When **Saint Jerome** faced trouble and was about to leave Rome and travel East, he wrote to Asella saying, “I write to you in a hurry, dear Lady Asella, as I am going to the ship swallowed by grief and tears. Nevertheless, I thank my God that I was counted worthy of the hatred of the world.”<sup>39</sup>

\* Do not be terrified, dear beloved brethren, of the coming persecution, or of the coming of the Antichrist who threatens. There is no weapon against all circumstances other than the evangelical advice and the heavenly commandments and warnings.

The Antichrist is coming, but Christ triumphs.

The enemy approaches and rages, but the Lord who heals our suffering and wounds accompanies us.

The rebel threatens in anger, but there is He who liberates us from the enemy’s hands.<sup>40</sup>

**The Martyr Cyprianus**

\* Along with this love we need also to patiently endure the world’s hatred. Why does the member exalt himself above the Head? You refuse to be in the Body if you do not want to bear the world’s hatred of you, the same as its hatred of the Head.<sup>41</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“If you were of the world,  
the world would love its own.  
Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world,  
therefore the world hates you.” [19]**

The believers are counted as not of the world not because of their wisdom or virtues, nor because their nature is different from that of other people, but because they accepted God’s call. He then chose them and set them apart for action in His kingdom. For this reason the world hates them. The life of the true Christian silently condemns the evil world. Therefore, the world has no other way but to take revenge of those who do not take part in its evil and calm its conscience.

Here, He refers to Psalm 69: “Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head.” (Ps 69:4). This Psalm is entirely a prophecy about the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>39</sup> Letters 45:6.

<sup>40</sup> Letter 58 to the people abiding in Thibaris, 7.

<sup>41</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 87:2.

\* As though the Lord Jesus Christ says to His disciples, “If you wish to love, you must suffer.” This is implied in His saying, “If you were of the world, the world would love its own.” If the world loved you, it would be evident that you wanted in yourself the world’s malice.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* The world loves itself falsely and hates itself truly. For, whoever loves evil hates himself (Ps. 11:5). Yet it is said the world loves itself as much as it loves the wickedness that causes it to be evil. But it is also said the world hates itself as much as it loves what harms it. Therefore, the world hates its true nature and loves vice.

The world hates what it is as the goodness of God created it. And it loves what it willingly brought upon itself. We are forbidden to love whatever the world loves in itself and we are ordered to love whatever the world hates in itself, that is to say, God’s creation and His various blessings.

We are forbidden to love vice in the world and we are admonished to love nature. But the world loves vice in itself and hates nature.

Thus, we love and hate correctly, but the world loves and hates in a wicked manner.<sup>42</sup>

**“Remember the word that I said to you,**

**‘A servant is not greater than his master.’**

**If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.**

**If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.” [20]**

The Lord did, indeed, call them friends. But it is suitable for them to consider themselves God’s servants. He did not wish to begin His discourse by mentioning how much they will be persecuted. He began, rather, by speaking about the hardship He will endure. He put Himself at the forefront of the battle between light and darkness. The suffering of His disciples is only their share in the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord set a distinctive parting line between the believers who are sanctified in His truth and the evil people who live in the darkness of foolishness.

\* The Lord has shown, here, that His disciples are like Him. It is as though He says to them, ‘If they persecute you, this is your share in My suffering. Therefore, you should not be perturbed, for you are not greater than Me.’

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* If “a servant is not greater than his master”, may those who follow the Lord remain close to His footsteps in humility, silence and tranquility. For those who are humble are more glorified<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 87:4.

**“But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake,  
because they do not know Him who sent Me.” [21]**

One of the main reasons of the world’s hatred for believers is ignorance and lack of knowledge. They do not know the Father who sent the Lord Jesus Christ. In that foolishness they ‘eat up’ God’s people. The Psalmist says, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘there is no God’ ... Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call on the Lord” (Ps 14:1, 4).

They do not know the Father and they do not know the Son sent by the Father “for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory,” (1 Cor 2:8).

We do not marvel that the Lord says, “No longer do I call you servants” and then says, “A servant is not greater than his master.” For He does not want to call us servants and at the same time He calls us ‘servants’ and says we are not greater than Him who is our Master. Saint Augustine explains that it is clear that in the first statement He means the servant who does not dwell in the house forever, and who is characterized by that fear that love casts out.<sup>44</sup>

**Saint Augustine** comments on the expression “for My name’s sake” saying this means ‘for righteousness sake’, for our Christ is our righteousness. The wicked persecute the righteous in Christ Jesus not for some crime they committed, but for their righteousness. Sometimes the righteous practice harsh punishment of the evil people, just as a judge punishes a criminal or as a policeman arrests rebels. If the judge or policeman is sanctified in the Lord, he is not judged for punishing the vicious because the pervert does not suffer for righteousness sake but for his own vice. Saint Augustine also says that sometimes the vicious persecute the vicious, as for example, the wicked rulers or judges who persecute the righteous, certainly also punish murderers, adulterers and all those who do evil and violate the general law. How then may we interpret the Lord’s words, “If you were of the world, the world would love its own,” [19] The world punishes those criminals, mentioned above, because they harm the world. However, the same wickedness is in those who punish the criminals and in those who love those crimes. Therefore the world that exists in the vicious and unrighteous hates its own who are criminals but loves the vicious who are serviceable.<sup>45</sup>

\* He says this, ‘they hate Me in you; they persecute Me in you. As your word is Mine, they do not obey it.’

All they do to you is done to Me, not to you. Therefore, those who do those things have greater misery. He also blesses those who suffer those things for His sake. For He says, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,” (Matt 5:10). They endure the persecution for My name’s sake. As the Apostle teaches us, “He became for us wisdom from

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<sup>43</sup> Letter 13 to Rogation, the priest and to the other confessors, 4.

<sup>44</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 88:1.

<sup>45</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 88:3.

God-and righteousness and sanctification and redemption-that, as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the Lord,’ (1 Cor 1:30-31). The people of the world do those things for evil, not for righteousness. Therefore, both have similar misery, the persecutors and the vicious who are persecuted. Also the righteous who chastise the vicious do that for righteousness, but the vicious who are punished do not suffer for the sake of righteousness.<sup>46</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin,  
but now they have no excuse for their sin.” [22]**

The divine promises have been realized, and He whose day Abraham rejoiced to see and for whose coming all the patriarchs and prophets yearned, has come. Because of this, they had no excuse for rejecting Him. Their hatred, however, was foretold in the Holy Bible (Ps. 35:19; 69:4; 109:3).

\* Here, the word ‘sin’, does not mean every sin, but means a great sin that includes all sins. Whoever is absolved of this sin obtains forgiveness of all his sins. This terrible sin is their disbelief in Christ who came specially to renew their belief. If He had not come they would not have this sin, but by His coming the life of those who did not believe was in danger of destruction, while those who believed were saved. As He is the head of the Apostles He became, as they declared, “to the one...the aroma of life leading to life, and to the other the aroma of death leading to death,” (2 Cor 2:16)<sup>47</sup>.

\* He adds saying, “but now they have no excuse for their sin” [22]. Someone may be moved to say, ‘those people to whom Christ did not come and with whom He did not speak may have excuse for their sin.’ My answer to this is that they may have excuse for this sin concerning their lack of belief in Christ, but they have no excuse for all their other sins. Moreover, He came with His Church to the nations and spoke to them. The reference here is to the words He said, “he who hears you hears Me,” (Luke 10:16). Paul the Apostle also says, “since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me,” (2 Cor 13:3)<sup>48</sup>.

\* However, it is clear that they do not escape from judgment: “For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law” (Rom 2:12). The Apostle’s word ‘will perish’ has a horrible ring, more so than the word ‘judged.’ This shows that such an excuse (that Christ did not come to them and did not

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<sup>46</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 88:2.

<sup>47</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 89:1.

<sup>48</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 89:2.

Speak with them) will not benefit them, but rather adds to their aggravation. For those who find excuse in that they did not hear, will perish without law.<sup>49</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“He who hates Me hates My Father also.” [23]**

**Saint Augustine** asks how can it be possible for the Jews who did not know the Father who sent His Only Begotten Son [21] would hate Him [23]? Saint Augustine then answers at some length, that a man may often love or hate another without seeing or knowing him, but only by imagining him or hearing about him. So, the Jews hated the Father without knowing Him, but as they imagined Him. Saint Augustine writes, “How could they love the Father of Truth when they were full of hatred for truth itself? They did not wish to be judged for their conduct, while the act of truth judged such conduct. Thus, they hated Truth as much as they hated the punishment Truth might submit them to. And as they did not know that He was the Truth who judged such as they were, they hated Him whom they did not know. And as they hated Him, they surely could not but hate Him who was born the Truth. So, as they did not know the Truth by whose wisdom they were judged and who is born of God the Father, they certainly also did not know the Father and they hated Him. Those people were really miserable. For, as they desired to be evil, they rejected Truth that judged them.”<sup>50</sup>

**“If I had not done among them the works which no one else did,**

**They would have no sin;**

**But now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father.” [24]**

The Lord Jesus Christ did among them great unique works revealing not only His power, but also His kindness, love, and mercy. But, in spite of that, they hated both Him and the Father who sent Him. No wonder they hated those who believed in Him and became His disciples.

\* They were sinners before He spoke to them and did such works among them, but they did not have the sin of disbelief in Him. This is the sin that is referred to in particular because it includes all other sins. If they were freed of that sin and believed in Him, they would have been forgiven all the other sins.<sup>51</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

They saw with their eyes full of envy and hate and consequently they hated Him. On the other hand, Saint John saw Him and enjoyed fellowship with Him. For he says, “which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have

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<sup>49</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 89:3.

<sup>50</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 90:3.

<sup>51</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 91:1.

handled, concerning the Word of life ...that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:1, 3)

**Saint Augustine** says that many prophets did works no one did, but there is no comparison between their works and the works of the Lord Jesus Christ. The countless wonders He did, their variety, and also that He did them with His personal power show that without Him nobody could do anything. Besides, His birth of a virgin and His resurrection the third day are further proof.<sup>52</sup>

\* They themselves were witnesses of this. For they said, “It was never seen like this in Israel,” (Matt 9:33). They also said, “Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind,” (John 9:32). The same was in the case of Lazarus being raised from the dead and all the other works and wonders that were new and beyond thought. Someone may ask, “Why then do they persecute You and us?” The answer is, “Yet because you are not of the world. If you were of the world, the world would love its own”, [19]. As this matter was baffling to us He told us the reason: their viciousness. He did not stop at that but also referred to the prophecy (Ps 35:19; 69:4) to show that this had been foretold a long time before, saying, “they hated Me without a cause,” [25].

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**“But this happened that the word might be fulfilled**

**Which is written in their law,**

**‘They hated Me without a cause.’” [25]**

They hated the Lord Jesus Christ without a cause. His words and teaching were open, presenting truth blended with love. His works were superior and unique based on His rich grace and infinite love. In the Psalms it is written, “Those who hate Me without a cause,” (Ps 35:19; 69:4). ‘Without a cause’ in Greek means ‘for nothing’ since they hated Him and did not think of receiving anything in return for their hatred.

**Saint Augustine** observes that the Lord Jesus Christ declared that the Jews hated Him and His Father without a cause and that they would kill Him. However, when the Paraclete arrived at Pentecost after the Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, He, through the word of the apostle Peter, attracted those who were present. So, about three thousand of those who took part in the uprising and asked for Christ’s crucifixion believed in Him. Thus, the Holy Spirit testifies effectively to the change of those who hated truth to become believers in the Truth.

\* As though He says, ‘They hated and killed Me when I was visible to their eyes; but the testimony will be carried for Me by the Helper who will attract them to faith in Me when I am not seen by them’<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 91:2-4.

<sup>53</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 92:1.

#### 4- Sending the Helper to Them

He gave them a path that seemed extremely difficult as He asked them to abide in Him like branches in the vine. That seemed impossible to a human being, for how can a weak man abide in the heavenly Son of God? How can the earthy unite with the heavenly?

After giving them this difficult path, He asked them to love, not just a temporary human affection, but by giving themselves even unto death as He gave Himself for the world. This commandment also seemed impossible, for who can fulfill it?

Finally, He told them the world would hate and persecute them. All of that seemed to be a narrow way a man cannot pursue. He, therefore, comforted them by His promise to send His Holy Spirit, the Paraclete. He is the heavenly teacher, the true guide who will lead them to Christ's perfect truth. He will make them firm in the vine as He pours the heavenly love in their hearts. He will grant them the power of testimony for Christ to attract to truth even those who oppose them.

**“But when the Helper comes,  
whom I shall send to you from the Father,  
the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father,  
He will testify of Me.” [26]**

He speaks here about the Helper who is a hypostasis called “Spirit of truth.” He proceeds from the Father and testifies of the Son through His gifts and blessings to the believers.

He is the Spirit of the Father, for the Son Himself says, “who proceeds from the Father,” (John 15:26) and in another place says, “...for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you (Matt 10:20). He is also the Spirit of the Son, for the Apostle says, “God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father’ (Gal 4:6). This means He will make you cry out, because this is what we say crying out to and in Him. This means He will fill our hearts with love without which our crying out will be in vain, for the Apostle says, “...if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His,” (Rom 8:9).

Christ had said that He would pray the Father to send the Helper (John 14:16). Here, He says, “I shall send Him to you from the Father.” So, He is sent from the Father as the administrator of redemption and sanctification, and He is sent from the Son who paid the price on the cross so that the Spirit may dwell in man and find in him the righteousness of Christ.

The Holy Spirit testifies of the Son, and as He dwells in the disciples they testify of the Lord Jesus Christ with the power of the Spirit.

\* The same Helper is also sent by the Father, as Christ had already said, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name,” (John 14:26). Consider their unity, for the Father sends Him whom the Son also sends.<sup>54</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* The disciples may say, what can we do? If they did not obey Your words, for the same reason they will not keep our words. If they drove You out, they will expel us. They saw miracles no one saw done by anyone but You, and heard words no one heard anything similar said by other than You, and yet they did not benefit from what they saw and heard. If they hated Your Father and Yourself together, why did You cast us to face their opposition? How may we be qualified later so that they may believe us? Who of our tribes will listen to us? The disciples may ask the Lord Jesus Christ these questions. However, so that they do not have these disturbing thoughts, Christ comforts them by saying, **“when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.”** The Lord says that the Holy Spirit whom He calls the Spirit of truth will qualify them to be believed.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* We affirm that the Holy Spirit Himself also who works in the prophets is an emanation of God. He proceeds from Him and returns like the rays of the sun.<sup>55</sup>

**Ethnagoros the Scholar**

\* The Holy Spirit is in reality a Spirit proceeding actually from the Father but not in the same way as the Son, for the Spirit is not born, but proceeds from the Father.<sup>56</sup>

**Saint Gregory of Nazianzus**

\* Thus it is impossible for the special attribute of the Father hypostasis to move to the Son or to the Holy Spirit. The attribute of the Father exists without cause, but this does not apply to the Son or the Spirit, for the Son “came forth from the Father” (John 16:28) and the Scripture affirms that the Spirit “proceeds from the Father” (John 15:26).<sup>57</sup>

**Saint Gregory the Bishop of Nyssa**

**Saint Epiphanius** uses the expression that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and takes from the Son and that He is of the same essence as the Father and the Son.<sup>58</sup> **Saint**

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<sup>54</sup> Of the Christian Faith, 2:9:76.

<sup>55</sup> Legat. 10:24.

<sup>56</sup> Oratione 39:12.

<sup>57</sup> De Oratione Dominica 3.

<sup>58</sup> Anor.7.



**Gregory the Bishop of Nyssa** maintains that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and takes from the Son.<sup>59</sup>

**Saint Cyril** asserts his teaching concerning emanation by saying, "...the Holy Spirit proceeds from God the Father as from a fountain; on the other hand, the Son is sent by God to His creation"<sup>60</sup>.

**The International Theological Joint Committee of East Orthodox and Catholic Churches** reports that, '... the Father is distinct from the two other hypostases in that He is of His essence since eternity, gives birth to the Son and sends the Holy Spirit. The Son is distinct from the two other hypostases in that He is born of His Father. The Holy Spirit is distinct in that He proceeds from the Father. Thus the Father is not born and has no anaitios or origin before Him. He is at the same time the only origin, the only root and the only source of the Son and the Holy Spirit<sup>61</sup>. He alone is aitios who from eternity gives birth to the Son and sends the Holy Spirit...Therefore, the Father has no previous cause anaitios. He is Himself the cause autoaitios; whereas the Son and the Holy Spirit have a source in the Father<sup>62</sup>.'

\* It befits us to make sure how many things must be said about that 'love' and also how many great things we need to know about God, for He Himself is Love. Just as "...no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Matt 11:27); likewise no one knows Love except the Son, and in the same manner no one knows the Son who is Love Himself except the Father. Moreover, as He is called Love, the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father, alone knows what is in God, just as the spirit of a man knows the things that are within his person (1 Cor 2:11). Here, then, the Paraclete who is "the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father" (John 15:26), walks about searching for the spirit that deserves and can accept His great love, the love of God that He desires to reveal to men.<sup>63</sup>

### **Origen the Scholar**

\* Christ told His apostles to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is a confession of belief in the Creator, the only begotten Son, and the Gift. For, God the Father, is One and everything is of Him; our Lord Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son through whom are all things (1 Cor 8:6) He is One, and the Spirit, God's Gift to us who is all things, He is also One (Eph 4:4). Thus the greatness of the Trinity is in accordance to the benefits the Trinity grants: the One Power from whom is everything, the only begotten Son through whom are all things, and the One Gift that grants us perfect hope. There can be no deficiency in this exalted

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<sup>59</sup> Adv. Maced.10.

<sup>60</sup> PG 77:318 b.

<sup>61</sup> Saint Basil the Great, sermon 24:4, volume of the Greek Fathers 31:9.6.

<sup>62</sup> Photius: De S. Spiritus Mystaggia 16; Mark of Ephesus: Capita Syllogistica 24.

<sup>63</sup> Heg Tadros Yacoub Malaty: the Holy Spirit according to the Learned Origen; transl. Into Arabic by Dr. George Boutros.

unity that embraces the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the infinite and eternal like the image that expresses Him and that we enjoy through the Gift.<sup>64</sup>

\* For, our fallen minds are incapable to comprehend the Father or the Son. Our faith that found difficulty in believing in God's incarnation is enlightened by the gift of the Holy Spirit, the bond of the Unity and the source of Light.<sup>65</sup>

### **Saint Hilary of Poitiers**

\* He fills all with His power. But only those who conform partake in Him. Those who partake of the Spirit enjoy Him as much as their nature allows, not as much as the Spirit can give Himself in that communion.<sup>66</sup>

\* As the sun is seen by a clear eye, similarly the Paraclete appears in the same image (the Son) that belongs to (the Father) the Invisible. Through the blessed meditation on the image we shall see the inexpressible beauty of the origin. He is the one who shines in those who are purified from uncleanness and makes them spiritual through communion with Him. And, just as when the sun's rays descend on the bright, transparent bodies they reflect brightness on others, likewise the spirits carrying the Spirit are enlightened and become spiritual imparting grace on the others.<sup>67</sup>

### **Saint Basil the Great**

\* Christ was born and the Spirit preceded Him. Christ was baptized and the Spirit testified of Him. Christ was tempted and the Spirit carried Him (to the mountain). Christ performed wonders and the Spirit accompanied Him. Christ ascended and the Spirit followed behind Him.<sup>68</sup>

\* The physical works of Christ ended and the works of the Spirit began.<sup>69</sup>

\* If the Spirit is not adored, how may He be able to deify me in baptism? We obtain from the Spirit what renews. You thus see the Spirit working as being God who grants us the gifts and you see what we may be deprived of if we deny that the Spirit is God. Through the Spirit I know God. He is Himself God and in the hereafter. He deifies me.<sup>70</sup>

### **Saint Gregory of Nazianzus**

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<sup>64</sup> On the Trinity 2:1.

<sup>65</sup> On the Trinity 2:33.

<sup>66</sup> Liber de Spiritu Sancto. 9:22 PG 32:108-9.

<sup>67</sup> Liber de Spiritu Sancto. 9:23 PG 32:109.

<sup>68</sup> Oratio 31, Theologica 5:31. 29 PG 36:159B.

<sup>69</sup> Oratio 41 In Pentecosten, 5. PG 36:436B.

<sup>70</sup> Oratio 31. Theologica 5:28 PG 36:105A.

\* Our reform is the work of the entire Holy Trinity equal in every respect. Through the Divine nature as a whole, the will and power traverse everything done through Him. Therefore, our salvation is in reality the work of the One God. And, though what was realized for our sake and took place in all creation seems to refer to each hypostasis, we yet believe that all things are from God through the Son in the Holy Spirit.<sup>71</sup>

### **Saint Cyril the Great**

\* The work that befits the Holy Spirit is the accomplishment of our unity with Christ.

\* The Spirit unites us. We say He relates us to God; when we admit Him we partake of the Divine nature, we receive Him from the Son, and through the Son from the Father.<sup>72</sup>

\* The Son Himself forms us according to His glory and brands us with the stamp of His form.<sup>73</sup>

\* He grants us the perfect scent of Him who gave birth to Him.<sup>74</sup>

\* He who grants the divine Spirit the life giver is the Son born of God.<sup>75</sup>

\* The fulfillment given to us by the Father and the Son is accomplished by the Holy Spirit who fills us with divine gifts through Him and makes us partakers of the unutterable Nature.<sup>76</sup>

\* As the Son lives in us through His Spirit in a manner that cannot be described (Gal 4:6), we say that we are called to the spirit of adopted children<sup>77</sup>.

\* We are grateful to the union with the Son that is achieved through the Spirit in those who accept Him so we take the form of adopted children<sup>78</sup>.

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<sup>71</sup> In Joannis Evangelium, Liber 10, 15:1 PG 74:333-6.

<sup>72</sup> In Joannis Evangelium 11:10. PG 74:544.

<sup>73</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 3. PG 75 :837A.

<sup>74</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 5 PG 75:837A.

<sup>75</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 3. PG 75: 964A.

<sup>76</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 3. PG 75: 800G

<sup>77</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 3. PG 75: 833.

<sup>78</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 3. PG 75: 837A.

\* If the true image that expresses perfectly the imitation of the Son Himself is without fault, the natural likeness of the Son is the Spirit. We conform to Him in turn through sanctification that gives us the form of the Father Himself.<sup>79</sup>

\* We take the form according to Christ and through Him we accept the image (Gal 4:9); the form of the Spirit is altogether good, and there is no one similar by nature to Him.<sup>80</sup>

\* Because of His strength and nature, the Spirit can surely reform us so that we have the superior image.<sup>81</sup>

### **Saint Cyril the Great**

In the writings of **Saint Basil the Great** and also of **Saint Cyril the Great** we read that the Holy Spirit works in us to make us the image of the Father. He is the living environment and through Himself He creates in us the similarity of the Father and the Son.

\* The Son born of God grants the divine life giving Spirit. The Son partakes of life and receives the perfect divine essence from the Father in whom is the Son and the Holy Spirit who gives life to those who obtain Him.<sup>82</sup>

\* In the One divine essence the three distinct hypostases unite in one exalted beauty. We also take a new form by accepting the mark of adopted children through the Son in the Spirit.<sup>83</sup>

\* Thanks are to the Spirit, for when we are molded according to the Son's exalted divine beauty, we partake of the divine essence.<sup>84</sup>

\* The Son grants us the perfect aroma of His Father. Through Him and in Him we accept the fragrance of knowing God and we become rich through it.<sup>85</sup>

### **Saint Cyril the Great**

Saint Cyril the Great says that the Holy Spirit gives energy as He is the power of God.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 7. PG 75:1089A.

<sup>80</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 7. PG 75:1089B.

<sup>81</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 7. PG 75: 1113A.

<sup>82</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 5. PG 75:964B.

<sup>83</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 5. PG 75:964B.

<sup>84</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 3. PG 75:837C.

<sup>85</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 3. PG 75:856C.

<sup>86</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 7. PG 75:1112B.

\* The Son proclaimed Himself and the Father alike. The Word Himself became visible and tangible.<sup>87</sup>

\* Concerning His greatness we cannot know God. However, concerning His love, He is perpetually known through His Word and through the Spirit who embraces the human being and grants him authority to the glory of the Father.<sup>88</sup>

**Saint Irenaeus**

\* The Father declares; the Spirit truly works; and the Son serves.<sup>89</sup>

**Saint Irenaeus**

The feast of the Pentecost is the coming of the Holy Spirit that Christ had promised. The Spirit in the continual Pentecost is an assertion of the presence of Christ in the Church. Thus, the feast of the Pentecost is a messianic feast no less than a feast of the Holy Spirit. It is pneumatological because it secretly consecrates the presence of Christ in Church. The feast of the Pentecost eliminates the confusion arising from Christ's ascension to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father, and Christ's promise "I am with you always, even to the end of the age," (Matt 28:20)<sup>90</sup>.

**Saint Macarius** says that when Christ and the Spirit stay in us we experience this fact in various ways: in joy or tears, in silence or rapture. There are many forms of the presence of God; as for the fruit of the Spirit, this always takes the form of the presence of Christ who grants the union that lives in the Church that is in the heart of the believer.<sup>91</sup>

**"And you also will bear witness,**

**Because you have been with Me from the beginning." [27]**

Saint Augustine observes that when the Holy Spirit descends upon the Church, the disciples who accompanied the Lord Jesus Christ from the beginning of His service bear the possibility of witnessing for Him. The disciples were unable to be witnesses when the Lord Jesus Christ talked to them, because the fullness of the Spirit had not yet descended upon them. When the Holy Spirit descends He will grant them faith working through love, and perfect love casts out fear. Thus, Peter the Apostle will not deny Christ again as he did when Christ was to be crucified. He will testify of Christ and joyfully endure suffering and persecution for the sake of Christ's name. "When the Holy Spirit testifies of Christ and inspires such courageous testimony

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<sup>87</sup> Adv. Haereses 4:6:6.

<sup>88</sup> Adv. Haereses 4:20:4. PG 7:1034B.

<sup>89</sup> Adv. Haereses 4:20:6. PG 7:10367.

<sup>90</sup> Boris Bobrinskoy: The Mystery of the Trinity, St. Vladimir 1999, p.72.

<sup>91</sup> Boris Bobrinskoy: The Mystery of the Trinity, St. Vladimir 1999, p.73.

that cannot be defeated. He will free Christ's beloved from fear and will make them love the hatred of their enemies.”<sup>92</sup>

\* In the previous words the Lord strengthens His disciples so that they may endure the hostility of their enemies. He prepares them also by presenting Himself as an example so that they may have more courage in following Him. He gives them the promise of the Holy Spirit who will come and testify of Him so that they may become themselves witnesses through the work of the Holy Spirit in His listeners. This is the meaning of: “And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning”, [27]. He means that when He testifies you also will bear witness. He is in your hearts, and you will proclaim Him with your voices: He will inspire you and you will speak so that the words... “Their sound has gone out through all the earth” (Ps 19:4)... may be realized. For, unless He fills them with His Spirit, He will not achieve much by giving Himself as an example of the goal.<sup>93</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

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<sup>92</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 92:2.

<sup>93</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 94:1.

**Meditations**  
**Inspired by the Gospel of St John –Chapter 15**

\* Engraft Me into You  
O True Vine

\* My wonderful love, reveal to me Your eminent love,  
You have planted me as in a divine paradise  
You enclosed it with Your love  
You expected me to give You fruit to delight Your heart  
Yet when I gave You bad grapes You did not neglect me.

\* You pulled me from my corruption  
And You engrafted me in You who are the true vine!  
I bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit, the grapes of love and joy.  
I have Your sweet taste and fragrance  
Without You I am not good but be thrown for garbage and fire!

\* Would Your love run in my veins  
As I am a living branch in and through You.  
That Your joy in me may be perfect and my joy through You becomes perfect.  
I love You and get to know Your mysteries and will.  
I love You and sacrifice myself for Your small brethren!

\* I love you even if the world hates me.  
I am a branch in You, O divine Vine!  
The world cannot endure you and so despises me!  
The world does not tolerate your voice;  
It cannot accept your words which I pronounce!

\* Who will consolidate me in You so that I may not be plucked out of You?  
Who will care for me but Your Father the wonderful Vinedresser?

Who will encompass me and work in me  
Only Your Holy Spirit, the Comforter  
Glory be to You O Trinity who is all love!

AMEN

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## Chapter Sixteen

### Sending the Helper

Pain entered the world as one of the fruits of disobedience. However, God in His love allowed His only begotten Son to become man and to suffer as a sacrifice of love offered on behalf of all humanity. Consequently, pain changed from being the fruit of sin to becoming a sign of love. We then obtained the right to suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. Through this unique sacrifice we perceive the meaning of the divine promise that He wounds and heals (Deut 32:39). The Lord Jesus Christ spoke to the disciples openly about how much they would suffer and He promised to them His Holy Spirit the Helper who will descend on them, work in them, and grant them His divine comfort.

\* The spirit needs the divine lamp that is the Holy Spirit who lights the dark house. The spirit needs the bright Sun of Righteousness who shines in the heart. The spirit also needs the armor with which it may fight the battle and win.

**Saint Macarius the Great**

|                                                                     |               |              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| <b>1 – The Painful Arrows of Love</b>                               | <b>verses</b> | <b>1-6</b>   |
| <b>2 – Sending the Helper</b>                                       |               | <b>7-15</b>  |
| <b>3 – The Promise That He Will See Them after His Resurrection</b> |               | <b>16-22</b> |
| <b>4 – Answering Their Prayers</b>                                  |               | <b>23-27</b> |
| <b>5 – His Ascension to Heaven</b>                                  |               | <b>28</b>    |
| <b>6 – His Abandonment during His Suffering</b>                     |               | <b>29-32</b> |
| <b>7 – His Victory for Them</b>                                     |               | <b>33</b>    |

#### **1 – The Painful Arrows of Love**

In perfect faithfulness the Lord Jesus Christ reveals to the disciples the trouble they will face during the missions to which He will send them. However, these are the burdens of love. They are the arrows of love for His sake, for the world hates them as it hates Him.

**“These things I have spoken to you,**

## **That you should not be made to stumble.” [1]**

The expression **“these things I have spoken to you”** is repeated seven times in this chapter. In Greek this expression implies continuity and dignity. It is as though the things He speaks about in His farewell speech are not confined to a particular time. They are vital matters related to the Church throughout all the ages.

The word **“to stumble”** here is interpreted by some scholars as “you will fall into a trap” similar to a bird or an animal that falls in a net.

The Lord informs the disciples beforehand about the sufferings they will endure so that they do not stumble. That is to say, lest they lose their faith and their spirits are harmed, just as a man’s body is hurt when he stumbles in the street or falls in a trap or over a stone.

\* “These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble,” [1]. As the Holy Spirit pours in our hearts, the Holy Spirit who was given to us provides (Rom 5:5), to those who love God’s law, great peace so that they do not stumble in anything.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“They will put you out of the synagogues;**

**Yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you**

**Will think that he offers God service.” [2]**

The Lord refers to the time of suffering as **“the hour of temptation.”**

To cling to Christ and testify of Him was considered a religious crime or blasphemy. Therefore, Christians were put out of the synagogues. They were deprived of the right to pray. They were as considered cursed and unworthy to worship God or participate in prayers with the believers. The pain that the Jew who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ suffered because he was put out of the temple and was deprived of the joy of belonging to the Jewish nation was not less than murder. He then lost the feeling of relationship to the people of God. He lost his peculiar privileges and was considered as one who had broken the law. He was looked upon as a Samaritan, a pagan, a tax collector, and as a traitor of his religion, his people, and country.

They did not stop at putting those who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ out of the synagogues. They pursued them to offer them as human sacrifice and considered doing that for the glory of God. As Isaiah says, "Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for My name’s sake, said, let the Lord be glorified" (Is 66:5). This is what happened to the Apostle Paul when forty men swore that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed him (Acts 23:12-13). In the Talmud it is written, “...whoever kills an infidel is equal to a person who brings an offering

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 93:1.

to God”<sup>2</sup> Thus wolves disguised in the clothes of lambs, and the enemies of God appeared as zealous servants. They practiced hostility as a religious obligation toward heaven.

\* In truth it was said to those “...they will put you out of the synagogues.” That is to say, they have passion for God but have no knowledge, for they ignore God’s righteousness. Those punished should have no shame in being cast out by people, as long as God is the glory of their strength.<sup>3</sup>

\* Those who think that they serve God by killing you do not know the Father or the Son. The Lord added these words to comfort His people who are expelled from the Jewish communities. He says, “The time is coming that” in a manner of one who informs them beforehand of good news that will be followed by major evil. They will truly disperse you and I will gather you, or they will truly scatter you, but the time of your joy is coming.<sup>4</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“And these things they will do to you**

**Because they have not known the Father nor Me.” [3]**

There is a big difference between a person who speaks or writes about God and a person who knows God and God knows him. Here, when the Lord speaks about knowledge He does not mean mere mental knowledge, but knowledge through life and experience. Therefore, when on the Day of Judgment He says to the wicked “I know you not...” it does not mean that God is lacking information, for He knows everything, He means He does not know them in the context of friendship and communion.

The cause of their wickedness is lack of true knowledge. As is written in **Hosea**: “...because they have transgressed My covenant, and trespassed against My law, Israel shall cry unto Me, my God, we know thee” (Hos 8:1-2). They may know God’s will, but they do not know God practically in their conduct. They study the Bible but they twist the interpretation as they like.

\* As though the Lord Jesus Christ says to His disciples: ‘it is sufficient for you so that you may be comforted, to know that all your suffering is for My sake and the Father’s sake.’ Here He also reminds them of His beatitudes when He taught them “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matt 5:11-12)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Bammidar, R.21 ad Num.25:13.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 93:2.

<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 93:3.

<sup>5</sup> Homilies on St. John, 77:3.

**“But these things I have told you,  
That when the time comes,  
You may remember that I told you of them.  
And these things I did not say to you at the beginning,  
Because I was with you.” [4]**

He did not tell them those things at the beginning when they followed Him so that they may not be confused or worried. Now that they have become His disciples, He declares this to them as an essential matter in their life and their communion with Him. Before He had spoken to them about the time of tribulation so that they would realize that what will happen to them will not be a coincidence as some believe but will be allowed by God and to the extent that God will permit. Moreover, in this statement, Christ paves the way for them so that they may be ready to face that time with their spiritual weapons and in particular with the sword of the divine Word.

Why did He inform them about that at that particular time? Because the hour of tribulation was approaching. The hour of His suffering was near and the time of their suffering will be soon and He, in the flesh, will leave them. When He was with them in the flesh He comforted and supported them. Now He leaves to them His word and His promise that He will send to them the Holy Spirit the Helper.

\* No one should be surprised that we are consumed by continuous persecution and are under unusual oppression, since the Lord has told us beforehand that these things will happen at the end. He also gave instructions to our army and His words teach and encourage us.<sup>6</sup>

**Cyprian the Martyr**

\* These words I say enable you to judge and trust in my other speeches. You cannot say that I flatter you by mentioning only what pleases you. I do not cheat you, for whoever wishes to cheat you will not tell you beforehand things that would cause you to leave him. Therefore, I inform you in advance that these things will occur to you, so that you may not be troubled by not expecting these events.

There is also another reason: that you may not say we did not know before that these things will happen. Remember, therefore, that I told you.

May we also consider these things at the time of trial? And when we suffer at the hands of evil people: “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb 12:2). These things are caused by the wicked and are for the sake of virtue and for His sake.

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<sup>6</sup> Letter 58 to the people abiding in Thibaris, 2.

For, if we contemplate these matters, everything will be easy and bearable. If one suffers for the sake of his beloved, he glories in doing so; how much more would be his feelings when he endures suffering for the sake of God?

He, for our sake considered this shame, the cross, glory; how much more, then, we need to take this same attitude?

If we can make light of pain, how much more can we disdain wealth and greed?<sup>7</sup>

\* “And these things I did not say to you at the beginning because I was with you,” [4]. He said that in a human way as though saying: ‘when you were safe and had the authorization to ask Me when you wished, while the entire storm was blowing on Me, it was not necessary that I speak to you about these things at the beginning.’<sup>8</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Saint John Chrysostom** asks, ‘why did Christ say to them that He had not spoken to them about those things before; although when He called the twelve disciples He said to them ‘You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake’ and they will scourge you in their synagogues (Matt 10:17-18)?’ Then Saint John Chrysostom answers his question by saying that what Christ had said to His disciples was about what would happen in the future when they would preach to the Gentiles. But what He speaks about in this verse are things that they will suffer at the hands of the Jews, things that will soon happen. He had not told them anything about those things before.’<sup>9</sup>

**“But now I go away to Him who sent Me,  
And none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’” [5]**

Peter had asked Him this question (John 13:36). Thomas also asked the same question (John 14:5), and He answered both. But now He tells them not to ask Him that question because sorrow filled their hearts, [6].

It befits them, instead of asking where He was going, to understand and trust that all things work together for good to them whom God loves (Rom 8:28).

\* Now He promises them that He will go away in a manner through which no one asks Him where He is going. For, a cloud received Him as He ascended from among them. When He went up to heaven, no one asked Him orally; this was rather eye witnessing (Acts 1:9-11).<sup>10</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

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<sup>7</sup> Homilies on St. John, 77:3-4.

<sup>8</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78:1.

<sup>9</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78:1.

<sup>10</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 94:3.

**“But because I have said these things to you,  
Sorrow has filled your heart.” [6]**

The Lord Christ had filled their heart with joy before now (John 15:11). However, when their thoughts were troubled, sorrow filled their hearts and they did not allow Christ's joy to possess them. Their thoughts were preoccupied with Christ's exterior kingdom and temporal glory and that they would rule with Him. As worldly thoughts entered their minds, worldly sorrow filled them.

\* Their human feelings were distressed because seeing Him in the flesh would end permanently. But He knew what was beneficial for them. For that inner vision through which He will grant them the Holy Spirit for solace is undoubtedly more glorious...since He pours Himself in the hearts of believers. He then adds, “It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you,” [7]. He seems to say to them: ‘it is better for you that the form of a bondservant be taken away from you, for the Word came in real flesh and dwelt among you. But I do not want you to continue in loving Me in the flesh and be satisfied with this milk wishing to remain little children forever. If you adhere to the flesh in a physical way, the Spirit will have no room for you.

What does He mean by “if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you” other than that you cannot accept the Lord as long as you continue in knowing Christ according to the flesh? Therefore, one who obtained the Spirit says, “Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer” (2 Cor 5:16). For, now even the body of Christ he does not know in a physical way since he achieved the spiritual knowledge of the Word who became flesh<sup>11</sup>.

\* Through Christ's departure according to the flesh, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit became present with them. Thus, Christ left them in a manner so that He may remain in His abode and not with them, and so that the Holy Spirit may be present in them. What then does His promise mean when He says, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age,” (Matt 28:20). My Father and I “will come to him and make Our home with him,” (John 14:23)<sup>12</sup>.

**Saint Augustine**

\* Extreme sorrow is terrible and brings death. Therefore, Paul says, “...lest such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow,” (2 Cor 2:7)<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 94:4.

<sup>12</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 94:5.

<sup>13</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78:1.

\* It is no little comfort for them to know that He understands their great sorrow. For, besides their sadness because He will leave them and terrible things will happen to them, they did not know if they could bear all that with a strong will.<sup>14</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

## **2 – Sending the Helper**

**“Nevertheless I tell you the truth.**

**It is for your advantage that I go away;**

**For if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you;**

**But if I depart, I will send Him to you.” [7]**

In the Old Testament the prophets comforted the people during trouble by foretelling the coming of the Messiah the Savior as their helper (Is 9:6; Micah 5:6; Zech 3:8). Now the Messiah has come and will depart according to the flesh. Therefore, there is urgent need for another Helper- that is the Holy Spirit- whose coming necessitates Christ’s departure [7]. It was not possible for the disciples to accept that. Consequently, the Lord Jesus Christ affirms “I tell you the truth” that it is for their advantage that He goes away. This teaching was unexpected and strange to them. His ascension is not for His rest, but for their advantage. For, if what He did through the flesh was for the sake of His believers, His ascension is the ascension of the Head that the members of the body do not relinquish.

He had previously declared to them the necessity of His death for man’s salvation (Matt 20:19; 26:2; Mark 9:31; 10:33; Luke 9:44; 18:32). Now, He does not repeat His previous declaration, but rather reveals God’s plan concerning sending the Holy Spirit to the world. This will not be achieved unless our salvation is realized through the cross, resurrection, and ascension to heaven.

Why will the Holy Spirit not come except Christ goes away first? Because He comes to dwell in the human soul that the Lord bought with His blood. He gave men His righteousness and the right to enter heaven. Thus, the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, His resurrection, and ascension are the path to the enjoyment of the coming of the Holy Spirit into the Church and His dwelling in it so that the believer may enjoy that abode.

On the other hand, Christ’s ascension to heaven as the glorified Savior does not take away from Him His preoccupation with His Bride-the Church- whom He has saved with His blood. He sends to her the Holy Spirit who sanctifies her for Him. He beautifies her and makes an icon of her for Him. She gets prepared for the heavenly eternal wedding. Thus, the coming of the Holy Spirit who is Christ’s Spirit is better for the Church than the Lord Jesus Christ’s staying physically on earth. If the Lord Jesus Christ continues to remain physically on earth, the human eye will turn toward Him. But the coming of the Holy Spirit will draw the human heart

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<sup>14</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78:1.

to the glorified Christ in heaven. Consequently, the human heart will yearn not for continuing to exist on earth, but for departing to the bridegroom.

The Lord Jesus Christ ascended to heaven at a critical moment and in strange circumstances, for He left His disciples powerless and having nothing to do but wait.

(1) From the point of view of their private life and faith, until the moment of ascension they were afraid, weak, hard-hearted and of little faith (Mark 16:14). He left them physically and He gave them difficult commandments, a narrow path, and His severe cross. Who could endure all that?

(2) From the point of view of their work He gave them a difficult mission. He asked them to preach and make disciples in the entire world. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19). He asked them to preach in the name of the Holy Trinity. This was a difficult mission at a time when they did not perform miracles, cure lepers and cast out evil spirits as they had done when He served on earth before His crucifixion.

They were, therefore, in need of support and help. For this reason, He promised to send them the Spirit of Fire, the Spirit of the Holy God Himself. He will work in them to sanctify them and others. **"Behold, I send you the Promise of My Father upon you, but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high,"** (Luke 24:49) The ascension of the Lord, therefore, became a matter of joy and their spirits rejoiced. For, as He blessed them, He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. They worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. They were continually in the temple praising and blessing God (Luke 24:51-53). For the Lord said to them, "...if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you," (John 16:7)<sup>15</sup>.

About the day of the Pentecost Feast, **Saint John Chrysostom** writes about 'The gifts of the Holy Spirit' and says: [Before these days He ascended to heaven and took His heavenly throne. He took back His seat at the right hand of the Father. Today He grants us the coming on of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit He distributes among us other heavenly gifts. For, what gift among all gifts do we enjoy in our redeemed spirits, that we did not receive through the service of the Holy Spirit?!

Through the Spirit we are free of bondage and called to freedom!

Through Him we become the children of God by adoption!

Moreover, if I may say, we were renewed taking off the loathsome burden of sins!

Through Him we see before us the orders of clergy!

Through Him our teachers help us! From Him we obtain the gifts of signs, of healing and all the other gifts with which the Holy Spirit adorns the Church of God.

This is what the Apostle Paul declares saying, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills," (1 Cor 12:11). He says, 'as He wills' not 'as He orders', and he says, 'distributing' not 'distributed.' He thus shows that the Spirit possesses the gifts and does not bow to the authority of another.

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<sup>15</sup> The author: God Sanctifies Me, 1967, p.3.



For, the authority that the Apostle testifies of that belongs to the Father is the same that is referred to the Holy Spirit. Just as he says about the Father "it is the same God who works all in all", he also says about the Holy Spirit, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things distributing to each one individually as He wills."

Observe this perfect authority for the divine nature is one. Therefore, there is not the least doubt concerning the authority; since there is equality in honor, power and authority must be one.]

\* In the Gospels of the three other evangelicals it is clearly shown that He made such a prophecy before the Last Supper (Matt 10:16-30; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-17): that the Helper or Intercessor became necessary when Christ would depart. He, therefore, speaks about Him since the beginning as He was with them and His presence was helping them. However, on the night of His departure it was appropriate for the Lord to speak about the coming of the Spirit who will pour love in the hearts of those who will courageously preach the word of God. With the Spirit, they will carry within themselves Christ's testimony. There will be no cause to stumble when the hostile Jews put them out of the synagogues and kill them thinking that in doing so they offered God service. For, love endures all things (1 Cor 13:7); and that love of God had been poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to them (Rom 5:5)<sup>16</sup>.

**Saint Augustine**

\* As though He says openly: 'If I do not withdraw My flesh from your corporeal understanding, I cannot through My Spirit the Helper guide you to spiritual perception'<sup>17</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

\* We cannot by any means have this blessing, which we who have not seen- yet believe, except by accepting it through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, He specifically said "It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you," [7]. He is with us always in His divinity. But if He does not leave us in the flesh, we shall always see His body as body and we shall not believe spiritually.<sup>18</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* Observe how He comforts them again. He is clearly saying, 'I speak to you not to cheer you, even though you grieved many times, but you need to listen to what is for your good. You truly grieve because you yearn that I stay with you though what is for your good is different.' For, part of the concern for others enforces a person not to be too gentle to them in matters that are for their benefit, or for matters that lead them to what is not to their advantage."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 94:2.

<sup>17</sup> Moral 8:13.

<sup>18</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 93:4.

<sup>19</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78:1.

## **The Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit**

The temporal birth of the Lord Jesus Christ opened the way to the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell in us. For the life of the Lord Jesus Christ everywhere and in every action testifies to the work of the Holy Spirit that is Christ's Spirit. John the Forerunner came as an angel to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus Christ. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15). The same Spirit came upon the Saint Virgin Mary and overshadowed her, like the smoke or thick cloud that covered Sinai, to make her ready so that the Holy One, who is to be born of her would be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35). Then, when Saint Mary visited Elizabeth, the Holy Spirit filled Elizabeth and the babe in her womb leaped for joy (Luke 1: 41, 44). Mary and Zacharias, being inspired by the Holy Spirit, glorified God (Luke 1: 46, 68) and Simeon the Elder came by the Spirit into the temple to receive the child Jesus (Luke 2: 25-32). The Holy Spirit also drove our Lord Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted (Mark 1: 12).

The Lord Christ gives us the Holy Spirit to dwell in us so that we carry Christ in us, and He Himself becomes our prayer and worship "in Spirit" as we cry out to the Father, "Abba, Father" (Rom 8: 15; Gal 4: 6).

**“And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin,  
And of righteousness,  
And of judgment.” [8]**

The mission of the Holy Spirit to the Church fulfills the Lord Jesus Christ's care for the Church. When the Holy Spirit comes He will grant people the life of repentance and a return to Him through the Cross. He alone can enter the heart, reveal sin and unveil it to a person so that he may return to the delightful communion with God. The Holy Spirit can convince the heart, mind, and the entire depth of a man that his happiness, safety, joy, eternal life and incorruption are in his steadfastness with the Savior, not with sin. He will persuade him that the pleasure of life with God is far greater than the pleasures of sin.

The Holy Spirit is called 'the Paraclete.' This is an old Greek word. 'Para' means 'dwell, beside', 'clete' means 'call', 'to help.' Thus, the Paraclete is the dwelling Helper or the Guide and Comforter, the Intercessor and Defender. In Latin Paraclete is 'advocatus' and in French 'avocat' which means 'lawyer' or 'defending intercessor.'

This is the basis of our communion with the Holy Trinity. He intercedes for us before the Father. He presents the case to end our judgment with a verdict of innocence. We thus have the right of communion and of enjoyment of the divine bosom. The plea of the Holy Spirit is powerful, able, and glorious. Nevertheless, it is an argument in truth for He does not advocate

for us falsely or with contrivance. He is the Spirit of Truth whose testimony is for Truth. He is Truth Himself. He is just in His defense; He does not hide our sins and mistakes: in His intercession for sinners (Phil 1:20), He does not conceal our sins or cover up their stains with fig leaves as Adam did and as Adam's sons do. He does not show preference, nor does He ask for association of light and darkness, or righteousness and corruption. His work and advocacy for us is that He 'cuts to the heart' of the individual before he believes and before the Spirit dwells in him. He changes his nature, so that He may grant him faith and acceptance of the gift of the Holy Spirit as on the day of Pentecost. "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the hearts, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles "...what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit," (Acts 2: 37-38)

**Saint Augustine** observes that the greatest sin is disbelief in Christ as the Savior of the world. For he who does not believe cannot have the blessing of remission of his sins. Therefore, "He will convict the world of sin" implies urging men to abandon disbelief in Christ and so open the way for forgiveness.

While Peter was speaking to Cornelius and those who were with him, 'the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word....Then Peter answered, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord,' (Acts 10: 44-47).

If the Spirit cuts to the heart of a person before baptism, will He not cut to his heart after He dwells in him through Chrismation?! His work is to convict a person of sin so that he may repent and confess. By means of the sacrament of repentance and confession, his sins are forgiven through the Holy Spirit who forgives by reason of the due rewards of Christ's blood. Christ said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them." Thus, the Holy Spirit does not cover up the sins of unbelievers or believers. On the contrary, as He is the Light, He reveals and exposes sin before a man's inner vision. He discloses our iniquities and their bitterness to our hearts. At the same time He reveals the work of the Cross and the captivating power of God's love.

In this way, the Holy Spirit presents our confessions- full of depravity- along with our tears of repentance, and prayers of faith and joins them with the Blood shed for our sake. Then immediately the verdict of innocence is declared. The person's old sins are forgiven both in the sacrament of baptism and in the sacrament of repentance and confession.<sup>20</sup>

\* Observe how He begins first by rebuking sin and by scolding not only the Jews but every one who is obstinate and fights the Paraclete. The Holy Spirit's third conviction is of judgment of the ruler of this world. The Paraclete will testify of Christ's glory. He will show to the world the

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<sup>20</sup> The author: God Sanctifies Me, 1967, pages 12-13.

error in deserting Christ and worshipping Satan who by nature is not God. Now Satan is not the ruler of this world rightfully, like one who has the esteem of the governor who inherits his province. However, he retains the glory of this world by deceit and violence as he falsely rules over those, and that because of their evil will he exercise his authority over them.<sup>21</sup>

**Saint Cyril the Great**

\* We yearn to understand why it seems that there is no sin for a person other than his disbelief in Christ. For He spoke about that sin only saying that the Holy Spirit will judge the world for it. It is obvious that in addition to the sin of not believing in Christ there are various human sins. So why does the Holy Spirit convict the world of this sin only? It is because in disbelief all sins are retained, but in belief all sins are forgiven. This is why God attributes to them this sin more than all other sins. For by having no faith, a man's sins are not forgiven- since he is proud and does not believe in our humble God. It is written, 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble,' (Prov 3:34; James 4:6). This grace from God is God's gift, but the greatest gift is the Holy Spirit who has been called "Grace." For, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God [because] through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned," (Rom 3:23; 5:12).

**Saint Augustine**

**Saint John Chrysostom** affirms that the Holy Spirit and also the Father testify of the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world that lies under the sway of the wicked one. Indeed, the Lord Jesus Christ delivered teachings and wonders but the wicked resisted them. But when He ascended to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit who worked in Christ's disciples and apostles to reveal truth. The Holy Spirit achieves great wonderful deeds in Christ's name. He convicts the world so that people may comprehend their wickedness and accept to come back to the Savior.

\* **"And when He has come, He will convict the world"** [8]. This means that they will be punished for their deeds when He comes. For, truly the things that were actually done were enough to convict them. However, when those matters are also accomplished through Him (after His ascension), when the teachings become more complete (through the coming of the Holy Spirit), and when the miracles are greater (by the apostles) they will be even more condemned. When they see all that done in My name, My resurrection will be more certain.

Now they can say, 'this is the son of the carpenter and we know his father and mother.' But when they see the bonds of death have become loose, evil eliminated, nature's troubles repaired, demons cast out and when they see the abundant help of the Spirit all realized through My mission, what will they say? The Father testifies of Me and the Spirit will also be a testimony though He has testified from the beginning. Yes He will testify and convict.<sup>22</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

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<sup>21</sup> The Mission of the Holy Spirit, in Toal 2:369-371. PG 74, 922 B2.

<sup>22</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78:1.

**Saint Augustine** says that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself convicts the world of sin when He says, “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin...” (John 15:22). He will convict them of righteousness, for He says, “O righteous Father! The world has not known You” (John 17:25). And He will convict the world of judgment, for He declares that He will say to those on the left hand, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels,” (Matt 25:41). Many statements occur in the Gospels to assert that the Lord Jesus Christ convicts of those matters. Why, then, does He ascribe this to the Holy Spirit as though this was a special attribute to Him? Saint Augustine answers that the Holy Spirit pours out in the hearts of the disciples (Rom 5:5) and grants them love that casts out fear (1 John 4: 18) so that they have the right to reprimand and convict. Saint Augustine continues, ‘I often say that the work of the Holy Trinity is not divided, but each Person of the Trinity has His role, not only without separation, but also without mingling. We rightly understand Their oneness and trinity (distinction)’<sup>23</sup>.

**“Of sin,**

**Because they do not believe in Me.” [9]**

The Lord Christ elucidates the role of the Holy Spirit in convicting the world of sin by saying, "...because they do not believe in Me", [9]. If sin rules over the heart, there is no way for casting it out but by the coming of another ruler who is able to annihilate it. This power is the belief in Christ that controls the heart. Sin ruled and became the source of corruption and atrocity. Therefore, there was an urgent necessity for belief in the Savior who will remove corruption and atrocity and replace them with integrity and sanctity. Man broke the law when he sinned and he was cursed. In believing in Christ who fulfilled the law and suffered the curse for us, we become free of the deadly letter and the curse and we enjoy the life-giving Spirit and a blessed life.

The sin of the Jews became extreme when they did not accept Him as the Messiah and Savior, even though He performed the signs foretold by the prophets (Is 35: 3-6). When the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost, some Jews confessed that sin and returned to God (Acts 2: 37).

\* As this sin seems to be the only sin, He mentions it before other sins. For, by persisting in it all other sins remain, and by removing it the other sins are removed.<sup>24</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* He convicts “of sin”: this means He will silence all their excuses and show that they disobeyed and their disobedience was exorbitant.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 95:1.

<sup>24</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 95:2.

<sup>25</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78:1.

**“Of righteousness,  
Because I go to My Father  
And you see Me no more.” [10]**

Concerning convicting of righteousness, the Lord Jesus Christ says, “...because I go to My Father, and you see Me no more”, [10]. This means that He convicts them of not understanding the righteousness and holiness of Christ. His resurrection and ascension to heaven are a proof of His righteousness. Therefore, as the Lord ascends to heaven, He sends His Spirit to carry the human hearts to where Christ sits. They will then get in touch and experience His righteousness in them, or rather Christ will become righteousness for them.

Convicting the world of sin refers to the work of the Holy Spirit in disclosing the reality of the world: that the world sins. But convicting the world of righteousness is exposing the reality of what the world did to Christ; that is His crucifixion. For, Christ’s redemptive suffering and crucifixion are for our righteousness. The Spirit that gives light to the eyes to see one’s sins gives them light also to comprehend the power of Christ’s death that grants righteousness.

The Jews did not properly perceive the value of Moses the prophet until after he departed from our world. Many people also did not know Christ’s righteousness until His ascension to heaven. The coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in accordance to the divine promise is a proof of Christ’s exaltation to the right hand of God (Acts 2: 33). This is an evidence of His divine righteousness.

**Saint Augustine** asks why the Lord Jesus Christ said that the Holy Spirit convicts the world of righteousness because He (Christ) goes to His Father? He answers that when the Word became flesh and came from His Father He revealed His mercy to us. As He ascends to heaven and goes to the Father we rise with Him and seek things that are above where Christ sits. He sits at the right hand of the Father; He sits as the Head and Body, as though the Church that became a body obtains the right to sit in heaven at the right hand of God and enjoys Christ's righteousness.<sup>26</sup>

\* Therefore, it is proper for us not to consider ourselves separate from that righteousness that the Lord Himself refers to, saying, “...of righteousness because I go to My Father.” For we, also, will ascend with Christ and be with Christ our Head. Now by faith and hope for sometime but our hope will be complete in the Last Resurrection. When our hope becomes complete our vindication also will be complete. The Lord who has completed this revealed to us why we need to hope in His body (that is in our Head), this body that rose and ascended to the Father. For it is written: “He was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification,” (Rom 4: 25). Thus, the world is convicted of sin in those who did not believe in Christ; and of righteousness in those who rose as members of Christ. For it is written: “...that we might become the righteousness of God in Him,” (2 Cor 5: 21). If we are not in Him we have

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<sup>26</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 94: 3-5.

no path to righteousness. But if we are in Him He takes us entirely to the Father and His complete righteousness is realized in us.<sup>27</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* The Apostle states the command clearly: we must believe that the work of the Father and the work of the Son is one work.<sup>28</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* When He convicts a righteous man (proud of his righteousness) He convicts him of sin, not of righteousness. Therefore, consider the divine words: ‘Be not righteous over much,’ (Eccl 7: 16, 20). These words are not addressed to the wise righteous person, but to the proud and arrogant. For the individual who becomes ‘righteous over much’, with that very excess becomes unrighteous. He makes himself too righteous by saying he is without sin and by imagining that he did not become righteous through God’s grace but through his self sufficiency and will. He is not righteous and living a righteous life, but rather he is satisfied with imagining what in fact he is not.<sup>29</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* “Of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more” [10]. This means: ‘I have shown a life without blame and this is a proof that I shall go to the Father.’ As they always denounced Him saying He is not of God, and therefore, called Him a sinner and rebel, He says that the Spirit will take away also this excuse. For if I seem to them not to come from God and they call me lawless, when the Spirit declares that I go to God, not for a while but to dwell there... ‘and you see Me no more’ implies this.... what will they say? Notice how with these two points He removes their wicked doubt. For, neither the miracles nor dwelling with God may refer to someone wicked. You cannot say about such a man that he is wicked or is not of God.<sup>30</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**“Of judgment,**

**Because the ruler of this world is judged.” [11]**

Briefly, the Holy Spirit convicts of sin [9] granting faith to human beings and introducing to them the righteousness of the crucified Christ. He also judges the wicked world and grants the believers what belongs to the Son so that they may enjoy sharing the heavenly glory. Thus, the Holy Spirit presents three important facts relevant to our life:

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<sup>27</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 94: 6.

<sup>28</sup> Of the Christian Faith, 3: 11: 90.

<sup>29</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 95: 3.

<sup>30</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78:1.

- (1) the corruption of our nature because of sin
- (2) correction of our nature so that we enjoy Christ's righteousness
- (3) the eternal condemnation of evil.

The Holy Spirit convicts of judgment "...because the ruler of this world is judged", [11]. While the world thought that they had judged Christ and condemned Him, the Holy Spirit revealed to the believers that through the Cross, the enemy of good was judged and exposed (Col 2: 15). Satan has been exposed as an impostor and a destroyer of mankind. The nations began to reject and abandon worshipping him when they heard the gospel of Christ's Cross. The work of the Holy Spirit is an affirmation that Christ is greater and stronger than Satan. Christ grants His disciples authority to trample on the powers of darkness. The believer experiences in his daily life the pledge of authority that he received so that he may enjoy it completely the Day of Judgment, when Satan is judged and the believer obtains remarkable honor. Man will occupy the excellent heavenly degree from which Satan and all his soldiers fell. For this reason the verb "is judged" carries the sense of continuity, for the victory over the powers of darkness is a daily continuous work.

\* Again, the world is convicted "...of judgment, because the ruler of the world is judged": that is Satan the ruler of the wicked. Satan dwells in the heart of this 'world' alone. He dwells in the hearts of those who love 'the world' just as our dwelling is in heaven if we are raised with Christ. Thus, just as Christ and we, His body, are one, likewise Satan with all the sinful whom he rules are one body. Therefore, just as we are not separate from righteousness about whom the Lord said, 'I go to My Father', similarly the sinful are not separate from that judgment that Christ said, "...because the ruler of this world is judged."<sup>31</sup>

\* The ruler of this world is the ruler of darkness or of those who do not believe in Christ. Whoever liberates himself from this world is told, "you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord" (Eph 5: 8). The ruler of this world about whom Christ says in a different speech, "...now the ruler of this world will be cast out" (John 12: 31) is, indeed, judged as determined, and condemned to eternal fire.<sup>32</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* As he is judged through Me, they will know who will trample on him later. They will know My resurrection clearly, that is the sign of who judges the ruler of this world. For he is incapable of holding Me. While they said that I have a demon and that I am a deceiver, all these events will reveal they are false. For, I could not have won if I was under sin. But now he is judged and cast out.<sup>33</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

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<sup>31</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 94:6.

<sup>32</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 95:4.

<sup>33</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78: 1.



**“I still have many things to say to you,  
But you cannot bear them now.” [12]**

The Lord Jesus Christ declared to them that He had many things that He did not desire to tell them because they would not be able to accept such things at that time. For, in Him, are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

\* Therefore, it is better for you that I depart if you would bear those things through My departure. What will happen? Is the Spirit greater than You and therefore we cannot endure now but later we can? Will the Spirit work better and more perfectly? No. It is not so. For the Spirit also speaks My work.<sup>34</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* At that time when Christ said to them, “You cannot follow Me now...” (John 13: 36), the disciples were not ready to die for Christ’s sake. However, later, innumerable men, women, children, boys and girls, young men and young women, old and young obtained the crown of martyrdom. The flock was ready for the sacrifice that the shepherds could not bear when the Lord said those words.<sup>35</sup>

\* Well, would we accept this matter as willingly? Many can bear those things since the Holy Spirit has come; though the disciples could not bear them before the coming of the Holy Spirit.<sup>36</sup>

\* Although I yearn, ask, and pray with all zeal that the Lord uses you to remove my ignorance in this matter, yet though I am unworthy, God forbid! I ask the Lord our God patiently and I believe that I shall not complain if He refuses to open when I knock. I shall remember His words: “I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now,” (Jn 16: 12).<sup>37</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come,  
He will guide you into all truth;  
For He will not speak on His own authority,  
But whatever He hears He will speak;  
And He will tell you things to come.” [13]**

The Lord Jesus Christ promised they would enjoy the coming of the “Spirit of truth” who will guide them into all truth. The Lord had introduced Himself to them saying, “I am the truth.” Whoever obtains Him has the truth. But how may they obtain Him? Through the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of truth. The Spirit works in them, and makes them firm in Christ who is the divine Truth.

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<sup>34</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78: 2.

<sup>35</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 96: 1.

<sup>36</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 96: 2.

<sup>37</sup> Letters, 166: 27.

Did the Lord Jesus Christ conceal the truth from His disciples? He came to the world to offer the truth. He spoke to His disciples as much as they could bear, and He spoke to the multitude according to their capability. But they were unable to accept all the truth. He therefore sent His Holy Spirit to guide them and take them into new depths of the truth. Moreover, the Lord affirmed that the Spirit of truth does not teach anything contrary to what the Lord teaches. The Spirit hears from the Father in harmony with the Son, and utters what He hears for the glory of the Holy Trinity and the salvation of mankind.

The Spirit of God leads believers to prophecy (Rom 8: 14). He takes them through the road; He guides and accompanies them. He remains their support until they reach the end where they enjoy all the truth. He is like the captain of a ship who knows all the water ways, and navigates taking the passengers to the mainland safely.

He is the Spirit of truth and He guides the believer only to the truth (1 John 3: 27). He speaks what gives us growth and helps us toward future matters. And, as is written in Joel, "It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions" (Joel 2: 28). This prophecy was realized as seen in Acts 11: 28; 20: 23; 21: 11. The Spirit also spoke about apostasy in the latter times (1 Timothy 4: 1).

\* He announced that without the Spirit we should live like small children. He said the Spirit will come and will change the small children into strong men through growth spiritually. He pointed that out, not to put the strength of the Spirit first, but to show that the perfect strength is in knowing the Trinity.<sup>38</sup>

\* The Son of God says concerning the Holy Spirit that He does not speak in His own authority. This means that the Spirit speaks in association with the Father and the Son. For, the Spirit is not separate or detached; He speaks what He hears. This means the Spirit does not speak without the Son, for He speaks the truth and breathes wisdom. He does not speak without the Father, for He is the Spirit of God. He does not hear on His own, for all things are from God. Therefore, what the Spirit says is the word of the Son, for the Spirit says nothing on His own authority. For the Trinity speaks of nothing outside Himself.<sup>39</sup>

\* This does not mean hearing whatever real, palpable words, but rather means the unity of will and strength that is in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Whatever the Spirit says, the Son says here (Jn 16: 13). Let us learn that what the Spirit says, the Son also says and what the Son says the Father also says. For, the work of the Trinity is one in thought and one in characteristic.<sup>40</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* He said to His disciples concerning the Holy Spirit, "He will tell you." He thus raised their distinguished understanding because human beings in general are more at ease when they know the future events. They had asked Him about that matter. Peter asked, "Lord, where are You

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<sup>38</sup> Of the Holy Spirit, Book 3: 14: 99.

<sup>39</sup> Of the Holy Spirit, 2: 12 (131, 133, 134).

<sup>40</sup> Of the Christian Faith, 5: 11 (133).

going?” (Jn 13: 36). Thomas also said, “Lord, we do not know where You are going; and how can we know the way?” (Jn 14: 5). Now, He relieves them by making it clear that the Holy Spirit will tell them everything that is hidden. If you remark, ‘Why the Lord Christ did not give the Holy Spirit to His disciples before He left them?’ I answer, ‘Because the curse had not been removed and our sin had not been forgiven. Therefore, it was not fitting that the Holy Spirit comes when all people were convicted. It is as though the Lord Christ says, ‘The hostility must be resolved; we must first make peace with our God, then accept this grant.’

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Saint Augustine** observes that the disciples, even after the crucifixion, the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Christ, were unable to comprehend such facts of belief as that He who created the world was the One crucified. That He was the Son of God who broke the way the Jews kept the Sabbath. Also the disciples could not understand that God was One Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; or that the Son was of one essence with and equal etc. to the Father. The disciples did not grasp all those facts clearly except through the Holy Spirit. When they were granted the Spirit love and zeal in the spirit filled their hearts that were enlightened with the knowledge of the truth.<sup>41</sup>

\*Therefore, dear beloved, you must not expect to hear us saying to you what the Lord refrained from imparting to His disciples because they could not bear such information. You must rather desire to grow in the love that the Holy Spirit granted to you pours in your hearts (Rom 5: 5). Thus, in your love for the spiritual and in the fervor of your spirit you can know the spiritual light. This will happen not through any sign that the corporal eyes see or a sound that rings in the corporal ear, but through the inner vision and hearing. You will then bear the spiritual word that the worldly people cannot endure. For, it is not possible to love the unknown. However, when a thing is known, even to a small degree, that thing is loved and with that same love a person obtains better and more complete knowledge.

If you grow in the love that the Holy Spirit pours in your hearts “He will teach you all the truth”, or as is written in some manuscripts, “He will guide you into all truth.” As it was said, “Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your Truth” (Ps 86:11). The result is that you will learn those things that the LORD refrained to speak of at that time. You will know them not through teachers outside, but “you will be taught by God” (John 6: 45).

Well, yes, now I have told you some things that have the same quality and you have accepted them. You have not only endured them, but you have also listened joyfully. For, this inner teacher who while He spoke externally to His disciples, said, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now,” [12]. He wishes to speak to us inwardly about what concerns God’s nature that is not incarnate. He wants to speak about that as He speaks to the angels who always see God’s face, but we are unable to endure that.

Therefore, when He says, “He will teach you all the truth” or “He will guide you into all truth” [13], I do not think that the fulfillment is possible in any man’s mind in this life. For, what man who lives in this corrupt body that resists the spirit can know all the truth? The Apostle says, “now, I know in part.” But, the knowledge of all the truth can be realized only through the

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<sup>41</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 96: 3. Cf.

Holy Spirit whose fervor we obtain now (2 Cor 1: 22). After that we shall obtain perfect knowledge that the same Apostle talks about saying, "...then face to face" (1 Cor 13: 12).<sup>42</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* This is our renewal; it makes of us an image of God again. This happens through the regenerating washing of the Holy Spirit that restores us so that we become God's children. We become a new creation again through the communion of the Spirit who delivers us from what was old.<sup>43</sup>

**Saint Basil the Great**

**Saint Augustine** comments on the Lord Christ's words concerning the Holy Spirit that, "He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come," [13]. Saint Augustine says that as the Spirit proceeds from the Father (John 15: 26) eternally, He is from the Father and not from Himself. He is one with the Father in essence and in equality. He is from the Father and has the same knowledge. He hears from the Father from Whom He proceeds. To Him, hearing is knowledge, and knowledge is His existence that we have previously discussed. As He is not from Himself, but from Whom He proceeds and from Whom He has His existence, and knowledge (hearing is nothing but knowledge), that hearing is eternal because knowledge is eternal. What is eternal has neither beginning nor end. The verbs 'hears, knows' may be used in any tense, past, present, or future.<sup>44</sup>

**"He will glorify Me,  
For He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you." [14]**

The coming of the Holy Spirit and His work glorify the Son. For, the Father glorifies Him in heaven, and the Holy Spirit glorifies Him on earth. The Holy Spirit comes in the name of Christ. He works for the benefit of Christ's kingdom realizing the message of His gospel. He does not come to establish another kingdom; it is the very kingdom of Christ that is also that of the Father. For, everything that belongs to the Son, belongs to the Father. And what is the Father's is also the Son's.

As Christ became Son of Man, the Father gave the Son what is His for our sake. The Son, in turn, entrusted the work to the Holy Spirit. This proves the unity of the Trinity in work.

**"All things that the Father has are Mine.  
Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you." [15]**

The faithful who are baptized in the name of Christ enjoy fellowship with Him in His death and His resurrection in a manner that is not controlled by the outward senses. This is achieved through the work of the Holy Spirit who comes from heaven when the priest calls Him, just as the Lord Christ decreed in His holy church. This is the Spirit who takes of Christ's and gives us (John 16: 15).

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<sup>42</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 96: 4.

<sup>43</sup> Ad. Eunom. 5

<sup>44</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 99: 4-5.

The Spirit gives us this sacrament with Christ's grace because "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3: 5). "Blessed be God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1: 3-4).

**"He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you,"** (John 16: 14). According to Vulcanists<sup>45</sup> the intrinsic relationship of the three hypostases is that no one of the three can accept anything from one of the other two except through 'emanation'<sup>46</sup>.

**Photius** believes that those words do not mean that the Holy Spirit takes from what is the Son's, but rather what is the Father's because the Lord Christ did not say "He will take of Me" but said "He will take of what is Mine." The first statement means that He will take of Me personally, but the second statement speaks of another person who has family relationship with the speaker.<sup>47</sup> The LORD added, "All things that the Father has are Mine." Therefore, what the Spirit takes that is Mine, He takes from the Father.<sup>48</sup> What the Spirit takes, here, is not of the divine essence, but rather of the characteristics of our Lord Jesus Christ so that we may take the image of the Son (Rom 8: 29).

\* "All things that the Father has are Mine." What, then, is more clear than this unity? All things that the Father has are the Son's, and all things that are the Son's the Holy Spirit also accepts.<sup>49</sup>

\* He has accepted everything from the Father by rights of His eternal birth of Him. The Father appears in His full glory (He loses nothing by what He gives to the Son).<sup>50</sup>

\* "All things that the Father has are Mine" does not mean that the Father granted Him all that, but rather means that what He receives from the Father is His right because He is the Son born of the Father.<sup>51</sup>

\* There is no matter improbable since the Son has the same will that the Father has.<sup>52</sup>

### **3 – The Promise That He Will See Them after His Resurrection**

**"A little while, and you will not see Me;  
And again a little while and you will see Me,  
Because I go to the Father." [16]**

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<sup>45</sup> That the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. See the article about Vulcanus in the dialogue with the Catholic Church.

<sup>46</sup> Cross: Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 1985, p. 423.

<sup>47</sup> Photius: De S. Spiritus Mystaggia 22.

<sup>48</sup> Photius: De S. Spiritus Mystaggia 29.

<sup>49</sup> Of the Holy Spirit, 2: 11 (118).

<sup>50</sup> Of the Holy Spirit Book 3: 18: 223.

<sup>51</sup> Of the Christian Faith, 4: 8: 80.

<sup>52</sup> Of the Christian Faith, 2: 6: 51.

As the Lord Christ goes the way of suffering and death, He departs temporarily in the flesh from them; this He describes as “a little while.” Then He reappears to them after His resurrection and gives them peace and comfort. A little while He dies and disappears; then He is risen and after a little while He ascends to heaven to the Father. Then He returns on the clouds to take His Church to everlasting glory. Thus, sooner or later, time is always a little while because there is no comparison between time and eternity. The apostle saint Peter says, “But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the LORD one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The LORD is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us.” (2 Peter 3: 8-9) As though Christ says, ‘My role necessitates that I leave you, but this is for your good, for your salvation and glory.’

\* “And again a little while and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.” He makes it clear, here, that He will not perish; His death is but a passing away. This is a declaration to them that He will return and that His departure is for a little while because He will come back. Their separation will be for a few moments, but His presence will be continuous.<sup>53</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**“Then some of His disciples said among themselves,  
‘What is this that He says to us,  
A little while, and you will not see Me,  
And again a little while, and you will see Me’  
And because I go to the Father.’ [17]**

**They said therefore, ‘What is this that He says, ‘A little while’?  
We do not know what He is saying.” [18]**

The Lord Christ took pity on them when He saw they were confused and did not understand what He said. For, no one dared to ask Him, but they whispered among themselves asking each other what Christ meant. He did not abandon them in their perplexity, but began to explain what He said.

\* The disciples did not understand what the Lord Christ told them. Here, He wonders how in spite of hearing these words several times, they seemed as though they never heard them.

The Lord Christ said those words in His counsel to His disciples clarifying His great love for them and disclosing His Self, who He is.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**“Now Jesus knew what they desired to ask Him,  
And He said to them,  
Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said,  
‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’? [19]**

**Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament,  
But the world will rejoice;**

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<sup>53</sup> Hom. 79. PG 59 – 465.

**And you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.” [20]**

As the disciples did not understand what He meant, He told them frankly that they would be sorrowful because of His Passion, crucifixion and death. He knew that they longed for knowledge and He, therefore, explained to them that matter. He did not give them the details, but He rather spoke about what would happen to them, about their feelings of sorrow and joy. He did not say more lest their bewilderment may increase. However, He affirmed that this would lead to their joy and enjoyment of the second birth.

The evil people find their happiness in the sadness and suffering of the saints, whereas the believer finds his joy in sharing the pain of those who suffer. He considers the misery of any man as being his own personally.

\* He showed them that after sorrow there will be joy and that sorrow will bring about joy. Sorrow will be for a short period.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* We understand that the disciples will be sorrowful because of Christ’s death, but will be soon filled with joy because of His resurrection. As for the ‘world’ by which He means the enemies who kill Christ, they will certainly be ecstatic for killing Him, when at the same time the disciples will be sorrowful.<sup>54</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow  
Because her hour has come,  
But as soon as she has given birth to the child,  
She no longer remembers the anguish,  
For joy that a human being has been born into the world.” [21]**

He did not promise He would abolish anguish, but He promised to introduce a new meaning of pain. Pain will be like labor pains. It is followed by the birth of the child and joy replaces pain.

\* What He says is as follows, ‘You will suffer labor pains but these sudden pains will bring you joy.’ These words affirm His resurrection. This journey is like a passage from the womb to daylight. To become a mother, a woman crosses a passage as in sorrow. Here also is inherent that the pangs of death are endured so that a newborn may result from them. He did not only say that the sorrow will go, but also that we shall not remember it. How great is the joy that follows! This is what will happen to the saints. Here He says ‘... human being’, not a child, has been born. This is related to His resurrection, that a man is not born of the pangs of death, but is born of the Kingdom.<sup>55</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**“Therefore you now have sorrow;**

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<sup>54</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 101: 2.

<sup>55</sup> Hom. 79. PG. 59: 466.

**But I will see you again and your heart will rejoice,  
And your joy no one will take from you.” [22]**

Although we shall enjoy full joy in eternity, yet we receive the pledge here on earth that we may live in continuous internal joy (2 Cor 6: 10). The happiness caused by the pleasures and attractions of the world turns quickly to sadness because the world changes continually. On the other hand, spiritual sorrow changes quickly to joy forever because the joy in Christ is constant. He gives us the reason of the joy that no one can take away. This reason is that He will appear to us and see us as members of His body. We shall see Him as our Head. For, this seems as One who has forsaken us for a short moment, but has returned and with great mercy and rich grace has gathered us (Is 54: 7).

His return is a return of joy to the heart. He returns as the true source of perpetual inner joy and satisfaction of the spirit. This joy no man or event can take from us because nothing can usurp the spirit from the Savior or take a man’s spirit from the love of Christ.

\* “Your joy no one will take from you” [22] because their joy is Jesus Himself.<sup>56</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* He mentioned that example to make clear the temporary sorrow and the permanent joy and that the benefit gained from the Savior is great.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

#### **4 – Answering Their Prayers**

The second reason for their perpetual joy is that as Christ reveals Himself to them and sees them, they will be linked to the Father and whatever they ask Him in Christ’s name they will obtain.

He blames them for not asking for anything in His name until then so that their joy may be complete. And, what will they require but that the Holy Trinity resides in them?!

**“And in that day you will ask Me nothing.  
Most assuredly, I say to you,  
Whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.” [23]**

They do not need to ask for anything now that the Lord Christ has revealed Himself to them, for in Him is all satisfaction. The Lord Christ risen from the dead thus reveals Himself in the heart and so fulfills all needs. They ask for nothing because the Holy Spirit grants them all the truth and guides them into it so that they enjoy Christ’s Kingdom.

\* If you ask: “What is the meaning of the words of the Lord Christ, ‘whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you’?” We answer, “This means that they do not need a mediator, but if they mention His name alone they will be rewarded by receiving everything they require. This demonstrates the power of His name.”

**Saint John Chrysostom**

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<sup>56</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 101: 3.



\* At this present time the Church is in the state of labor pains longing for the fruit of her struggle. But then she will give birth to real meditation. Now she moans in labor, but then she will give birth joyfully. Now she gives birth through her prayers, but then she will give birth through Praise.<sup>57</sup>

\* The Lord is not slow concerning His promise. A little while and we shall see Him, then we shall ask nothing because we shall not yearn for anything and there will be nothing concealed that we may ask about. That little while seems to us to be long because it still continues and will end. Then we shall feel how that period was a little while.<sup>58</sup>

\* In the world to come as we reach the Kingdom and become like Him for we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3: 2), what then shall we demand since He will satisfy all our desires with good things (Ps 103: 5)? As is written in another Psalm “I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness” (Ps 17: 15). One asks when one needs something. This has no place where there is abundance.<sup>59</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“Until now you have asked nothing in My name.  
Ask, and you will receive,  
That your joy may be full.” [24]**

They had not asked for anything until that moment. However, when He who will teach them to pray comes, they will ask for union with God the Father through the only begotten Son in the Holy Spirit.

\* The Lord Jesus knows that a man’s spirit, that is to say, his rational mind that was created in the Lord’s image, cannot be satisfied except by Him alone.

He knows that He is revealed and that He is concealed. He knows that in Him what is hidden has been revealed. He knows all that. The Psalm says, “O how great is the multitude of thy sweetness, O Lord, which thou hast hidden for them that fear thee! Which thou hast wrought for them that hope in thee,” (Ps 30: 20 LXX Vulgate)

Your kindness is great and varied. You concealed it for those who fear You.  
For whom You will disclose it? For those who hope in You.  
A double question was raised, but one part of it solved the other part.  
Are those who fear You different from those who hope in You?  
Are those who fear God the same as those who hope in Him?

There is fear of the law, and hope in grace. The law warns those who are self-confident; grace helps those who trust in God. You serve the law, but if there is no grace, you are punished so that you cry, “O wretched man that I am” (Rom 7: 24). You know that you are conquered and

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<sup>57</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 101: 5.

<sup>58</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 101: 6.

<sup>59</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 102: 3.

your strength is degraded so you say, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” This is how the law warns whoever depends on himself.

Observe here is a human being who is self-dependent. He tries to struggle; he is prostrate and enslaved and is soon captured. Whoever learns to depend on God while the law kept warning him not to depend on himself grace supports him. As he relies on God, in trust he says: “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God, by Jesus Christ our Lord,” (Rom 7: 24-25, Vulgate).

Now contemplate His goodness, taste it and enjoy it. Listen to the Psalm, “O taste, and see that the Lord is sweet” (Ps 33: 9 Vulgate). He is good to you because He delivers you.

You lived in your bitterness when you relied on yourself. Now drink of His goodness and accept the enthusiasm of this great overflow.<sup>60</sup>

\* What you ask for is nothing compared to what I desire to give you. For, what will you ask for in My name? That the demons become subject to you. Do not rejoice in that, for that is nothing; if it was worthwhile He would have told them to rejoice.

“That your joy may be full” means ask for what may fill you.

When you ask for temporary things you ask for nothing. “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again.” (John 4: 13)

Ask for what gratifies you.

Speak Philip’s language: ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.’ The Lord said to him, “Have I been so long a time with you and have you not known Me? Philip, he that sees Me sees the Father also.” (John 14: 9 Vulgate).

Offer thanksgiving to Christ who became weak for your sake because you are weak. Let your desires be for Christ’s divinity so that you may be filled with it.<sup>61</sup>

\* His words, “...whatever you ask...” do not mean just asking for anything. They mean rather asking for something that is truly pertaining to the blessed life.

The words that follow, “Until now you have asked nothing in My name” [24] may have two meanings: either that you have not asked in My name because until now you have not known My name as you should. Or, you asked for nothing compared to what you should have asked. What you asked for may be considered as nothing.<sup>62</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“These things I have spoken to you in figurative language;  
But the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language,  
But I will tell you plainly about the Father.” [25]**

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<sup>60</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 95: 1-5.

<sup>61</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 95: 6.

<sup>62</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 102: 2.

He offers us great knowledge concerning the Father so that we may feel His fatherhood, enter His mysteries, and contemplate His extreme glory. The Father will not be strange to us and this will give us full joy.

In spite of all that He explained to them, still He did not reveal all the divine mysteries because they could not bear them then. He spoke to them in figurative language, not plainly. But after His resurrection, His ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit, He will speak to them about the mysteries plainly.

\* As though the Lord Christ says to them, ‘At My resurrection you will understand all My words perfectly.’

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Saint Augustine** interprets the word ‘the hour’, or ‘the time’ here as meaning the future when we see God face to face. It is as St. Paul says, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known," (1 Cor 13: L 12).

**“In that day you will ask in My name,  
and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you” [26]**

As though He says, ‘I do not need to tell you that I shall not stop asking the Father for you through My Blood that was shed for you. My love for you will not cease and the love of the Father for you will not end.’

\* How will the Son not ask the Father, for rather the Father and the Son listen to those who ask. No one can comprehend this except with the spiritual mental eye.<sup>63</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“For the Father Himself loves you,  
Because you have loved Me,  
And have believed that I came forth from God.” [27]**

The secret behind the Father’s love for the faithful is their faith working through love (Gal 5: 6). Through their love for the Son they enjoy the Father’s love for them. The faithful then feel free to ask the Father, not in fear, but in the privilege they have, that is the love of their heavenly Father who loves His children.

\* The reason for our love is that God loves us. Certainly, our love for God is a divine gift. He gave us this grace, that we love Him. He loved us when we did not love Him. Even when we did not please Him, He loved us so that we may become a cause of joy to His eyes. For, we could not love the Son if we did not love the Father also. The Father loves us because we love the Son. We yearn to obtain from the Father and the Son the ability to love the Father and the

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<sup>63</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 102: 4.

Son because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Spirit of the Father and Son (Rom 5: 5). Through the Spirit whom we love, we love both the Father and the Son. Therefore, God promotes that pious love in us and with it we worship Him. He saw that it was good and on that basis He Himself loved what He promoted in us. However, He would not have worked in us if He did not love to work in us.<sup>64</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

## **5 – His Ascension to Heaven**

**“I came forth from the Father  
And have come into the world.  
Again, I leave the world  
And go to the Father.” [28]**

Here, the Lord speaks to them openly about His incarnation that ends in His ascension so that He may carry the believing humanity with Him. This is the secret of His love, that He appeared in the flesh and carried us to glory.

He came forth from the Father who dedicated Him to this world and sealed Him. He descended to our world with amazing humility and great divine love. Then, He left the world in the flesh and returned in His ascension to the Father. This is the mystery of the entire Gospel: the divine incarnation, His death in the flesh, then His resurrection and His ascension to heaven. This is the key of heaven!

\* He says, “I came forth from God” announcing thus that His nature is the same given to Him at His birth.<sup>65</sup>

\* “I came forth from the Father, and have come into the world.” The last clause is a reference to His incarnation. The first refers to His essence.<sup>66</sup>

**Saint Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers**

\* When Christ says that He “came forth” from the Father, do not imagine a change in place as that happening to the people. Do not interpret “I have come” in the language of motion, but rather as referring to His incarnation.<sup>67</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* He was speaking about His physical suffering and His resurrection and through His resurrection, those who doubted became believers. For, He truly is God who is omnipresent and does not cross from one place to another. But as a man, He leaves but by Himself. He,

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<sup>64</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 102: 5.

<sup>65</sup> On the Trinity, 6 (31).

<sup>66</sup> On the Trinity, 6 (31).

<sup>67</sup> In 1 Cor. Hom. 20.

therefore, says in another context, “Arise let us go from here,” (John 14: 31). He thus leaves and comes. This is the common thing He shares with us.<sup>68</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* He came forth from the Father because He is of the Father. He came into the world to reveal to the world the body that He took from the Virgin. He left the world by withdrawing in the flesh and He went to the Father by ascending as a man. However, He did not leave the world by withdrawing His active presence that rules the world.<sup>69</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

## **6 – His Abandonment during His Suffering**

**His disciples said to Him,  
“See, now You are speaking plainly,  
And using no figure of speech!” [29]**

The gentle loving rebuke of the Lord Jesus Christ gave them confidence and the feeling that He was speaking plainly, and answering the questions they thought about, and could not express or find answers for. The disciples felt He was speaking to them quite frankly and plainly, especially that they believed He was the Messiah for the entire world, knew all things and nothing was hidden from Him. He tests the hearts and minds. He does not need anyone to ask Him, for He knows the secrets, thoughts, and hidden requirements of every one.

**Saint Augustine** observes that the disciples thought He was speaking to them openly and using no figure of speech, though the hour had not yet come when this would be realized according to His divine promise. This was achieved when He completed His words saying, “Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own,” [32]<sup>70</sup>.

**“Now we are sure that You know all things,  
And have no need that anyone should question you.  
By this we believe that You came forth from God.” [30]**

As though they declared, ‘You have known the misgivings that caused us to doubt even before we revealed them and You gave us peace as You said, “for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me,”’ [27].

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe?”[31]**

The Lord Christ answers “Do you now believe?” Will your belief remain steadfast? The hour has come, that you will be scattered and leave Me!

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<sup>68</sup> On the Holy Spirit, Book 2: 8: 80.

<sup>69</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 102: 6.

<sup>70</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 104: 1.

\* May men not set aside thinking about the Son when they read about God alone, or stop thinking about the Father when they read about the Son only.

The Son on earth is not without the Father (John 10: 30). How then may you think that the Father is in heaven without the Son?

The Son in the flesh is not alone. It is written, “I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.” So do you think that the Father dwells alone in the light?<sup>71</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

**“Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has come,  
That you will be scattered, each to his own,  
And will leave Me alone.  
And yet I am not alone,  
Because the Father is with Me.” [32]**

The Lord came to take our place so that we may enjoy sharing His glory. We all often feel isolated. Our parents may be with us, but we cry with David, “My father and my mother forsook me.” Our friends and beloved may surround us, but we groan, “No one shares my feelings or understands my deep thoughts.” These are the screams of the spirit that sin has broken and alienated us from God, the real provider. There is no one who can fill the inner void. But now that the Lord Jesus Christ has come without sin, He does not feel isolated because He is never separate from the Father and His Holy Spirit. Yet, He was alone among men; He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. When the time of His suffering came, His disciples left Him and He was alone. However, He declares, “I am not alone, because the Father is with Me,” [32]. This is the cry of victory of every spirit that unites with the suffering Christ. For, that spirit will not feel secluded or alone since God dwells in that spirit and never goes away.

## **7 – His Victory for Them**

**“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace.  
In the world you will have tribulation,  
But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” [33]**

Through faith Christ enters our hearts and we enjoy His victory for us. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5: 4-5).

The peace that the Lord Jesus Christ gives them offers the blessed, glorious life so that they may enjoy the spirit of strength and victory along with the heavenly comfort and divine support.

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<sup>71</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 3: 3: 22-33.

He does not conceal from them the fact that in the world they will have tribulation. However, He asks them to be of good cheer in the middle of tribulation because He will be revealed in their life as overcoming the sinful world.

It is said that an artist wished to present a painting of peace. He chose to paint a very stormy day and a huge rock that was battered by waves on all sides. In this painting there was a ship that was wrecked by the waves and corpses of sailors and passengers floated on the water in the middle of a vortex. A dove that built a nest in a hole in the middle of the rock lay there quite secure. The artist then wrote the word “Peace” on the rock directly below that hole. Thus is our peace in Jesus Christ the Rock of ages. In Him we dwell and have rest amid the vortex and tribulations of life.

\* The Lord tells His disciples that in the world they will have tribulation. This means that as long as they are in the world they will be oppressed. This will happen not only in the present, but also in the future.

\* He allows us also to overcome by looking up to the Head of our faith. We walk the same path that He passed through for our sake. We are not dead because we struggle with death. We are immortal because of our victory. Does death corrupt our bodies? So what? Our bodies will not remain corrupt, but will rather be in a better state.

Let us then overcome the world. Let us run toward eternity. Let us follow the King. Let us prepare the memorial of victory. Let us despise the worldly pleasures. We do not need much effort to achieve this.

Let us turn to heaven so that we may conquer the world! When you do not desire the world, you overcome it. When you deride it you vanquish it.

We are strangers and passengers. Let us not grieve for any sad thing related to the world.<sup>72</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* We trust in Him who says, “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” [33], because with His help and protection we conquer Satan our enemy.<sup>73</sup>

\* Why does He say to us “Be of good cheer”, but that He has overcome for our sake and has fought for our sake?

How did He fight? He fought by taking our nature for Himself.

He overcame for us as He revealed to us His resurrection. Cling, O man, to God who created you a man. Cling fast to Him and put your trust in Him.

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<sup>72</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78: 3.

<sup>73</sup> Letters, 39.

Pray that He may be your strength. Say to Him, 'In You, O Lord, is my strength.' Then, you will sing when people threaten you. And what you will sing are the words the Lord Himself has told you, "In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid, what can man do to me?" (Ps 56: 11)<sup>74</sup>.

\* In the trials they faced after His glorification they accepted the Holy Spirit and they did not leave the Lord Christ.

They fled from city to city but they did not run away from Him.

As trials overtook them in the world, they found peace in Him.

Instead of wandering away from Him, they rather found their refuge in Him. The Holy Spirit worked in them and thus they realized Christ's words, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" [33].

Believers in Christ are joyful and victorious, but in whom? In Him since He conquers the world because His members overcome the world. For this reason the Apostle says, "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory" and adds immediately, "through our Lord Jesus Christ," (1 Cor 15: 57)<sup>75</sup>.

**Saint Augustine**

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<sup>74</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 67: 4.

<sup>75</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 103: 3.



**Meditations**  
**Inspired by the Gospel of John**  
**Chapter 16**

\* Do Not Leave Me Alone!

\* Look, the world aims its arrows at Me!  
They think My death serves God and them!  
My solace is that they wanted to be free of You not knowing You are their Savior  
They wished to be free of Me yet I shall not stop loving them.

\* Do not leave me alone.  
As You have been tried, You can help the suffering ones like me!  
You have ascended to Your heaven  
But You have not abandoned me, for You fill heaven and earth.

\* You have sent Your Holy Spirit, the source of my comfort  
To convict me of sin, so that I trust in Him who forgives my sins.  
To convict me of righteousness, so that I may appear before the Father concealed in Your  
righteousness!  
To convict me of judgment, so that I may see Satan condemned under my feet!

\* May Your Spirit guide me  
May He show me Your entire truth  
So that I may know Your plan for me!  
By filling me You are revealed in me  
I see, hear, and feel Your love!

+ Your sweet Spirit overflows with Your sweetness in me  
Amid the suffering of the world I enjoy Your divine comfort  
He carries me to You in the garden alone.  
All have abandoned You, but no one can separate You from Your Father  
Give me, in my solitude, the joy of feeling Your divine presence!  
Yes, I pray You not to leave me alone.

AMEN

+++

## Chapter Seventeen

### The Farewell Prayer

After the long but joyful and comforting exposition of the Lord's speech to His disciples (that speech extends over four chapters: 13-16) John the Evangelist gives us the overt farewell prayer delivered before them. This is a unique speech given by the Son in the last moments before He is led to be crucified. This prayer is different from the Lord's Prayer that the Lord Himself has taught us. The Lord's Prayer concentrates on asking for the forgiveness of sins. But this other prayer reveals those longings in the heart of the Lord for His Church. Those yearnings are realized through the Cross. Christ did not need to pray for forgiveness of sins because He is without sin; He is Himself the One who forgives sins.

This is considered the longest prayer of the Lord that the Evangelists record for us. However, we cannot say that it is the longest communication between the Lord and the Father, for He spent the entire night praying before He chose the twelve disciples (Luke 12:6). There are also other occasions when He spent a long period praying.

This prayer has a special sanctity for the believers because it occurs in the shadow of the Cross. It befits that unique Intercessor and Savior who carries His Church in Himself as the members of His holy body to offer her to His Holy Father. This is the request of the Son for salvation [24] breaking the veil that separated the human race from the Father.

This is considered a family prayer presented by the Head of the family, Jesus Christ, on behalf of His family, the disciples or the entire Church. It is a farewell prayer that He offers, and His disciples hear after His farewell speech to them about the mystery of His relationship with the Father. Now, He speaks openly with the Father for their sakes to reveal to them His role toward them while He sits at the Father's right hand.

It is an ecclesiastic prayer and as **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, in this prayer Jesus is the High Priest who acts on behalf of His people. This prayer is called the high ecclesiastic prayer, or the prayer of the High Priest. He offers it to prepare the human race to accept the fruits of the unique sacrifice. This prayer forms the highest announcement of the mystery of the unity of the Father and the Son.<sup>1</sup> It is not a mere act but a presence in the Father to whose bosom He carries us.

He offered it as a prayer of the soul after the offering of the Christian Easter sacrament. That is to say, He prayed after He had given them His body and blood for the remission of sins and for eternal life for them. This prayer is for their preservation in the grace they received. It is as though the Lord Jesus Christ asserts to us our need to pray continuously so that we may keep the divine grace, and so that God may guard us in the rich blessings of His divine sacraments.

This is a Lord's prayer presented by the Lord of glory to teach us how to pray. It is a prayer when in confrontation of death. It is filled with sweetness because He faces death in order that He may sanctify His beloved. Jacob blessed the twelve patriarchs, or fathers, before his death. Moses blessed the twelve tribes also before his death. Now, the Lord Jesus Christ

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<sup>1</sup> Boris Bobrinskoy: *The Mystery of the Trinity*, St. Vladimir 1999, p. 83.

blesses the Church in the entire world before He gives His life a sacrifice of love for their sakes. The clear theme in this prayer is the practical affirmation of what He said to His disciples, **“Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”** (16:33). Now that the moments of His crucifixion are very close, He looks at His death not as a catastrophe approaching Him, but as victory He realizes for the human race. He repeated this truth several times to His disciples, but they were not yet able to comprehend it. Therefore, He asked the Father to support them during the resurrection so that they may understand it quickly and enjoy its blessings. Now while He walks the road of the Cross He delivers His disciples in the hands of the Father. For, there is no power that can support them except the divine grace.

|                                                           |              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>1- Christ’s Prayer for Himself</b>                     | <b>1-5</b>   |
| <b>2- A general Prayer for Others</b>                     | <b>6-10</b>  |
| <b>3- A Prayer for Them That the Father May Keep Them</b> | <b>11-16</b> |
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| <b>5- A Prayer for Unity</b>                              | <b>20-23</b> |
| <b>6- A Prayer for Them to Be Glorified</b>               | <b>24-26</b> |

#### **1- Christ’s Prayer for Himself**

##### **“Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven” [1]**

As the Word of God became a truly perfect man, He prayed to assert His submission even to the law and the system of worship. He prayed also to reveal His relationship to the Father, for He was accused as being Beelzebub, the ruler of the devils and that He was not from God.

The Lord Christ did not need to pray since He is one in essence with the Father. But as our representative, He offers up this prayer for Himself. “Glorify Your Son” [1] so that we do not cease to ask for our glory in Him.

As Christ is God we pray to Him. As He became man He prays so that all righteousness may be complete in Him. It has been said to Him as to us, “Ask of Me, and I will give you,” (Ps 2:8). Now, He asks the Father and gives a special honor to prayer so that we may obtain satisfaction in prayer. Paul the Apostle says, “Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (Heb 5: 7-8). He bought the human race with His blood. He offered blood to ask the Father to give Him the human race to dwell in Him and be justified. Without Him we cannot ask God as our Father and we cannot obtain His blessings. He sanctified our prayers with His prayer. He opened for us the way of meeting with the Father through the divine pleasure. He prayed on our behalf, for He knows the depth of our hearts (Ex 23: 9). He understands perfectly our needs and He is the only path that goes up to heaven to the Father’s bosom. Therefore, He is the only one who is able to sanctify our prayers.

The Lord Jesus Christ lifted up His eyes to heaven as He had done before (John 11: 41). Why? He dwells in heaven in His divinity and He does not need to lift up His eyes to heaven

like someone begging the Father for something. However, as a Son of Man, the Lord sanctified even the movements of the body so that we also may lift up our eyes with His eyes and He lifts up our hearts to heaven during prayer (Ps 25: 1). At that time, the Jews lifted up their heads and opened their eyes toward heaven during prayer. The Lord used this same popular position common at that time so that we may learn to follow the church congregation in the church rites without confusion. This does not mean that prayers must necessarily be offered in no other manner. The Lord praised the tax-collector who did not dare lift up his eyes and stood beating his breast in repentance (Luke 18: 13). The Lord Himself bowed down as He spoke with the Father in Gethsemane (Matt 26: 39).

**“Father, the hour has come.**

**Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You.” [1]**

The Lord Jesus Christ calls the Father, His Father, for He is His Father in essence, so that when we lift up our eyes with Him, we may look at God as our Father by the adoption that we obtained through the Holy Spirit. He guides us to His Father in the spirit of courage, and hope in getting blessings from His divine hands.

**“The hour has come” [1]** He often repeated that His hour had not come, but now that He begins walking the road of the Cross, He says, “the hour has come” and He knows it. Man does not know his time (Ecc 9: 12), but the Son of Man knows the hour and calls it “this hour” (Jn 12: 27), and “the hour” (Jn 17: 1). For, there is no hour in the entire history of humanity, or since the beginning of time like the hour of the Cross. It opened the gates of heaven, reconciled the human race with the Father, and gave them the right to eternal inheritance and heavenly glory.

The hour of Christ’s suffering is, in God’s plan, the highest aim of the Lord from the beginning and even before His incarnation. The decisive hour came when the battle between heaven and hell for the glory of God and the happiness for man took place eternally. As though He says, ‘the hour has come when the powers of darkness will afflict Your Son. Now, O Father, glorify Your Son.’ It is a unique hour, the hour of war between Light and the ruler of darkness, between heaven and hell. John the beloved saw it and said, “he went out conquering and to conquer” (Rev 6: 2). He went out riding the Cross that breaks all powers of darkness.

In the midst of the suffering that the Son accepted joyfully, the Father glorified His Son. When the mobs tried to arrest Him they fell on their faces. After Judas betrayed Him he confessed his crime and ended by committing suicide. Also Pilate’s wife sent to warn her husband not to harm Jesus. Nature also glorified Him. The sun was darkened and also the moon was eclipsed, the rocks were split and the graves opened. The veil of the temple testified also, for the veil was torn. Men saw all that when the Lord was brought to judgment and during His suffering and death. These are signs of glory, but that does not preoccupy the Lord. When He says, **“glorify Your Son”** He is absorbed in the glory that is not visible to the human eye, that is in the glory of victory over Satan, the defeat of the powers of darkness, the freedom of the captives in Hades, and the entrance of the thief on the right into Paradise. The Father glorified Him also in His resurrection and by sending the Holy Spirit to the disciples. He glorified Him by establishing His kingdom in the hearts of men. This was His preoccupation for which He prayed.

Satan wanted to give Him the kingdoms of the world when he tempted Him. That was on condition that He gave up His being the Son of God and refused the glory the Father gives Him. However, the Lord representing us did not accept glory except from the hands of His Father because in Him we inherit glory and we are sanctified as children of God.

The Lord offered up prayer before surrendering to death as a sacrifice for our sins. He prayed so that we may offer up a similar prayer as we travel in the world. When we feel that the hour of our departure from the world has come, we call out to God, ‘the hour has come, stand close to me and reveal Yourself to me., My earthly house, this tent, is destroyed and I shall have a building that is not made with hands of men. As You have glorified me with Your grace, glorify my body the day I meet You on the clouds.’

**“That Your Son also may glorify You.”** I give You my will and I devote all my energy and gifts for the sake of Your kingdom. My victory, salvation and glory are a living testimony to Your great glory and rich grace.

Saint John the Evangelist wrote this Gospel so that every soul may deeply experience the pledge of eternal glory and so that it would be possible for the entire person, spiritually and physically, to enjoy sharing that glory. We, therefore, find the word ‘**glory**’ repeated 18 times in this Gospel more than in any other book in the New Testament, except in 2 Corinthians in which the Apostle speaks about the suffering and trouble of the servant of God whom the Lord glorifies. As for the verb “glorify”, it is repeated here 23 times, whereas in any other book in the New Testament, it does not occur more than 9 times. It is as though John the Evangelist wishes us to soar with the Holy Spirit so that we may relish the glory that the Lord Christ prepares for us. This is truly the Book of glory in which the Word made Himself of no reputation so that we may encounter Him and get acquainted with Him and His love, and unite with Him and so we are glorified.

This is the glory of the Son that we enjoy His Cross and so share His glory. This is the glory of the Father also for He so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (Jn 3: 16), that is to say, enjoy everlasting glory. Thus, the glory of the Son and His Father is one. It is glory based, not on necessity or increase in Their glory, but rather on Their love for us. We enjoy sharing this glory through the divine act of redemption.

**\* Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven....** When the Lord Christ said to His disciples, “In the world you will have tribulation” (Jn 16:33), He asked them to pray so that their spirits may not be troubled. For, they saw Him as a man, and for their sake He prayed when He raised Lazarus from the dead. He mentioned the reason for His prayer: “because of the people who are standing by.” He said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me,” (Jn 11: 41-42).

You may say, ‘Yes, these things should have happened because of the presence of the Jews. But why should they occur in the presence of His disciples?’ My answer is, ‘ It was

necessary that this should take place in front of His disciples who had said, “Now we are sure that You know all things and have no need that anyone should question You,” (Jn 16: 30). They needed that He would verify this for them more than for all the other people. And there is another reason: the Evangelist did not call this act of the Lord Christ, ‘a prayer’, but said, “Jesus lifted up His eyes,” (Jn 11: 41) and spoke to His Father in a more precise expression.

The Lord Jesus Christ says to the Father, **“...the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You.”** This shows us that He did not go to His Cross unwillingly. How can He do so unwillingly when He prays that this may happen, and He calls it glory and honor not only for the crucified, but also for His Father with Him. For, through the Cross the Son is not glorified alone, but His Father is glorified also with Him. Before the Cross, even the Jews did not know the Father. It has been said, “Israel does not know Me” (Is 1: 3). But after the Cross, the entire world ran toward Him.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* If the Son had died in the flesh and did not rise again, He would without doubt have not been glorified by the Father, nor would He have glorified the Father. Now that He is glorified in His resurrection through the Father, He glorifies the Father through the preaching of His resurrection., This is revealed in the very arrangement of the words: “Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You.” This means, ‘Raise Me up so that through Me the entire world may know You’<sup>3</sup>.

**Saint Augustine**

Saint Augustine observes that the Greek word for ‘glory’ (doksá) is translated into Latin as ‘clarifica’, meaning, making the matter sparkle. When the Son reveals the Father, He reveals His true Self. The human race then see His radiance and so praise Him. Concerning this, the Scripture says, “Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; they will still be praising You” (Ps 84: 4). Praise for God is without end when the knowledge of God is perfect. Because the knowledge is perfect, there is glamour and glory.<sup>4</sup>

**“As You have given Him authority over all flesh,  
That He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.” [2]**

As He is the Only Begotten Son, His authority is related to the Father’s authority since He is born of the Father and He has no authority from an outside source. He is one with the Father in divine nature and essence. As He accepted in obedience to achieve our salvation and reconcile us with the Father, He obtained authority from Him. But this authority is different from the authority of the kings and rulers of this world. His authority to reconcile humanity with the Father and make us adopted children through the Holy Spirit makes us as relatives and grants us everlasting life. He is Himself everlasting life. As Son of Man He accepted eternal life on our behalf so that through Him He may pour His love in every man.

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<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, 80: 1.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 105: 1.

<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 105: 3.

**‘You have given Him’:** it has been said that St. John loved the verb “give”, for it occurs 76 times in this Gospel. It is repeated 17 times in this prayer, 13 times of which is about the Father giving to the Son and four times about the Son giving to His disciples. The repetition of this verb bears many meanings to the Evangelist. For, as he speaks about the divine Word being the only Son of God in nature, he sees the Father giving birth to the Son eternally and giving Him all He has because He is the same in essence. So, the Father does not give the Son a gift or a blessing as offered from outside. But, as They are two distinctive hypostases, and yet They are One in essence, the giving cannot be comprehended or expressed in words. It is not subject to time, nor to change in its measure or degree. All that is the Father’s is also the Son’s and all that the Son has the Father also has in divine attributes. Through this extremely divine mystery, the Evangelist sees the Son Incarnate overflowing in grants through the divine grace. His gifts to His believers are free and are given by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Every divine blessing is given to us by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as Saint Cyril the Great repeats.

The Church says in almost every Holy Liturgy that Christ is the **“Lover of Mankind”** to affirm that it is the pleasure of the Holy Trinity to give continually to mankind, and without ceasing so that men may carry the icon of Christ and enjoy the heavenly wedding with Him eternally.

The word ‘flesh’ here means ‘human beings’ in general (Gen 6: 3). He has authority over mankind, on the body as on the soul. As He offered up Himself a sacrifice once for all to reconcile all with God, He tasted death by His grace for everyone (Heb 2: 9). As He is the Messiah, Savior of the world who became man to achieve redemption, He received from the Father general authority over all flesh, that is to say, over all mankind, so that by sanctifying Himself for that deed, He reconciles all with the Father. By His grace He tasted death for everyone (Heb 2: 9). In this way, the realization of the promise that the Messiah would obtain the nations for His inheritance was fulfilled (Ps 2: 8). He will join the nations with the Jews (2 Cor 5: 14-15; Rom 5: 21; 1 Tim 2: 4-6). The authority of the Lord Jesus Christ is over all mankind, but He grants everlasting life to the believers whom the Father gives to the Son as an everlasting inheritance. He has power over mankind to grant life to God’s children and make all things for them (2 Cor 4: 15). All the divine promises are for their sakes.

In His prayer for Himself that the Father may glorify Him, He bears love for the Father as for us. For, His glory is the glory of His Father and in Him we enjoy communion with His glory. We experience the power of His resurrection and our hearts go up with Him to enjoy the splendor of His glory!

He does not say, ‘will give’, but says ‘give’ because the Son’s gift for us, or His offering up Himself as a gift for us, is an ongoing gift up to now. We accept it, live it, enjoy it, and grow in it until we enjoy it in a greater and more magnificent way when we meet Him face to face.

\* If you say, ‘What does the Lord mean by “You have given Him authority over all flesh”?’ I answer, ‘He has shown from the beginning that preaching Him is not limited to the Jews alone, but extends to the entire world. Here, He announces beforehand the first call to the nations (after the Jews reject Him). For He had said previously, “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles” (Matt

10: 5), but the time came when He said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (Matt 28: 19). He has shown that the Father desired that.’

This matter was completely opposite to the Jews and also to the disciples’ views. Even after that it was not easy for them to accept preaching to the Gentiles until they received the Spirit’s teaching, for this to the Jews was a stumbling block.<sup>5</sup>

\* What does ‘all flesh’ mean? Assuredly not all men believed in Him. However, He offered that all may believe and if some people ignored His words, this is not the fault of the teacher but that of those who did not accept His teachings.<sup>6</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**“And this is eternal life,  
That they may know You, the only true God,  
And Jesus Christ whom You have sent” [3]**

**‘Eternal life’:** Christ offers up Himself a sacrifice and so abolishes the work of sin, that is death. He abides in believers and they abide in Him and enjoy Him who is Life that cannot be opposed. Through Him, the believer can cross the boundaries of time and his spirit can enjoy eternity in heaven. The believer’s body is glorified having a new nature befitting eternity. The redemption offered by the Lord Jesus Christ is called ‘eternal life’ for the following reasons:

- (1) The believer has the right to stand before divine justice, for he is protected by Christ’s sacrifice that preserves him from eternal death.
- (2) Life, even in this present world acquires a new taste and message, for the believer, through the redemptive work of the Lord Christ, infuses in others the spirit of joy and inner peace.
- (3) It is eternal life because it goes beyond time boundaries and defies death.
- (4) It reveals the perpetual spirit and body of the believer.

**“That they may know You”:** knowledge is the path to eternal life. It is knowledge of the Father, the only true God, and worshipping and obeying Him, and accepting the Lord Jesus Christ the Teacher, Sacrifice, Priest, and Savior, the only true Christ.

**“The true God”:** God is not a mere name or a mental idea. He is the true God who is preoccupied with His creation. He cares for the salvation of mankind. He is active in His infinite love. In His divine love He sent His Only Begotten Son to work salvation for mankind. This is not a mere intellectual knowledge, but is rather an operative knowledge and an appreciation of God’s redemptive plan. It is an agreement with that plan, so that the believer accepts Jesus Christ as Lord, Redeemer, Teacher, and He who satisfies the entire needs of the believer. It is a practical acceptance of the Lord’s divine message. The believer thus enjoys a continual renewal of his life through the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, knowledge is life and communion with Him Whom we get to know. What is said about the only true God is not contrary to what is said about Jesus Christ, but is rather opposed to paganism and the worship of many gods.

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<sup>5</sup> Homilies on St. John, 80: 1.

<sup>6</sup> Homilies on St. John, 80: 2.



Some writers interpret the verse as follows: ‘that they may know You and Jesus Christ whom You have sent, the only true God.’

**Saint Ambrose** considers the believer an intelligent merchant who approaches the desk of the spiritual cashier to give the talents and, in exchange, insists to receive the divine promises of a free eternal life and knowledge of the true God.

\* This is the Word of the Lord: this is the precious talent through which you are saved. This money must be seen on the spirits’ table so that through true continual trade of good currency it would be possible to go everywhere by buying eternal life. ‘This is the eternal life that You, O Almighty Father, grant us freely so that we may know that You are “the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” [3]’<sup>7</sup>.

+ In this way He puts an end to the argument of the followers of Sabelius who say that the Three Hypostases are only three names or forms of one hypostasis and also the Jews who heard Him speak. The former group must not say that the Father is the Son, for that would have been possible for them to say if He had not added “and Christ.” The others must not separate the Son from the Father.

\* The holy Scriptures say that eternal life is based on the knowledge of the Transcendent and on good works.<sup>8</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* “The only true God”: He says this in a way that distinguishes Him from others, who are not gods, as He was about to send them to the Gentiles. But if the heretics do not accept this and because of the word “the only” they refuse to believe that the Son is the true God, they, then, refuse definitely that He is God. However, if the Son is God and is the Son of God who is called “the only God”, it is clear that He also is the true God and that the word “only” is for distinction from the others.

If the Son was not the true God, how then could He be “the Truth”? For the Truth is far above “the true.”<sup>9</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* **First:** there is no eternal life in acknowledging God the Father without acknowledging Jesus Christ.

**Secondly:** Christ is glorified in the Father. Eternal life is specifically inherent in knowing the only true God and also in knowing Jesus Christ whom God has sent.<sup>10</sup>

\* Thus, the Father is glorified through the Son through whom we know Him.

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<sup>7</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 5: Prologue: 15.

<sup>8</sup> Duties of the Clergy, 2: 2: 5.

<sup>9</sup> Homilies on St. John, 80: 2.

<sup>10</sup> On the Trinity: 9: 42.

Glory is this: that the Son who became flesh accepted authority from Him over all flesh along with taking us back to everlasting life.

But, what is eternal life? His words inform us that life is “that they may know You and Jesus Christ whom You have sent, the only true God.” Is there any doubt or difficulty here, or any contradiction? Life is that you know the only true God.<sup>11</sup>

**Saint Hilary of Poitiers**

**“I have glorified You on the earth.**

**I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.” [4]**

The Lord Jesus Christ announces that He did not come so that He may rest, but so that He may work all day until He finishes the work of salvation. As He carries us in Him we do not know rest except in continual work to achieve our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2: 12). We must not accept a mid-way or solution, but must strive all the time for our redemption.

**“I have glorified You”:** Our Lord Jesus considered His redemptive work completed in fact, for He bowed His head in acceptance of the cup with love so that He may carry our sins in His flesh and offer up Himself a sacrifice on our behalf. He, thus, achieved His message. He speaks with the Father saying that He has finished the work that He received from the Father. He looks forward to the Gospel being preached everywhere in the world, and to the believers getting to know the love of the true God, and enjoying their union with Him and their worship of Him. He glorified the Father because He pleased the Father and completed His work. In this is also pleasure and glory for the Son.

We did not see the Lord Christ complaining that His life had been full of trouble since His birth to the Cross. He never spoke about how much He suffered insults and accusations, pain and temptation as the Son of Man. For, He came to work for the glory of the Father by declaring divine love practically for mankind. On His way to Golgotha He is involved only in achieving the will of the Father that is one with His own will. We, when we unite with Him, we overstep all incidents and suffering, and care only for the glory of God in us and in our brethren, so that we may complete our message for the sake of God’s kingdom. The Lord Jesus Christ did not come to the world to walk a road covered with flowers. He rather came to find His pleasure in fulfilling all righteousness. Likewise, the Father finds His pleasure in Christ because Christ reveals Him practically and realizes His plan concerning man. The Lord finished the work and will of the Father so that we may have salvation. Now, He still fulfills in us that work and will, so that He may be seen in us and so that we may share His glory.

In the same spirit, it befits the servants in the church- who have God’s grace- to achieve His divine plan for salvation, to behold mankind with hope for the redemption of many. It befits us as members of Christ’s body to glorify the Father by achieving His will and His work as much as possible. We must glorify Him on the earth, which He has given to the human race, in preparation for crossing over to eternity. It befits us to persevere to the last breath in fulfilling the divine work.

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<sup>11</sup> On the Trinity, 3 (13, 14).

+ The Lord Jesus Christ said to the Father, **“I have glorified You on the earth.”** He said that, because the Father is glorified in heaven. He is glorified in His nature, and in His angels who worship Him. Christ does not speak about that glory that the Father has in essence. He rather mentions the glory that is in the worship of people for Him. He said, “I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.” If you ask, ‘If the work of the Lord Christ had not yet been finished, how could He say, “I have finished” it?’ My answer is, ‘Either that He meant that He finished the work that concerned Him, or He spoke about what will happen as though it had already happened. Moreover, everything has been achieved because the root of all blessings has been prepared and the fruit will necessarily follow. This will be through His presence and support in all those subjects that will be fulfilled later. He, therefore, says again in humility: “the work which You have given Me”’<sup>12</sup>.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* What thing did the human nature of the Only Begotten Son not accept? That thing was evil, for He did all that was good as human nature united with the Word through whom all things were made. But, how did He finish the work He was given when there still remained the suffering of martyrs for whom He offered up Himself as an example they should follow? For this reason Peter the Apostle says, “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2: 21). He says that He has finished what He surely knows He finished, just as previously in the prophecy the Spirit had used the past tense while speaking about things that would happen after many years. For He says, “They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones” (Ps 22: 16-17). He does not say, ‘They will pierce and will count.’ Likewise, He speaks here as having glorified the Father first and asks that He may be glorified. We need, therefore, to understand that He used all the former words about the future and expressed them in the past tense.<sup>13</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself,  
With the glory which I had with You before the world was.” [5]**

For our sake He made Himself of no reputation leaving His glory; and for our sake He was glorified for He received from God the Father honor and glory (2 Pet 1: 17); that glory that He had before the world was (Jn 17: 5).

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings, crowns His believers with His own hands making them kings. There is no degree of honor, not the very highest, that God cannot raise us to if He so wills it. He raises the poor out of the dust that He may seat him with princes or spiritual kings (Ps. 113: 7-8). For, the Lord took David from among his sheep and made him king on the greatest throne on earth at that time. In His worthy precious blood, our Lord Jesus Christ granted us His Holy Spirit that shapes our inner self so that we may share that glory and radiance in the best image.

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<sup>12</sup> Homilies on St. John, 80: 2.

<sup>13</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 105: 4-5.

The glory of the Son bears many forms of honor, authority, and joy to fulfill the will of the Father and finish the work. That glory that He asks for is His glory that He had before the world was created.

**First:** Eternal glory: One with the Father in glory, for He is the brightest of His glory (Heb 1: 3) inseparable from Him. The expression ‘before the world was’ and similar expressions occur in the Bible to mean eternity (Jn 17: 24; Ps 90: 2; Eph 1: 4; Jn 1: 1).

**Secondly:** In His incarnation, the divine Word abandoned His glory; His flesh was like a veil to hide His radiance, but that veil did not change His nature or remove His truly eternal glory. The Father was glorified in the Son’s incarnation and condescension even to the Cross to achieve redemption. Nevertheless that condescension of the Son did not deprive Him of His glory.

**Thirdly:** He again has His glory and is clothed with it to open for us the way to heavenly glory; for through our mingling with the Lord who is glorified we enjoy sharing glory in eternity.

The Son asks that He may be covered with the glory that He has since eternity before the creation of the world. Thus the law in which He wrapped Himself will be glorious in the resurrection and the ascension to heaven. For He has the authority to lay down His life by death and take it by resurrection because He is the Resurrection. The Father declares the glory of the Son in His resurrection and ascension and in His sitting at the right hand of the Father exalted above every name (Phil 2: 6-9). This is the clear declaration of the prophet Isaiah: **“Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he has put him to grief: when you shall make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand... Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he has poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”** (Is 53: 10, 12) This is the pleasure of the Father in the Cross, because through the Cross human believers become spoil that the Crucified carries to the divine throne, justified and glorified in Him. This is the glory of the Father and of the Son who grants righteousness. It is the glory of humanity who shares heavenly glory. However, as He fulfills the will of the Father, He accepts suffering as the will of His Father and He accepts resurrection as the pleasure of His Father.

This is the glory of the Son incarnate. He does not obtain glory from an outside source. He accepts it from what He has eternally and reflects it in His humanity. He does not ask to be glorified with the rulers of this world. Satan had tempted and offered Him all the kingdoms of this world, but He had refused so that we may deride temporary glory and seek what is heavenly. As though He says, ‘Give the glory of this world to those who long for it. As for Me, My glory is with You in heaven eternally. I do not ask to be glorified with men, but with You.’

We cry with our Christ to ask for our glory not on earth but the glory that is “with the Father”, in the divine bosom so that the divine promise may be realized in us: **“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne”** (Rev 3: 21).

\* Think how the Lord did not ask the Father to glorify Him with the glory He has on earth, but prayed that He glorifies Him with the glory He has with Him.

\* Where is that glory? He did not accept glory from the people because of the cover He covered Himself with, how then could He ask the Father to glorify Him? What does He say here? What He says concerns the dispensation. For, His human nature is not yet glorified, nor has He yet obtained incorruption. His body (flesh) had not yet shared the royal throne. Therefore, He does not say, “on earth”, but says, “with You.”<sup>14</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* I can, thus, remind you of many things now in different ways. But, in every condition I offer you another testimony so that you may be sure that God is called “Father of mankind” having an unsuitable meaning, for He is not the Father of mankind by nature.

This is how God was addressed in Isaiah, “You are our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us” (Is 63: 16) and Sarah was not in labor to give birth to us.

As the Psalmist says, “Let them be scattered before him; a father of the fatherless and a judge of the widows” (Ps 68: 5 LXX). Is it not clear to all that he calls God a father of those who recently lost their fathers, not because He gave birth to them, but rather because He cares and protects them?

Yet, while we call God, Father of mankind inappropriately, He is the Father of Christ alone in essence and not by adoption.

So, to mankind He is a father in time, but to Christ He is Father before time. Christ, therefore, says, “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”

**Saint Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* We understand that the glory of His humanity that is liable to death becomes immortal with the Father. This was fulfilled in the first determined dispensation before the world was and was fulfilled at the fixed time in the world.<sup>15</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

## **2- A General Prayer for Others**

**“I have manifested Your name to the men  
Whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours,  
You gave them to Me,  
And they have kept Your word.” [6]**

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<sup>14</sup> Homilies on St. John, 80: 2.

<sup>15</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 105: 7.

His prayer for Himself is very short compared to His prayer for the others. However, His prayer for Himself precedes His other prayer so that we may comprehend our love for our brethren as for ourselves. For, if we ask for our eternal glory and declare our love for our salvation, we need to ask the same for others as for ourselves. His prayer for the others has a special place so that our prayers for the sake of the Church and the salvation of mankind may not occupy a small corner in our prayers. We must not tighten our hearts concerning the others. We must rather have a big heart through the Holy Spirit to ask in abundance for their sake.

After He prayed for Himself, though He did not need to but He prayed in participation with the Father and the mutual, or rather one glory in Them both, He now prays on behalf of His people whom He knows by name. He prays for all those who believe in Him and who seek Him. He teaches us that in our prayer we connect divine love with brotherly love. Thus in His prayer for Himself He reveals His wonderful unity with the Father along with His great heart for mankind.

He desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. But in this prayer of intercession He presents those who accept what the Father offers to them. He desires to carry the entire world to the throne, but He does not carry anyone by force, and He does not ask for those who do not accept His work in him or her. He offers to those whose names have been written in the book of life through His blood.

**“I have manifested Your name to the men”** [6]: Nature manifests the existence of God in some limited ways. The Law of Moses declares God more, but the incarnation of the Word is a perfect manifestation of God in His love for men and in His characteristics. Christ as a teacher who brought His disciples to the knowledge of God, prays to the Father for those He received from the Father. He is the Son who knows the mysteries of His Father and He gave His disciples the knowledge of the name and person of the Father. He shines on them giving them the light of knowledge and dispersing the darkness of ignorance. So they love, worship and glorify Him. In His teaching He does not ask for what is His although He is one with His Father, for no one knows the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him (Matt 11:27). He alone is able to reveal the truth and take His disciples to enter the truth and the truth enters their hearts.

**‘Your name’**: The Jews used to look upon the name of God with great reverence. They did not dare pronounce the name “Jehovah” lest they should make a mistake in pronunciation. The scribes also who wrote the Holy Scriptures followed special rites such as washing the pen immediately before writing the name of God. To pronounce the name of God implied His very presence. The early Church had the same Biblical thought and considered uttering the name of Jesus carried with it His presence. The Fathers prayed the “Jesus Prayer” repeating His name and so declaring their feeling that He is among them and in them. For, a name is not merely a way of distinguishing between one person from another; the name of a person is his very essence. It is no wonder, therefore, that Nebuchadnezzar changed the name of Mattaniah to Zedekiah (2 Kings 24: 17). In that manner Mattaniah became one of Nebuchadnezzar’s men and everyone using his new name understood his relationship with Nebuchadnezzar. When Rachel gave birth to a boy as she was dying, she called his name “Ben-oni” meaning “the son of sadness.” But his father refused that the name of his son should be connected to the sadness of

his mother, and instead he gave him a name full of hope and strength, for he called him “Benjamin” meaning “son of my right hand” (Gen 35: 18).

Moreover, God Himself often changes the names of His believers so that they may have qualities that are suitable to their divine call to do a certain task. He called ‘Abram’, Abraham to make him father of many nations (Gen 17: 5). Likewise, He changed the name of ‘Sarai’ to Sarah so that she may take the role of a princess. He also called Jacob ‘Israel’ so instead of having the trait of anger because he followed his sibling, he now enjoys the secret of God’s power as a soldier or wrestler for God (Gen 32: 28). Again, when Pashur insulted Jeremiah and smote him then put him in the stocks, God changed the name of Pashur to ‘Magor-missabib’ (Jer 20: 3) for this name implies terror all around and indicates the divine punishment that will befall him as a result of his violence.

The Lord Jesus Christ also commanded us to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt 28: 19; Acts 8: 16) so that the Holy Trinity may be present and dwell in the baptized person. Thus the name of a person is often used in the Bible to signify the nature of the person. In our love of God we announce our love of His person and essence.

**“The men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours”:** By “The men whom You have given Me” He means primarily the disciples who followed Him. But these words extend also to include all those who accept Him throughout the ages, those who listen and respond to Him. He knew them all but did not mention any name because He thought of them all. He says, “You have given Me” referring to those who through faith belong to Christ. He says they also belong to the Father who presents them as a gift to be heirs of Christ. Through the Cross, the Lord Jesus Christ offers them to the Father justified and qualified for reconciliation with the Father. The Father in turn offers them to the Son as members of His body having the right to eternal inheritance.

They are related to God the Father, as they are His creation who obtained life through His Son. They are the last honest remnants who are sanctified by Christ’s blood, and He has chosen them.

**“They have kept Your word”:** This means they were steadfast in Him and continued in Him working through Him. A commandment is kept when it enters the heart. It is sealed in the heart by actual practice. To show our obligation in the accuracy of teaching, He says that He gave them the words that the Father gave Him. It is thus suitable for us to give others the same words that the Lord Christ gave us and with which the Holy Spirit inspired His disciples and holy apostles. He established this living knowledge in the life of His disciples and the apostles He chose. Those kept the Word, for they accepted the Word incarnate in their lives even though the world rejected and opposed them..

\* The Lord Jesus Christ says to the Father, **“I have manifested Your name to the men”** for He manifested the Father’s name by His teachings and works. And He says, “the men whom You have given Me out of the world” just as He had said before, “no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father” (John 6: 65); and ‘unless My Father attracts them.’ Likewise, He says here, “whom You have given Me.” He calls Himself “the way.” He establishes two things in what He says: that He does not contradict the Father, and that the will

of the Father is that they are given to the Son. “They were Yours, You gave them to Me.” Here, the Lord desires to make it clear that His Father loves Him greatly, for He did not beg the Father that He gives them to Him. And He says, “and they have kept Your word” meaning ‘they kept Your word by believing Me.’<sup>16</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Saint Augustine** asks, ‘Did those who belonged to the Father not belong to the Son?’ Certainly those who were the Father’s were also the Son’s. Why then does He say, “They were Yours, You gave them to Me” [6]? They were the Father’s as they belonged to the Son the Word; but as the Son came to the world in the flesh they accepted the incarnate Son and became His disciples. He does not say ‘They were Ours’ because the Son born of the Father refers authority to the Father.<sup>17</sup>

**“Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You.” [7]**

\* It is possible for someone to ask the Lord Christ, ‘How did they know that?’ He would have answered, ‘from My teachings because I taught them that.’<sup>18</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* When He said, “They have known surely” [8] He desired to explain that ‘they believed’ [8]<sup>19</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“For I have given to them the words which You have given Me;  
And they have received them,  
And have known surely that I came forth from You,  
And they have believed that You sent Me.” [8]**

The Lord Jesus Christ gives His disciples the divine heavenly teaching, but its essence is in discovering His person and that He came forth from the Father.

Believers understand that the Lord Jesus Christ is the divine Word incarnate. His teachings are divine facts. His commandments are heavenly law and His promises are true and honest because they are divine.

I gave them the words and teachings that are Yours and they thus have the pure learning that comes directly from heaven and is not mixed with human teachings that corrupt the word of truth.

They are quite sure that I am the promised Christ and now they do not ask for another for they enjoy My divine work and heavenly teachings.

**“I pray for them.**

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<sup>16</sup> Homilies on St. John, 81: 1.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 106: 5.

<sup>18</sup> Homilies on St. John, 81: 1.

<sup>19</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 106: 6.



**I do not pray for the world  
But for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours.” [9]**

He offered His life a sacrifice for the entire world. But He prays or intercedes with His blood for those who have accepted and believed in Him. The Lord dies for the sake of the entire world, but He knows perfectly those who will insist on refusing Him because they are not His. Therefore, He concentrates on those who were given to Him out of the world. But those who persist in refusing Him will remain in the world like chaff that the wind drives away or that is thrown into the fire because it is chaff that has no value.

He does not intercede for those who are determined to drink of the cup of evil, to rebel and refuse to believe, not because He does not love them but because they reject His work in them. He does not say, ‘I pray against them’, for He has no hatred, rather they hate and refuse Him. As for us, since we do not know who are the Lord’s and who are not and since we cannot judge anybody, we must pray for all people (1 Tim 2: 1, 4). For as long as there is breath in a man for whose salvation we pray, there is hope and our prayer will find room so that we repeat with Samuel the prophet, “...as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way” (1 Sam 12: 23).

The Lord Jesus Christ devoted His divine possibilities for His chosen ones so that they may be qualified to spread His Gospel in the world. He prays for the people whom He carries in Himself as children of God who have the right of sharing the inheritance. He does not say that He prays for the heavenly beings.

In the mutual love and in obedience of the Father, the Son incarnate gives His precious blood for the salvation of mankind. And, in His love for the Son, the Father gives those men to the Son as a holy bride. The Son accepts the gift from the Father for the sake of mankind, for they are considered honored vessels.

Those who have accepted the word of the Lord Christ and believed in it have entered into the new covenant with the Father. Therefore the Lord Jesus Christ considered them to be the Father’s, for He says, “they are Yours.” They are the Father’s gift to the Son, since the Father has revealed His love for mankind by giving His Only Begotten Son to save the world. The Son received them as a gift from His Father, for He regarded them His Father’s. They are first fruits to God (Rev 14: 4) through their true union; and so we are considered belonging to the Son as to the Father. We are the people of God the Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**\* “I pray for them” [9]** Do You inform the Father of their news as though He ignored them? Do You speak to Him as to someone who lacks knowledge?

Do you not see that the aim of this prayer is that they know His love for them? For He who does not only give what He has but also prays another to do the same to show greater love.

What then? He says, “I pray for them” and “I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me.” He always says, “You have given” so that they may realize that the Father considered this a good thing.

And as He had always said, “They were Yours. You gave them to Me”, He removes evil doubt, lest anyone should think that His authority was new, that He received that authority recently, what does He say? “And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine” [10].<sup>20</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* He adds, “for they are Yours” [9]. For the Father does not lose those He gives to the Son since the Son continues saying, “all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine” [20]. It is clear enough that all that belongs to the Father belongs also to the Son.<sup>21</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“And all Mine are Yours,  
And Yours are Mine,  
And I am glorified in them.” [10]**

The people who are sanctified by Christ’s blood are among His possessions and also those of the Father. It is true that any of God’s creatures can say to the Father, ‘all mine are Yours’, but only the Lord Jesus Christ, who is One with Him in essence, can say, “And all Mine are Yours, and I am glorified in them.” For the Father and the Son are One and equal in might, authority and glory. There is no conflict between Them. There is no ‘this is mine and that is yours’ as among people. Since eternity the Father gave birth to the Son as light from light. The Father is for the Son and the Son is for the Father. They are one in essence. They have one nature. Those who are the Father’s are necessarily the Son’s. He who has the Son and knows Him has the Father and knows His mysteries. All that the Son offers as blessings of salvation are for the glory of the Father as though the Father offers them.

The Son has nothing that does not belong to the Father. The Father has nothing that is not the work of His Son because the Son is the power, wisdom and Word of might of His Father. As we have become members of the body of Christ, He, the head, presents us to the Father as belonging to Him. For the Father is glorified in us through our blessing in listening to Christ’s words, through our obedience, true testimony for divine love, and through our work toward His kingdom. What we do in Christ’s name we do guided by His Holy Spirit for the glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

**“I am glorified in them”:** The Lord Jesus Christ announces beforehand the success of His disciples in spreading the Gospel. Through that, Christ is glorified in those in the world who believe in Him. Christ is glorified in His believers who listen to Him, obey Him, work in His name, and preach His grace. This glory is offered to the Father also.

The Lord prays for those who believe in Him because He will ascend to heaven and go to the Father and the members of His body, His believers, will remain on earth glorifying the Father and testifying of Him by carrying Christ’s name. The disciples preached and performed miracles

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<sup>20</sup> Homilies on St. John, 81: 1.

<sup>21</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 107: 2.

in the name of Christ and the Holy Spirit dwelling in them and so glorified Christ (Jn 16: 14). This is also referred to the Father.

\* Do you not see the equality in glory? Lest when hearing **“You have given to Me”** you may think they were taken from the authority of the Father or had belonged before and taken away from the authority of the Son, He has removed those two difficulties by saying this. Therefore, **“You have given Me”** is said in great humility, for all that belongs to the Father is the Son’s and what is the Son’s is the Father’s. This cannot be said about sons of men, but the Father and the Son are equal in honor.

He then explains the reason and gives evidence by saying, **“And I am glorified in them”**, meaning ‘I have power over them’ or ‘they will glorify Me and believe in You and Me and glorify Us equally.’

How may He and the Father be glorified equally? They will all die for Him as for the Father. They preach His Gospel as that of the Father and as they say all things were made in the name of the Father they say they were made in the name of the Son also.<sup>22</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* **“And I am glorified in them”** [10] He speaks to the Father about His own glorification as though that was completed though this would happen in the future. He recently prayed to the Father to fulfill His glory. By saying His glory has actually been achieved showing that it was in fact arranged to be achieved, He desired to show that what will be realized in the future is an absolute fact.

### **3- A Prayer for Them That the Father May Keep Them**

**“Now I am no longer in the world,  
But these are in the world,  
And I come to You.  
Holy Father, keep through Your name  
Those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.”** [11]

**“Now I am no longer in the world”** as though He says, ‘I am about to leave the world in the flesh and consequently they are in need of special help and support. They need that I present them to You so that You may keep them in the truth.’

As He prays that they may be protected, He calls God, **“Holy Father.”** His precious gift to His children is holiness so that they may be holy as He is Holy. He hates sin and therefore He embraces His children so that sin may not creep into them. They, in turn, as His children cannot endure sin. They are terrified of sin as the most dangerous enemy they face.

**“Keep them through Your name”**: As believers are the children of the holy God, He keeps them for the sake of His name’s honor and not because they are themselves worthy. As

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<sup>22</sup> Homilies on St. John, 81: 2.

Christ is ascending to the Father, He carries the names of His believers as on His chest, as the greatest heavenly high priest. He takes them to the throne and has for them all love and kindness. He never forgets them, for their names are inscribed on His palm, sealed on His breast, dwelling in His heart. He had told Peter the Apostle that He had prayed for him that his faith should not fail (Luke 22: 32) and that he should not stumble unaware into the danger that he would soon face. Christ said, "I have prayed for you." He, the Savior, prays for His disciples that the Father may keep them all their lives from stumbling. He prays that they remain always guided by the Father so that we may share the same love and never cease to pray for the salvation of many, for their spiritual growth in the Lord.

The Son declares that the Father has given Him the chosen to become His, for the Son has offered His blood for the redemption of the entire world. Now, the Son gives, with love, those believers to the Holy Father praying to Him saying, "Keep them through Your name." He does not pray that they become rich or have worldly honor. He does not pray for their earthly victory, but prays that the Father may keep them through His name from sin and the wicked world until they travel the days of their sojourning and reach the Father's bosom. He prays that they may be protected in the divine commandments through the Father's name and that they may enjoy the spirit of unity.

**"Those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are":** The Lord Jesus Christ links holiness and true unity. For, where there is holiness there is great love that unites. Where there is sin there is envy, contention, hatred and severance. Whoever has holiness that is from above experiences unity in its highest degree and all holy people become one like the unity of the Holy Trinity.

He prays the Father to keep them through His name, meaning through Him and belief in Him. The aim of this belief or this teaching is that all believers may be one, may become one body and spirit similar to the unity of the Father and the Son. Thus, the Father is glorified in them.

\* **"Now I am no longer in the world"** [11] meaning, 'though I shall not appear in the flesh again, I still am glorified through them.' But why does He say always, "I am not in the world" and "as I leave them I commit them to You" and again, "while I was with them in the world I kept them"? If anyone interprets these words simply he will face many absurd notions. For, how can it be reasonable to say that He will not be in the world and that as He leaves He gives them to another? These words mean He will leave them forever. But He spoke those words to give them peace and joy.

\* He says, **"Keep them through Your name"** meaning keep them through Your help.

\* This is what you doubt. He presents Himself to their minds and to their small spirits when they hear Him saying this and giving them up to the care of the Father. After they hear His many counsels and they still do not respond, He speaks to the Father and reveals His love for them.<sup>23</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

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<sup>23</sup> Hom. 81. PG 59: 480.

After **Saint Gregory of Nazianzus** became a Christian and despised the world, he was suddenly dazzled by the radiance of the Holy Trinity who dwelt in him when he was still in the world. He wrote, “From the day I left the things of the world to devote myself to contemplate the heavenly light, sublime thoughts carried me to take me away from anything that concerned the flesh and hide me in secret places in the heavenly tabernacle. From that day, the light of the Trinity, that exceeds the ability of the mind to comprehend, has blinded my eyes. This light shines on all from the greatly glorified throne. The shared rays of the Trinity cannot be described. This is the source of all that is here below and that is separated by time from the things above. From that day I died to the world and the world died to me.”<sup>24</sup>

\* He declares that He is no longer in the world- that is in the flesh. He prays the Father to care for those He is about to leave (that is, His absence in the flesh) saying, “Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me.” As a man, the Lord prays to God on behalf of His disciples whom He received from Him.<sup>25</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name.  
Those whom You gave Me I have kept,  
And none of them is lost except the son of perdition,  
That the Scripture might be fulfilled.” [12]**

**“I kept in Your name”:** We have seen that in the Scriptures often “the name of God” is an expression used to signify “God Himself.” The aim of the Word incarnate is to keep His believers in the Father by presenting Himself to them as being the Divine Truth. The Lord Jesus Christ prays that His believers may be kept as He kept His disciples when He was on earth, so that none of them may be lost except he who insisted on being a son of perdition. He thus prays for the sake of believers also, that the Holy Father may keep them so that they may fulfill the holy Gospel and testify for the divine truth.

None of them was lost except that one who insisted on becoming a son of Satan the deceitful and, consequently, became a son of perdition. That man obtained the blessing of discipleship but willingly and wickedly corrupted that gift because of his love of money. Christ calls Judas “son of perdition” because he withdrew from the membership of the divine family. He refused to be a child of God and insisted on being a son of Satan who destroys and kills. He is the “son of perdition” because he did not seek his own salvation, but instead willfully and wickedly ruined the divine grants offered to him and opened his heart to a series of sins to enter, like greed, betrayal and despair.

**“That the Scripture might be fulfilled”:** The Holy Scripture prophecies as in (Ps 41: 9; 109: 8) and in him was achieved the symbols of Ahitophel concerning David the king, and Absalom concerning his father, but in Judas betrayal was more horrible.

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<sup>24</sup> Poemata de seipsol, PG 37: 984-85.

<sup>25</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 107: 4-5.

\* The Lord Jesus Christ prays to the Father, **“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name.”** When He says this He speaks as a man and prophet but does not show that He does anything in God’s name.

He says, **“Those whom You gave Me I have kept, and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”** In another passage He says, “of all He has given Me I should lose nothing” (John 6: 39). Yet the traitor was not lost alone. After him many were lost. So, how can He say, “I should lose nothing”? The answer is ‘on My part I do not lose.’ In still another passage He explains more clearly, “and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6: 37) as though saying, ‘I am not the cause of their loss. I did not neglect them and as they willingly go away I do not force them to come back.’<sup>26</sup>

\* “That the Scripture might be fulfilled” not that the Scripture might be realized, but this is the method of the Scripture: things are correlated as though they happen because they are written.<sup>27</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* He says, ‘as I am about to come to You, keep them in Your name as I have kept them in while I was with them.’ He kept them in the name of the Father. The Son, as a man, kept His disciples while He was with them in the flesh. But the Father also kept those whom He heard in the name of the Son. He answered their prayers offered in the name of the Son. The Son Himself says to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you” (John 16: 23). But we must not interpret this physically, that they take turns in keeping us as though one substitutes the other when one of them goes away. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit who are one true blessed God keep us at the same time.<sup>28</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“But now I come to You,  
And these things I speak in the world,  
That they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.” [13]**

As the Lord Jesus Christ completes His message on the Cross and is risen from the dead, He goes to the Father. The Father finds His pleasure in this and the Son is happy in His redemptive mission. He prays that His believers may have His joy fulfilled in them. He carries His people with love in His ascension and as the heavenly High Priest He registers their names on His breast to take them into the heavenly Holiest. He carries them in His heart abiding in Him as He abides in them. He engraves them on the palms of His hands with the nails of the Cross. Then, even if they cannot see Him because He is in heaven, He is still not far from them, nor are they far from Him. He is in their hearts as they are in His heart and mind. He is preoccupied with them until He takes them into the bosom of His Father.

Whoever accepts the good will of God and His good Word must expect the opposition of the evil will and word of the world. Therefore, the Lord prays for His disciples and for all the

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<sup>26</sup> Homilies on St. John, 82: 2.

<sup>27</sup> Hom. 81. PG 59: 480-481.

<sup>28</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 107: 6.

members of His Church that they may have His joy fulfilled in them in this world. This is the will of the Lord Jesus Christ and the desire of His heart: that every believer may enjoy the perfect continual heavenly joy. He leaves them surrounded by tears, suffering and tribulation, but He achieves in them inner joy that exceeds nature.

May our tears raise our eyes to see our Christ praying His Father for us that we may have His perfect joy. This is a divine promise we must hear with the spirit of faith, in quiet silence and we must adhere to it so that we may obtain it. A person who keeps Christ's word patiently obtains divine special protection at the hour of trial (Rev 3: 10). This has been actually realized when the martyrs were full of joy during their suffering. The joy of Christ is a divine gift and a free blessing. At the same time it is a command we must obey. It is given to those who strive in it. Therefore, the Apostle admonishes us saying, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord" (Phil 3: 1) and again, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice" (Phil 4: 4).

The Holy Spirit shapes whoever conducts himself in the world following the thought of the Lord Jesus Christ and so seeks to become an icon of Christ. He follows Christ's footsteps and does not think of the things of the world. He does not devote his life to serve the world. The Father gives such a man His protection for His Holy Son's sake.

**"That they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves":** The aim of His address to believers is to pour His divine joy in them. Our Lord Jesus Christ is our eternal perfect joy. He is the source of joy and the Lord of true happiness. Without Him all joy fades away because that joy is linked to the evanescent world. But Christ's joy is eternal like Him. He is the pleasure of the Father. He, therefore, asks this of Him.

Undoubtedly, companionship with the living gives a kind of happiness and bereavement causes sadness and pain. But, the time has now come to tell them that He will leave them in the flesh and they will not meet Him in the same manner they did during the years of His open service on the earth. This separation must be the source not of sadness but of joy. They enjoy His presence in their midst and in themselves for He dwells in their hearts and evokes in them His perfect joy. His joy is their joy and they thus experience the perfect joy.

+ He says that His joy that He gives them must be fulfilled in them. He declares that this is why He spoke in the world. Peace in the future world and its blessing are granted through the manner we choose to live in the present: exercising moderation, righteousness and piety.<sup>29</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**"I have given them Your word;  
And the world has hated them  
Because they are not of the world,  
Just as I am not of the world." [14]**

He prays the Father to give support to believers: they need to have Him as their own personal friend because they have many enemies. The world hates them for no other reason but

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<sup>29</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 107: 8.

that they are not of the world and they urge humanity to leave the evil world and take delight in the holy One. Therefore, the Psalmist says, “Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head.... Because for Your sake I have borne reproach” (Ps 69: 4, 7). Because they obeyed, they accepted the Word, the world cannot endure them because the world rejects salvation. The world despises what is offered for its glory. The world does its best to destroy the faith and causes ruin. Thus, the children of the world deny the Word of glory and redemption. Instead, they devote all their energy to overthrow the living faith. They, thus, destroy themselves unknowingly.

He tells the world that the believers were of the world but now they are not of the world. They are a new creation (2 Cor 5: 17). They are a new rival though they make a world of love, sacrifice and service even of the rebels. The old world wants all to belong to it. The old world may admire the new creation for their potentiality, possibilities, and conduct; but as it is a selfish world, it will not stop wishing that the new creation returns to its arms and it will not cease from opposing them and getting rid of them.

There is a Jewish proverb that says, ‘If the world does not know the value of its righteous, it will erect (in hatred) a fence of pearls to protect them.’ The farewell prayer of the Lord Christ reveals the great work of God in keeping the servants, believers, and the word of the Gospel. Without this divine blessing faith would have vanished a long time ago. For, throughout the centuries, the world has agglomerated its energy to annihilate faith and destroy the Church and all Christians. However, the words of the Lord Christ are the secret in the survival of faith and of believers to this day.

The Holy Father says, “Once I have sworn by My holiness I will not lie to David.” (Ps 89: 35) As He is holy He does not endure sin. He considers the holy peoples His and He keeps them from sin, which they also hate and regard as a dangerous evil. He, as a Holy Father, cares for His children. He teaches them and keeps them in His direct care. They, on their own, cannot abide in the divine blessings they obtained and, therefore, they need God’s help. They are protected for God as they are His children.

\* When we adhere to virtue, evil people persecute us. When we desire virtue they deride us. We must not get confused or angry for these are natural reactions. Everywhere virtue arouses hatred in the malevolent because they envy those who wish to live appropriately. The wicked try to find excuse for themselves when they disparage the others.

They hate them and use every means to abuse their way of life because they behave differently.

We must not be sad, for this is the sign of virtue and for this reason the Lord says, “If you were of the world, the world would love its own.” (Jn 15: 19) and in another place He says, “Woe to you when all men speak well of you” (Luke 6: 26). In the same sense He says here, “I have given them Your word and the world has hated them.” He says, ‘for You and Your word they hate them.’ Because of that they are qualified to enjoy all God’s care.<sup>30</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

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<sup>30</sup> Homilies on St. John, 82: 1.



\* This hatred of the world had not yet affected their lives but would happen later. He speaks about the future in the past tense, as is His custom. He explains why the world hates them by saying, “because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world” [14]. They were granted this through their new birth because when they were first born they were of the world. He previously said, “I chose you out of the world” (Jn 15: 19). This is a kind of distinction granted to them as they become like Him, for He is “not of the world.” It is given to them through being saved from the world. In any case, He was never of the world, for even when He took the form of a bondservant He was born of the Holy Spirit of whom they were born again. Thus, because of their second birth they were not anymore of the world, for they were born of the Holy Spirit. For the same reason He was never of the world because His birth or incarnation was of the Holy Spirit.<sup>31</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“I do not pray that You should take them out of the world,  
But that You should keep them from the evil one.” [15]**

He prays that God may keep them from the evil world and explains the two ways to keep God’s children from the world.

The first way is to take them out of the world through sudden, quick death so that they cross over to a better world. This is what some men of God like Job, Elijah, Jonah, and Moses wished when they were in trouble and suffered trials. But the Lord did not ask for this for His disciples, for He came to the world to give His believers a life of triumph through carrying the Cross. He did not wish them to escape from the world. The Lord came to the world to serve humanity; the world, therefore, was not worthy of the believers (Heb 11: 38). The evil world is dark and the Lord Jesus Christ came to illuminate the world and overcome evil and darkness. He made His disciples as bright stars to enlighten the world. The love of the Lord for His believers did not cause Him to withdraw them immediately from the world of darkness, but to sanctify them so that they may give light to the world and have the spirit of victory. Jeremiah, the prophet, wished to run away to the wilderness (Jer 9: 2). But our Christ works through all and as the Apostle Paul says, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry” (1 Tim 1: 12). Saint Peter wrote, “Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator” (1 Pet 4: 19). Thus, even the ascetic hermit cannot escape the feeling of responsibility to work in one way or another for the sanctification of the world. The Son did not pray to the Father to send a chariot of fire to carry His disciples to heaven and take them away from the evil world.

The second way is to grant them the spirit of strength and triumph over evil in the world. This is what the Lord asked for His disciples, that God should keep them from corruption in the world. He, therefore, entrusts them to the bosom of the Father so that the evil one may not approach. He does not pray that God should keep them by removing trials and tribulation from their path, but that they experience victory in their struggle against evil and that they testify to the power of the rich grace working in them.

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<sup>31</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 108: 1.

\* What does the Lord Jesus Christ say to the Father? “Keep them from the evil one.” This means keep them from evil conduct, from sin, and from feebleness of the heart.<sup>32</sup>

\* He does not pray that they may be saved from trials only, but also that they may persevere in their faith.<sup>33</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* Their existence in the world is important even though they are not of the world.<sup>34</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“They are not of the world,  
Just as I am not of the world.” [16]**

He prays that God should keep them because they have become like Him. As they became similar to their Christ, they are no longer of the world. They are not preoccupied with the pleasures of the world. They are not troubled by its problems because the service of their Christ occupies their thoughts and fills their hearts.

\* If you say, ‘What does the Lord mean by saying that His disciples “are not of the world”?’ I answer, ‘They look at another world and have nothing of the earth. They have become like the citizens of heaven. In these words the Lord revealed His love for them, for He praises them and raises their praise to His Father to whom He entrusts them.’

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* It may be asked, ‘If they are not anymore of the world, whether they are or are no longer sanctified indeed in the truth, how then does He pray that God should not take them out of the world?’ That is because those who have been sanctified must remain so that they may grow in sanctity and in holiness. This is not achieved without the grace of God who sanctifies their growth as He sanctified them at the beginning. Concerning this point Paul says, “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1: 6).<sup>35</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

#### **4 – A Prayer for Them to Be Sanctified**

**“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” [17]**

What does “sanctify” mean? The work of God in them does not stop at keeping them from evil and the evil one. It extends to the positive work such as acting in holiness, goodness, and righteous work. He prays that their hearts may burn with the love of holiness. Their

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<sup>32</sup> Hom 1. On Gal. PG 61: 664.

<sup>33</sup> Hom. 82. PG 59: 483.

<sup>34</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 108: 2.

<sup>35</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 108: 2.

sanctification implies also continual growth in faith and inflammation of the heart with the Spirit of God.

The means of sanctification is “by Your truth”, meaning the word of God. By the Word and by prayer every act of the Church, such as the holy sacraments, is sanctified. The spirits of God’s servants are also sanctified.

The prophets did their work through sanctification. Jeremiah (Jer 1: 5) and the Levite priests also acted by sanctification. The servants in the New Covenant are likewise sanctified and consecrated (Rom 1: 1). The Lord Jesus Christ as High Priest sanctifies the priests.

The word “sanctify” ‘Hagiason’ is derived from two syllables: “A” or “Ha” which in Greek, means a negative, and “gee” means “earth.” So, the word means “no earth.” Consequently, sanctification implies removing what is of the earth from the heart so that the heart may devote itself to the love, worship, and service of God. It also implies “purity” since the heart is purified of all temporary blemish and acquires a heavenly spiritual quality. The priest or servant who is troubled by worldly concerns even in the service of the Church dishonors the Gospel and loses divine truth. He loses the holiness of his heart.

The word “sacred” in Hebrew means offering a sacrifice. The sacrifice is dedicated to God alone and its goal is that the people, as God’s people, enjoy communion with the Holy God.

The quality of “holiness” belongs to the Holy God alone. For this reason, the heavenly hosts praise Him saying, “Holy, Holy, Holy.” Our holiness then has no other meaning but our unification with the Holy and sharing with Him a divine nature. A holy life is not merely good conduct but is a relation to the divine life and experiencing the work of the Holy God.

\* What does He mean by His words, **“Sanctify them in Your truth”** [17] but to say, ‘Sanctify them in Me.’ The Father sanctifies in the truth, that is His Word, His Only Begotten Son. He sanctifies His heirs and the heirs with the Son.<sup>36</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

+ **“Sanctify them in Your truth”** meaning ‘Make them holy by giving them the Spirit and true teachings.’ Just as He said, “You are already clean because of the word, which I have spoken to you (Jn 15: 3); now He says the same thing: ‘Guide them; teach them the truth.’ For, uttering the right teachings concerning God sanctifies the soul. He says that they are sanctified by the word, but this does not only indicate the wonderful works, for the word of God also purifies. But “sanctify them” seems to me also to reveal another similar demand; that is ‘Consecrate them (isolate them) for the word and the Gospel.’ This is shown in what is said later.<sup>37</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

+ The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit sanctify together, give life, light and rest. Let no one refer sanctification particularly and especially to the energy of the Spirit alone. After hearing the Savior’s words, ‘Sanctify them in Your name’ (John 17: 11, 17), it is clear that all energy is

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<sup>36</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 108: 3.

<sup>37</sup> Hom. 82. PG 59: 483-484.

achieved equally for those qualified by means of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This energy is in every grace, virtue, guidance, life, consolation, change to immortality and crossing to eternal life, and in all other good blessings descending on the human being.<sup>38</sup>

**Saint Basil the Great**

\* Just as the Father sanctifies, the Son also sanctifies and the Holy Spirit sanctifies. The Father sanctifies, as it is written, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thes 5: 23). And in a different place, the Father sanctifies, “Father, sanctify them by Your truth” [17].

The same Apostle says concerning the Son, “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor 1: 30).

The Apostle teaches also that the Holy Spirit sanctifies. He says, “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2 Thes 2: 13).

However, sanctification is one because baptism is one and the blessing of the sacrament is one.<sup>39</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

**“As You sent Me into the world,  
I also have sent them into the world.” [18]**

The Son devoted Himself to the work of salvation and, therefore, the Father sent Him on a mission to fulfill that divine act. He has been called, “Advocate” (1 Jn 2: 1), “Apostle” (Heb 3: 1), “servant” (Rom 15: 8) and “sent forth” (Gal 4: 4). However, He was sent forth as Son of God, not like the servants and bondservants.

Why does He link His mission from the Father to His own mission? That is because the mission is difficult and the task is arduous. Therefore, He wanted to affirm to them that He supports them. He works with, through, and in them, for their work is a continuation of His work. The Lord Jesus Christ, as Son of Man, accepted gifts for the sake of men (Ps 68: 18). He then gave those gifts to men (Eph 4: 8).

As He offered Himself as a sacrifice, He opened the way for His apostles to partake of His practical love and, through abiding in Him, become holy offerings (Phil 2: 17; 2 Tim 4: 6). The death of the saints became dear to God because their death was linked to that of Christ.

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<sup>38</sup> Letter 189 to Eustathius, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Of the Holy Spirit Book 3: 4: 25-28.

\* The Father sent His Son, not in the sinful flesh, but in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom 8: 3). His Son then sent those who were born in the sinful flesh, after they were sanctified through Him and were purified from the contamination of sin.<sup>40</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* He was accustomed to speak about the future as though it actually happened.<sup>41</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**“And for their sakes I sanctify Myself,  
That they also may be sanctified by the truth.” [19]**

As He willingly gives Himself up to death so that He may save humanity, He says He thus sanctifies Himself or consecrates all His life to achieve our salvation. And, as the apostle Paul says, “But Christ...with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption (Heb 9: 11-12). He devoted all His life for the redemption of the human race. Nothing else absorbed Him especially that He is the only One who can offer Himself a sacrifice without blemish to save the entire world. Now, being the High Priest and at the same time the sacrifice, He sanctifies Himself not by any outside power. He does not need the blood of animals to sanctify Him, for He is without sin. But He wills to devote all His power even to death on the Cross to sanctify His servants and people.

Just as the Son devoted His mission to the salvation of humanity since nothing but human beings preoccupied Him, likewise the believer is sanctified and consecrates all his ability and time for Christ who is “the truth.” This is the pleasure that Paul the apostle experienced and, therefore, described himself as “separated to the gospel of God” (Rom 1: 1). This is what the prophets obtained and so heard the divine voice saying, “before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you” (Jer 1: 5). This was the perception of the Levite priests: that they are consecrated for the service of God. The believer also, even though he does not dedicate his time to service, to preaching and worship, his heart is still sanctified as he does everything, even his food, drink and sleep, for the glory of God.

\* Here He says that He sanctifies Himself. He does not say that He helps Himself to be sanctified by purification of the spirit or soul. Nor does He desire to partake of the Holy Spirit since the Holy Spirit is in His essence and He is forever and ever Holy and will remain so. He says here, “I sanctify Myself” because I offer Myself and present Myself as a sacrifice without blemish, for a sweet smelling aroma, because the offering brought to the holy altar is sanctified or is called, according to the Law, holy.<sup>42</sup>

\* As He is with the Father in existence eternally, He accepts being His Son in the Spirit. And as in the flesh He became similar to the adopted children of God; therefore, it is said that He was

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<sup>40</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 108: 4.

<sup>41</sup> Hom. 82. PG 59: 484.

<sup>42</sup> Comm. On John 6: 51.

sanctified. For, sanctification refers to His humanity or the flesh because human nature cannot acquire holiness of itself.<sup>43</sup>

#### **Saint Cyril the Great**

\* What does He mean by, “I sanctify Myself”? He means, ‘I offer Myself a sacrifice because all sacrifice is called holy and those offered to God are in particular sacred. He says this either because their Head was on the way to be so, or because they also offer a sacrifice, for it is said, “present your bodies a living sacrifice” (Rom 12: 1).<sup>44</sup>

#### **Saint John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord said these words in order that we may know that He is sanctified in the flesh for our sakes and also is sanctified in His divinity.<sup>45</sup>

#### **Saint Ambrose**

\* The Word was not only sanctified as a man, but He also sanctifies Himself. He is the source of sanctification for His humanity. **Saint Cyril the Great** affirms that the Lord sanctifies His flesh. He receives the Spirit, His Spirit. He accepts the Spirit as a man, but He grants the Spirit to Himself as He is God. He did that for our sake, not for His own sake.<sup>46</sup>

\* The Word who dwells in His flesh sanctifies His own form by the Holy Spirit and transforms His shape to the image (power) of His nature.<sup>47</sup>

\* Someone may claim that the Lord Jesus Christ was sanctified by the Holy Spirit and used the Spirit as a power other than His own. That is to say, He obtained the force against the evil spirits and the ability to perform miracles in front of the people through the Spirit. If someone says this but does not confess that the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ and by Him He does the divine work, that individual must be anathema.

#### **Anathema 9 by Saint Cyril the Great**

\* What did He mean by, “**And for their sakes I sanctify Myself**” [19]? The meaning is, ‘I sanctify them in Me because they are (part) of Me.’ Those He speaks about are His members. The Head with the members is Christ. This is what the Apostle teaches as he speaks about Abraham’s seed. The Apostle writes, “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed.” The Apostle says this after saying, “He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ.” (Gal 3: 16-29) What does he declare to them when he says, “you are Abraham’s seed” but that, you are Christ’s? In the same sense the same Apostle writes in a different epistle, “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ” (Col 1: 24). He does not say, ‘my afflictions’, but says, “the afflictions of Christ” because he is a member of Christ and in his oppression he filled up his share of the afflictions, for it was destined for Christ to bear pain in His entire body. And, so that you may be sure of that meaning in the statement before us, read what follows: “that they also

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<sup>43</sup> Dialogue 6 PG 75: 1008D.

<sup>44</sup> Hom. 82.

<sup>45</sup> Of the Christian Faith, 2: 9 (78).

<sup>46</sup> In Joannis Evangelium 11 PG 74: 548B.

<sup>47</sup> In Joannis Evangelium 11. PG 74: 549.

may be sanctified by the truth” [19]. This only means “by Me” according to the fact that the Truth was the Word who was in the beginning and was God.<sup>48</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

## **5 – A Prayer for Unity**

**“I do not pray for these alone,  
But also for those who will believe in Me through their word.” [20]**

He prays for those who believe in Him through the word of His disciples and apostles. This prayer extends across the ages and carries all souls so that they may rejoice in the redemptive prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ for their sakes. They will then be protected in His honorable blood, sanctified and united with the other members. His farewell prayer extends to include all those who are ready to accept salvation across the generations and to the end of time. For, He is the Intercessor by His blood for all those who accept His redemptive act so that all may become one. They will then enjoy true unity, pure heavenly wisdom, and glory from the Father.

Why is this prayer only for those who believe in Him equally in the present and the future, while we should pray for all humanity? We have already said that He desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, but He does not force anyone to be saved or to come to the knowledge of the truth. As He knows who will reject Him, He does not pray against them, but He does not intercede for them and their salvation since they insist on refusing salvation, lest it might be thought that He compels them to accept the faith, or that His prayer is ineffective, God forbid! On the other hand, we do not know who are believers and abide in the faith and who definitely refuse or deny later, therefore it befits us to pray for all.

He prays on behalf of the weak in faith so that they may become strong and abide in Him. He also prays for those who in the future will believe.

\* The Lord Jesus Christ says about His disciples, “And for their sakes I sanctify Myself” [19]. But lest someone may think that what He does is for the sake of His apostles only, He says, here, “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word.” He thus comforts the spirits of His apostles by showing them that many will become their disciples. He cheers them also by revealing to them that they will become the agents of salvation for many people.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* Since the apostles who accompanied Him preached the word of faith in this manner at the beginning, their message was therefore called “their word” [20], but in all cases this is no reason to think that their word is not ‘the word of God’ because it was called “their word.” Therefore, the Apostle says to the Thessalonians, “when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” (1 Thes

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<sup>48</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 108: 5.

2: 13). It is the word of God because it was granted freely by God, but it is called “their word” because it was given to them chiefly and at the beginning so that they may preach it.<sup>49</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“...that they may be one,  
As You, Father, are in Me, and I in You;  
That they also may be one in Us,  
That the world may believe that You sent Me.” [21]**

After He prays for their protection from the evil one and for their sanctity, He prays for the unity of the entire Church that will be established only after evil is cast out. For, evil causes rivalry and division, but holy life grants love and unity. Unity is based on the action of God in the life of the servants (the apostles, disciples, and priests) just as His deed is in all believers among the people.

The Lord Jesus Christ repeats the clause **“that they may be”** seven times (verses 11, 19, 21 twice, 22, 23, 24). Four of the seven times He prays that His followers may be one. Thus was Jesus the Lord of glory concerned in particular with unity.

Unity preoccupied the heart of the Lord Christ, for He had prayed for it [13] and He now prays persistently to the Father for it. He desires that the inner relationship in the Church may be similar to the relationship between the Father and the Son. This is what the Lord repeats in His prayer. The secret of the unity of the Church is in that the Church clings to the Holy Trinity who has a unique unity in essence. It is also in that the believers’ hearts may be filled with love so that everyone may have a place there. Pray that all become one: one body, one heart, one thought, one hope, and one in enjoying the divine promises.

This prayer was fulfilled in the first Church when the ministers and the people had one faith and one heart, although they had different cultures among the Gentiles. Each expressed his faith in the way that befitted him, but believers of Jewish origin united with Christians of Gentile origin in one body. We are quite sure that Christ’s farewell prayer will be fulfilled when the Church in the entire world will unite round one faith with one spirit and one aim, that is meeting the Lord Jesus Christ eternally and carrying the spirit of adopted children to the one Father.

\* **“That they may be one in Us”** means that they may be one in believing in Us.

\* What does “in Us” mean? It means belief in Us. For, as there is no harm done to humanity more than division, it is a prerequisite that they become one. All believers through the apostles are one, though some have seceded.<sup>50</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* We must verify how God the Father is, how the believer will finally be, and how the saints have been promised to be like the Father and the Son, that they become one in themselves and become one in the Father and the Son.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 109: 5.

<sup>50</sup> Hom. 82. PG 59: 484.



\* The truth must be imprinted in the mind in more details. We are not one in the Father and the Son in essence, but by grace, for the essence of the human spirit and that of God cannot be one as the followers of Mani claim.<sup>52</sup>

\* John the Evangelist who drank the word in Christ's bosom says, "By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit....Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God." (1 John 4: 13, 15). If you believe in Christ, as the apostles believed, you become one body with them in Christ. But if you are quick in claiming that you have faith and works like them while you do not have the same faith and deeds, you will not be able to have the same position they have.<sup>53</sup>

\* "Do you not know that you are the temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 3: 16; 6: 19)? He says, "temple", not 'temples', to show that God dwells in all similarly. Call the Church what you like: bride, sister, mother, for the gathering of the Church is one only. The Church does not need a husband, a brother, or a son. The belief of the Church is one, and the Church is not contaminated with various teachings nor divided by heresy. The Church remains a virgin and where the Lamb goes the Church follows. Only the Church knows the song of Christ.<sup>54</sup>

**Saint Jerome**

\* The Trinity is in us and we are in the Trinity for the Three are One in essence and we are one in nature. The Trinity is in us as God is in His temple. We are in the Trinity as creation in the Creator.<sup>55</sup>

\* "That they also may be one in Us" [21]. He adds, "in Us" so that we may know that our becoming one in that love in the one faith is referred to God's grace, not to ourselves. But as the Apostle says, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light" and lest one refers this to himself, the Apostle adds, "in the Lord" (Eph 5: 8).<sup>56</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* It is more appropriate here to quote the words of the Gospel, "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" (Jn 17: 21). O, the majesty and glory that holds this unity! The Holy Spirit is that glory and majesty. No one who examines carefully the words of the Lord Jesus Christ who says, "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them" (Jn 17: 22) can deny that. In truth the Lord Jesus Christ gave that glory to His disciples when He said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn 20: 22).

The Word of God received that glory that He had before the creation of the world, when He took human nature for Himself. Therefore, human nature was glorified by the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>51</sup> Letter. 124: 10.

<sup>52</sup> Against Jovinianus, 2: 29.

<sup>53</sup> Against Jovinianus, 2: 19.

<sup>54</sup> Against Jovinianus, 2: 19.

<sup>55</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 110: 1.

<sup>56</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 110: 2.

From that relation results the distribution of glory of the Holy Spirit to everyone united in Christ, beginning with the disciples. Christ thus says, “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one; I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me” John 17: 22-23).

Whoever grows quickly from youth to a perfect man arrives at the level of this spiritual stature (Eph 4: 13). Even though he was born a slave, or a bondsman, he will obtain the royal merit and the glory of the Holy Spirit in purity.

This is the undefiled dove that the Bridegroom looks for when He says, “My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her.”<sup>57</sup>

**Saint Gregory of Nyssa**

**“And the glory which You gave Me I have given them,  
That they may be one just as We are one” [22]**

This may refer to the glory that the Word incarnate obtains by performing the miracles and attracting the lost souls to their salvation. For He grants His disciples this ability in His Holy name, for He is not ashamed to call them brethren (Heb 2: 11). They receive adoption by the Father and have this glory, the glory of adopted children. But they do not obtain it in essence like the Lord; for they obtain it by grace. Glory is a divine gift: “The Lord will give grace and glory” (Ps 84: 11).

Through the suffering on the Cross the Lord carries us to His glory: “For 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” (Heb 2: 10). As our hearts soar we see that Glory about which it has been said that the angels cover their faces before Him. This Glory shines on the heavenly sublime Jerusalem, for the Lamb is the light of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21: 23).

The world does not know God the Grantor of knowledge of life and unity with Him. But believers know Him as their Father with whom they are united. They experience His continual love and they offer Him an uninterrupted thanksgiving offering.

The Lord Christ affirms that the source of the unity that believers enjoy is in His acceptance as Son of Man of glory from the Father to give it to His believers. Thus, our abiding in the One Christ and our pleasure in having that glory are our way to this true unity. The unity of the Church is real; it is a divine blessing and a living testimony that Christ is the true Messiah. It is a testimony of the great love of God for mankind.

The Lord Jesus Christ, thus, stresses unity as a basic and essential matter. It is not a superficial unity such as in the meetings of church leaders; it is rather the unity of the action of the Holy Spirit who gathers all in the spirit and in divine power to a perfect and holy aim, not on

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<sup>57</sup> Song of Solomon by Gregory, bishop of Nyssa, translated into Arabic by Dr. George Nawar, sermon 15.

the level of Church politics. The center of this unity is that all become one in the Father and the Son, just as They are One. Whoever accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as the “Way” walks through Him to the Father’s bosom united with Him and walks through Him to the hearts of the believers to experience the unity of the brethren.

As the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, some people consider Him the Spirit of unity. He grants unity; He unites all to work all in all (1 Cor 12: 4).

\* “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them” so that by signs and doctrine they must be one spirit. For, this is the glory: that they become one and this is even greater than the signs. Just as we glorify God in whose essence there is no conflict or difference, and this is His great glory, He says ‘may these qualities were also causes of glory to them.’ One may ask, ‘How does He pray to the Father to give them glory and yet He says that He Himself has given them that same glory?’ The answer is, ‘whether His sermon is about the signs or about harmony and peace among them, He grants them those gifts, while He prays that the Father may give them peace (He prays to the Father on their behalf).’<sup>58</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* He is Jesus who prays, “**as You, Father are in Me, and I in You; that they may be one in Us**” (Jn 17: 21). For, if God who is One is in everyone, He will make all become one and the number will be lost in the unity.<sup>59</sup>

**Saint Basil**

\* What was that glory but immortality that human nature accepts in Him? For He did not accept that alone, but in His usual way according to His anticipated fixed dispensation He refers to the future using the past tense. For, now that He is in His glory, that is His resurrection by the Father, He raises us He Himself to the same glory at the end.

What He says here is similar to what He says in a different context, “For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will.”

The Father does not work in one manner, and the Son works in another manner. They work ‘in the same manner’ (See John 5: 21, 19). In that Christ has risen by Himself, the Lord indicated earlier, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn 2: 19). Thus, the glory of immortality that He said He took from the Father, it is understood, He also gave to Himself, though He did not say so.<sup>60</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* Love casts out fear and as the Apostle says, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love” (1 Jn 4: 18). But if fear changes into love, that unity is achieved as a result of redemption. For all are united with that one good through the perfection symbolized by the dove: “My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her” (Song of Solomon 6: 9).

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<sup>58</sup> Homilies on St. John, 82: 2.

<sup>59</sup> Letter 8 to Caesareans, 7.

<sup>60</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 110: 3.

The Lord Jesus Christ explains this idea in the Gospel more clearly. When He gave the disciples all power through His grace, He also gave blessings to His saints through His prayer to the Father. He crowned these blessings when He added, “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one” (Jn 17: 22). This means, they must not differ in doing what is good; they must unite in one thought through the unity of the Holy Spirit. As the Apostle Paul writes, “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit” (Eph 4: 3).<sup>61</sup>

**Saint Gregory of Nyssa**

**“I in them, and You in Me;  
That they may be made perfect in one,  
And that the world may know that You have sent Me,  
And have loved them as You have loved Me.” [23]**

\* Is it true that human beings can, with God the Father’s grace, love that same love of the Son in whom the Father is well pleased (Matt 3: 17)? This is the pleasure of the Father in Himself, and we are His pleasure through the Son. We in whom God sees the image of the Son through adopting us and therefore are His children.

Eternal love in God’s essence is one thing; love through grace is another. The Father loves the Son a perfect, eternally secure love. As for us, our growth in grace qualifies us for God’s love.<sup>62</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* How does He give them glory? By being in them, He and with Him the Father, so that they unite. He shows that peace is more powerful than miracles in attracting men. Just as conflict causes separation, peace grants unity.<sup>63</sup>

\* The Lord Jesus Christ makes it clear here that He does not love His disciples alone, but His Father also loves them.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* “I in them, and You in Me” [23] meaning ‘I am with those You have sent Me to and You are in Me, I who reconcile the world with You through Me.’<sup>64</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* The Father loves us in the Son because He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world (Eph 1: 4). For, He who loves His Only Begotten Son, surely loves the Son’s members through His work. He has engrafted us in Him through adoption, but in this we are not equal to the Only Begotten Son through whom we were made and recreated. For He says, “I have loved them as

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<sup>61</sup> Song of Solomon by Gregory, bishop of Nyssa, translated into Arabic by Dr. George Nawar, sermon 15.

<sup>62</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 5: 7: 89-90.

<sup>63</sup> Homilies on St. John, 82: 2.

<sup>64</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 110: 4.

You have loved Me.” A person is not always equal to another when it is said, ‘as this so is the other.’

He loves the Son as divinity, for He begot Him equal to Himself. He loves Him also in the flesh, because the Only Begotten Son became man. He loves Him as the Word for the body of the Word is dear to Him. But as for us, as we are members of Him whom He loves, and so that we may be so, He loved us for that reason before He created us.<sup>65</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

## **6 – A Prayer for Them to Be Glorified**

**“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me  
May be with Me where I am,  
That they may behold My glory which You have given Me;  
For You loved Me before the foundation of the world.” [24]**

\* The aim of the Lord Jesus Christ’s redemptive intercession for those who believe in Him is that they enjoy existing with Him eternally in heaven. After He prays that they may be protected in the Holy Name, in sanctification, and in unity, He prays for their glory. As the Psalmist says, “The Lord will give grace and glory” (Ps 84: 11). This is God’s plan concerning us that we may be blessed with eternal union with Him, in the Kingdom of Heaven, and with a life blessed and glorious.

What is heaven? It is where the Lord Jesus Christ is: “with Me where I am.” His presence is the heaven of heavens, the perfect blessing and the joy. Heaven is to be with Him (Phil 1: 23). It is seeing the glory of the Son before whom the angels cover their faces (Jn 12: 41). The Lamb is the light of the uppermost New Jerusalem (Rev 21: 23). Just as the bride shines with the light of her groom, the radiant glory shines on the Church that carries His icon and rises from glory to glory.

He prays to the Father who has authority to give eternal life. He speaks as King of kings, as the greatest Chief Priest, as Savior of the world, and as the Offering of love for humanity and obedience to the Father. He prays from a superior position of power as the Son of God, the Only Begotten Son who grants life.

\* He says, “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am.” This is what they desired to know, for they often said, “Lord, where are You going?” (Jn 13: 36) The Lord says to the Father, “that they may behold My glory” as He mentions here, in a mysterious way, that perfect peace is in that His disciples look at the Son of God and this will make them glorified. This is what the Apostle Paul means when he says, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2 Cor 3: 18). And just as those who look at the sun and enjoy the gentle wind enjoy themselves by doing that, this will be our

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<sup>65</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 110: 5.

case. For that sight of the glory of the Lord gives us much more pleasure than the joy of those who look at the radiant sun..

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* The glory that the Word has is also the glory of the Father. The Apostle writes, “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2: 10-11). Therefore, concerning His divinity, the Son has His glory, and the glory of the Father and that of the Son is one. The Son is not less than the Father in majesty, for the glory is one. Neither is He less in divinity, for the fullness of divinity is in Christ.<sup>66</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* Undoubtedly it is enough that He says, “I desire that those may be with Me where I am” and He says, “with Me” because being with Him is the greatest blessing. We cannot doubt that the true believer is with Christ in faith. For, about this, He says, “he who is not with Me is against Me” (Matt 12: 30). But when He said, “I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am” He spoke particularly about that vision when we see Him as He is (1 Jn 3: 2).<sup>67</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“O righteous Father! The world has not known You,  
But I have known You,  
And those have known that You sent Me.” [25]**

When He prayed that they may be sanctified He called the Father, “Holy Father”; now that He prays that they may be glorified, He calls the Father, “O righteous Father.” The glory that we may have is the crown of the righteousness that the righteous Judge gives us. The righteousness of God is the source of all good and glory for us; that glory which the righteous Father promised us and which the crucified Son offered as a price that we may be qualified to have it.

\* He has shown us here that no one knows God the Father unless he knows God’s Son. As though the Lord Jesus Christ says to the Father, ‘I wished that the people may have their share, but they did not know You.’ And I think that He says this here finding their stupidity difficult to accept because they refused to know that He is good and righteous.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* Because You are righteous the world does not know You. That is the world destined to judgment that it truly deserves. But the world that has been reconciled through Christ is qualified to know You, not because it is itself worthy, but through grace. For, what does He mean by knowing Him, but having eternal life? That eternal life He bars from the world that will be judged, and gives to the world reconciled with Him. Thus, the world does not know You because You are righteous and in return the world gets what it deserves, that is not knowing You. In the same way, the world reconciled with You knows that You are merciful, not because it is itself worthy but it is given grace because it needs help to know You.

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<sup>66</sup> Of the Christian Faith, 2, 9 (82).

<sup>67</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 111: 2.

He then says, “but I have known You” [25]. He is the spring of grace Who in essence is God and by grace became man, indescribable, by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin, and as God’s grace is through our Lord Jesus Christ, He adds, “and these have known that You sent Me” [25]. This is the case of the world that is reconciled with Him. ‘But because You sent Me they knew’, that is, through grace they knew.<sup>68</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it,  
That the love with which You loved Me may be in them,  
And I in them.” [26]**

He concludes His farewell prayer by praying that they may have divine knowledge. After He prays that God may keep them from evil, He prays that He may sanctify them for the divine work. Then He prays that they may have heavenly unity, and now He prays that they may have that knowledge that is fulfilled only when they lift up their hearts to live in heaven and discover divine glory.

The knowledge that we enjoy is the fruit of our unity with Him; we know the Son who carries us up to the knowledge of the Father. It is a knowledge that grows continually: “I declared to them Your name, and will declare it.” This is the knowledge of God’s mysteries: that the Son who alone perfectly knows the divine mysteries presents, for He is one with His Father. We have known the Son and He has taken us to the knowledge of the name of the Father. He will also give us knowledge through our growth in our holy love, and through our continual discovery of God’s love and the dwelling of the Word in our hearts.

Knowledge is a dynamic process that does not stop. Through grace, the believer continues to grow in the knowledge of the Father who grants gifts. The believer grows in the knowledge also of the Son who is the Messiah fulfilling salvation. And he grows in the knowledge of the Holy Spirit whom the Lord in His prayer calls “the Spirit of truth.”

Among the blessings of unity is that believers experience the love of the Father for them through His love for His Only Begotten Son. They rejoice in the divine love and in that the Son dwells in them. For, the Son is love in them; He is the source of perfect joy (Jn 17: 13).

\* We also will rejoice in accordance to our measure if we are wise. Therefore, Paul says, “if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may be glorified together” (Rom 8: 17). But there are those who act against themselves because of their laziness and sleep. When such glory, rather than being sent into Hades, is shown to them, when they can reign and be glorified with the Son of God yet they still deprive themselves of such great blessings; then they deserve a profusion of tears and they become more miserable than any being.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 101: 5.

<sup>69</sup> Homilies on St. John, 80: 3.

\* Do you see how the Lord reaches a good aim with His words? The good aim is love that is the source and perfection of all good work. May we, therefore, know God and love Him so that it may not be said, “They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him” (Titus 1: 16). Once more, it is written, “he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim 5: 8) because while the unbeliever cares for his family, relatives and strangers, he who denies the faith neglects even his family. For, what excuse do you have when they blaspheme against God and disrespect Him because of you?”<sup>70</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* I have declared to them Your name through faith and I will declare it publicly. I have declared Your name to those whose journey on the strange earth has a definite end. I will declare Your name to those whose kingdom will have no end.<sup>71</sup>

\* Christ’s prayer ends and His suffering begins.<sup>72</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

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<sup>70</sup> Homilies on St. John, 82: 3-4.

<sup>71</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 101: 6.

<sup>72</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 101: 6.



**Meditations Inspired  
By  
The Gospel of St John, Ch 17**

Do You Lack Glory,  
O You wholly glorious?

+ I stood among Your disciples, amazed!  
I heard You pray 'Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You!  
Do You lack glory, O You wholly glorious glory?  
And does the Father need glory,  
He who dwells in unapproachable light?

+ Your glory and Your Father's glory are one,  
That the fallen humanity may be glorified with heavenly glory!  
You desire all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.  
You desire that dust may become heaven!  
That the corrupt may rejoice in incorruption!  
This is the wonderful glory!

+ Carry me to where You speak to Your Father.  
My spirit will then be comforted in this dark world  
As long as You put the souls of Your believers in Your Father's safe  
They will be protected and no thief can come near them!

+ You carry them to Your Holy Father!  
So that just as You have consecrated Your life for our sanctity  
We may be sanctified in You,  
And we may be considered holy and righteous before Your Father.

+ Carry us all to the Father  
As members of Your one body  
So that the spirit of division may not sneak in!  
But that we may enjoy eternal and true unity!

+ You pray for us because You are the heavenly High Priest  
You pray on our behalf because You are the Head of the Church  
You alone can, through Your blood, request  
Because through Your Cross You raised us up to heaven  
You hid us in Your pierced side  
And with Your blood You bought and redeemed us!

+ Your prayer is certainly fulfilled in us!  
When we see You in Your glory  
We rejoice in the radiance of Your glory covering all Your Church

And all are glorified through You and in You forever!

Amen

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## **Chapter Eighteen**

### **The Religious and Civil Judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ**

Until the end of chapter seventeen, John the Evangelist records very little about the history of the Lord Jesus Christ. He writes what is necessary to reveal the personality and mission of Christ. However, now, as the hour has come as we have read in the farewell prayer, and as the ordeal of the Cross has approached, Saint John is engaged, as do all the other Evangelists, in relating the details of the events of that week. The disciples and apostles, who were ashamed when the events were taking place, found in those events sweetness, salvation, and glory. They saw in them also a revelation of the great divine sacraments.

After reporting the long farewell speech of the Lord Jesus Christ to the disciples, and after presenting the farewell prayer, the Evangelist begins to narrate Christ's suffering. St John is concerned with relating the circumstances surrounding the suffering of the Lord Christ because they concern our salvation. St. John also mentions what the other three Evangelists have not.

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|-----------------------------------------------|----------------|
| <b>1- He Gives Himself up to the Soldiers</b> | <b>(1-9)</b>   |
| <b>2- The Cutting off of Malchus's Ear</b>    | <b>(10-12)</b> |
| <b>3- Before Annas</b>                        | <b>(13-14)</b> |
| <b>4- Peter's Denial</b>                      | <b>(15-18)</b> |
| <b>5- A Dialogue with the High Priest</b>     | <b>(19-24)</b> |
| <b>6- Peter's Twofold Denials</b>             | <b>(25-27)</b> |
| <b>7- At the Praetorium</b>                   | <b>(28-32)</b> |
| <b>8- A Discourse with Pilate</b>             | <b>(33-40)</b> |

#### **1- He Gives Himself up to the Soldiers**

**“When Jesus had spoken these words,  
He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron,  
Where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered.” [1]**

The Lord Jesus Christ prepared His disciples for this hour, through His farewell talks and His farewell prayer, asking that the Father may support them. He also, in the upper room in the presence of His disciples, declared many secrets concerning their salvation and the redemption of the world. Therefore, the time had come for the moments of facing the Cross with inner joy and pleasure in accordance to the pleasure of His good Father.

The Evangelist relates to us the story not of the arrest of Jesus Christ, but rather of His giving Himself up to the soldiers to judge Him. He took His disciples and went out to the Passover celebration in full moon. He entered a garden that a friend owned and where He was accustomed to gather His disciples. At that time, the Jewish noblemen had their gardens and places of amusement outside the city on the Mount of Olives. This continues to be an Asian custom.

The hour had come for the leader of our salvation to enter the circle of suffering, to achieve our redemption that He has come to achieve. The last moments of His life here on earth carried consecutive events affecting our entire being. As though the Lord Jesus Christ practiced first His work as teacher guiding His disciples to the divine truth. Then, as priest He pleaded the Father for them. Then, as a sacrifice He gave Himself up and as king He reigned with practical love and self-sacrifice. He opens hearts with His blood and establishes His throne in us. He is the Teacher, Priest, Offering, and King. He chose the garden as grounds for the battle where they capture Him, or rather where He gives Himself up. He did not choose a house in the city, so that no friend or anybody may defend Him and get involved in the battle for His sake. He did not want to be the cause of bloodshed or trouble and embarrassment for the landlord. He also desired the people to take this as an opportunity to go unobstructed with the religious leaders and with soldiers to capture Him. At the garden, it was possible for the disciples to run away without bloodshed because of Him. On the other hand, in the city, some might oppose those coming to arrest Him and this might turn into a battle. He does not ask for human glory, or for defenders. He withdraws so that He may carry the suffering of others. He came to bear the sufferings of men, not that others might bear His sufferings. He, thus, gave us a living example of the loving Christian leader. He does not cause others to carry his trouble or pain. He does not complain, but he bows with his Master to carry the trouble of other people. Finally, His arrest at the garden declares the refusal of the castles of the wealthy and houses of the Jews to shelter Him. He was captured outside the city as one whom the people rejected.

‘Over the Brook Kidron’: the garden of Gethsemane was at the foot of the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem. A very narrow valley in which the Brook Kidron runs and separates this hill from the city. The brook was a very small river, six or seven feet wide and was most of the time dry except when it rained. Its name is derived from ‘qaadar’ a Hebrew word meaning ‘black’ because the remains of the offerings and the city garbage were thrown in it. Some think it was a drainage canal rather than a river. To cross over the Brook Kidron was meaningful:

**First:** Psalm 110: 7 is the prophecy of David the prophet about the Messiah. It says, “He shall drink of the brook by the wayside, therefore He shall lift up the head.” The Messiah drank of the brook on His way to His glorious suffering for our salvation. It was described as a ‘black river’ because of the darkness of the valley in which it ran and because of the color of its water because of the dirt thrown in it. Our Christ drank of that water on His way for our redemption and He thus lifted up His head and our heads.

**Secondly:** David the king, and those who were with him, crossed the brook Kidron when he took flight from his son the unruly Absalom. They went up the Mount of Olives as they cried loudly (2 Sam 15: 23, 30). Likewise, when the Jews rejected their King “the Son of David” He withdrew to the Mount of Olives taking the same route as David. The rebellious Jews pursued Him so that He might not rule over their hearts.

**Thirdly:** Some good kings of Judah used to burn and destroy the pagan idols and throw them in that valley. Those kings were, for instance, Asa (2 Chron 15: 16), Hezekiah (2 Chron 30: 14), and Josiah (2 Kings 23: 4, 6). This valley was, thus, full of filth thrown in it. The Lord Jesus Christ, who is without sin, accepted to be sin for our sakes to carry the curse for us all.

The Second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, entered the garden to endure the pains of the Cross. The first Adam's sin began similarly in the Garden of Eden. In the garden, the curse was announced and in it Adam obtained the promise of a Savior. Therefore, the achievement of salvation began in the garden. In the garden also resurrection took place and man enjoyed divine righteousness. Every time we enter a garden we remember the suffering of the Lord in the garden that He planted so that we might enjoy the fruit of the fulfilling joyful Spirit.

He took His disciples with Him because He was accustomed to take them with Him when He withdrew to pray. He did not take them so that they might defend Him, but that they might watch His suffering and endurance for their sakes and so that they might be qualified to share His suffering. He may have desired to reveal to them their weakness so that they may realize they have no salvation without their Savior.

The Evangelist speaks about the cup that the Father gives Christ to drink [11], but he does not mention the details of Christ's suffering in the garden because the other Evangelists write about them. However, the Evangelist shows that everything happened in accordance to a great divine plan and the evil people who acted with all their free will. The road of suffering did not mean defeat or weakness of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the path of the Son of God to achieve the great plan of salvation for humanity. It is the way of the Cross that grants victory and destroys the rule of darkness. The Evangelist brings out the other aspect of the Lord's pain, it is the way of eternal glory. He shows that the suffering Jesus is in control of the situation so that we may share with Him the same feelings as we partake of His pain and crucifixion in our daily life.

\* What he relates here concerning the Lord entering the garden with His disciples did not happen immediately after His prayer. However, certain events surely took place and this Evangelist and the other Evangelists write about them. Other events also occurred but were not mentioned by the other Evangelists<sup>1</sup>.

**Saint Augustine**

\* Death is an extremely terrible thing. But it is not so to those who learn true wisdom from above. For, whoever does not know the future events and considers death disintegration and an end of life must be really terrified like one who crosses to non-existence. But, whoever learns, by God's grace, the hidden secret concerns of God's wisdom and considers death a journey to another place, finds that death is no cause for horror. He is rather happy and rejoices because he will leave the evanescent life to go to a better and more glorious life without end. This is what Christ teaches us by His behavior as He goes to His suffering, not unwillingly, or out of necessity, but willingly. It is, therefore, said, "When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered."<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place;  
for Jesus often met there with His disciples. [2]**

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 112:1

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, 83: 1.

The Lord allowed that His arrest should occur at the place that Judas knew, so that He might give him the chance to reconsider and perhaps realize that he was misusing the advantage he had of being Christ's special companion even at His place of worship. The Evangelists relate the facts but do not comment. They mention what Judas did as a true fact but they do not blame or rebuke him. They also present the acts and words of the Lord Jesus Christ without comment. They may, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, have wished to let the acts speak to the hearts and minds of the readers.

\* As the Lord went out to the place known to His betrayer, He made it easier for the conspirators; and it indicated to His disciples that He willingly went to His death. This was enough to comfort them, that He came to the garden as someone condemned to a prison.

‘When Jesus had spoken these words’: What were those words? They were certainly spoken to the Father. He was surely praying. Why did he not say, ‘When He finished praying He went out there’? The answer is because that was not a prayer, but a discourse for the sake of the disciples.

And, lest when you hear the words of the Evangelist, “where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered,” you think the Lord Jesus Christ went to hide there, the Evangelist continues immediately saying, “And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place.” He does not merely say this, but he also says, “for Jesus often met there with His disciples.” For, the Lord often met with His special disciples there to speak to them about special necessary things no one else was allowed to hear. He took them to a mountain or a garden, to a place where there was no disturbance compared to other places, so that they might not be troubled when they listened to Him.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* There, was the wolf in lambskin who walked among the sheep in secret against the Head of the family. He knew how to find the opportunity to disperse the weak flock and cast his lustful nets on the Shepherd.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**Then Judas, having received a detachment of troops and officers  
From the chief priests and Pharisees,  
Came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons.” [3]**

How was Judas not ashamed to face the Lord Jesus as he guided His enemies against Him and retracted from His fellowship and that of His disciples?! This is the work of sin and of Satan. The sinner becomes as shameless as an adulteress. Judas led that big procession; he might have wanted that number of people because he aspired to be a meaningful and respectful leader.

A troop or cohort (teen speiran) went out. It is equal to a tenth of a legion. Some say the legion consists of 6000 men; but others say that this was not a fixed number and its divisions

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<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 112: 2.

were not equal. The troops here are Roman soldiers whom the governor sent to protect the temple. The officers belong to the Sanhedrin. Some consider the number of soldiers and officers (the temple soldiers) to be 500 men. Some say they were one thousand men but those who were around the Lord in the garden were probably eleven. For, the large number does not indicate a true conviction. Often, only a few are honest and loyal in their relation with God. The soldiers may have carried swords, while the officers probably came with sticks.

Some may wonder why did this number of men come to capture the Lord Jesus Christ? The Roman rulers often sent out big numbers of soldiers to do a small task. In Acts of the Apostles we read that the commander sent 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spear men to guard the captive, Paul, on the way (Acts 23: 23). Moreover, they were afraid Christ's arrest might cause a public rebellion.

These were not a multitude of common people coming haphazardly. They were leaders, responsible men from the temple and the royal court, who had come to arrest Him. The nominal literal church united with the powers of darkness against the Truth. The crowd consisted of a mixture of various Jewish leaders and officers and Roman Gentile soldiers. Each group was considered an enemy of the other group, but they united to oppose the Lord Jesus Christ. They became friends when the Lord entered the path of pain to offer everybody as members of His suffering, glorious body.

The Lord went out at night to lead the battle against the powers of darkness. He went out to the battlefield declaring His going out to the Cross. He went out with His disciples to a known place, to the garden, as in a procession. He went out as in a planned design waiting for a procession in agreement with darkness. He was waiting for Judas with the crowd of darkness as though by appointment and at a place Judas knew. The Lord did not hide from the mob of darkness as He hid before when the Jews took up stones to throw at Him as He taught in the temple. He hid then and went out of the temple going through the midst of them (John 8: 59).

They came with lanterns to capture Jesus, the Second Adam, although it was full moon. They thought He might hide among the trees as the first Adam did in the Garden of Eden when he hid from God's face. They came with torches to give light to them for they might see the shining Sun in the garden. They wished to see "the Sun of Righteousness" by means of the lanterns. They had swords and weapons lest the Second Adam and His disciples might resist them. They did not realize that in doing this they carried the swords against themselves. The procession came ready, perhaps fearing an eclipse of the moon and they, therefore, carried torches and lanterns. They also feared His disciples had weapons and, therefore, they came armed and ready for a battle.

It is not strange to find this same kind of thinking across the ages. The world accusing the Church of wishing to establish a nation within the nation, in spite of the fact that the Church has spiritual armor and her kingdom is not of this world. John the Evangelist alone, excluding the other Evangelists, mentions "troops" who are groups of Roman guards linked to Jerusalem, coming with officers from the chief priests and Pharisees to arrest the Lord Christ, as though Rome, the capital of the world, became involved in the accusation of Jesus of Nazareth.

\* It is a detachment not of Jews but of soldiers. We thus understand that the order came from the ruler for the security of the criminal man, and to keep outward show of legislative authority and also to suppress any resistance of the captive. At the same time a large multitude gathered armed to frighten anybody who might defend Christ.<sup>4</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* They often sent people to arrest Him and could not. But this time it is clear that He gives Himself up willingly. How did they allure the troops? They were soldiers who did anything to obtain money.<sup>5</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* Who is the lamb that changed itself into a wolf and began attacking the Good Shepherd?

\* Why did you with deceit forget the grace our Lord who gave you as He gave to Peter and John?

\* O wise men fear deceitful kisses, for the Son of God was crucified by one kiss.

**Saint Jacob of Sarug**

**Jesus therefore, knowing all things that would come upon Him,  
Went forward and said to them, “Whom are you seeking?” [4]**

The Lord Jesus Christ faced the rebellious armed multitude asking them gently, “Whom are you seeking?” Undoubtedly many officers of the temple had seen Him when He went there. But they feared that Judas might make a mistake by kissing Him because he knew Him more than they. When they saw Him they did not know Him. This shows that their lanterns did not benefit them. When He went forward they could not arrest Him so that they might know that their swords could not help them unless He gave Himself up to them.

\* He thus did not wait to know their aim when they came. He spoke and acted without confusion, for He knew all things.<sup>6</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**“They answered Him, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’  
Jesus said to them, ‘I am He.’  
And Judas who betrayed Him, also stood with them.” [5]**

When they wanted to make Him king, He departed (Jn 6: 15). When they wanted to crucify Him He presented Himself. He came to the world to carry our burdens on the Cross. He met them quietly and peacefully and answered them kindly, “I am He.” This is the glorious name of God in the midst of His people (Exodus 3: 14). They trampled over Him as on a worm, not as a man (Ps 22: 6) and they did not realize He was Jehovah Himself.

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<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 112: 2.

<sup>5</sup> Homilies on St. John, 83: 1.

<sup>6</sup> Homilies on St. John, 83: 1.



When they were asked whom they were seeking they answered, “Jesus of Nazareth.” All they knew about Him was that He was “Jesus of Nazareth.” They may have used this title in scorn, that He came from Nazareth, and to conceal the fact that He was the promised Messiah. They, indeed, did not know Him because if they knew the Lord of Glory they would not have crucified Him. The Lord did not take advantage of their ignorance or blindness as Elisha did when he confronted the Syrian forces. For, he deceived them showing them the wrong route and took them to the city. According to John the Evangelist, the Jews were confused because of the identity of Jesus that He was “of Nazareth.”

\* Nathanael stumbled at the beginning of his service for the Lord Jesus Christ when he said about Christ, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (Jn 1: 46)

\* When He spoke to the multitude about Himself being the bread coming down from heaven, they said, “Is not this Jesus....whose father and mother we know” (See Jn 6: 38-42) referring to Joseph of Nazareth.

\* Also when Nicodemus tried to defend the Lord, those who doubted said, “Will the Christ come out of Galilee? No prophet has arisen out of Galilee.” (Jn 7: 41, 52). They made this mistake because He was from Nazareth of Galilee.

\* For the fourth time in the garden, the multitudes said scornfully that they sought Jesus of Nazareth.

\* At last, in the fifth time, when Jesus was stretched on the Cross condemned to death, the declared title of His crime was “Jesus of Nazareth, The King of the Jews” (Jn 19: 19). Do you perceive how the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ can fight for Him. For, how could He be in their midst and blind their eyes. The proof that the darkness of night was not the reason is clear, as the Evangelist writes about Judas, that, “he came there with torches and lanterns.” If they had no torches, they would have recognized the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ. If they did not know Him, how could Judas who was with Him all the time not know Him while he stood with them.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Now when He said to them, “I am He”  
They drew back and fell to the ground.” [6]**

He said, “I am He.” This is the glorious name of God (Exodus 3: 14) especially when He announces His presence in the middle of His people. The expression “I am” ‘ego eimi’ in Greek refers to the ‘self’ that is full of awe and cannot be comprehended, unveiling him. In chapter eight, Jesus says: “...before Abraham was I AM.” ‘Ego eimi’ (John 8: 58). He says, “I AM” not ‘I was.’ Here, when He said to them “I am He” they drew back and fell to the ground, helpless as though a terrible thunder and bright lightning had struck them. He could have commanded the earth to open its mouth and swallow them as it swallowed Dathan and Korah and their men (Numbers 16: 30-35). But He gave Himself up to them after protecting His disciples. He thus asserted to everybody that He willingly gave Himself up. He desired them to realize they were weak and repent. He was not punishing them for what they did, because that punishment was

harder than they could endure. All this neither moved their hearts to repentance, nor did they relate what happened to the power of the Lord Christ. Instead, they pursued their wicked, ungrateful, stony road.

A sign is performed in the last moments before He gives Himself up, yet their hearts do not respond because they did not seek the divine truth. They rather followed their human passions and sought the things that are for persons not the things that are for God. For, a miracle does not move the heart unless that heart even in its blindness wishes to know and live in the light.

**Saint Augustine** says, ‘If He did this when He was arrested to be brought to judgment, what will He do when He comes to judge?’

\* The Lord of Glory who despised shame and embraced suffering in the flesh did not relinquish His will. He said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn 2: 19). Again He said, “No one takes it (My life) from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (Jn 10: 18). When those armed with swords and sticks approached on the eve of His suffering, He caused them to draw back when He said, “I am He” (Jn 18: 6, Exodus 3: 14). Once more when the thief asked Him to remember him as He was dying, He revealed His universal authority by saying, “today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23: 43). Even during the moments and as He suffered, He did not resign His authority.<sup>7</sup>

**Saint Gregory of Nyssa**

\* His voice alone saying, “I am He”, without weapons, hit the multitude and set them back, and caused them to fall to the ground in spite of all their wildness, their hatred and the horror of their weapons. For, God is concealed in human flesh and the eternal Light is now hidden in human arms. So they sought Him with torches and lanterns to kill Him with darkness.<sup>8</sup>

\* Indeed, they looked for Him in their mad rebellion, to carry Him to death, but He also was searching for them when He delivered Himself to die. Therefore, He revealed His authority to those who had the will but not the authorization to arrest Him. May they now capture Him so that He might do His will in those who did not know Him.<sup>9</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**Then He asked them again, ‘Whom are you seeking?’  
And they said ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’” [7]**

As He did not intend to punish them, but only wanted them to reconsider, He raised them with care and did not leave them forever fallen to the ground. For, He came not to judge but to save. When they fell to the ground, He did not abuse or harm them. He merely repeated His question and they gave the same answer. He desired to stir up their conscience so that they might realize their mistake, but their answer was the same, without change, exposing their stubborn insistence on evil.

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<sup>7</sup> Against Eunomius 2: 11.

<sup>8</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 112: 3.

<sup>9</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 112: 3.

\* Oh what stupidity! The word of the Lord Jesus Christ threw them down on their backs, but they did not change their attitude. Even though they knew His power, they repeated their same answer.

\* If they did not know that He was Jesus, how could Judas who was always with Him not know Him? Judas stood with them, and like them he did not recognize Jesus, and like them he fell to the ground. Jesus did this to show that they were not only unable to capture Him, but they also could not see Him though He was among them; for He did not allow it.<sup>10</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Jesus answered, “I have told you that I am He.  
Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way.” [8]**

He ordered them to let His disciples go their way because His disciples were not yet able to share suffering with Him, for they were weak in their faith. He also desired to pass through the winepress alone because no being had the right to save the world but the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone could take our place to carry our sins on our behalf and forgive us through His unique redemptive sacrifice. This is the right behavior according to the legal process, that the indicted should give himself up to judgment to allow the release of those involved in the contention. In this way He gave His beloved the benefit of His protection and He also gave to the rebellious mob the chance to reconsider and repent willingly.

He willingly gave Himself up to become a prisoner, not because He could not escape, but because He did not desire to escape. When He asked them to let His disciples go, He did not entreat them, for they were very weak. But He commanded them so that they might realize that He had the authority to care for the safety of His disciples. He also had the authority to give Himself up for their sakes and the sake of all the chosen ones. He revealed His kindness to His people even during the bitter moments of pain. He pitied them in their weakness of faith and their immature spiritual stature. The time had not yet come for them to share His suffering. They had not yet obtained the power of the Holy Spirit that would support them. He does not allow us to be tempted more than we can endure. He knows how to permit tribulations that befit us in accordance to the possibilities He grants us and according to the stature we have reached.

**‘...that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke,  
“Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none.”’ [9]**

\* The Lord Jesus Christ said, “...if you seek Me, let these go their way.” He thus revealed His kindness to the end, as though He said, ‘if you need Me, you must not meddle with these, for here I am and I give Myself up to you.’

\* Loss here does not mean death but eternal loss. However, the Evangelist here means death also. One may wonder, why they did not arrest the disciples along with Him. Why did they not tear them to pieces, especially when Peter aroused their anger by what he did to the servant. Who then stopped them? No one stopped them other than the force that caused them to draw

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<sup>10</sup> Hom 83. PG 59: 490.

back. Thus, so that He may prove that what happened did not happen because they wanted to, but because He commanded and His power hindered them, the Evangelist adds, "...that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, 'Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none.'" [9].<sup>11</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* Some may ask, why did He let His disciples escape. The answer is, "That the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, 'Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none.'" [9] While later He allowed His believers to be persecuted and martyred, He wanted His disciples to escape because they had not yet obtained the Holy Spirit that would support them during oppression. For, they could have denied the Lord like Peter who denied Him three times during the trial. If they did, they would have died not only physically, but also eternally.<sup>12</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

## **2- The Cutting off of Malchus's Ear**

**Then Simon Peter having a sword,  
Drew it and struck the high priest's servant,  
And cut off his right ear.  
The servant's name was Malchus." [10]**

Simon Peter was wrong to behave in a manner that was not proper for him as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ warned His disciples not to resist the authorities. He told them not to resist violence with more violence (Matt 5: 39). The Lord had repeated several times that the Son of man must suffer. He had also declared that His hour had come. But still Peter resisted with words and actions to prevent suffering. While he thought he was defending his Master, he was acting against his Master's will. He had just heard the Lord ordering the crowd to let His disciples go their way in peace. But instead of going away, Peter insisted on staying and striking with the sword. When Simon Peter saw the multitudes falling before the Lord Jesus Christ, he was encouraged and wanted to use the sword for defense. But when he saw the Lord captured and judged, he quickly denied Him three times.

Peter is known for his zeal and quick behavior. What he did was to cut off the servant's right ear. It is strange that he did not dare to strike Judas who betrayed his Master and who was leading the crowd, but he only struck the servant. Peter had good intentions as he was defending his Master. But his intention does not justify his conduct and his use of the sword. He should have waited for his Master's orders.

Peter may have wanted to kill the high priest's servant, but the Lord permitted only that he cuts off the man's ear. The Lord did that not to show His healing power in restoring the man's ear, but to demonstrate His gentleness to His antagonists. God did not allow Peter to behead the servant because that might have moved the soldiers to kill the disciples, and then they would have condemned the Lord as a rebel who incited people to rebellion and murder.

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<sup>11</sup> Homilies on St. John, 83: 1.

<sup>12</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 112: 4.

The three other Evangelists relate this incident without mentioning the apostle Peter's name or the name of Malchus. This may be because they were still alive, but saint John mentions the two names because they had died.

\* The apostle Peter trusted in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the signs He had performed. He, therefore, armed himself against his attackers. If you say, 'how did Peter who was commanded neither to have gold nor two tunics (Matt 10: 9, 10) have a sword?' I answer, 'I think that the apostle Peter feared this very incident would happen and he therefore was prepared.' If you say, 'he was ordered not to slap anybody (Matt 5: 39) how then could he become a murderer? For he was told not to take revenge.' I answer, 'he does not fight, here, to defend himself, but to defend his Teacher. Besides, the disciples were not yet perfect'<sup>13</sup>.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* In this manner the disciple wished to defend his Master without thinking what meaning his action might imply. Therefore, he was told to be patient and the incident was recorded so that we might understand its implication.

'Malchus' means 'appointed to reign.' What then is the significance of the ear that was cut off for the sake of the Lord and which the Lord healed? It means a renewal of hearing that is pruned from its old condition to serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. Who can deny that he with whom Christ deals thus is not appointed to reign with Him? The servant was found in need of being released from slavery to enjoy healing and freedom.<sup>14</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**So Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword into the sheath.  
Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?' [11]**

The Lord Jesus Christ did not magnify the situation. He gently and compassionately rebuked His sincere disciple and He healed the servant. He kindly chided Peter so that he might not use the metal sword, but use the sword of the word of God that can triumph. The Lord accused him of resisting the will of the Father who gave the Son, the Word Incarnate, the cup to drink even though it seemed extremely bitter.

The Lord was determined to drink the cup for our sake. He would drink the cup of suffering to death on the Cross, so that He might give us the cup of salvation, of divine blessing and heavenly solace. He desired to drink the cup in obedience to His Father, the Lover of mankind, who knew that His Only Begotten Son yearned to redeem the human race. We also, as we receive from God's hands the cup of pain, let us remember that it is a great honor for us to share with the Only Begotten Son His suffering, His Cross, and His cup. Let us accept it from the hands of the Father who loves us and cares for us. He knows in His wisdom how much we can endure and how much that will benefit us. He is a wise Father who can never be wrong in His judgment!

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<sup>13</sup> Homilies on St. John, 83: 2.

<sup>14</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 112: 5.

In love and in obedience, the Lord drank the cup of suffering, the fruit of our sins. Let us drink the cup of joyful salvation that grants blessing and comfort. It is appropriate for us also to partake with our Christ of the cup that He received with joy and pleasure from the Father. It is a small cup, neither a river nor a sea. It is not hell, but a light yoke we carry for a few moments. Our suffering with Christ is a cup given to us as a divine gift. The Father offers it to us in His loving Fatherhood for our glory, not for our loss. The cup indicates the individual's fortune in life, both good and bad. But here the cup refers to Christ's last suffering that He accepted with joy from the Father for our sake.

\* The Lord said to the apostle Peter, "Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?" He thus made it clear that what happened was not because of the might of those accusers, but was the result of His power and authority. He also explained that He was not opposed to God, but was rather obedient to His Father to the point of death.<sup>15</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord accepted the cup from the Father's hands and willingly drank it. For, the Apostle says, "Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma." (Eph 5: 2).<sup>16</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**Then the detachment of troops, and the captain and officers of the Jews  
Arrested Jesus and bound Him." [12]**

The Lord's tenderness, and His healing of Malchus's ear did not appease the rage of the mob against Him.

This Evangelist is the only one who has recorded that they arrested Jesus and bound Him. They bound Him thinking they conquered Him. They were perhaps afraid He might perform a miracle and get away from them; so they bound Him. It is said that as He gave Himself up they wanted to be sure they could control Him; so they bound Him so violently that His fingers bled. They bound His hands behind His back and put fetters round His neck and dragged Him. A sequence of suffering and abuse in every possible manner began. Slaves were the only people who were bound before they were found guilty. They arrested and bound Jesus, neither because He was weak or disabled, nor because He could not escape, but because He desired our salvation through the Cross. They could not have had the ability to bind Him if He had not bound Himself to the horns of the altar with ropes of infinite love, like a sacrificial lamb offered for the world. They did not realize that He was bound instead of us who are bound with the cords of our sins (Prov 5: 22) and the yoke of our transgressions (Lamentations 1: 14). Evil binds the spirit and drags us to God's judgment. Corruption is the tether of the spirit taking us to Satan's kingdom. As our Christ became sin for our sakes, He accepted to be bound with ropes to free us from our bondage. He was bound so that we might be free.

As He, because of His love for us, accepted the chains, we now have the honor of becoming bound by the obedience and love of God. We are proud of the fetters of love and say

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<sup>15</sup> Homilies on St. John, 83: 2.

<sup>16</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 112: 5.

with the Apostle, “Remember my chains” (Col 4: 18) as sharing the chains with Christ. These are shackles that have become not of bondage and of evil, but signs of love and union. No wonder that Paul and Silas rejoiced, and though their feet were fastened in the stocks, they sang hymns at midnight inside the prison. According to Saint Ignatius of Antioch these hymns were precious spiritual pearls.

Captain Chiliarches was a centurion and may be the captain of the temple officers, or of the Roman chief who was responsible for the security and protection of the temple. The prophecies have been fulfilled for the bulls have surrounded Him (Ps 22: 12). They surrounded Him like bees (Ps 118: 12). The symbols have been realized: Isaac was bound to be offered as a burnt sacrifice; Joseph was unjustly bound in prison so that his spirit might be free; and Samson was bound so that the Philistines might kill him. The prophet Isaiah wrote concerning Christ, “He was taken from prison and from judgment” (Is 53: 8).

### **3 – Before Annas**

During the Roman occupation, the Romans were mostly preoccupied with collecting taxes to give to the emperor and the military authorities to ensure the empire and its power. Rome did not force the colonies to change their language, culture, religion, or execute their interior affairs. The Romans left them to perform their civil and criminal trials in accordance to their customs, but the Roman ruler had the right to change things if necessary. The ruler also was the judge in matters of national peace, especially in the case of public unrest, or in plots against the Roman nation. Therefore, the judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ took place naturally before the chief priests and the Sanhedrim, but the Roman ruler had to confirm the sentence of capital punishment.

The religious leaders feared that the Roman ruler might refuse to kill Jesus Christ for a religious reason. They, therefore, presented two complaints: one religious, that is blasphemy, the second criminal that is civil strife against the Roman nation.

**And they led Him away to Annas first,  
For he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year.” [13]**

‘Annas’ is a Hebrew name short for ‘Ananias’ that means “Jehovah has granted.” He was the chief priest in Jerusalem.

‘Caiaphas’ is an Aramaic name that may mean, ‘rock.’ He had become the high priest for the Jews because the position of high priest was not, as before, held for life.

It was expected that Christ would be cast in prison until morning when He would be judged. However, the powers of evil were afraid of Him and hastened to judge Him religiously at night. They stayed up all night judging Him because they were thirsty for His blood as for a prey they had caught. The procession went out at night first to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem where Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year, lived. It may be that the house of Annas was on their way, or they might have wanted to ask Annas his opinion, as he was the former experienced and older high priest. They knew that at his old age he was thirsty for the blood of Jesus Christ and he therefore would not be upset, but would consider it an honor, when

they would disturb him at midnight. They went also perhaps thinking that they would be paid because they had accomplished their task in accordance with the opinion of Caiaphas “that it was expedient that one man should die for the people” [14].

They led Him away to their masters at midnight as Caiaphas had advised. First they went to Annas to assert His accusation from the point of view of religion before the people, as they would show that there was no conflict among the religious leaders and that they agreed to destroy Jesus. They took Him there so that they might convene an informal meeting to collect evidence of accusations against Jesus. The official, formal meeting was in the morning before the high priest Caiaphas who presided. It was not expected that Annas would be present during the religious trial before the Sanhedrin very early in the morning. As high priest they gave him Christ, the Offering, to examine and see that He was an offering without blemish! Besides, bringing Christ to Annas the father-in-law of Caiaphas would support Caiaphas in his judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ, since he would base his sentence on the decision of his father-in-law. Annas had strong power among his people because he was high priest for a long time and because at least five of his sons were high priests successively. That year his son-in-law was high priest. Annas found no reason for postponing the sacrifice. He sent Him immediately to his son-in-law, Caiaphas who called the members of the Sanhedrin. They all assembled in the house of Caiaphas, or perhaps in their place in the temple, so that they might pronounce the sentence quickly without delay. To them, in this case, examination and deliberations were not necessary. The judgment of Caiaphas was proposed to appear as for the good of the people. He suggested that one man- justly or unjustly, innocent or guilty- must die because public welfare required it.

\* If you say, ‘Why did they bring the Lord Jesus Christ to Annas?’ I answer, ‘Because they wanted to arrest Him, to declare what they did and to proclaim their victory.’

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* They led Him to those who could never be near Him. He continued to be the bright day and they remained darkness. They ignored the words, ‘They looked to Him and were radiant’ (Ps 34: 5). Had they come to Him they would have had Him, not in their hands to kill Him, but in their hearts to welcome Him. At any rate, as they arrested Him in this way, they widened the gap between them and Him. They bound Him, He who desired to free them.<sup>17</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews**

**That it was expedient that one man should die for the people. [14]**

Why does the Evangelist remind us of that prophecy? He declares that those events happened for the sake of our salvation. This is the increasing power of truth. For even the enemies declare the incidents beforehand.<sup>18</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

#### **4 – Peter’s Denial**

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<sup>17</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 112: 6.

<sup>18</sup> Hom. 83. PG 59: 491.



**“And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple.  
Now that disciple was known to the high priest,  
And went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest.” [15]**

Peter at first ran away with the other disciples. But he returned and followed Christ from a distance and with him was John the Evangelist. Saint Jerome thinks that John followed the Lord to the Cross because he was known to the high priest as a man of position<sup>19</sup> and of a good respectful family. Some, however, say that John used to sell fish to the house and servants of the high priest. Therefore, they allowed him to follow Christ up to the moments of His crucifixion.

\* If you ask, ‘Why did John not mention his name?’ I answer, ‘Because here he mentions a great virtue he did not control. For, Christ’s disciples ran away, but he ran after Him. He concealed himself and gave precedence to Peter. Moreover, lest it be said how did this disciple enter the courtyard of the high priest when all the disciples went away? He says, ‘that disciple was known to the high priest,’ so that no one wonders that he followed Christ or be described as courageous.<sup>20</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**But Peter stood at the door outside.  
Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest,  
Went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in.” [16]**

Peter came urged by his longing, but he stood at the door and did not enter because he was afraid.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Then the servant girl who kept the door said to Peter,  
“You are not also one of this Man’s disciples, are you?”  
He said, “I am not.” [17]**

Peter might have had some excuse if the person who spoke to him was Malchus, the high priest’s servant. The servant would have said, ‘You cut off my ear, I’ll cut off your head.’ But this was a servant girl, who kept the door, who questioned him. He should have had the courage to say that he was proud to be that Man’s disciple. Or, at least, in human wisdom, he should have remained silent. But he denied in spite of the Lord’s warning that he would deny Him three times before the cock crew.

Calzarius writes that the name of the servant girl was Ballila. It may be remarked that the custom in most of the ancient nations was to give a woman, probably an old woman, the task of keeping the door.

\* Oh Peter what do you say? Did you not affirm that even if you had to die for Christ’s sake you would die? What happened that you could not bear even a question by a servant girl?

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<sup>19</sup> St. Jerome, Epistle to Marcel

<sup>20</sup> Homilies on St. John, 83: 2.

Did a soldier question you?

Was it one of those who arrested Christ that asked you?

No that was only a simple servant girl who asked humbly. It was not even a man who could be violent that posed the question.

She did not say, ‘Are you not the disciple of that deceitful corrupt man?’ She only said, “this Man” that implied that she pitied Him. But Peter could not bear a word on that subject. She spoke gently, but Peter neither understood nor thought about it properly.<sup>21</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Now the servants and officers who had made a fire of coals stood there,  
For it was cold,  
And they warmed themselves.  
And Peter stood with them and warmed himself. [18]**

He stood with the servants and officers round the fire, may be so that nobody would think he is a disciple of Jesus, and would rather believe he is one of the servants. He stood with the evil people to warm himself and did not realize that with that fire he inflamed temptation that might burn him if it were not for God’s grace that saved him.

In those horrible surroundings of hatred, the Evangelist draws our attention to the triple ingratitude about which our Lord Jesus had already spoken to His disciple Peter who was so ungrateful.

The servants and officers made a fire because it was cold. They were not interested in the judgment of Jesus Christ. They cared only for warmth because it was cold. As it was said, “They drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph” (Amos 6:6). Those were perhaps the servants of the high priest and with them the Roman soldiers who cruelly arrested Jesus and led Him away to Annas then to the house of Caiaphas. They were then given permission to be dismissed from the court of judgment. On the other hand, the high priest and those with him were so eager to kill Jesus that they forgot it was cold.

It was more appropriate for Peter to avoid the company of the evil people and repeat the Psalmist’s words, “Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men who work iniquity; and do not let me eat of their delicacies” (Ps 141: 4). But, instead, he stood with the servants and officers to warm himself. He should have accompanied the Lord in His trial, for He might have asked for his testimony. Peter’s zeal froze because of the cold within him and he stood with the opponents of truth to warm himself. He thus exposed himself to the danger of ingratitude to his Master.

\* John the Evangelist says, “It was cold.” If we take the season into consideration, the weather was not cold. However it would be cold when Christ was not known, when no light was seen, when the burning flame was denied.

Peter stood in front of the fire of coals because he felt he was freezing. The evil of Jewish flames burns and does not give warmth.

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<sup>21</sup> Homilies on St. John, 83: 2.

Evil is the stove that inflames the darkness of error even in the minds of the saints. It blinded Peter's two inner eyes.<sup>22</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

## **5 – A Dialogue with the High Priest**

### **The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine.” [19]**

The high priest may have asked Him with what authority He had disciples and how He could form a religious following to preach a new doctrine and consider Himself a general reformer. The high priest asked Christ about His disciples to assert the civil claim that He stirred up the people against the nation, and that He was a threat to the Roman rulers since He had disciples who opposed the authorities. He asked Him about His doctrine to affirm the religious accusation that He was a blasphemer and false prophet working against the Law and not concerned with the safety of the Jewish teachings. To stress the necessity of His execution, the high priest pointed out two reasons: one political and the second religious. Both accusations were punished by death. He wanted to incriminate the Lord Jesus Christ.

The high priest did not ask the Lord about His love and miracles because he could not deny that they were divine acts. He knew that this would cause those present to reconsider the case because of the Lord's great works. Caiaphas wanted to set traps for the disciples of Jesus as men, who incited the people to riot. But the Lord Jesus Christ, because of His love for them, set them free of the traps without answering the question concerning them. The Lord came for their salvation and sanctification. He therefore was silent concerning them to save them from the opponents. Besides, as He defends His doctrine, He leaves no room for the accusation of the disciples since they practice what they hear of His doctrine.

\* Oh how cunning was that high priest! He had heard the Lord speaking continually to the people in the temple and teaching them openly. But now he wants to know so that he may condemn the Lord Christ.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Jesus answered him,  
“I spoke openly to the world.  
I always taught in synagogues and in the temple,  
Where the Jews always meet,  
And in secret I have said nothing.” [20]**

Concerning the second accusation, He asked for the testimony of the multitude because He spoke openly to all those who had ears to hear. He spoke to all those who wished to listen to the truth whether they were from the upper or lower class, educated or illiterate, Jews or Gentiles, friends or enemies.

He is similar to the sun that shines on all places. He taught openly in the temple, on the mount and on the seashore. He spoke on feast days, on the Sabbath, and any time appropriate for

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<sup>22</sup> Exposition 10: 76.

the word. He is wisdom that cries at all places that they may incline to Him (Prov 8: 3; 9: 3). The Lord used the word, 'openly' that may also mean 'boldly', for He did not teach in secret corners like one who was afraid or one who asked for some favor. He is the Teacher of all and wishes to build everybody. When He said, "in secret" He did not deny that He met certain individuals or His disciples alone. Those personal meetings were not secret conferences, but rather were an open book for everybody since what He said privately to someone was in harmony with His public teaching. For example, what He said to the Samaritan woman, she proclaimed to the people of her city. When they came to Him He spoke to them the same words. The Lord Himself declared that whatever is spoken in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops (Luke 12: 3). Thus, the believer should follow his Master's example in this matter (Rom 6: 11; 10: 6). The Lord affirms that His commandment is not secret. As it is written in Deuteronomy, "For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off." (Deut 30: 11). The learned Tertulian writes, "Truth dreads nothing but that it may be concealed." As though He says, 'Why do you ask Me? Ask the officers that you and the high priests and Pharisees with you sent to Me, for they previously gave you this report concerning Me saying, "No man ever spoke like this Man!"' (Jn 7: 46).' Some of those officers may have come to arrest Him and were present at His religious trial but they said nothing about the truth though they had testified of Him earlier.

It is evident that the word, 'the world' refers to the Jewish world because the Lord spoke to them openly. But He met the Gentiles individually, that is with certain individuals who wished to speak to Him or enjoy His works of love.

The Lord Jesus Christ did not establish a secret school. His teachings were public and sincere. He and His disciples opposed neither the people nor the nation.

The judge was himself the prosecutor accusing, and the accused Himself was the lawyer and the witness defending Himself.

\* How now? Did He never speak in secret? Indeed, He spoke but not as they thought that He spoke out of fear or for strife; for at all times what He said was far above the hearing of many people.<sup>23</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* "I spoke openly to the world" [20]: He spoke openly and many heard Him. Yet this was not truly openly since they did not understand even what He said to His disciples. He surely spoke to His disciples in secret, but He desired that what He said to them they would spread. For, He said to the few at that time, "Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops" (Matt 10: 27). Thus, even if it seems He spoke to them in secret, it was not meant to be in secret, for He did not say, 'let the listeners be dumb.' He rather asked them to preach in every possible way. Likewise, words may be said openly and yet at the same time remain secret.<sup>24</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

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<sup>23</sup> Hom. 83. PG 59: 491.

<sup>24</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 113: 3.

**“Why do you ask Me?**

**Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them.**

**Indeed they know what I said.” [21]**

He asked for the testimony of those who heard Him, not of His disciples or His friends who might defend Him, but of the temple officers and the people who listened to Him. They had said, “No man ever spoke like this Man!” (Jn 7: 46 That was the testimony of the officers before the high priests and Pharisees.

The answer of the Lord Jesus Christ to the high priest implied an accusation against that high priest: that his legislative procedure was wrong, that he was in wait for a non-existing error, and that the judgment was contrived and deceitful. Therefore one of the officers struck Jesus in defense of the high priest’s honor as he claimed [22].

\* These are not the words of a proud man. They are the words of One who is confident of the truth of what He says. As though the Lord said to the high priest, ‘Do you ask Me about My disciples? Ask My enemies who conspired against Me and bound Me.’ This is the proof of truth void of doubt or hesitation that He asks for an enemy to testify of what He said. This was what the high priest should have done but did not do.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying,**

**“Do You answer the high priest like that?” [22]**

Some writers think that the word, ‘struck’ does not mean, ‘slap’, but it means, ‘smite’ with the stick that the temple officers carried. He hit Him with the stick on the face. The word ‘smite’ is used in Micah 5: 1, “they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek.” It is also used in Job 16: 10, “they have smitten me upon the cheek reproachfully.”

The words of the Lord did not convey antipathy. He did not sound cruel, but rather compassionate. He spoke gently and courteously but also courageously. He did not insult the high priest, for His words were convincing and an answer to the priest’s accusation. The officer, then, gave expression to what went on in the heart of the high priest and what that high priest wanted to do. That officer did not realize that by what he did he announced the person of the Messiah about whom Isaiah prophesied, “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. I hid not my face from shame and spitting” (Is 50: 6). Micah wrote, “they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek” (Micah 5: 1). In Job also it is written, “They have gaped upon me with their mouth; they have smitten me upon the cheek reproachfully; they have gathered themselves together against me” (Job 16: 10).

Some believe that the officer might be Malchus whose ear the Lord Christ had healed. He thus responded with ingratitude and violence to Christ’s act of love. The officer could also have been one of those who testified of the Lord in front of the high priest and Pharisees (Jn 7: 46), and was afraid that Jesus might ask for his testimony concerning His words and teachings.

He who was healed was perhaps afraid they would think he was a friend of Jesus to the disadvantage of the temple, or that he was not loyal to the high priest and the people. Therefore, he showed some hostility to Christ.

\* Be afraid, O heavens, and shake, O earth, because of the Lord's patience and longsuffering and the rashness of His servants. What did the Lord say? He did not say, 'Why do you ask Me?' as though He refused to speak to him. He desired to expose the stupid behavior. He was above that blow though He could destroy, remove, and strip it of everything. But He did not do so, but only uttered words that could calm all fury.<sup>25</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Jesus answered him,  
If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil;  
But if well, why do you strike Me?" [23]**

By answering the man who struck Him, He gave His believers the right to defend themselves but not to take revenge. The defense must still be in love, truth and meekness. The Lord suffered blows and abuse but did not threaten.

The Lord Christ could have answered that officer by performing a miracle such as causing the man's hand become stiff, or the earth to open and swallow him, etc. But the Lord answered the man gently and with wisdom, without turning the other cheek as He commanded in His Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5: 39). He, thus, has taught everybody that there are some who would turn the other cheek physically but with a heart full of hatred for him who hit him. As for the Lord, He turned His entire body to be crucified in love for the sake even of the man who struck Him. Thus, the 'turning' must be inward.

\* We lack our Savior's patience. Our Christ was led like a lamb to slaughter. He did not open His mouth, but He mercifully said to the man who struck Him, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?"<sup>26</sup>

**Saint Jerome**

\* The Lord did not answer the high priest scornfully. He did not show any disrespect to him as a priest. Christ only asserted His own innocence.<sup>27</sup>

**Cyprian the Martyr**

\* This has shown what must be revealed: that the great commandments (such as turning the other cheek) are realized not physically but with the heart's inclination. For, it is possible for an angry man to turn his other cheek only in appearance.<sup>28</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**Then Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. [24]**

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<sup>25</sup> Homilies on St. John, 83: 3.

<sup>26</sup> Against the Pelagians, 3: 4.

<sup>27</sup> Letter 59 to Cornelius: 4.

<sup>28</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 113: 4.

It is evident that they had released the Lord from the chains as Annas examined Him. Now they bound Him again. However, some writers observe that the statement may be interpreted as that He was bound even during His trial and He was sent as He was to Caiaphas.

Saint John the Evangelist was not concerned in relating the incidents chronologically. What happens here comes after verse 13 immediately chronologically.

## **6 – Peter’s Twofold Denials**

**Now Simon Peter stood and warmed himself.  
Therefore they said to him,  
“You are not also one of His disciples, are you?”  
He denied it and said, “I am not!” [25]**

Peter may have heard that the high priest asked the Lord about His disciples [19]. Peter then was afraid he might be arrested or beaten like his Master. He, therefore, denied that he was one of Christ’s disciples. He led himself into temptation twice as he stood with the officers to warm himself. He wished to warm himself with the fire of the wicked and caused the cold to come to his good life. He should have warmed himself with the coals of flame of Christ’s love that many waters could not quench (Song of Solomon 8: 6-7).

Saint John the Evangelist relates to us a painful story, the story of Peter’s threefold denials that may be counted among the Lord’s suffering and is not less than His physical pains.

**The first denial:** Peter was outside or down in the courtyard of Caiaphas. Jesus was not in the upper part of the court in front of the high priest. As he stood with the officers warming himself, Peter said to a servant girl who kept the door that he was not one of Christ’s disciples (verses 16-17).

**The second denial:** A little while after his first denial (Luke 22: 58) he certainly withdrew from his place and went out to the gateway (Matt 26: 71). At that moment the rooster crowed for the first time, right after midnight. But the servant girl and those with her followed him, for it is obvious that there is a direct link between the two spots. There, a man accused him of harassing the servant girl and that probably aroused many standing by to ask questions and find out the truth about Peter. It is not understood that when the man inquired about Simon Peter, the others stood silent, for the situation shook the entire city. The questions of so many undoubtedly caused much noise.

**The third denial:** Peter is in the court and Jesus sees him from some distance. About an hour after his first denial, those present accused him of being a Galilean (Luke 22: 59) and insisted he was one of Christ’s disciples. Saint John states that a relative of Malchus affirmed the accusation. The denial here was tense and the rooster crowed a second time.

Peter made consecutive mistakes. He sinned and each sin led to another until he reached what he never expected would happen. He began by self confidently proclaiming he would die for his Master. Through that human pride arising from self-confidence, he was absorbed in his own self and stood warming himself among the evil group. With every fall (in denying) because of his human weakness, he fell into another stronger and more bitter denial in spite of the Lord’s warning to him. When the rooster crowed the first time (the signal that the Lord gave him), he

did not refrain from what he said. He needed Christ's look at him to raise in him the spirit of repentance and to fill him with hope.

\* How strange Peter was! He was sincerely yearning, steadfast in Christ, yet he was negligent. After they bound the Lord and led Him away, Peter did not move but stood warming himself. Then, when they asked him, he denied, so that you know how weak we human beings are (Luke 22: 62).

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**One of the servants of the high priest,  
A relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said,  
'Did I not see you in the garden with Him?'" [26]**

Peter tried to conceal his identity as a disciple of Christ. He did not know that whatever was secret must be revealed. There is a popular saying that there may be a bird in the air that tells what we, liars, may hide.

\* Why did the Evangelists agree in what they wrote about him? They did not wish to accuse him, but they wanted to teach us that it is a bad thing to depend on oneself and not leave things in God's hands. But do not be surprised that his Master gently cares for him. For, He had thought of His disciple and helped him rise when he fell. He looked at him through a stream of tears.<sup>29</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**"Peter then denied again,  
And immediately a rooster crowed." [27]**

\* See, for the prophecy of the Physician is realized and the insolence of the patient is brought to light.<sup>30</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

## **7 – At the Praetorium**

**Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium,  
And it was early morning.  
But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium,  
Lest they should be defiled,  
But that they might eat the Passover." [28]**

Why did they take Him to Pilate to judge Him?

- 1- So that the sentence of capital punishment may be legal and in accordance to the law of the city that was under Roman rule.

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<sup>29</sup> Homilies on St. John, 83: 3.

<sup>30</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 113: 6.



- 2- If they had not judged Him formally, riots would have started and they would not have crucified Him. For, the governor only could decree crucifixion but the rioters would have stoned Him and the prophecies would not have been fulfilled.
- 3- The Jewish religious leaders may have feared the rebellion of the people. They, therefore, thought that a formal trial would give them some legality and control over the people if they rebelled.
- 4- They wished to give His death a form of shame and scandal since the Romans used crucifixion as the most shameful death. The leaders wanted to ruin His reputation and completely blot His fame.

Now the Evangelist gives us a live picture of the judgment of the Lord before the Roman governor, Pilate, at the Praetorium. The trial begins very early in the morning. Occurrences run quickly so that the Sanhedrim may achieve their plot, supported by a civil trial, before the people disagree and separate concerning Jesus. Some say that this judgment was between two and three o'clock in the morning; but others think it was between five and six in the morning. The leaders hastened the proceedings while the people were still asleep so that they might minimize the danger of public insurrection or the equal danger of public reconsideration of the case of the Lord Christ. For, the people who now side with the leaders may support Him.

The Jews considered this a very serious matter. They, therefore, forced the great Roman officer, Pontius Pilate, to convict Christ. The multitudes had to remain outside the Praetorium lest they should be defiled if they entered a pagan court during the days of the Passover, or if they entered the house of a Gentile who did not observe the special ordinances of that week such as getting rid of yeast. The Jews believed that they would be defiled even if they touched a Gentile, especially during the Passover. They strained out a gnat and swallowed a camel.

According to the Mosaic Law, whoever enters an unclean place is defiled and whoever enters a tent where a dead man lies is defiled (Numbers 19: 14). The unclean person cannot eat of an offering (Lev 7: 20) and this prevents him from keeping the Passover. A person who is unclean during the Passover may observe the Passover a month later (Num 9: 6-13).

St John the Evangelist and the other Evangelists point out the fact that the events of the Cross did not happen because the wicked people, who seemed physically stronger and having authority, could defeat the Lord Christ. These events were in complete harmony with the Father's plan for the salvation of the world, and the Son's pleasure in fulfilling that plan. No wonder that our Christ announced on the Cross, "It is finished" (Jn 19: 30) before He bowed His head and gave up His Spirit. The Cross with all that happened was not a catastrophe in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was, rather, a fulfillment of the divine design.

The Roman authorities allowed the Jewish courts to openly affirm and execute capital punishment in specific cases: adultery, blasphemy, and sacrilege. This may be the reason that their first accusation against Christ was that He intended to destroy the temple. This was an indirect means they used to deliver Him to ritual or lawful death. This death according to Jewish tradition was by stoning. The Lord had hidden Himself when they wanted to throw stones at Him (Jn 8: 59) because He would not have achieved salvation of the world if He had died by stoning. On the other hand, crucifixion was executed in accordance to the Roman law to punish

slaves and non-Romans. It is a horrible and shameful punishment that, to the Jews, symbolized a curse and extreme defilement. Therefore, the Jews and the Romans joined to execute it as quickly as possible on the day of preparation for the Passover.

A discussion began in which three parties participated. Those were first the official religious Jewish leaders as prosecutors. Secondly, the Roman governor, as a Roman representative was responsible in examining the suspect. Then, thirdly, the Lord who knew that His hour had come and that in obedience He fulfilled the Father's will that was in harmony with His own will as lover of mankind.

Some say that 'the Passover' here does not signify the lamb of the Passover, but other offerings given during the celebrations of the Passover. Those offerings were eaten on the eve preceding the feast. They believe that the Lord was crucified on the day following the feast. Others think that 'the Passover' here indicates the lamb of the Passover; that day was the suitable day for that offering, for the Lord was hung on the Cross at the same time as they ate the Passover. Thus, the Lord did not eat the Passover with them. A different group observes that the Jews were free to eat the Passover starting on the Thursday supper and continuing to Friday evening. This was allowed because the large number of sacrificed lambs made it necessary.

Some believe that the Lord ate the Passover the final year of His life on earth (Matt 26: 17-19; Mark 14: 12-18; Luke 22: 8-15). He ate it a few hours before it was the time to eat it. They believe that Christ was sacrificed the exact moments the lamb should be slaughtered according to the law.

It is clear in the Gospels according to the saints Matthew, Mark, and Luke that the Lord ate the Passover on Holy Thursday; then, Christ gave His body a Passover of the New Covenant. However in the Gospel according to St John, it is clear that the Jewish leaders had not yet eaten the Passover and consequently the Passover was on Good Friday.

Many writers published complete books to solve this problem.<sup>31</sup> There is evidence that different groups in Israel used different calendars other than the one used by the temple officials. For example, the group who produced the Dead Sea manuscripts used an old calendar and concluded that the priests in Jerusalem celebrated all the feasts on the wrong dates. The simple solution of our problem, then, is that Jesus and His disciples used a different calendar and kept the Passover a day before the temple officials. This explains why the Passover lamb is not mentioned during the Lord's supper although the lamb is essential in keeping the Passover. It was not possible to offer the lamb as sacrifice before eating it without the approval of the special temple authorities. The three Gospels consistently refer to the Passover meal that the Lord and His disciples ate. On the other hand, St John refers to the formal celebration and as that had not yet taken place, some high priests refused to enter the Praetorium lest they should be defiled and should be forced to keep the Passover a month later (Numbers 9: 6-13).

\* And I say to one of them, 'Tell me what defilement you will suffer if you are present at the court where He justly meets the unjust? You pay tithe of mint and anise but unjustly kill and do

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<sup>31</sup> Leon Morris, the Gospel according to John, Eerdmans Grand Rapids 1971, pp. 774-486.

not think you are defiled. Yet you think you would be defiled if you went into the court of justice.'

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* Whoever enters the house of a Gentile during the days of unleavened bread is considered defiled! How evil this is! Is it true that they are defiled by the house of a stranger but are not defiled by committing evil? They feared they should be defiled if they entered the court of justice of a stranger and they were not afraid of defilement through the bloodshed of an innocent brother.<sup>32</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**Pilate then went out to them and said,  
‘What accusation do you bring against this Man?’” [29]**

Pilate had some good qualities. On the one hand, he did not refuse to do his duty as judge early in the morning, although he could have asked them to wait until the suitable time for him. On the other hand, he was modest, for when they refused to enter the Praetorium lest they should be defiled, he could have not gone out to them. He could have told them they must enter to him or return to their homes. He could have asked them to postpone the trial till after the feast when they could enter his headquarters. One more good quality is that he wished to investigate and therefore asked what accusation they brought against Jesus. He wanted to know the truth of the charge.

\* Do you not see that he is free of the passion to judge and free of cunning? When he saw Jesus bound and led by so many he did not think that this was enough to indict Him. He asked them why they accused Him considering it strange that they should judge Him and reach a verdict without judgment on his part. Why do they say this?<sup>33</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

Pilate’s question does not mean that he did not know the accusation brought against the Lord Christ. But, as a ruler he had to see that the procedures follow in the right sequence and in order. Moreover, Pilate’s question disappointed the leaders because they knew that according to the Mosaic Law the blasphemer must die, but according to the Roman law blasphemy of the God of the Jews was not punished by death since it was not considered a capital offense.

Indeed, the Roman soldiers took part with the temple officers in arresting Jesus Christ. This shows that there was a form of collaboration and consultation between the religious and the civil authorities. This may be why the religious authorities were not ready with an indictment against Jesus Christ. Still, whether Pilate participated or did not take part in arresting the Lord Christ, he was a Roman governor who was proud of being just and of making sure that the legal steps were in order.

**They answered and said to him,  
“If He were not an evildoer,**

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<sup>32</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 114: 2.

<sup>33</sup> Homilies on St. John, 83: 4.

**We would not have delivered Him up to you.” [30]**

Pilate asked them politely what accusation they brought against Jesus. This was his duty as an officer of the kingdom. At the same time he revealed his disturbance because of the rioters. But the answer of those who denounced Christ revealed their inability to assert their claim against Him and still persisted in their violence. They could not bring a specific accusation against Christ such as He was a traitor, a murderer, or an instigator to riot. They brought a general accusation saying He was an ‘evildoer.’ They were forcing Pilate to unwillingly do what they desired. But Pilate did not wish to collaborate with them. The plaintiffs were not polite in talking to Pilate. He went out to them and asked them what accusation they brought against Christ. But they arrogantly mentioned no accusation but considered Pilate’s question a form of mistrust in them and their judgment. They said, “If He were not an evildoer we would not have delivered Him up to you.” The Jews did not want Pilate to be the judge. They wanted him to carry the penalty into effect. As though they had the right to judge, but the governor had no right to know the accusation and to discuss it with them. They wanted to judge and Pilate to enforce their judgment. This was quite unreasonable.

\* What madness! Why do you not mention the evil acts instead of hiding them? Why do you not give evidence of that evil? Do you not see that they avoided direct accusation because they were incapable of saying anything? Annas asked Him about His doctrine and listened to Him then sent Him to Caiaphas. Caiaphas also questioned Him and as he discovered that He did nothing that was wrong, he sent Him to Pilate. Pilate asked, “What accusation do you bring against this Man?” Even then they found nothing to say. Pilate was then confused.<sup>34</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Then Pilate said to them,**

**“You take Him and judge Him according to your law.”**

**Therefore the Jews said to him,**

**“It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death.” [31]**

The Jewish religious leaders may have thought that the act of delivering up a Jew to the imperial ruler is enough to prove his evil doing and crime. For, it is impossible for the leaders of a colonized country to deliver up to the colonial governor a person to condemn him to death for no reason. However this thought did not suit the Roman ruler whose duty was to enforce the law and the correct legislative procedures. He considered this a kind of irregularity and therefore said, ‘If He broke your law, you take Him and judge Him according to your law. This is not my responsibility and Romans care nothing for this.’ The Romans did not want to be involved in the local legal problems of the settlements. They left them to the leaders and local judges since those problems did not concern national security.

Some writers observe that Pilate, here, reminds the Jews of their ill conduct and their abuse of their authority. That was why the Romans deprived them of the right to condemn a person to death. It is as though he was saying to them, ‘Because you have abused your authority, the nation has taken from you the right to condemn anyone to death. Why, then, do you condemn

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<sup>34</sup> Homilies on St. John, 83: 4.

Jesus and ask me to execute your verdict without real judgment? You take Him and judge Him if that is your authority. Or give me the indictment and let me investigate and examine the accusation so that I may not commit an error or be your partner.'

**Lightfoot** says that the Jews were not allowed to inflict capital punishment for forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem. The Jews admitted this fact several times. It is said that the Sanhedrim, influenced by some religious leaders, refused for a long time to condemn a Jew to death because they considered him a son of God no matter what he was, a robber or an evildoer. As a result, the number of criminals and thieves increased. Evil spread and the law was as asleep. The law did not move and left it to the ruler– even if he was a pagan – to deal with the criminals. This was a divine dispensation because if the Sanhedrim had condemned Jesus to death as an evildoer or blasphemer, etc., they would have stoned Him instead of crucifying Him. And so that we may be redeemed from the curse of the law, it was necessary that the Son of Man should be hung on the Cross.

The Jews were not allowed to sentence anyone to death by crucifixion. But the Sanhedrim had the right to inflict death by stoning. We then do not wonder that a woman caught in adultery was brought to the Lord Jesus Christ to judge her, for it was necessary according to the Law of Moses that she should be stoned. The Lord did not break the law but demanded that he who was without sin let him throw a stone at her first. No one among the crowd was without sin. Again, we are told that the Jews stoned to death Stephen the deacon and first martyr without asking permission of the Roman authorities (Acts 7: 58).

\* The Jews said, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death." They meant this was not lawful at that particular time. For, they put many to death as is shown in the case of Stephen the martyr whom they stoned. However, they desired to crucify Jesus to defame Him.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**'...that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die.' [32]**

The Jewish leaders refused to sentence the Lord to death by stoning because that would have roused the people especially that the multitudes coming from many towns crowded the city. The people might have heard about the Lord Jesus Christ and wanted to meet Him. But, if the ruler were the judge, the people would not revolt. They might distrust Jesus because an authority that was not religious condemned Him.

What is more important is that His crucifixion was a fulfillment of God's plan that He had revealed through the Law and the prophets.

## **8 – A Discourse with Pilate**

**'Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again,  
Called Jesus, and said to Him,  
"Are You the King of the Jews?"' [33]**

Why did Pilate ask Him that question? There are many opinions.

- 1- Some say that Pilate began to relate with the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and realized that He was a strange, yet esteemed and respectful person even though He was delivered up to him as a prisoner who must die. Inside the Praetorium, far from the Jewish leaders and rebellious multitudes, Pilate had a chance to be alone with the Lord Jesus. It was as though the Lord who was rejected by His people, had gone to the Roman world outside to announce His own Self.
- 2- Others observe that Pilate as a judge who wanted justice and truth was obliged to hear all those involved so that he might know whether the accusations against Jesus were true or false.
- 3- Other commentators believe that Pilate spoke sarcastically. For, if Jesus spoke the truth, Pilate said to Him mockingly, “What is truth?” This question may have meant, ‘Are You the king of the Jews, the Messiah whom they expect to save them from colonialism? Are You the king of the Jews who hate You and deliver You up to death? Are You the lawful king and actual king czar? According to this group Christ did not answer Pilate because Pilate did not wish to learn the truth but was speaking ironically. Jesus, therefore, did not show him His pearls.

\* As Pilate wanted to avoid the hostility of the Jews, he did not ignore them. He offered to examine Christ for a long time and therefore he entered and ‘called Jesus.’

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Jesus answered him,  
“Are you speaking for yourself about this,  
Or did others tell you this concerning Me?” [34]**

Here it is clear that Pilate was undecided between, on the one hand, his longing to know the person of Christ whether He had true authority or not, and on the other hand, the controversial rumors the Jews spread about Him. As though the Lord asked Pilate to think seriously about the matter so that he may know who He is.

\* The Lord did not ask Pilate this question because He did not know what was in Pilate’s mind. His question was rather a criticism of the Jews. He rebuked Pilate by saying, ‘You heard what the Jews said. So why do you not investigate?’

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew?  
Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me.  
What have You done?” [35]**

Pilate was not satisfied. He, in disdain, said he did not care because this matter concerned the Jews. It did not concern him. He relinquished his responsibility and said he was not a Jew and those who had delivered Him were of His nation and chief priests. Pilate’s only responsibility was that of a judge.

\* Here Pilate wishes to shirk involvement in this matter. When he asked, ‘are You a king?’ Jesus rebuked him saying, ‘This is what you heard the Jews said. Why do you not examine the matter carefully? They said I was an evildoer. Ask them what evil I did. You are not doing that, for you are simply bringing accusations against Me.’<sup>35</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Jesus answered,  
“My kingdom is not of this world.  
If My kingdom were of this world,  
My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews;  
But now My kingdom is not from here.” [36]**

\* The Lord addressed Pilate, for he was not very bad. Pilate was not like them, so He desired to show him that He was not a mere man, but was God, the Son of God.<sup>36</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

The Word, having taken the form of a bondservant, did not deny that He was the King. He had honor and authority neither according to the thought of the Jews, nor according to Pilate’s opinion. His kingdom was within the heart. It controlled the hearts and minds because it was the divine Truth. Pilate thought that Christ’s words meant that He considered Himself a King, although He stood before him as a prisoner whom the leaders of His nation accused and condemned to death. The Lord stressed that His kingdom was not from this world.

**First:** His kingdom is not of this world like the evil kingdoms that extend over the seas and earth (Daniel 7: 3; Rev 13: 1, 11). The capital of His kingdom is Jerusalem, the city of God coming from heaven (Rev 22: 2).

**Second:** The nature of His kingdom is not of the earth. It is a kingdom in human hearts (Luke 16: 21). It grows in the hearts and conscience. Its wealth and possibilities are spiritual and its glory is within (Rom 14: 17).

**Third:** The guards of His kingdom are not of the earth and their weapons are spiritual. They do not need temporal weapons of the earth. Therefore He forbade His disciples to defend Him. To satisfy Pilate a little the Lord Christ said that His kingdom was not of this world, else He would have had an army to defend Him. For, the Lord would not engage in the special issues of this world, especially those concerning authority, but at the same time He is a King on a higher level than the kingdoms of the world.

**Fourth:** The design of His kingdom is not temporal. He therefore did not permit His disciples to be drawn out to false glory and human greatness.

**Fifth:** The inhabitants and citizens of His kingdom are not of this world. They live in this world but are not of it. They enjoy a new spiritual birth. God’s Spirit guides them and they rejoice in divine wisdom and have divine wealth.

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<sup>35</sup> Homilies on St. John, 83: 4.

<sup>36</sup> Homilies on St. John, 83: 4.

Through the Spirit of prophecy, the prophet, Isaiah, had a vision of a King of the people through the Cross. Isaiah said, “Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people” (Is 55: 4). His kingdom is not like the kingdoms of the world where ‘truth fails’ (Is 59: 15).

The Lord Christ’s answer to Pilate means that He is not a king as Pilate thinks. He is not a political king like the kings of nations. He is not a king who through rebellion will free this people from Roman rule. At the same time He is a heavenly King not of this world and does not need an army to defend Him and support His power. Pilate certainly could not understand this distinction and he therefore made light of Christ’s answer. Pilate may also have been confused because he could not understand what the accused said, for Pilate had never heard such words.

\* The Lord put an end to Pilate’s suspicions...Pilate thought that Jesus would obtain power as a king. But is Christ’s kingdom not in this world? His kingdom is certainly in this world also. How then does He say, “My kingdom is not of this world”? This does not mean that He does not govern here, but that His Empire is from above. It is not a human empire; it is much greater and more sublime. But if it is greater, how come He has become a captive? He willingly delivered Himself up. But He does not announce it now. What does He say? “If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight; so that I should not be delivered” [36]. Here He reveals the weakness of this earthly kingdom, for it depends on servants, but the kingdom above is self-sufficient and needs nothing.<sup>37</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* Come to the kingdom that is not of this world.

Come. Believe and do not, out of fear, fall in anger.

He truly said in a prophetic words ascribed to God the Father, “Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion” (Ps 2: 6). He set Him on the hill of Zion, not a king on the world. For, what is His kingdom but those who believe in Him and to whom He says, ‘You are not of this world, as I am not of this world.’ And yet He desires that they stay in the world so that His words to the Father concerning them may be fulfilled. For He said, “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one” (Jn 17: 15).<sup>38</sup>

\* They were of the world as long as they were not of His kingdom. They were then related to the ruler of this world. All humanity was of the world. Indeed, the good God created mankind, but corruption was born of Adam who succumbed and became a corrupt lump under judgment. Then it became a kingdom not of the world as it was renewed through Christ. For, thus God has delivered us from the power of darkness and carried us into the kingdom of the Son of His love (Col 1: 13). Concerning this kingdom He says, “My kingdom is not of this world” or ‘My kingdom is not here.’<sup>39</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**Pilate therefore said to Him,  
“Are You a king then?”**

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<sup>37</sup> Homilies on St. John, 83: 4.

<sup>38</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 115: 2.

<sup>39</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 115: 2.



**Jesus answered, “You say rightly that I am a king.  
For this cause I was born,  
And for this cause I have come into the world,  
that I should bear witness to the truth.  
Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” [37]**

With fiery words the Lord Jesus Christ Himself affirms that He is a King who bears witness to the truth. He says that everyone who is of the truth hears His voice [37]. He is King through His eternal birth of the Father and as the divine Word. But this truth no one can accept but he who is of the truth and in the truth. Pilate himself could neither understand that truth, nor hear His voice.

The Lord came so that He should bear witness to the truth. The Old Testament says that God was “the God of truth” (Ps 31: 5; Is 65: 16). We read in the New Testament about “the truth of God” (Rom 15: 8) that the pagans exchanged for the false and the lie (Rom 1: 25). The truth is the essence of God and Jesus Christ says, “I am the truth” (Jn 14: 6).

**“Everyone who is of the truth”:** We read in this Gospel about those who are ‘of the earth’ (3: 31), those who are ‘of the world’ (15: 19). We read about those who are ‘of God’ (8: 47), and those who are ‘of Satan their father’ (8: 44), those who are ‘from beneath, and those who are from above’ (8: 23). This Gospel thus distinguishes between two groups: one from above related to heaven and to God and to truth; and the second group is from beneath, related to the earth, to this evil world and to Satan. There is no third group in between.

\* He was born a King and all His other attributes are of His birth. He did not obtain anything in addition. When we hear, “For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself (5: 26) we consider nothing outside His birth, and so are all the remaining qualities.”<sup>40</sup>

\* When they said that He was an evildoer and could not prove it, He stood silent. But when He was asked about His kingdom, He spoke to Pilate declaring to him and guiding him to things above. But why did Pilate ask Him in the absence of the Jews when he left them and entered the Praetorium? He expected great news and wanted to know everything in detail about the problems of the Jews. Christ answered, “My kingdom is not of this world” that means, ‘I am truly King but not as what you might expect, I am much more sublime.’ With these words and the words that follow He indicated that He did not do evil.<sup>41</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* Not everyone who hears My voice is of the truth, but whoever is of the truth hears My voice because this is a gift that Truth grants him. This means that through the abundant grace of Christ we believe in Christ.<sup>42</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**Pilate said to Him,**

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<sup>40</sup> Homilies on St. John, 83: 4.

<sup>41</sup> Hom. 84. PG 59: 498.

<sup>42</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 115: 4.

**“What is truth?”**

**And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews,**

**And said to them,**

**“I find no fault in Him at all.” [38]**

Pilate asked a very important question: “What is truth?” But he did not wait for the answer. Instead he went out to the Jews to tell them that he found no fault at all in Jesus. Pilate may have asked the question really wishing to know the truth, but his preoccupation with other business did not give him a chance to enjoy the answer and experience the truth. This is how we often behave in our prayers when we ask God but do not wait for His answer.

Pilate appears as a friend of Jesus. He seems to have loved Him and sympathized with Him. For, he openly declared His innocence and that he found no fault in Him to condemn Him to death. When they forced him, he said he would decree nothing of himself, but would execute their judgment. Pilate tried every means to dissuade them from their decision. It is difficult to evaluate the character of Pilate. It is clear that he was quite convinced that Jesus Christ was innocent and that they enviously and cunningly delivered Him up. Pilate feared the people might rise against him if he released Jesus. It is possible to say that he wished to be just and honest but without causing trouble. For, he was not ready for any sacrifice on his part to support justice and truth.

**“But you have a custom that I should release someone to you at the Passover.**

**Do you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews?” [39]**

This custom was in honor of the Passover, a commemoration of freedom from the slavery of Pharaoh. However, they turned the custom of honor to a breaking of the law that says, “He that justifies the wicked, and he that condemns the just, even they both are abominations to the Lord” (Prov 17: 15).

\* Observe how he acted wisely. He did not say, ‘As He is not guilty and should not be condemned to death, forgive Him as a grant of the Passover.’ He rather declared His innocence first, then asked them if they still did not wish to drop His case: since He is innocent, they could still forgive Him in honor of the Feast even though He might be guilty.<sup>43</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* We do not blame you, O Jews, for releasing a criminal at the Passover. We blame you for killing the innocent. Nevertheless, if that did not happen, the true Passover would not have been fulfilled and the shadow of the truth would have remained for the sinning Jews. Through the dispensation of the wonderful divine Wisdom, the truth of the shadow was realized by means of the deceptive men. For, Christ was brought as a lamb to the slaughter as a sacrifice so that the true Passover might be observed.<sup>44</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**Then they all cried again, saying,**

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<sup>43</sup> Homilies on St. John, 84: 1.

<sup>44</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 115: 5.

**“Not this Man, but Barabbas!”**  
**Now Barabbas was a robber.” [40]**

Pilate did not find any fault at all in Jesus to convict Him. To give the angry people a chance, he suggested releasing the innocent Man on the occasion of the Passover. In spite of his legal authority, Pilate could not oppose the furious multitudes who asked for the release of Barabbas rather than Jesus. They asked him to set Barabbas the robber free and to kill Jesus. For, Barabbas could not rob them of the seat of Moses on which they sat. But Jesus, according to them, withdrew that seat from them and robbed them of their false traditions.

It is astonishing that Barabbas in Aramaic means “the son of the father.” He was a man who was known to have committed murder and fornication. Here, the world refuses the true “Son of the Father” and releases the man who has the name only but whose profession is robbery. The word “robber” in Aramaic is ‘archilestess’ that means ‘a gang leader.’ Some believe that Barabbas was a leader of a group of thieves who committed much bloodshed and threatened the Roman ruler (Luke 23: 19). They stupidly preferred the robber, the symbol of sin, rather than the Holy Righteous. The human being often chooses his physical lusts rather than the joy of righteousness in Christ.

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Meditations Inspired by the Gospel of St John  
Chapter 18

Your Sufferings Reveal Your Glory

+ The hour of Your suffering has come. It is the hour of Your glory.  
You willingly entered the garden with Your disciples.  
You, O the Sun of Righteousness entered and waited  
For the procession of darkness to come to You.  
They carried swords and sticks to capture You.  
All nature expected a word from You to destroy them.  
They carried torches to look for the Sun of Righteousness!  
They all did not realize You willingly delivered Yourself up to them  
For the sake of Your wonderful love of their salvation.

+ They wanted to arrest You  
But they fell down on their faces  
You delivered Yourself up to them  
So they bound You cruelly, lest You should escape.  
Your hands bled  
Yet with love You healed the wound of the servant Malchus!

+ They took You to the high priest in the dark night  
You who desire to take them with Your Holy Spirit to Your divine glamorous light.  
The evil high priest advised that it is better that You should die for the nation.  
He did not understand that You are the heavenly High Priest  
That You die to end the death of the human race  
And You rise to raise them up with You.

+ The high priest enveloped himself with religious temporary popular authority  
But everybody abandoned you  
One disciple betrayed you, and another denied you  
The power of the high priest is in human evanescent inner possibilities  
But you are the Power, Word and Wisdom of God  
Your divine glory does not need human support!

+ They delivered you up: You the King of kings to a human ruler.  
They demanded that you should be killed as an evildoer  
The governor found no fault in you at all!  
He used every means so that he might not do what was against his conscience!  
But the stubborn people insisted murdering you.  
They accepted Caesar as their only king and rejected your kingdom.  
They released Baraboo so that you should be crucified, you who are all goodness!

+ In weakness Pilate gave you up to be crucified.  
For he could not lose Caesar's friendship as a price for justice.

All the powers of darkness gathered against You

And did not know that by doing so, they revealed the Light of Your glory!

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## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### THE CRUCIFIXION OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

We noticed in the previous chapters that St John the Evangelist is not inclined write a chronological narration. His aim is to reveal the person of Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word of God who came to save the world. Now that he speaks about the crucifixion of the Lord, he does not relate the historical events, but rather presents the person of the crucified Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior of mankind. He exults and is proud of the cross.

|                                      |       |
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| 9 – The Burial of Jesus              | 38-42 |

#### **1 – Pilate’s Judgment**

##### **So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him. [1]**

Pilate tried to release the Lord because he was sure Christ was innocent. He thought he could release Him because he traditionally used to release a prisoner at the Passover; yet he failed because of the people’s uprising. However, as he was still convinced that Jesus Christ committed no crime, he used another method, that is he allowed his soldiers to scourge and scorn Him so that he might prove to the people that Christ was helpless and therefore they should forgive Him.

The Evangelist gives us an exposition of the judgment of the Lord. It is full of injustice: the plaintiffs are confused, the judge wavers between his feeling of injustice to Jesus and his fear of the rebellion of the multitude against him, and their claim that Jesus wanted to be king and oppose Caesar. Pilate failed to acquit Jesus, and therefore he was obliged to let the case proceed in accordance to the rules. He had to treat Jesus cruelly because of the danger and nature of the accusation. Pilate first condescended to the wish of the people and ordered his soldiers to scourge Jesus and treat Him as a rebel. Pilate hoped that by doing this he would legally prove that Jesus was innocent.

Pilate was not serious in judging justly. For, though he knew that Jesus was righteous, he condemned Him to be scourged like a criminal [1]. Luke the Evangelist says that Pilate said to the multitude, “I will chastise Him and release Him” (Luke 23: 16). Pilate’s aim in scourging Jesus seems to have been his hope that the Jews would change their minds concerning His crucifixion. Clearly, Pilate felt that Jesus did nothing to deserve crucifixion.

It seems that the scourging was executed in accordance to the Roman rules, which were far crueler than the Jewish rules. The Romans usually scourged those condemned to crucifixion.

The Lord Jesus Christ accepted this for our sake. As Isaiah writes, “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting” (Is 50: 6). The Psalmist says, “The plowers plowed on my back; they made their furrows long” (Ps 129: 3). The Lord Himself had said, they will “deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify” (Matt 20: 19; see Mark 10: 34; Luke 18: 33). Saint Peter says, “by whose stripes we were healed” (1 Pet 2: 24). The Physician was scourged so that the sick would be cured. He endured being scourged for our sake so that the believers would find their pleasure in enduring suffering for Him and partaking of His pains and crucifixion (Acts 5: 41; 16: 22, 25).

Scourging was a terrible punishment. The historian **Eusebius** explains that they used a whip made of several strips made of leather with bits of metal or bone at the tips so that the flesh of the person scourged would be torn. Sometimes the veins and inner layers of the scourged were exposed. The Roman writer, **Cicero**, says that sometimes scourging caused death. The Roman soldiers were cruel and had no mercy. It may be that Jesus Christ could not carry the cross to the place of the crucifixion because He was scourged. Some scholars point out Christ’s quick death on the cross as the result of the cruel scourging. The Evangelists mention the fact that Christ was scourged but do not describe His pain.

The Lord considered all sorts of suffering and abuse for our sake as easy. He loves us and longs for our redemption so that we should regard our partaking with Him, of His shame and pain, a glory that we do not deserve.

\* John the apostle says, ‘Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him.’ Pilate probably wished to calm the Jews and evade their anger. Just as he could not rescue the Lord with his first address to the Jews, he failed in stopping their wickedness to that extent.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* We need to believe that Pilate did this for no reason but to let the Jews see this cruel treatment and be satisfied, without madly asking for His death. For the same reason the governor allowed his soldiers to do what followed. He may have commanded them to do that, though the Evangelist said nothing about this<sup>1</sup>.

**Saint Augustine**

**And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns  
And put it on His head,  
And they put on Him a purple robe. [2]**

The soldiers used to scorn those who were convicted, especially that the soldiers represented the occupying authority that abused rebels against Rome. Their sarcasm fitted the accusation that He was “King of the Jews.” They did not find a king to put to death often, and they thought that scorning a king of the Jews was a farce hard to repeat.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 116: 1.

“Purple”: this is an expensive color. It is a mixture of violet and red made of some kinds of rare fish shells. Purple clothes were expensive and linked to royal life, and worn by the rich and high ranking men in the nation.

Matthew the Evangelist writes that they “put a scarlet robe on Him” (Matt 27: 28). This color is extracted from some dead insects and a scarlet robe is much cheaper than a purple garment that the military captains wore. The soldiers perhaps brought an old robe that a military commander had thrown away because it was old. The soldiers then used the purple gown to dress a poor Galilean (Jesus) who would be king! The crown of thorns and the purple robe denote royalty but the world uses them for wicked humor.

\* St John reports, ‘And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe.’ This Pilate did to please the angry Jews. For this reason he led the Lord Jesus Christ out, crowned with thorns, so that when the Jews would see Him so abused, they give would vent out their sickness a little and throw out their poison.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Then they said,  
“Hail, King of the Jews!”  
And they struck Him with their hands.” [3]**

Thus Pilate delivered Him up to the soldiers so that they deride Him. They therefore twisted a crown of thorns for Him and put it on His head instead of the crown of a king. They put on Him a purple robe as a king and in scorn they struck Him with their hands as they said, “Hail, King of the Jews!”

**Pilate then went out again,  
And said to them,  
“Behold, I am bringing Him out to you,  
That you may know that I find no fault in Him.” [4]**

Pilate brought Him out to the Jewish leaders and the tumultuous crowds to show them that their accusation against Him, that He wanted to be king, was some kind of illusion. For here He was before them, His flesh torn with scourging and He had become an absurd subject of scorn. Pilate hurt the Lord Jesus Christ even though he knew that He was innocent. Then he brought Him out to the accusers hoping that they might drop their case against Him. Pilate declared that according to the Roman law he “found no fault in Him” [4]. There was no fault at all in Him, he repeated (Jn 18: 38). Thus Pilate pronounced himself guilty because since there was no fault in Christ at all, why then did he scourge Him and give Him to the soldiers to abuse Him? Why did he bring Him out to His prosecutors and did not release Him immediately as justice decrees?

**Then Jesus came out,  
Wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.  
And Pilate said to them,**



### **“Behold the Man!” [5]**

By saying, “Behold the Man” Pilate may have wished to assert to the Jews that if they thought Christ wanted to be king and oppose Caesar, this was false. For now that they saw Him so weak and helpless, having no followers who might oppose authority, they should not fear Him.

By bringing Him out wearing the crown of thorns and with His head, face, and all His body covered with blood, to those who denounced Him, Pilate gave them the chance to insist on crucifying Him. For Pilate treated Him as a slave. He unjustly tortured Him because a slave had no right to defend himself. On the other hand, it was necessary to prove that a free man was guilty before tormenting him so cruelly.

The Lord came out to become a spectacle, in front of the people, carrying our reproach. This is why the apostle Paul later said, “Let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach” (Heb 13: 13).

His sight was so painful that Pilate said, “Behold the Man” without mentioning His name in some derision. That sight moved the heart of the man of wisdom almost a thousand years before. For he said, “Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousal, and in the day of the gladness of his heart” (Song of Solomon 3: 11).

Some believe that the words of Pilate, “Behold the Man” bear a secret meaning. The word ‘Adam’ in Hebrew means ‘man’ “Behold the Man” may thus mean ‘Here is Adam whom God created to be king and given him power over all creatures, but he has become miserable and has brought a curse upon himself and all creation. Thus the Second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, has taken the place of the first Adam to bring the royal heavenly life to those who have lost even their temporary peace. Instead of death that the first Adam brought, Christ became life giving (1 Cor 15: 22, 45). This is what Pilate said and unaware of the meaning of what he said!

Pilate faced the outburst of rage and hostility to Jesus by declaring His innocence. In so doing he became a witness across history. But Jesus did not utter a word. Pilate said, “Behold the Man.” He did not say, ‘Behold the culprit.’ As though he meant that according to him Christ was innocent of any guilt at all.

**Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him,  
They cried out, saying,  
“Crucify Him, crucify Him!”  
Pilate said to them,  
“You take Him and crucify Him,  
For I find no fault in Him.” [6]**

After hearing Pilate repeating that he did not find fault at all in Jesus, and after seeing Jesus’ body torn with scourging, His head and forehead pierced with thorns, and His face swollen with beating, the people could have asked for His release. But the chief priests and

officers quickly cried out saying, “Crucify Him, crucify Him.” Their envy and malice were so extreme that they did not accept Pilate’s judgment. They were not sorry for the Lord’s pain. They, instead, considered Him deserving death even if He was innocent. For in their opinion their safety and the peace of the city necessitated His crucifixion and removal.

The chief priests and their followers had come for one purpose, which is to stress the importance of Christ being crucified no matter what the price might be. They did not listen to anything Pilate said. But as they perceived his strong wish to release Him, they for the first time, said the words, “Crucify Him.” This was what the chief priests and officers said, disclosing what was in their hearts.

For the third time Pilate declares the innocence of the Lord and then he says to them, “You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him.” [6]. He knows very well that they cannot crucify Him. He says this only to rebuke them as though he says, ‘If your envy drives you to crucify Him, do not use me as an obedient means of that envy. I would then do evil against justice. My conscience is troubled. Act according to your envy if you can!’

\* Observe how the judge presented his defense in many ways to acquit the Lord of the accusations against Him. But nothing of all this shamed them. They insisted on fulfilling their aim. The statement, “You take Him and crucify Him” is an expression of one who wants to be innocent of committing a crime, and wants to force the Jews to do something illegal. For, they brought the Lord to him to decide on crucifying Him. But what happened was the opposite, for, the judge declared the innocence of the Lord and did not indict Him.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**The Jews answered him,  
‘We have a law,  
And according to our law He ought to die,  
Because He made Himself the Son of God.’” [7]**

The accusation that He opposed Caesar and the Roman authorities and stirred up the people proved false. So they charged Him with an offence which Pilate had no right to discuss. That accusation was that He had blasphemed and opposed the Jewish law. This was the business of the high priest and the Sanhedrin. Pilate and his men could not interfere in religious matters. The leaders accused the Lord of blasphemy and claiming He was divine, “because He made Himself the Son of God.” These religious men leaders understood from the Lord’s many speeches that by saying, “the Son of God”, He meant He was equal to God. They, therefore, accused Him of blasphemy.

The prosecutors presented their indictment, which is that He blasphemed and therefore deserved death (Lev 24: 16). They were proud of the law even when they broke it and sinned against God. He who makes his boast in the law, does he dishonor God through breaking the law? (Rom 2: 23). They broke the law and thought they honored it. They did not listen to the prophecy, “Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed” (Is 10: 1).

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<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, 84: 2.

\* Contemplate the accusation: “He made Himself the Son of God” [7]. Tell me is this an accusation that He who does the deeds of the Son of God calls Himself the Son of God? What then did Christ do? While they proceeded with one accusation after another, He continued His calm, thus fulfilling the words of the prophet, “He opens not His mouth. In humiliation His judgment was taken away” (Is 53: 7, 8 LXX).<sup>3</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid,...” [8]**

When he heard that the accused did not only claim to be king, but also that He was divine, Pilate was greatly troubled and afraid. The case became more difficult for him. He could calm the people concerning His claim to royalty, but Pilate could not appease the terror of the people if Jesus said He was divine. At the same time Pilate feared the personality of Jesus because he was unable to identify Him. Pilate was sure that the religious leaders hated Jesus, but how could he be sure that Jesus was truly the Son of God. Pilate was afraid of taking part with them in the crime of opposing the incarnate Son of God.

**‘...and went again into the Praetorium,  
And said to Jesus,  
‘Where are You from?  
But Jesus gave him no answer.” [9]**

Pilate asked the accused a question inside the Praetorium. That question revealed what went on in his mind, which is that the personality of Jesus was a puzzle. As though he asked, ‘What is Your secret origin? Who are You? Tell me.’ This was a question that was often addressed to the Lord. The Jews asked Him, “Who do You make Yourself out to be?” (Jn 8: 53). He answered the Jews that no one knows Him except He who is with Him all the time and is of the same essence. For He said, “If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me” (Jn 8: 54). The Jews were confused because He announced, “It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him” (Jn 8: 54-55).

As Pilate was troubled and afraid he asked the Lord Christ, “Where are You from?” [9] Pilate spoke to Him in the Praetorium, in the court away from the noise of the Jewish leaders and the people. Jesus had answered Pilate’s previous questions, but concerning this question, ‘Jesus gave him no answer’ (Jn 19: 9). Pilate asked for information about Jesus in relation to this world. But the answer to the question needs leaving this world to comprehend the eternal. For, Christ is not a mere prophet among prophets, nor just a teacher, a worker of signs and cures. Therefore, He was silent. Pilate had asked Jesus, “Are You the King of the Jews?” (Jn 18: 33) and again, “Are You a king then?” (18: 37). Jesus answered, “You say rightly that I am a king.” Now Pilate does not ask, ‘Who are You?’ or, “Are You the Son of God?” He asks, “Where are You from?” implying, ‘Are You a human being or celestial? Are You from beneath or from above? Pilate knew the town of the Lord- the man, and he was surely asking whether He was greater than man or not. It was not possible for him to ask this question directly, lest he should be accused of intruding in religious beliefs, and which the religious leaders only should decide.

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<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St. John, 84: 2.

The Lord said nothing, not because He could not, or because He did not care for Pilate's salvation, but because He wished to give Pilate a chance to think carefully. Earlier, He had answered saying, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn 18: 36). In that discourse He had made it clear to Pilate where He was from.

In the spirit of prophecy, Isaiah wondered at the Lord silence. Isaiah said in many passages, "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street" (Is 42: 2). "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opens not His mouth" (Is 53: 7).

\* Pilate was afraid when he heard the Jews saying, "He made Himself the Son of God" [7]. He was terrified lest what they said should be true and he should be violating the law. He therefore did not ask Jesus what He did, but trembling with fear, he began examining Jesus as a person. He asked, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer because He had already said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn 18: 36) and "For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth" (Jn 18: 37). Pilate should not have resisted what he heard.<sup>4</sup>

\* The apostle John says, "But Jesus gave him no answer." As the Lord was silent and gave Pilate no answer, He made it clear that He obediently came to His agony.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* He walked to judgment without opening His mouth. He was not like one with an evil mind convinced he had sinned. Rather in meekness He offered Himself a sacrifice for the sins of others.<sup>5</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**Then Pilate said to Him,  
"Are You not speaking to me?  
Do You not know that I have power to crucify You,  
And power to release You?" [10]**

Pilate boasted of having power and was angry because the Lord did not answer his question. Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?" Pilate exaggerated in showing his power because he thought that he was in control of the situation. He did not realize that on the one hand he had no right to crucify an innocent person, and release another person who should be crucified according to the Roman law. On the other hand, Pilate forgot that God Almighty is there and nothing happens without His permission.

We realize that the silence of our Lord Jesus was not because He refused to answer the question, but because Pilate could not understand the truth. Pilate therefore thought that he had

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<sup>4</sup> Homilies on St. John, 84: 2.

<sup>5</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 116: 4.

power to crucify or to release Him [10]. Jesus then answered that Pilate had what limited power allowed to him from above.

\* Do you see how Pilate condemned himself first. For, if he was in power, why did he not release Him when he found no fault in Him at all?

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Jesus answered,  
“You could have no power at all against Me,  
Unless it had been given you from above.  
Therefore, the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.” [11]**

Pilate may have expected that his words would give Jesus Christ a chance to speak to him so that he would release Him. But the Lord rebuked him for his pride, and for boasting of having power over justice, ignoring the role of God Almighty. The Lord Jesus Christ answered him so that He would remove his stupidity. As Solomon writes, “Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit” (Prov 26: 5). When Pilate used his power and unjustly scourged Him, the Lord Jesus was silent. However, when he proudly announced that he had power, Jesus scolded him so that he might know his limitations. Pilate forgot that “...he that is higher than the highest regards and there be Higher than they” (Ecc 5: 8). These are the last words that the Lord said to Pilate in this Gospel. Christ asked Pilate to know that every power a man on earth has is divinely given to him by heaven, not by Rome. God is truly Almighty and He, not the emperor or those that the emperor appoints as rulers and governors, has power over all human affairs.

Pilate had not experienced such moments as this- when he had to judge a person whom some considered the Son of God and the King of Israel. He thought he was in control of the destiny of this person. But the Lord made it clear to him that he was only a tool in God’s hands, and that he could have done nothing without permission from God (Acts 4: 27-28). Still the Lord gave him some excuse when He compared his sin to that of those who delivered Him to be judged. However, this does not justify Pilate, nor does it relieve him of his responsibility. The responsibility of those who delivered Him is greater because they had read the Scriptures, and had heard the prophecies that were fulfilled in Him, and had also seen the miracles He had performed and the divine power He had.

Some observe that here the Lord Jesus Christ was referring to Judas, the disciple who betrayed and delivered Him. But it is obvious that He did not mean Judas alone when He mentioned the one who delivered Him. He meant the entire Jewish nation and the chief priests. As Pilate had said before, “Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me” (Jn 18: 35). Indeed, Pilate did not find in Jesus Christ fault for which He should die. Judas, on the other hand, was a disciple and friend of Jesus and was given many blessings and possibilities to work for the heavenly kingdom. Pilate deviated from justice, but did not accept a bribe like Judas. Pilate was wrong in not insisting on releasing the innocent, but he was not envious and full of hatred and hostility like the Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus Christ.

What does the Lord mean by sin here? According to John the Evangelist, He meant “not knowing God” as seen in Jesus Christ.

\* The Lord destroyed Pilate's pride and arrogance. For He said to him, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above." He made it clear that this event is unlike many other incidents, for what was happening was done in a mysterious way.<sup>6</sup>

\* When you hear the words of the Lord Jesus Christ to Pilate, "...unless it had been given you from above", do not think that Pilate is innocent of transgression. The Lord said, "...the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin"; this shows that Pilate sinned.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* When He did not answer, He was silent like a lamb; and when He answered, He taught us as a Shepherd. Therefore, may we learn the lesson as the Apostle also says, "...there is no authority except from God" (Rom 13: 1). He who delivers an innocent man to the ruler to kill him is more sinful than he who has power to kill for fear of a higher authority.<sup>7</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**From then on Pilate sought to release Him,  
But the Jews cried out, saying,  
'If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend.  
Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.'" [12]**

The words of the Lord Jesus Christ did not cause Pilate to defend his power, but on the contrary they made him more earnest in wanting to prove the Lord's innocence and release Him. This is evident in the uprising of the Jews and their screams as they accuse Pilate himself of not being Caesar's friend if he neglected punishing the Man who opposes Caesar. Pilate then would lose his position if he did not perform his duty.

Christ's enemies found the means by which they could put more pressure on Pilate when they accused him of negligence in punishing a rebel. For, the Roman law respected the right and customs of the people they governed within their community. Moreover, the Roman law was extremely cruel and had no pity in crushing rebellion. Therefore, Pilate was in danger if the multitude persisted in complaining that he was lenient towards the accused.

Pilate feared their protest against him before Tiberius Caesar, for he was known as the most passionate emperor. Tiberius listened to remonstrations against many men and he did not trust those who served him. Pilate was willing to free Jesus, but he was not ready to face an accusation that he failed in his duty as a friend of Caesar. He could not get into trouble with Rome at any price.

\* When the Jews could not find in their law an accusation against the Lord, they slyly turned to laws outside their own laws. For they said, "Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar." Now I ask the Jews, "How did the Lord Jesus Christ appear to be a rebel and usurper? How can you prove this? Please, explain! Was He wearing a crown? Did He look like a usurper?"

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<sup>6</sup> Homilies on St. John, 84: 2.

<sup>7</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 116: 5.

Did He have soldiers? He walked with twelve disciples. He was simple in the food He ate, the clothes He wore, and the place where He slept!”<sup>8</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**When Pilate therefore heard that saying,  
He brought Jesus out  
And sat down in the judgment seat  
In a place that is called the Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha.” [13]**

The Pavement here was like a stone pavement usually in the open air. This was where the judgment seat was on which governors and rulers sat to judge. It was paved with blue, white, and black stones and marble. That place was called **Gabbatha** in Hebrew. The name is derived from ‘gaba’, which means ‘high’ because where the judge sat was usually high so that everybody could see the judge, follow the procedure, and hear the verdict. The judge stepped up on marble steps to the seat. The Pavement may be the name given to those steps. Some say that the word, ‘Gabbatha’ means a closed place because there was a wall surrounding it, made to prevent anyone from attacking the accused during the trial surrounded it. Others think that the place was confined to the trial of criminals who were dangerous to the state.

The verdict was about to be announced because the governor sat down in the official judgment seat, or ‘curule’, an ivory seat for Roman judges and their representatives.

**Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover,  
And about the sixth hour.  
And he said to the Jews,  
“Behold your King!” [14]**

The Evangelist first describes the place of judgment then specifies the time. That was about the sixth hour, meaning at noon, on the Preparation Day of the Passover, the days of unleavened bread (Luke 23: 54) and the Jews were preparing for the Passover Sabbath. This timing augments the guilt of those who crucified Him, for they did not wait until after the feast. This shows their bitter hatred and their haste in achieving their aim. They removed the old yeast from every house, but they did not remove their old nature from their hearts, minds and conduct.

That was between the third and the sixth hour, because He was on the Cross at exactly the sixth hour.

Mark the Evangelist writes that it was the third hour when they crucified the Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 15: 25). He considered the scourging as the beginning, but John the Evangelist said it was the sixth hour when Christ was actually on the Cross.

Some writers believe that the sixth hour here is according to the Roman time that considers midnight as the beginning of a new day. The other Evangelists, however, used the Jewish time that marked the day as beginning and ending at sunset. So, the sixth hour in the morning was when the sentence was pronounced and the actual procedure of the crucifixion

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<sup>8</sup> Homilies on St. John, 84: 2.

began. In some manuscripts and writings of the Fathers, the hour was the third, not the sixth hour.

As the Jews turned their accusation against Pilate, he angrily ridiculed them saying to them, “Behold your King!” [14] He meant, ‘If you strongly seek to crucify Him, you hurt yourselves for He is your King.’ This arrow was his last attempt at saving the Lord Christ from crucifixion.

\* Pilate delivered the Lord Jesus Christ up to the Jews thinking they would pity Him. The proof that this was his aim is that he said to them, “Behold your King!”

**Saint John Chrysostom**

Deriding the Jews, Pilate announced, “Behold your King!” The Lord was at that moment probably crowned with thorns and wearing the purple or scarlet robe. Pilate did not realize that Christ was truly not only the King of the Jews, but was also the King of the entire world. In Him the prophecies were fulfilled that He was the Lord Jesus Christ. In the past, Gideon had refused to be king over Israel and looked forward to the Lord Himself to be the true King (Judges 8: 23). When the people asked Samuel the prophet to name a king for them like all the nations, God said to Samuel that the people did not reject him but rejected the Lord Himself to be their King (1 Samuel 8: 5, 7). Men of the Old Testament expected the fulfillment of the divine promise, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth, for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron’ (Ps 2: 7-9).

It would have been proper for Pilate to announce to the entire world, ‘Behold your King who cares for the souls and raises them in His eternal kingdom of heaven.’

The Lord Jesus Christ came as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1: 29). He is the Lover of mankind, but He cannot bear to see their sins. He takes away their sins so that they may come to the Father carrying His righteousness. But here we see men not tolerating their Savior. They want to stop seeing Him. The wicked cannot endure God's love and cannot even behold Him!

**But they cried out, “Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!”**

**Pilate said to them,**

**“Shall I crucify your King?”**

**The chief priests answered,**

**“We have no king but Caesar!” [15]**

They cried out more that they could not bear His sight, “Away with Him, away with Him!” [15] They refused to be related to Him or have any relationship with Him. They had no king but Caesar. Isaiah the prophet looked at Him and said, “...whom the nation abhors” (Is 49: 7). He also said, “He has no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not” (Is 53: 2-3).



Capital punishment by crucifixion was known in the past in and out of the Roman Empire. The ancient world looked at crucifixion as the most horrible manner of death because it was a shame and a curse. Ancient writers avoided describing crucifixion in details. Cicero wrote that crucifixion was “the most cruel and disgusting punishment” and Josephus said it was the meanest method of execution. The Roman philosopher, Seneca, explained that crucifixion was a slow and extremely painful death and wondered if anyone wanted willingly to die in this manner. He said, “Is it possible that a person would prefer to waste time in enduring the painful death of his organs one after the other and let his life end drop by drop instead of giving up his spirit at once? Does anyone wish to be nailed to the cross, a curse for a long time, disfigured, his body swollen because of his shoulder and chest wounds, and breathe while suffering extended bitter pain? Indeed, he would find many reasons to prefer death before crucifixion.”<sup>9</sup>

The Roman citizen was rarely condemned to be crucified. This punishment was used to deter slaves from rebellion and force them to accept humiliation and distress. As they stood against the Lord, the Jews did not want freedom; they did not want to be saved; they only hoped to get rid of Jesus. Thus, they became Caesar’s slaves. They lost their feeling that they were under Roman rule. The Jews, especially their leaders, hated Caesar and his representatives, but because of their hostility to the Lord they thought that loyalty and subjugation to Caesar was a better choice. They were ready to be under the rule of any tyrant representing Caesar. They would willingly obey him if that resulted in the removal of the Lord Christ.

The answer of the chief priests implied their fear that their priesthood institution would come to an end. They accepted Caesar as their only king and they forgot God’s Kingdom.

\* Observe the Lord carefully in His trial. He allowed soldiers to drive Him. Pilate sat down to judge Him. He who sits at the right hand of the Father stands before the judge! The people He saved from Egypt were now crying out, “Away with Him! Crucify Him!” Why, O Jews? Is it because He healed the blind among you? Or is it because He made the lame walk and gave blessings to many? The prophet is amazed and says, “...against whom make ye a wide mouth, and draw out the tongue?” (Is 57: 4). The Lord Himself says in prophecies, “Mine heritage is unto Me as a lion in the forest; it crieth out against Me: therefore have I hated it” (Jeremiah 12: 8). I did not reject them but they rejected Me, therefore I say, “I have forsaken My house” (Jer 12: 7).<sup>10</sup>

### **Saint Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* They forced him saying, “Crucify Him.” Why did they strive to kill Him by this method? It is a shameful death! They feared lest in the future He would be remembered and therefore they condemned Him with a curse. They did not know that the Truth is glorified in all impediments. To prove that this was their fear, listen to what they said, “...we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise’” (Matt 27: 63). Therefore they stirred up all the people to turn the matter upside down to destroy further threats. The leaders corrupted the confused people who then cried out repeatedly, “Crucify Him!”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Hengel: Crucifixion. London 1977, pp. 30-31; Leon Morris, p. 655.

<sup>10</sup> Article 13: 15.

<sup>11</sup> Homilies on St. John, 84: 2.

\* “We have no king but Caesar”: they willingly submit themselves to punishment. God therefore gave them up, because as children they expelled themselves from His care and great guidance. As with one voice they glorified that foreign power, He permitted them to fall, as they required.<sup>12</sup>

\* Here they came down from Christ’s Kingdom and claimed for themselves Caesar’s kingdom.<sup>13</sup>  
**Saint John Chrysostom**

## **2 – The Crucifixion**

**Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified.  
So they took Jesus and led Him away.” [16]**

As he did not fear God but feared men, Pilate signed the condemnation to crucifixion and delivered Jesus to those who should crucify Him. He who testified several times that Christ was innocent, finally dictated His punishment as a criminal. Pilate washed his hands (Matt 27: 24) to announce that he was innocent of that judgment. However, washing his hands will not make him innocent before God. To save time, the Jewish leaders went with the executors of judgment. They were afraid that Pilate would change his edict, for they saw him from time to time proclaiming the Lord’s innocence. Moreover, they feared the multitude might reconsider when they remembered the wonderful works of the Lord Jesus Christ and the testimony of Pontius Pilate that Christ was innocent. The multitude would then turn against the wish of the chief priests. This is how the adversary stirs up his followers to take every chance to hasten the destruction of faith in the Lord in the life of every believer so that he should not enjoy it.

In their opinion, the leaders felt that they were successful in their plot and that the victim had fallen into their trap. They took the lamb to be slaughtered and did not comprehend that the prophets foretold what happened as God’s redemptive plan.

\* As Pilate heard them he quite foolishly delivered Him up to them. He should have ascertained that Christ aimed at obtaining royal authority. But he, out of fear only, pronounced his judgment. Christ had already said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” But Pilate was totally involved in temporary matters and did not rule, as he should. His wife’s dream was enough to terrify him, but nothing made him act well because he did not contemplate heaven, but he delivered Christ.

Now they gave Him, as an evildoer, the cross to carry. They hated the cross and refused to touch the wood. That was the condition of the symbol, Isaac, when he carried the wood. But at that time, what should happen depended on the father’s decision because it was a symbol. But here the reality was accomplished practically.<sup>14</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

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<sup>12</sup> Hom. 84. PG 59: 501.

<sup>13</sup> Hom. 85. PG 59: 503.

<sup>14</sup> Homilies on St. John, 85: 1.

**And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull,  
Which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha.” [17]**

As part of His suffering, He actually carried the cross. The slender, sensitive body carried the heavy cross. He carried it alone at first. Then He could not because of His weak body, the wounds caused by the scourging, the crown of thorns, and the slapping of His face. Therefore, Simon of Cyrene helped Him carry the cross (Matt 27: 32). As Isaac carried the wood of the burnt offering on his way to become a burnt sacrifice, similarly Christ carried the wood of the cross. As the prophet says, “...the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Is 53: 6). Saint Peter says, “who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness” (1 Pet 2: 24).

They brought Him to the place of execution outside the city, to a place called Golgotha. Origen the Scholar referred to a tradition that said that this was the place where Adam was buried. There, where death defeated the first Adam and changed him into dust, Christ, the Second Adam died to vanquish death and give life back to Adam and his descendants. That place was on Mount Moriah where Abraham was about to offer his son, Isaac, as a burnt offering but God sent him a ram to offer instead of Isaac. Some writers believe that the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified on a hill that looked like a skull.

\* Some say that Adam died and was buried there and that Jesus achieved victory at the same place where death ruled. Christ went carrying the cross and triumphed over death. His cross was a symbol of victory, though the Jews intended something else.<sup>15</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* He bore our pains and accepted suffering on the cross. He took our flesh and if He had not suffered He would not have shared our human life. He first suffered then descended. But what were those sufferings that He endured for our sake? Those were the sufferings of love!<sup>16</sup>

**Origen the Scholar**

**Where they crucified Him,  
And two others with Him, one on either side,  
And Jesus in the center. [18]**

Two others were crucified with Him, one on either side. This was probably not the time for them to be crucified; but the chief priests insisted they should be crucified as an insult for Him to be crucified with criminals. This may be why the two thieves reviled and abused Him because His crucifixion hastened theirs so that they may be crucified with Him. The high priest did not demand that two of His disciples should be crucified with Him. That might have been considered an honor that they were crucified for the sake of the truth and that the disciples shared His suffering. The high priest instead insisted that two criminals must be crucified with Him. Those two might have belonged to the group of Barabbas the thief.

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<sup>15</sup> Hom. 85. PG 59: 504.

<sup>16</sup> Homilia 6 in Ezechielem 6 PG 13: 714 D.

The Jewish leaders wanted to declare that He was the most evil of the three because they crucified Him in the center. Yet, they did not realize that by doing this the prophecy was fulfilled that He was numbered with the transgressors.

\* If you ask, ‘What was the aim of the Jews that they crucified Him, and two others with Him? I would answer, ‘By doing this they unwillingly fulfilled the prophecy. For, Isaiah the prophet mentioned this long ago when he said, “And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death” (Is 53: 9). Satan wanted to conceal what happened but he could not. For, the three were crucified but only Jesus was glorious so that you know that His power is above all.’

There were signs when the three were crucified, but nobody referred the miracles to any of those two, but only to Jesus alone. Satan’s plan failed totally and instead, one of the two thieves was saved. He did not dishonor the cross, but he increased that honor to a great degree. For, the rebirth of a thief on the cross and his admission into Paradise is not less than the trembling of the rocks.<sup>17</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

### **3 – The Title Put on the Cross**

**Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross.  
And the writing was:  
‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.’ [19]**

St John calls the writing on the cross ‘a title’, ‘titlos.’ Matthew calls it ‘the accusation’, ‘citiei’, while Mark and Luke describe it as an inscription ‘apigraphe.’ John the Evangelist often points out the importance of the cross in the life of Jesus Christ. Thus, in chapter three, when Jesus met Nicodemus at night He said, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up” (Jn 3: 14). Again, in His speech to the Jews the Lord says, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He” (Jn 8: 28). And to the Greeks He says, “And I if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”

The Evangelist elevates our minds so that we may see the exaltation and glory we received through the Crucified. In Him we see our Christ glorified in and with His Father. We now have the right to go to the Father’s bosom. The essence of the cross is that He is lifted up on it to draw all peoples to Himself so that they may live at a more sublime level on earth.

The Apostle Paul sees God’s love in the form of a Cross, drawn on humanity. For, he speaks of the width and length and depth and height of the love of God (Eph 3: 18). The measures of the cross seem to be the acquaintance with the secret of divine love.

In eastern tradition the Cross is celebrated as a living person. It is seen as Jesus crucified requesting the heights, separating darkness from light, and ignorance from knowledge. As it became a sign of judgment, it distinguishes between those who yearn for the eternal light and those who are pleased with darkness.

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<sup>17</sup> Homilies on St. John, 85: 1.

The meaning of the Cross is that one is lifted up beyond this world. It means that a person is open to the eternal world and regains partaking of the enlightenment so that he may go to God and let Him enter his life.

The use of the words ‘up’ and ‘down’ is significant in the Gospel according to St. John as he talks about the person and work of the Crucified. Though this Evangelist does not write about the Last Supper, yet he records at great length the speech of the Lord about the Eucharist (Jn 6: 32-40). Christ affirms that He is the bread that comes down from heaven, or from above. Also the Lord’s speech about baptism, which is immersion, draws our hearts to birth from above to see, through the Cross, the depth of the love of God our Father (Jn 3: 3-8).

In short, in the Cross, we are not of the world even though we are in the world (Jn 7: 6, 14, 16, 18). We are from above. We become partners of Christ who is risen from the dead and whom Mary Magdalene did not recognize until He called her by name. She and the disciples whom the Lord Jesus Christ accompanied as they were traveling to Emmaus thought He was a stranger.

\* Christ is the King of the Jews whose circumcision is that of the heart in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God (Rom 2: 29). They are those related to the free Jerusalem, our eternal mother in heaven, the spiritual Sarah who cast out of the free house the bondwoman and her children (Gal 4: 22-31). Therefore what Pilate wrote was written because the Lord said His word.<sup>18</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* In this way, Pilate combined two aims: his revenge of the Jews and his apology to the Lord Christ. For, when they defamed the Lord Jesus Christ by crucifying two thieves with Him, Pilate silenced them, and all who would blame the Lord, and made it clear that they rebelled against their King. In this way he took revenge of the Jews. As for his apology to the Lord, he expressed it by putting the writing on a board announcing clearly, though not completely, the Lord’s victory and the foundation of His kingdom. This board was similar to the sign given to the victorious conqueror.<sup>19</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* he enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ testified that He is the King, King of Israel, for they wrote over His head on the Cross, ‘This is Jesus the King of the Jews’ (Matt 27: 37). We accept this testimony even though it may be understood that His power and divinity are limited to the children of Israel. The title written on the cross testifies of Christ’s divinity not only to the Jews but also to all the people. He is King over the entire earth and rules over all its parts.<sup>20</sup>

**Gregory of Nyssa**

**Then many of the Jews read this title,  
For the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city;  
And it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.” [20]**

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<sup>18</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 117: 5.

<sup>19</sup> Homilies on St. John, 85: 1.

<sup>20</sup> Song of Solomon by St. Gregory of Nyssa, translated into Arabic by Dr. George Nawar, sermon 7.

This title was written in three languages that were prevalent at that time. Hebrew, which is the language of the Law, Greek, the language of philosophers, and Latin, the language of the rulers. For, the Lord was crucified to be King over all.

\* Even in His crucifixion, the chief priests envied the Lord Christ. I say to them, ‘this title does not harm you because if the Lord Jesus Christ was dead and weak and His name would be forgotten, why should you be afraid of what is written, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”?’ [19]

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate,  
“Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’  
but, ‘He said, I am the King of the Jews.’ [21]**

Crucifixion was not enough to satisfy their thirst for revenge. So they put pressure on Pilate to change the title and write, ‘He said, ‘I am the King of the Jews’ [21] but Pilate refused to do as they wished. They had already pushed him enough, and he could not do more. They wanted to declare that the Lord was a usurper of honor and authority and that they were loyal to Caesar; yet they were in submission to a foreign ruler and secretly wanted a Jewish ruler having full authority. They did not understand that their Ruler will “be cut off” (Daniel 9: 26).

**Pilate answered,  
“What I have written, I have written.” [22]**

The Roman law forbade the change of the wording of the sentence once it is announced. It seems that Pilate unwillingly prophesied that this was the Messiah who will alone rule over the hearts. This prophecy is in Psalm 18: 22 written about a thousand years before the Crucifixion.

#### **4 – Distribution of His Garments**

**Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus,  
Took His garments and made four parts,  
To each soldier a part, and also the tunic.  
Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece.” [23]**

He carried our sins. He also did not refuse to be naked on the Cross, so that we may see our own nakedness and pray that we put on the Lord Jesus Christ, our righteousness.

It was an almost worldwide custom that the belongings of those who were condemned to death went to the executors of the sentence. Saint John the Evangelist presents to us the extremely few belongings of the Lord. These were His garments cast on the ground. The four soldiers who carried out the verdict distributed His garments among themselves. The seamless tunic remained. It was woven from the top in one piece. They cast lots for it so that they may not tear it. He became as though He did not own anything, not even the tunic that was like a second skin. His garments were on the ground belonging to nobody because the condemned to death had no say or right even to His own clothes. A man’s clothes in Israel at that time

consisted of an outside robe, an under robe, a head cover, a belt, sandals and underwear. However, there were no sandals among Christ's belongings.

The Jewish Philon of Alexandria writes that the tunic of the high priest in the temple in Jerusalem was always seamless and woven from the top in one piece. This was a ritual obligation. Some commentators say that this symbolized the priesthood of Christ. Some say that Christ's tunic was similar to that of the high priest. The Jewish historian Josephus describes it as without seam, one piece on the shoulders and sides. It was long and had an opening for the neck and two for the arms.<sup>21</sup> It has been reported that Christ's mother made that tunic for Him when He was a child. Like the clothes of the people of Israel in the wilderness, Christ's tunic was not torn, nor became old.

\* I think that John the Evangelist wrote this to reveal the common simplicity of the garments.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Origen the Scholar** observes that this tunic is symbolic of the perfect doctrine of Christ that must be preserved without a tear or division in parts. Saint Cyril the Great says it symbolizes the birth of Christ of a virgin, for she remained a virgin after His birth. But Saint Cyprian, who groaned because of the schism in the Church in North Africa, considers that the tunic without seam refers to the truly united Church that is never torn or mended.

**Saint Augustine** wrote in a letter to the Donatists, "Why do you want to divide the Lord's garments. Why do you not keep the tunic of love in the world whole, woven from the top. That tunic that even His oppressors did not tear?"<sup>22</sup>

**Father Theodore of Mopsuestia** believes that this type of clothes was common at the time of the Lord Christ, though by then, soldiers only wore it.

\* The garments were distributed for our sake. Nobody can have everything when the lots are cast. For the distribution of the Holy Spirit is not according to a man's will. For, "...there are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit...But one and the same Spirit works all those things, distributing to each one individually as He wills," (1 Cor 12: 4, 11). Thus was the distribution of His garments, His works, and His blessings.

We read that the tunic was "woven from the top in one piece." The belief in Christ is woven in the same manner: for He came down to humanity since He was born of God before all ages and He accepted the flesh.

The statement, "the tunic was without seam" also refers to faith, for faith must not be torn. It must remain whole.<sup>23</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* The garments of the Lord Jesus Christ that were "made four parts" stand for the cardinal Church that spreads over the entire world. For, the world consists of four equal harmonious parts

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<sup>21</sup> Antiq. B3c.7.s.4.

<sup>22</sup> Letters, 76.

<sup>23</sup> Exposition 10: 116, 119, 120.

in four regions. For this reason, He says that He will send His angels and they will gather together His elect from the four winds (Matt 24: 31). Those are the four cardinal points of the world: the east, the west, the north and the south.<sup>24</sup>

\* The tunic, for which they cast lots, refers to the unity of all the parts bound by love. When the Apostle wishes to speak about love he says, “I show you a more excellent way” (1 Cor 12: 31). He says again, “...to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge” and in another Epistle he writes, “But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (Col 3: 14). If love is a more excellent way, if it passes knowledge and is above all things, then the tunic that represents love must be woven from the top and must be without seam.<sup>25</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“They said therefore among themselves,  
‘Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be,’  
That the Scripture might be fulfilled which says:  
‘They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.’  
Therefore the soldiers did these things.” [24]**

\* Contemplate the prophecies that were fulfilled in the discussion of the soldiers. The crucified were three, but the prophecies were fulfilled in the Lord Christ. Why did not the soldiers do the same with the clothes of the other two crucified, and they did this with Christ alone? Observe the accuracy of the prophecy because the prophet David did not only say, “they divided My garments”, but he also mentioned what they did not divide. For they divided some garments, but His tunic they did not tear, but cast lots for it for one person to have it.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Saint Jerome** writes the Eustoichim about the life of virginity and the proper conduct of virgins. He observes that such virgins imitate the Lord Jesus Christ who had a tunic woven from the top, heavenly. May the married sew for themselves garments because they lost the robe woven from the top.

In the same letter, he asks the virgins not to wear shoes. He writes, “Moses and Joshua had orders to take off their shoes because the land they stood on was holy (Ex 3: 5; Joshua 5: 15). That command had a secret meaning. Likewise when the disciples were appointed to preach, they were asked not take with them sandals or shoes (Matt 10: 10). When the soldiers began to cast lots for the clothes of Jesus, they did not find shoes to take because it was not possible for the Lord to have shoes when He prohibited His servants to have them.”<sup>26</sup>

## **5 – His Care for His Mother**

**Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother,  
And His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas,  
And Mary Magdalene.” [25]**

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<sup>24</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 118: 4.

<sup>25</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 118: 4.

<sup>26</sup> Letters 22: 19.



In Matthew 27: 56, and in Mark 15: 40, it is written that Mary the wife of Clopas is the mother of James the Less and of Joses and that her son James is the son of Alphaeus. It seems that Clopas and Alphaeus are two names for the same person. Hegesippus quotes Eusebius<sup>27</sup> saying that Clopas was the brother of Joseph, Saint Mary's betrothed.

While all the disciples, except John, had run away, the women (His mother, her sister, and Mary Magdalene) remained with Him by the cross. The women were not afraid of the cruelty of the wicked or the horror of the spectacle. Indeed, they could do nothing, but they showed their loyalty to the end. They accompanied Him on the way of salvation, which He walked, and in which the prophecy of Simeon the Elder was fulfilled. He said to Mary, "a sword will pierce through your own soul" (Luke 2: 35). Though they were extremely sad, they did not behave inappropriately as was the custom of women at funerals at that time. They accompanied the Lord because they were loyal and loved Him. Truly, that was God's great blessing that supported those women, especially His mother.

While four soldiers executed violently and cruelly the sentence of crucifixion, in contrast, four women stood with Christ during His suffering.

\* The women stood by the Cross. The weak sex showed more manliness and everything changed definitely.<sup>28</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**When Jesus therefore saw His mother,  
And the disciple whom He loved standing by,  
He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" [26]**

At that moment, Saint Mary's heart was certainly totally absorbed by her Son's agony. As for Him, His pain did not distract Him, for it was the fruit of His great love for His mother and for all humanity. He was involved in the redemption, the growth, and glorification of everybody. In a last sign of kindness to His mother, He wanted to secure care and help for her after His departure. He therefore gave her to whom He loved and was closest to Him out of all the disciples. Joseph the carpenter had certainly died years before. There was no one to care for Saint Mary. The Lord therefore, while on the Cross, gave her to Saint John the beloved as his mother, and gave to her Saint John as her son. By this, John obtained a new relation; he became the son of the mother of Jesus, the Lord of Glory.

He left nothing for His mother since He had neither gold nor silver that she might inherit. The money box was for all the disciples and Judas who had it had probably squandered it. The soldiers took His clothes and Jesus had nothing to give His mother but to entrust her to whom He loved, John the apostle!

Through the Cross, His mother enjoyed the motherhood of the others after her only Son, Jesus, was lifted on the cross. He did not say to her, 'Mother' but said 'Woman.' This was no

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<sup>27</sup> H.E.1:3:11.

<sup>28</sup> Hom. 85. PG. 59: 506.

contempt or rejection of her motherhood, but rather not to increase her pain as a mother hearing her Son speaking in His last moments before His death. He may have desired to assert to her that He was not of this world. He therefore spoke to her, not in terms of mere blood relationship, but as she being a representative of the Church that He loved exceedingly.

**Nicephoros**<sup>29</sup> says that the Virgin Mary lived eleven years in the house of John in Jerusalem. Some say that she went with him to Ephesus.

\* I would like you to meditate on the fact that the Lord did everything without confusion while He was on the Cross. He spoke to His disciples about His mother. He fulfilled the prophecies: He gave good hope to the thief. Yet, although He willingly accepted crucifixion, He broke into a sweat; He suffered and was troubled. What does this mean? It is not difficult to understand it. Before His crucifixion He showed the weakness of human nature, but here He revealed the greatness of His power.

Besides, He teaches us that before the terrible things happen, we are troubled yet cannot prevent them. But after the battle begins, we find things are possible and easy. Therefore, may we not fear death. Naturally our spirits love life, but it happens that the bonds of nature become loose and our desire for temporary life becomes weak.<sup>30</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* That disciple gained a hundred times more than he gave when he received the mother of Him who grants everything.<sup>31</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**Then He said to the disciple, “Behold your mother!”**

**And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home. [27]**

\* On the cross, Christ saw and divided the acts of piety between His mother and His disciple. The Lord testified not only on the general level, but also on the individual level. John referred to that testimony and gave witness to the greatness of this commandment.<sup>32</sup>

\* His mother stood and disregarded the danger that surrounded her. She did that because of her zeal for piety. He disdained the dangers and gave His mother a pure devout Son. This passage teaches us to practice actual kindness. It also teaches children to respect their mothers. He declared that she who gave birth to God remained a virgin. Still, she was delivered in a secret manner to John, the youngest of the disciples. Here is the mystery of the Church. For, the Church at first was related in appearance, not practically, to the old nation. But she gave birth to the Word that was planted in the bodies and minds of men, through faith in the cross, and the burial of the Lord’s body according to God’s commandment. She then chose to adhere to the younger group.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Eccv. His. Lib 2, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Homilies on St. John, 85: 1.

<sup>31</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 119: 3.

<sup>32</sup> Letter, 63: 109.

<sup>33</sup> Exposition 10: 129, 132, 134.

## **Saint Ambrose**

\* How wonderful that honor was that the Lord Christ gave to His disciple! How abundant that honor was because when He departed at that time He gave her to His disciple, That disciple cared for her and as she needed help the Lord entrusted her to His beloved disciple.

\* He teaches us to give unusual respect to our mothers. When our parents oppose us concerning spiritual concerns we must not cling to what is ours. Although they do not know us fully, we must offer them respect and prefer them to others because they are our parents who brought us up and endured terrible things for our sakes.<sup>34</sup>

## **Saint John Chrysostom**

\* The Holy Bible teaches us that not only the biological father is called father, but also others may be called 'father.' Listen to what the Apostle says, "For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel" (1 Cor 4: 15). Paul was father to the Corinthians, not according to the flesh but through teaching. And he begot them again through the Spirit.

Listen also to Job who says, "I am father to the poor." He calls himself father not because he begot them all, but because he cared for them.

The Only Begotten Son of God Himself when He was nailed to the tree at the crucifixion, He looked at His mother in the flesh and at John, the most beloved of His disciples, and said, "Behold your mother!" He said to His mother, "Behold your son." He declared she should pour her 'parental' love in John<sup>35</sup> In this manner He indirectly explained Luke's words, "and His father and mother marveled at Him", these are the words that the heretics quote saying that He was born of a man and a woman.

Just as Mary was called a mother of John because of her 'parental' love, not because she gave birth to him, likewise Joseph was a father of Christ because he cared for Him and brought Him up, not because he begot Him. For, the Gospel says, "...and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son (Matt 1: 25).<sup>36</sup>

## **Saint Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* He is the virgin son who accepted the Virgin Mother an inheritance from the Lord.<sup>37</sup>

## **Saint Jerome**

## **6 – They Offer Him Vinegar**

**After this Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished,  
That the Scripture might be fulfilled, said,  
"I thirst." [28]**

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<sup>34</sup> Hom 85. PG 59: 506.

<sup>35</sup> The Greek word is used about the love that the mother or father has for the son, or that the son has for his parents.

<sup>36</sup> Article 7: 9.

<sup>37</sup> Letter 127: 6.

The Evangelist mentioned previously, in his account of the Lord's encounter with the Samaritan woman, that the Lord was thirsty and that also was at the sixth hour. Some say that it was at that hour, noontime, that Adam went out of Paradise. God, thus, shows His great love of mankind and His thirst for humanity to return to His divine bosom.

During His service, the Lord Jesus Christ declared to the Samaritan woman that He was thirsty (Jn 4: 6-7) for He asked for her belief. At the end of His journey and on the Cross, He declared that He was thirsty for mankind to enjoy His redemptive work. We read that the flames of hell caused the rich man to feel thirsty and beg for a drop of water to wet his tongue. Our Christ, having taken our place, declared that He was thirsty so that we may drink of the fountains of His love.

It was natural that the Crucified felt thirsty because his body lost a lot of water because of perspiration and the wounds. Our Christ did not complain of pain of the flesh because of the crown of thorns, the nails, and the spear. The only complaint that He uttered was that He was thirsty. Here He expressed His inward thirst in addition to His physical pain. The Psalmist David foretold this in the Psalm about the Crucifixion. He said, "My tongue clings to My jaws" (Ps 22: 15) and also in Psalm 69: 21. The synoptic Evangelists do not mention the Lord's thirst. John the Evangelist alone records it.

**Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there;  
And they filled a sponge with sour wine,  
Put it on hyssop,  
And put it to His mouth. [29]**

Some writers are inclined to think that this was to intensify His pain, but this was unnecessary because He was dying. It was usual to give the crucified a cup of wine to reduce his pain in his last moments. But in the case of the Lord they frivolously gave Him a sponge filled with sour wine or vinegar. Other commentators say the exact opposite. For, those who investigated the truth found proof that for a long time the Roman soldiers in the hot climate countries were given a special drink called 'Pouska.' That was a mixture of water and vinegar that would quench their thirst.

Some people ask how can a sponge filled with vinegar be put on hyssop, which is a weak plant, and raised to the mouth of the crucified. They thought that the word 'hyssop' meant 'a stalk' because in Greek the word has those two meanings. The word 'stalk' appears in an eleventh century version. However, most researchers reject this meaning because 'hyssop' appears in all the former manuscripts and the manuscripts of the early Church Fathers.

**Raymond E. Brown** says that there are eighteen plants that are called hyssop. There are also several kinds that have a long stalk that can lift a sponge to reach the mouth of a crucified man.<sup>38</sup>

The Lord Jesus Christ refused to drink wine before He was crucified (Matt 27: 34; Mark 15: 23). That was the wine that would have relieved His pain.

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<sup>38</sup> Leon Morris, p. 668.

\* Who has such authority to shape what such a “Man” did to arrange everything concerning His suffering? But this Man is the mediator between God and men. The Man about whom we read in the prophecy...Who knows Him? He is He who revealed Himself bearing all those pains. He is Himself hidden, for He is God who prepared all the suffering.

He saw everything that would happen and requested that it should be fulfilled. He therefore accepted to drink vinegar: ‘And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink’ (Ps 69: 21)<sup>39</sup>.

\* He said, “I thirst” [28] as though He said, ‘One thing you have failed to do, that was to give Me what you are.’ For the Jews were themselves, vinegar was extracted from the wine of the Father patriarchs and prophets. They were like a vessel full of the evil of this world. Their hearts were like sponges, for they were deceitful and in their depth were irregular pores. As for the hyssop on which they put the sponge filled with sour wine, that is a weak herb that cleans the heart and fits the humility of Christ whom they encompassed and thought they had absolutely trapped. It is therefore said in the Psalm, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean” (Ps 51: 7). For Christ’s humility purifies us, because if He had not humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Phil 2: 8), His blood would not have been shed for the remission of sins; in other words for our purification.<sup>40</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

## **7 – He Gives up His Spirit**

**So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said,  
“It is finished!”  
And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. [30]**

By saying, “It is finished!” the Lord Jesus Christ declared that the hostility of His persecutors had reached the end, and that the prophecies concerning His crucifixion had been entirely fulfilled. The shadow has been removed completely and the truth has been realized. He was sold for thirty pieces of silver; His hands and feet were pierced; His garments were divided, and they cast lots for His tunic. Moreover, they had just given Him vinegar for His thirst and finally His side was pierced. Now His sufferings are complete so that He may go carrying the spoils to Paradise. In replacement of the sad environment, He opens the gates of Paradise so that the spirits that are reposed in hope may rejoice. Now that He has offered His body a sacrifice, He, as the Great Heavenly High Priest goes to the Father so that the Father may smell the sweet savor.

**‘He gave up His spirit’:** His life was not taken from Him by force; He willingly gave it up. He said to the Father, **“Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.”** He thus expressed His acceptance of death as His choice to redeem many spirits.

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<sup>39</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 119: 4.

<sup>40</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 119: 4.

**‘And bowing His head’:** Those who are crucified usually raise their heads to breathe. They do not bow their heads except at the very last breath. But to indicate His willing choice, the Lord Christ bowed His head, as in sleep or as surrendering to declare, first, that He carries the burden of our sins and evils. Some commentators observe that bowing His head proclaims the extent of the weight of our sins that He willingly carried for us. “For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me” (Ps 38: 4). “For innumerable evils have surrounded me” (Ps 40: 12). Bowing His head declares also His submission and obedience to His Father who is pleased to offer His Only Begotten Son a sacrifice of love for the human race.

On the Cross, Jesus gave up His human spirit into the hands of the Father so that He may give His Holy Spirit to His Church.

\* **‘And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.’** This means that He died. Yet, giving the last breath does not come after bowing the head; but what happens here is the opposite. What happens to us did not happen to Him. We bow the head after the last breath, but He bowed His head and then gave up His spirit. The Evangelist clearly shows that Jesus Christ is Lord of all.<sup>41</sup>

\* Do you see how the Lord did everything He desired with authority and without confusion?

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* He bowed His head and completed the journey of His spirit in comfortable work for it. Now His spirit is in the bosom of the Father who cares and strengthens it in His bosom. The Learned Origen

\* Who can sleep when he wants to, as Jesus died when He desired? Who is he who took off his clothes when he wished, as Christ put off His flesh as He pleased? Who is he who travels in this manner when he wants, like Christ who departed from this life as He pleased? How great is the power of Christ for whom we long and whom we fear, for He is the Judge. That greatness of power and authority He proclaimed while He was a dead man!<sup>42</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

## **8 – His Side Is Pierced with a Spear**

**Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day,  
That the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath  
(for that Sabbath was a high day),  
The Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken,  
And that they might be taken away. [31]**

Every Sabbath was holy. But this Sabbath was during the Passover week when they ate unleavened bread and offered their first fruits. Therefore some considered it a ‘high day’ or ‘megale hemerra.’ It was the greatest of the days of preparation for the Passover. The

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<sup>41</sup> Hom. 85. PG 599: 507.

<sup>42</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 119: 6.

preparation for every Sabbath started at the ninth hour (3:00 PM) of Friday. **Josephus**<sup>43</sup> writes that the Emperor Augustus decreed, for the sake of the Jews, that no one was obliged to offer greetings on the Sabbath beginning with the ninth hour of the day of preparation in accordance to the Jewish rites. Dead bodies were not allowed to remain on ordinary days (Deut 21: 23). Now they may have felt compunction and could not bear to see His body hung before them to remind them of their horrible crime and spoil the joy of the feast. Moreover, there were many strangers in Jerusalem, because of the feast, and the Jews did not want the body of the crucified Christ to remain hanging.

Some writers observe that the Jews did not ask Pilate that the heads of the crucified might be cut off so that they die quickly without much pain. They rather asked their legs might be broken so that they suffer even more. Thus, even in asking for mercy (to take away the bodies from the cross) they were very cruel. When they pretended to be holy (the bodies did not remain so that the land might not be defiled) they were evil. They cared to keep the Sabbath, but had no regard for justice or righteousness.

\* The Jews swallowed a camel and strained out a gnat. They committed a great sin, but were very careful in keeping the Sabbath.<sup>44</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other  
Who were crucified with Him. [32]  
But when they came to Jesus  
And saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. [33]**

The Lord Christ died quickly before the two thieves. That may be because His body was weak and He was gentle and could not endure all that suffering. Or, He may have permitted Himself to die before them so that everybody might comprehend that He died of His own will. He gave up His spirit into the hands of the Father at the time He chose. He surrendered to death of His own will, not as an obligation, but through His victory in love.

**But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear,  
And immediately blood and water came out. [34]**

The incident of piercing the side of Christ is recorded in this Gospel only. Jesus, who truly died in the flesh when His spirit left His body, declares that He is the beginning of life that conquers death. By His death He vanquished death and gave us back eternal life.

The early **Church Fathers**, such as the saints Augustine, Ambrose and John Chrysostom, consider this (blood and water that came from Christ's side) the first indication of the sacraments. Water is a symbol of baptism and blood is the Eucharist. We thus drink directly from the wound in the side of our Lord Jesus. The Learned Tertulian, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem,

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<sup>43</sup> Josephus: antiq. 6. 16.c.6.s51.

<sup>44</sup> Homilies on St. John, 85: 1.

and Saint Jerome believe that water and blood here are symbols of baptism and martyrdom.<sup>45</sup> Others think that water stands for the Old Testament and blood is for the New Testament because in it the promise was fulfilled and the people of both Covenants enjoyed salvation.

It is said that the name of that soldier is Longinus, and that when blood and water gushed from the Lord's side some drops of blood fell on the soldier's sick eyes and healed them. He then believed in Christ and preached in Cappadocia and received the crown of martyrdom there. Some say that the name Longinus is a phonetic corruption of the Greek word 'longchee' that means lance or spear, a word that occurs in this verse.

The debate continues concerning which side, the left or right, of the Lord Christ was pierced. The Holy Spirit does not inform us through the Gospels but just says that Christ's side was pierced with a spear in fulfillment of the prophecy. Some believe that the spear pierced the Lord Jesus Christ to the heart, and opened a window through which the spirit saw Christ's heart full of divine love, or extremely fiery love for mankind. It is an open window through which the believer can meet God and send to Him affection. It is the window of the heart that is never closed to any repentant.

God allowed the soldier to attack the heart of the Lord with a spear so that we may see in that heart the Rock that was struck for our sake (1 Cor 10: 4). We also see the fountain that flows for us (Zech 13: 1) and the wells of salvation that were dug for our sake (Is 12: 3). We see the river that overflows to give joy to the city of God.

\* The Lord was wounded in His suffering and blood and water came out of the wound. The water is for purification, the blood for drinking, and the spirit for His resurrection. For Christ alone is our hope, faith, and love. Our hope is in His resurrection, our faith is in the font, and our love is in the sacrament.<sup>46</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* The soldiers came and broke the legs of the others but did not break Christ's legs. However, they pierced His side with a spear to please the Jews and as an insult to the dead body. Now, the prophecy is fulfilled, "and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced" (See Zech 12: 10). Moreover, this act became an evidence of faith for those who did not believe later, like Thomas and similar people. This also conveys a great mystery that has been realized. For, blood and water came out and this was neither a coincidence nor did it lack purpose. The two springs flew together and through them the Church was established. Those initiated in the sacraments know this: that through the water they obtain a new birth, and through the Blood and Body they are invigorated. The mysteries were founded, thus from the beginning, so that when you approach the cup full of awe, this is like approaching Christ's side to drink.<sup>47</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

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<sup>45</sup> Letter 69: 6.

<sup>46</sup> Concerning Virgins 3: 5 (22).

<sup>47</sup> Hom. 85. PG 59: 507.



\* Just as His work and service on the earth began with water, it also ended with water. They pierced His side with a spear, and blood and water gushed as symbols of baptism and martyrdom.<sup>48</sup>

**Saint Jerome**

He announced this before, when He ordered Noah to make a door in the side of the ark (Gen 6: 16) through which all the animals, symbolizing the Church, enter so that they would not perish in the flood. He created the first woman from the man's side as he slept (Gen 2: 22-23). She was called life (Eve) the mother of all living (Gen 3: 20). The Second Adam bowed His head and slept on the Cross so that from the side of the sleeping Man, the Bride may be formed. What is more pure than that Blood? What can grant health more than that wound?<sup>49</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**And he who has seen has testified,  
And his testimony is true;  
And he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. [35]  
For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled,  
'Not one of His bones shall be broken.' [36]**

Saint John testifies that he saw that with his own eyes, and that it happened miraculously. He affirms this because the other Evangelists do not relate this incident and because what happens here asserts Jesus Christ's death.

The Scripture is fulfilled in accordance to the promise given to all the righteous as a reference to what would be realized concerning Jesus the Righteous. Psalm 34: 20 says, "He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken." By the Spirit, David writes, "All my bones shall say, 'Lord, who is like You?'" (Ps 35: 10). Again, the Jews were forbidden to break any bone of the Passover lamb (Ex 12: 46; Numbers 9: 12). Our Christ is our Passover who was sacrificed for us (1 Cor 5: 7). He is the Lamb of God (Jn 1: 29) and therefore His bones were not broken.

Bones, to the Hebrews, denote the strength of the body because they form the skeleton of the human being. Not breaking Christ's bones signifies that even though the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified as in weakness, yet there is strength in His weakness. Sin breaks our bones and destroys our strength. The Psalmist David therefore says in the Psalm of repentance, "That the bones You have broken may rejoice" (Ps 51: 8). But sin could not break or crush Christ's bones, for He stood steadfastly carrying the burden of our sins to save us.

This was previously said in describing the lamb to the Jews. However, the symbol is present for the sake of the truth and has become clearer. For this reason the Evangelist quotes the Scripture in the middle of what he says.

\* Saint John declares loudly the required sacraments in advance. As he saw the treasure in the sacraments, he was scrupulous in relating what happened and how the prophecy was fulfilled.

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<sup>48</sup> Letter 69 to Oceanus, 6.

<sup>49</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 120: 2.

“Not one of his bones is broken” (See Ex 12: 46; Ps 34: 20). This was said about the lamb of the Jews for the sake of the truth to which the symbol referred beforehand. In Him the prophecy was perfectly fulfilled. Therefore, the Evangelist quotes the prophet. Saint John introduces himself always as a witness, but if his testimony might be doubted, he introduces Moses as a witness: what happened did not lack purpose, but was rather mentioned earlier in old times.<sup>50</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**And again another Scripture says,  
‘They shall look on Him whom they pierced.’ [37]**

The Scripture speaks also concerning Him who was pierced with a spear. In the book of Zechariah the prophet, we read, “and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn” (Zech 12: 10; Rev 1: 7). We also read that He was wounded in the house of His friends (Zech 13: 6).

\* Those miserable people who scorned Him when they saw Him hung on the precious Cross, will look upon Him and see Him crowned with divine glory. They will go down the pit of destruction as a just punishment for their transgression concerning Him.<sup>51</sup>

**Saint Cyril the Great**

\* Once more St John supports the prophet’s words with his own testimony. I have told you those words so that you may know the great relation that exists between the symbol and the truth. Do you not see the effort he took concerning these things, and so that they may believe by comprehending through what seems shameful and disgraceful!?

The soldier’s abuse of the dead body was worse than the crucifixion. However, not even through ignominy can anyone harm our cause. For, what seems to be extremely shameful is itself an extremely exalted record of the good concerns.<sup>52</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

## **9 – The Burial of the Lord Jesus Christ**

**After this, Joseph of Arimathea,  
Being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews,  
Asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus;  
And Pilate gave him permission.  
So he came and took the body of Jesus. [38]**

As the Jewish Passover was imminent, the quick burial was necessary. The Evangelist describes the burial in an impressive manner, and as a dignified act of faith and love of two secret disciples. Joseph of Arimathea was a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, but in his weakness he followed the Lord secretly during His service. However, at the critical moments, when the body of the Lord was hung on the cross, Joseph of Arimathea went courageously to ask Pilate to

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<sup>50</sup> Hom. 85. PG 59: 507-508.

<sup>51</sup> Comm. On St. Luke, Hom. 145, ch. 22.

<sup>52</sup> Hom. 85. PG 59: 508.

give him permission to take the body of Jesus. In doing this he obtained great honor. Nicodemus accompanied him. He had once come at night to the Lord, but now he was not afraid of being expelled from the Sanhedrim. If those two men had not buried Jesus, the soldiers would have buried Him with the two thieves in an old grave and His resurrection would not have been affirmed. People would have even claimed that another man had risen from the dead.

\* Joseph was not one of the twelve disciples. He was probably one of the seventy apostles.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came,  
Bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. [39]**

Myrrh and aloes are used to preserve the body for a long time. Some researchers say that a hundred pounds of that mixture would be enough to preserve two hundred dead bodies and they think this was a mistake in writing. However, this was a custom in the case of important or loved personalities. It has been said that a huge quantity of the mixture was used in the funeral of Aristobulus. It has also been said that five hundred servants carried the aloes used to preserve the body of Herod<sup>53</sup> and eighty pounds of spices were used at the funeral of the great Gamaliel. A pound is a Greek and Roman measure equal to a hundred dirhams.

\* Here is myrrh for burial. The aloe juice is for crossing over to the underworld where every drop goes down. And cinnamon is provided for the body on the Cross.<sup>54</sup>

**Saint Basil the Great**

\* Your original smell is better than all spices (Song of Solomon 4: 10) used in the burial of the Savior [39]. The sweet smell flows out, when the pleasures of the body members are destroyed. But the other smell is like the smell of Lebanon (Song of Solomon 4: 11) that produces the smell of incorruption of the body of our Lord, the pure flower of virginity.<sup>55</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

**Then they took the body of Jesus,  
And bound it in strips of linen with the spices,  
As the custom of the Jews is to bury. [40]**

\* What does that signify, that not His disciples, but Joseph and Nicodemus are the ones who buried the Lord?

One of them is good and just (Luke 23: 50) and the other has no hypocrisy. Thus Christ's burial is done without deceit or evil. There is no room for trickery. If the apostles had buried Him, the Jews would have said, those certainly never buried Him. But a just man wrapped Christ's body in costly linen (Matt 27: 59; Luke 23: 53) and an honest man anointed Him with spices. Therefore, what happened did not lack purpose, for, righteousness envelops the Church, and innocence serves grace.

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<sup>53</sup> Josephus, b15 c.3, s.14, b17, c.8.s.c.

<sup>54</sup> Hom. 17, Ps. 44: 7, Exegetic Homilies in Fathers of the Church vol 46, p. 290.

<sup>55</sup> Concerning Virgins 1: 7: 39.

Cover the body of the Lord, the Church, with garments and anoint Him with myrrh and spices, so that the Church may become to God the fragrance of Christ (2 Cor 2: 15).

Joseph brought expensive linen. That may have been what Peter saw descending from heaven and in it all kinds of animals, a symbol of the Gentiles (Acts 10: 11-12). The Church is thus wrapped, linking a variety of people in partaking of their faith in that pure fragrant mystery.<sup>56</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* I believe there was no lack of purpose in saying, “as the custom of the Jews is to bury” [40]. For, if I am not mistaken, by saying this he urges us to practice such service for the dead in accordance to the custom of our country.<sup>57</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden,  
And in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. [41]**

Christ’s body was buried in a new tomb that Joseph of Arimathea had prepared in a garden he owned outside the city near Golgotha where Christ was crucified. Joseph did not expect that in that tomb the Lord Jesus Christ would be buried.

In a garden, the Lord had bowed His head to joyfully deliver His will up into the hands of the Father and be carried to the cross. In that garden He was arrested, and in a garden the Lord rose from the dead to announce that through His suffering and death He has defeated death and has granted the resurrection. In the garden was buried the grain of wheat about which the Lord Jesus Christ had spoken (Jn 12: 24) and it produced thirty, sixty, and a hundred fold. In the garden, the Lord let the streams of life flow (Song of Solomon 4: 15).

The tomb was new and the Lord rose from it while the stone was rolled over it as its door. Just as He was born of a virgin He rose from a virgin tomb. Everything concerning Him, even the tomb, was new so that He may grant us a new life.

\* In that garden, I sang to My Bride, in the Song of Solomon, “I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse” (5: 1). For the place where He was crucified was a garden. What did He take from there? “I have gathered my myrrh with my spice” for He drank myrrh with vinegar. After that He said, “It is finished” because the mystery was accomplished, the Scripture was fulfilled, and the sins were forgiven. “But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most High Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ...cleanse your conscience” (Hebrews 9: 11-14).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Exposition, 10: 136, 137.

<sup>57</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 120: 4.

<sup>58</sup> Article 13: 32.

\* Again He says in the Song of Solomon, “I went down into the garden of nuts” (6: 11) for He was crucified in a garden. For though that place is now decorated with royal gifts, yet it was a garden and the landmarks and traces still exist. He is “a garden enclosed...a fountain sealed” (Song of Solomon 4: 12). The following was written about the Jews who said, “we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Therefore command that the tomb be made secure” and “So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard” (Matt 27: 63-64, 66).<sup>59</sup>

\* He was buried in a garden where a vine was planted for He said, “I am the true vine” (Jn 15: 1). He was planted in the earth so that He may pluck out the curse that happened because of Adam. For the earth then brought forth thorns and thistles. The vine sprang out of the earth so that the words of the Psalm may be fulfilled: “Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven” (Ps 85: 11).

What does He who was buried in the garden say? He says, “I have gathered my myrrh with my spice” (Song of Solomon) and “myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices (4: 14). These are the signs of burial as is recorded in the Gospels, “certain other women with them came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared” (Luke 24: 1); “And Nicodemus...also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes” (Jn 19: 39). It is also written, “I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey” (Song of Solomon 5: 1) for He ate myrrh before crucifixion and honey after the resurrection.<sup>60</sup>

**Saint Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* Just as no one before or after Him was born of the Virgin Mary, likewise no one before or after Him was buried in this tomb.<sup>61</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews’ Preparation Day,  
For the tomb was nearby. [42]**

There was no funeral service for the Lord Jesus Christ because He was crucified, rejected by His people, and because there was no time and therefore the burial had to be in a hurry before sunset. The Sun of righteousness was buried at sunset and it was impossible for the tomb to imprison His light. Darkness could not control Him. The soldiers stood guard lest He should rise and proclaim that He paid our debt, His sacrifice for us was accepted, and that He justified us before the Father. However, the soldiers’ watch became a testimony of the truth of His resurrection.

This conduct (the quick burial) shows that His resurrection was not in anybody’s mind in spite of the continuous references to it before His crucifixion. The burial took place in this manner because there was no time and there was no tomb prepared for Him. No one thought of burying Him in the family cemetery because the sun was about to set and it was difficult for the

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<sup>59</sup> Article 14: 5.

<sup>60</sup> Article 14: 11.

<sup>61</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 120: 5.

family to prepare for burial especially in such bitter circumstances. This is from the human point of view. However, concerning the divine dispensation, everything was amazingly arranged. Thus, Isaiah foretold this seven hundred years beforehand when he said, "And he made his grave...with the rich in his death" (Is 53: 9).

\* It was arranged that the body of the Lord was laid in a new tomb in which no one was buried before, so that nobody might think that there was another buried with Him who rose from the dead. Also this enabled His disciples to come to the tomb and see what happened, for the tomb was nearby.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Meditations Inspired by the Gospel of St John  
Chapter Nineteen**

**With You I Am Judged, and with You I Am Crucified**

+ They led You to the court of justice, You O Judge of all!  
Your presence sanctified the tribunal  
Acceptance of injustice  
For Your love and Your children's love became my spirit's pleasure!  
You remained silent before Pilate who was therefore troubled.  
You declared to him that Your kingdom was not of this world  
So Pilate wanted to know who You are.  
They released Barabbas the robber  
And You, O Righteous, were crucified.  
Yes, You opened the gates of captivity  
And released my spirit from prison.

+ I shall go out with You to Golgotha.  
In the act of Your cross I find honor I do not deserve.  
I look at Your crown of thorns  
And I see that You are preparing for me a crown of eternal glory.

+ The road to Golgotha has become a royal road  
Who deserves to cross it  
To enter with You to Your heavenly glory?

+ You carried the wooden cross to carry all mankind who believe in You.  
In Your wonderful love You thirst for all mankind  
They gave You vinegar to drink,  
So that You may give us to drink the river of life in Jerusalem above  
You bowed Your head and gave Your spirit up into the hands of Your Father  
So that You may raise our heads before Your Father  
And glorify our spirits and bodies!

+ They pierced Your side with a spear and blood and water came out!  
Your blood sanctified me entirely  
And through the water You granted me the Spirit of prophecy to the Father

+ In Your crucifixion You were numbered with the transgressors  
So that You may declare that You are the Savior of sinners.  
In Your death You were buried in the grave of a rich man  
You are the lover of sinners for their justification  
You gather the poor and the rich  
You are the lover of mankind.

+ They buried You in a garden  
Because the first Adam died in the garden  
And in the garden You have come to restore life to us once more!.

Amen

## **The Resurrection: The first and eight day combined**

### **The Lord Risen from the Dead**

St. John opens the first chapter of his Gospel by proclaiming the eternal existence of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a completely different beginning in contrast to the opening chapters in the other three Gospels. St. John elaborates that the Lord, being the word of God, and being one with Him, was born since time eternal. However, in the closing chapters of his Gospel, St. John writes about the same events recorded in the other Gospels as they all speak about the Lord's resurrection. This is because His resurrection represents the focal point of the act of salvation. The Lord spoke repeatedly about that subject; and He presented the story of Jonah the prophet inside the whale as an example of His burial and resurrection (Matt 12:40). None of the evangelists have explained to us how the Lord arose. They were preoccupied with confirming His resurrection. In every possible way, they wanted to convince everyone of that great event. As much as the disciples and apostles confirmed the Lord's resurrection, as much as unbelievers resisted this fact. Indeed, His resurrection entailed a confirmation of the crime committed in killing the Messiah, the Giver of life. The resurrection confirms the redeeming act: since He was slaughtered for our sake, then His resurrection confirms the acceptance of this sacrifice. Since He was crucified on account of our debts, then His resurrection proclaims the payment of the debt. Nothing has preoccupied the minds of preachers more than the need to confirm the Lord's resurrection. This is because the Lord was publicly crucified and the sun became darkened at that moment. The Lord arose in order to appear to His followers and those loyal lovers who seek their salvation.

Each Evangelist has underlined an aspect of the resurrection that differs from that recorded by the other writers. What St. John has underlined is not recorded in the other Gospels. He does not relate the story found in St. Luke's Gospel about the Lord's meeting with the two disciples on the way to Emaus. St. John does not include the story in St. Matthew about the Lord's meeting with some of the women who were going to the tomb. He also does not relate the story in St. Mark about the youth who was dressed in white and who informed the women that they would see the Lord in Galilee.

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#### **1- Dawn: The Empty Tomb**

**Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, While it was still dark,**



### **And saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.[1]**

St. John has reported many events where women played great roles: the first miracle he reports reveals the holy virgin Mary, the mother of the Lord, as an intercessor for those present at the wedding in Cana. In chapter four, the Lord meets with the Samaritan woman who attracted the whole city of Sychar. After the Lord had revealed Himself to her, she wanted them all to enjoy meeting with Him. In the incident of the raising of Lazarus from the dead (Ch. 11), the presence of the two sisters, Martha and Mary is of great significance. In this Chapter, Mary Magdalene appears with her amazing inner faithfulness. She came to the tomb while it was still dark. She was driven by her great love to the One who was absent from her at that time. Her personal and immense sorrow seem to be the driving force leading her to go to the tomb. She felt overwhelmed by the finality of absence which the grave always inspires. She was the first person to see the stone rolled away from the grave. The Lord intended her to witness that the One who takes away the sins of the world has risen (John 1:29), and that the final veil has been removed.

The word 'Magdalene' is the feminine for the word 'Magdala.' Here the word 'Magdalene' means 'Mary, from Magdala.' The Talmud mentions that there was a city called Magdala, and it took about twenty minutes to walk from Tiberia (on the Sea of Galilee) on the northern side to that city. The word 'Magdala' means 'tower.' Actually there was a tower in the region which carried that name- probably a watch tower.

St. John mentions St. Mary Magdalene solely, and has not referred to the other women who went to the tomb with her. Probably, this is due to her great eagerness to go there. The Lord had shown her great love and she had adhered to Him and had used her money to provide for His needs (Luke 8:2-3). She had listened to His teachings, and loved Him to the end. She stood by the Lord up to the moment of His death on the Cross. Now, she had come to His tomb without fearing the possible obstacles and dangers. Indeed, her love for the Lord stripped her of the fear of death and of the grave. She came to the tomb to weep bitterly and to pour frankincense and spices on His Body. This was Mary Magdalene who had adhered to the Lord up to the last moment of His burial. Now she would be the first to enjoy the news of His joyful and glorious resurrection: the empty tomb!

Mary Magdalene came to the tomb **at the beginning of the week**. That is, she came as soon as the Sabbath of the Old Testament was over. According to the literal application of the law, it would have been incorrect to visit the tomb until the new Sabbath day - the first Sabbath of the New Testament- when the Lord arose from the dead. Mary Magdalene, in this context, has become a representative of the Church that fulfills the law of the Lord Jesus Christ. She celebrates the new Sabbath as she hurries to the Lord's tomb in order to enjoy fellowship in His resurrection. The Gospel here begins with the first day in the new week. It opens before us a totally new age. It proclaims, in that new age, a new resurrected life and a new world. Since that time, Christians have designated Sunday as the day of rest: it is celebrated in memory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is called 'the Lord's day' (Rev 1:10).

**She came to the tomb in the early morning.** Indeed, love drives the believer to meet with the One resurrected from the dead at the first possible opportunity and as early as possible, without delay or procrastination. She came while it was still dark, yet the Sun of Righteousness

could shine within her and brighten the path to the empty tomb that stood as a witness to the glory of the Lord's resurrection. It was still dark, but love provided the light to her path.

**She 'saw that the stone had been taken away.'** As she was preoccupied with thoughts about the Lord, she did not worry about the problem of rolling the stone in order to offer the spices (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1). At the same time, when she came and found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty, she did not realize immediately that the Lord had risen. She thought the body had been taken away. The Lord intended her to enjoy the news of the resurrection gradually.

The Lord arose while the stone was in its place with the seals on it. However, to ensure that all the others would be completely assured, it was necessary to open the tomb after the resurrection. This is what happened, and this is what drove St. Mary Magdalene to take action. She was so filled with love for her Lord, that she could not rest; and as soon as the Sabbath ended, she went very early to the tomb. She was anxious to find some comfort in that place. When she got there, and saw the stone rolled away, she did not enter inside. She did not even bend down. Rather, she ran eagerly to the disciples. She zealously wanted to get back to them and report promptly what happened to the body. This explains why she ran and the words she said to them<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Then she ran and came to Simon Peter,  
And to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them,  
"They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb,  
And we do not know where they have laid Him." [2]**

As the two disciples ran towards the tomb, it was hard for Mary Magdalene to join them. So she probably returned to the tomb while they were there or maybe after they had already left. She began to weep and it was then that the two angels appeared to her to console her.

She had quickly run to Peter and John because they lived on the outskirts of the city and close to the tomb. Therefore she just ran to them. It never occurred to her that the Lord had risen according to what He had said to His disciples. Yet, there were clear indications of the resurrection, and the testimony was powerful. She probably suspected that the high priest had ordered that the body be moved to another place as a form of humiliating the Lord. Or could Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus have feared that the Jews would be angered by their act so they had carried the Lord's body to another tomb?

Mary Magdalene ran to the two disciples to beg them to look for the Lord's body. Her grief due to His death did not erase her need to see the Lord's body. She wanted to offer spices as an indication of her love even after His death.

The amazing thing is that Peter and John stuck together. Peter's denial had humbled him, yet he did not despair. Through repentance and tears, he came back to share fellowship and service with John. Lovingly, John did not reject drawing close to that one who had denied the

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 85:4

Lord; for Peter showed remorse.

Some believe that Mary Magdalene ran to Peter and John while the other women ran to report the news to the rest of the disciples.

The mother of the Lord went to the tomb where she met the rest of the women.. Being the Theotokos, she alone realized the power of the angels' words- She and the other women listened to the glad news concerning the resurrection- Mary Magdalene told them how she had met with her Son and Lord. Mary Magdalene had seen the One risen from the dead. She had recognized Him before all the other women. She fell down and touched His feet and became an apostle to His disciples<sup>2</sup>.

**Fr. Gregory Palamas**

**Peter, therefore, went out, and the other disciple,  
And were going to the tomb. [3]**

They both went out as quickly as possible to check the news. They wanted to be personally assured, and they wanted to look for the Holy body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**St. John Chrysostom** believes that St. Mary Magdalene imagined that the body had been stolen because she was not thinking clearly about the resurrection. However, the evangelist St. John does not deny praising her for her action. Moreover, he does not consider it shameful that the disciples heard the news first hand from a woman who had spent the whole night vigilant and anxious to see the body of the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>3</sup>.

The Evangelist exposes the stages one takes to progress towards understanding and comprehending the resurrection. The first step is the immediate shock that Mary Magdalene got on discovering the empty tomb. Then St John sees and experiences what the Lord had declared previously that 'He would arise from the dead.

**So they both ran together,  
And the other disciple outran Peter, and came to the tomb first. [4]**

The two disciples ran together as soon as they heard the news from Mary Magdalene. Her words did not lead them to despair though the matter was out of their control and they could do nothing. However, they wanted to act quickly in order to comfort her and to find out the real situation. They ran together and did not compete as to who would enter into the tomb first. Even though John outran Peter due to his youthful age, yet they cooperated. The incentive one of them had to run to the tomb did not impede the other. Each ran as fast as he could. Peter did not envy John as he ran faster, nor did John despise Peter for his slowness. Peter had repented denying the Lord. His guilt feelings slackened his movement towards the tomb. Yet he was not deprived of the One risen from the dead. This is serious spiritual friendship, which bears the spirit of communal action with no impediments to others. The wise prophet accordingly says: 'two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor' (Eccl 4:9).

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<sup>2</sup> Homily on the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women. PG 151:244 CD, 245

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St John, 85:4

Some believe that Mary Magdalene ran to the disciples after she and the women with her had seen the angel who told them that the Lord had risen. However, she was so stunned that she did not report to the disciples what the angel had told her. All what preoccupied her was to find the Lord's body and to meet with Him. Her vision of the angel and his conversation with her could have seemed more like a dream or part of her imagination. Note that the only disciples, who moved at her words, were Peter and John only.<sup>4</sup>

**And he stooping down and looking in,  
Saw the linen clothes lying there, yet he did not go in. [5]**

John did not go in because he trusted that the words of Mary Magdalene were true and that the body was no longer in the tomb. He was assured just by looking inside the empty tomb. However, as soon Peter stepped inside, John followed him. Then they saw and believed that the body was no longer in the tomb.

**Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb;  
And he saw the linen clothes lying there. [6]**

They looked and saw the linen clothes placed in order and folded. This was a sign of the resurrection. Indeed, anyone who intended to steal or remove the Body would not have stripped the linen clothes from it. A thief would not have bothered to fold the clothes; and anyone intending to move the Body would not have taken off the clothes. If some persons had stolen the Body would they have engaged in complicating their job by removing the handkerchief and placing it in another place after folding it? What had happened definitely was not the action of grave diggers or thieves looting corpses.

\* St. John stooped to look inside. However, St. Peter entered in and saw the linen clothes. He stopped and did not speak immediately. The jealous one entered and looked in more deeply to discover and see more detail. Then he called on the other disciple to come in. After he had first seen for himself, Peter called John to enter and see the linen clothes and how the handkerchief that had covered His head was put in another place separately<sup>5</sup>.

Out of necessity, they would have removed the Lord as He was (with the linens on Him). That is why St. John the evangelist reports in the earlier chapters that His Body was covered with a lot of spices. These would let the linen clothes stick to the Body just as hard as lead. Consequently, when we hear that the handkerchief was lying in a separate place, we do not accept the words of those who claimed that the Lord's Body was stolen. A thief would not perform a needless act: why would he remove the burial clothes and the handkerchief? Besides, how could he escape if he had spent all this time to dismantle the Body and risk being discovered red handed? He would have been arrested if he had delayed and taken time at the job. Again, why would the clothes be placed away from the handkerchief and folded separately? So that we might learn that the action did not take place hastily or nosily<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Adam Smith; Comm. On St John 21:2

<sup>5</sup> Hom 85. PG 59:510

<sup>6</sup> Hom 85. PG 59:509- 510

\* If you were to say: “what is the purpose of the handkerchief not lying with the linen clothes, but folded together in a place by itself?!” Our answer would be: So that you would know that the act was done by someone who was not hurried nor anxious. Therefore they believed in the Lord’s resurrection based on that action.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* If the enemies had stolen the Body, then they would not have left the burial clothes behind in order to ensure some material gain. If the Lord’s follower were the ones who did that act, they would not have accepted to strip the Body and humiliate Him. The best explanation is that the incident reveals that the Body had crossed over into eternity and had no need for clothes in the future.<sup>7</sup>

**St. Amonius of Alexandria**

**‘...and the handkerchief that had been around His head,  
not lying with the linen clothes, but folded together in a place by itself. [7]**

The Lord left the burial clothes and the handkerchief that covered his head behind in the tomb. He had risen and would not die again or need burial. **His Body was now enveloped in glory and He had abandoned the earthly clothes that would deteriorate inside the tomb.** In Paradise, we do not need clothes as we do on earth; for we are enveloped in the Lord’s righteousness and share His glory. When Elijah was taken up in the fiery chariot that soared into the heavens, his cloak fell away as he did not need it.

Let us abandon with the Lord the burial clothes behind. For we carry the promise and warranty of incorruption, which replaces the corruption that has come upon us.

The Lord has left us the burial clothes placed in an orderly manner inside the tomb; as well as the handkerchief that covered His head in a place by itself. **He intended that every believer, whenever he goes to his own burial, to find coverings that the Lord has prepared by His precious burial clothes. There, the believer would also find the Lord’s handkerchief to wipe away the tears shed during his struggle on earth.**

**St. Chrysostom** comments on the burial clothes and handkerchief that were left in the tomb. He says that the Lord encourages us not to spend too much when we bury our dead. The body of the dead person will arise in brilliant glory and will not need grand clothes!

\* How majestic is the power of the One crucified! He encourages those who physically die as death is not final. Therefore they should not behave as persons who will ultimately die. Conversely, they should behave as persons who are sending the departed one to a distant and better home. He encourages people to know that this corrupt earthly body will wear more glorious clothes than those made of silk and golden threads- a clothing of incorruption. It is therefore appropriate not to worry over burial, since people need to consider that a virtuous life is clothing similar to an amazing breeze...

\* What excuse do we have if we decorated a body that will be eroded with corruption and

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<sup>7</sup> Leon Morris, p 692

worms; while we neglect the Lord Jesus Christ who is thirsty and walks naked and estranged? Let us therefore stop this meaningless toil. May we conduct the funerals of the departed in a manner that contributes to our benefit and to theirs for the glory of God. Let us be giving for their sakes, and let us look with them for food on the way... let us send the departed to the tomb while he is wearing these clothes ( of giving) so that the Lord would be his inheritance!

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first,  
Went in also; and he saw and believed. [8]**

John had arrived first as he raced towards the tomb. However, Peter showed more courage as he stepped into the tomb looking for the body. He wanted to check the matter in all its possibilities. Some persons are characterized by their speed, others by their aggressiveness, and all support one another through their talents and their various skills. John's speed encouraged Peter to move more quickly; while Peter's courage led John to step inside the tomb. Peter saw and marveled (Luke 24:12); John saw and believed, (John 20:8).

The physical death of the Lord Jesus Christ has removed our fear of death and of the grave. Death will eventually take hold of us, and we will be laid in a tomb. Therefore, it is appropriate that we repeat with the righteous Job: "...I say to corruption you are my father, and to the worm, you are my mother..." (Job 17:14).

**For as yet they did not know the Scripture,  
That He must rise again from the dead. [9]**

St. John the Evangelical explains why he and Peter were slow to believe. It was due to their lack of deep knowledge of scriptural prophecies. They need God to open up their minds to understand the Holy Book in the same way it happened to the disciples who were going to Emaus (Luke 24:44-45) All the disciples did not understand the prophecy of the Psalmist who said: 'For you will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will you allow your Holy One to see corruption,' (Ps 16:10). They also did not understand what the Lord had told them about the fulfillment of Jonah's miracle by His own resurrection, (Matt 12:40).

The Evangelist does not say: 'He will arise from the dead', but he stated 'that He must rise again from the dead.' On the one hand, the resurrection was part of God's plan to save and redeem us. Therefore it was an expedient matter. On the other hand, it was not possible for death to imprison the Lord, or for the grave to seize Him who had said:  
"I am the Resurrection"!

**Then the disciples went away again to their own homes. [10]**

They returned to the place where all the other disciples were gathered. They all had no homes in Jerusalem, so they gathered in a home there and they did not return to their homes after

the crucifixion. John and Peter did not go to the other disciples in order to proclaim the resurrection, or to confirm that they could not find the body. They returned probably because they feared future troubles. It was hard for them to know what the Jewish leaders would do upon discovering that the Body was no longer in the tomb. They returned and joined their fellow disciples and waited to hear from God. They definitely spoke about what had happened, and they decided to meet all together in the evening on that same day. It was then that the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to them; but Thomas was not there. It was essential for them to meet together especially that the two angels had appeared to Mary Magdalene, whereas no angel had appeared to Peter and John.

**St. John Chrysostom** believes that the two disciples had gone each to his own home at first as they felt amazed. There the resurrection began to touch their minds. Then they returned and met with the other disciples according to the Lord's command.

## **2. In the Morning: Mary Magdalene and the Two Angels.**

**'But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping,  
And as she wept she stooped and looked into the tomb.'** [11]

Whereas the two disciples hurried back to their fellow disciples, Mary Magdalene stayed by the tomb and wept. It was hard for her to leave the tomb without seeing the Body of the Lord.

The soul is bound to the Lord Jesus Christ by love. She desired to get acquainted with His mysteries and longs to see Him. While Mary wept she stooped and looked inside the tomb. She was assured that the Body was no longer there. The two disciples had also entered and were assured. However, her love drove her to keep stooping and looking inside time and again. She hoped to find something that would console her!

\* The female species is characteristically emotional to a great extent, and is more inclined to tenderness. We say that so that you would not be surprised why Mary wept so bitterly at the tomb, while Peter showed no emotions! The Holy Word reports that **'... the disciples went away again to their own homes.'** As for Mary, she stood there weeping; on account of her weak nature and because she had not yet comprehended well enough the matter of the Resurrection. In contrast, the two disciples marveled and believed after having seen the burial linen clothes; and so returned home. Why did they not go back immediately to Galilee according to the command the Lord Jesus Christ had given them before His suffering? Maybe it was because they were waiting for the arrival of the others as well as due to their own state of ultimate astonishment. These two disciples therefore went on their way home, whereas Mary remained by the tomb. As we have said earlier, just looking at the tomb gave her great comfort...

All things considered, she received a blessing on account of her great zeal. This is not to be discounted, for what the disciples had missed, this woman was the first to see: she saw two angels seated, one at the feet and the other at the head, and even their white clothes reflected the brilliance with joy<sup>8</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

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<sup>8</sup> Homilies on St John, 86:1

**And she saw two angels in white  
Sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet,  
Where the body of Jesus had lain. [12]**

After the two disciples had left, and probably after the sun came up on that same day, Marty returned alone. She was still searching for the One she missed. Her condition had not changed, though when she stooped and wept, the tomb presented another proclamation. She saw two angels sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet. It was as though they were measuring the Body with heavenly standards rather than earthly ones. Therefore they could present the Body risen from the dead throughout all ages, to establish out of Him the one universal church as His Holy Body.

The Lord responded to her love and tears. So he opened her eyes to see the two angels witnessing to His resurrection- for based on two witnesses, a testimony is acceptable. She had not seen them before; nor had the two disciples when they had entered the tomb. St. Matthew and St. Mark report that Mary saw one angel- they were probably satisfied with making reference only to the one who spoke to her.

White clothes indicate purity.

**Why were the angels sitting?** Angels do not need to sit in order to rest for they do not possess a body that is liable to get tired. Their sitting down indicates an invitation to shake off our fear of the grave. Wherever the Lord is present, we may sit and rest. Although the world had positioned guards to secure the tomb and prevent the Lord's resurrection, yet He arose, and the guards trembled and ran away. As for the guards of the Lord, they are the angels who were sitting in security and assurance in the Lord's conquest and victory over the forces of darkness.

The two angels are a reference to the two cherubim who stood over the Ark of the Covenant where the throne of mercy and God's presence among His people was found (Ex 28:18). They did not carry swords, like those standing at the gate of the Paradise of Eden, in order to prevent men from entering. These angels were sitting at the head and feet where the Body had been laid, and they welcome us. They lead every believer to enjoy fellowship with the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. They invite us to enjoy eternal life through the cross that is the tree of life.

**St. Gregory the Great** comments that the angel seated at the head proclaims the Lord's divinity: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1:1). The other angel, seated at the feet proclaims the Lord's incarnation: 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14). They could also be a reference to the two Testaments, the Old and the New Testaments. Both present the same message: that the Lord became incarnate, died, and arose from the dead. They are like the two cherubim who sat on the Ark of the Covenant where the glory of God shone. The word 'cherubim' means 'perfect knowledge.' What else could that mean other than the two Testaments? What is the mercy seat other than the Lord who became man? The Old Testament proclaims a matter that is imperative and bound to happen. The New Testament announces that this proclamation has been fulfilled and completed. Both Testaments faced each other while they faced the seat of mercy at the same time. They contemplated the Lord who became incarnated; and with one heart, they explained



the mystery of His plan<sup>9</sup>.

\* Why was one angel seated at the head, while the other was seated at the feet? Is it not because the Greek word for angels is translated into Latin as ‘untie’ (bearing/carrying news)? Therefore the angels refer to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that is preached from head to foot- or from the beginning to the end of time<sup>10</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* The woman’s comprehension had not soared sufficiently to accept the Resurrection based on the evidence of the handkerchief and the burial linens. Then something else occurred, for she saw the two angels seated and dressed in shining clothes. They were there to alleviate somewhat her great sorrow and to comfort her. They did not speak about the resurrection, but she was led to that knowledge gently. She saw unusual brilliant features, shining clothes and heard a soothing voice<sup>11</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* The Jews honored the Holy of Holies because it contained the cherubim, the seat of mercy, the bowl of manna, Aaron’s rod, and the gold censor. Does the Lord’s tomb less honorable than the Holy of Holies? On entering there, we would probably see the Savior in burial clothes; and if we stayed longer, we would see an angel seated at His feet and another at His head. This tomb had been carved by Joseph of Arimathea, and the prophetic words of Isaiah inform us of his glory: ‘...and his rest shall be glorious,’ (Is 11:10). This indicates that the burial place of the Lord would receive universal honor<sup>12</sup>.

**St Jerome**

**Then they said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?”  
She said to them, “Because they have taken my Lord,  
And I do not know where they have laid Him.” [13]**

The two angels behaved tenderly towards Mary Magdalene. They marveled at her weeping because they expected her to rejoice that He had risen. Indeed, the heavenly ones lovingly share our sorrows. They are surprised that we are saddened because they know what glory the resurrected Lord has prepared for His followers.

Even the sight of the angels could not satisfy the heart of Mary Magdalene. She had come to seek the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

The two angels stopped her tears for what else could they be proclaiming other than that, in one way or another, the matter promised future joy... They raised the question: ‘why are you weeping?’ It is as though they were telling her: ‘Do not weep.’ But she assumed that they asked

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<sup>9</sup> cf. Hom 25: Forty Gospel Homilies, PL76:1189

<sup>10</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 121:1

<sup>11</sup> Homilies on St John, 86:1

<sup>12</sup> Letter, 46:5

this as they did not know the cause of her tears<sup>13</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* In all these circumstances, it was as though a door was opening up before her so that she could gradually acquire the knowledge of the Resurrection. The manner in which the angels were sitting down was an invitation for her to ask them for they indicated that they knew what had happened. Therefore they did not sit together, but each sat apart... What did she say? She spoke with emotion and excitement: **‘...they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.’** What are you saying? Have you not learned anything about His resurrection until now? Do you still imagine that He is still lying somewhere? Do you not see that Mary Magdalene had not yet acquired superior knowledge?<sup>14</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* She was not looking for the Body. She was looking for the Lord who had been taken away<sup>15</sup>.

**St. Gregory the Great.**

\* ‘By night on my bed I sought the one I love’ (Sg of Sol 3:1). It is also written: ‘Mary Magdalene came....while it was still dark’: ‘By night on my bed I sought the one I love, I sought him, but I did not find him’ And in the Gospels, Mary says: **‘...they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him?!’**<sup>16</sup>

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

## **1- In the Morning: The Meeting of Mary Magdalene with the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**‘Now when she had said this,  
She turned around and saw Jesus standing there,  
And did not know that it was Jesus.’ [14]**

The special ‘place’ where the Lord stayed, and where He went is a vital topic. At the beginning of the Gospel, the first two chosen disciples asked the Lord: ‘... where are You staying?’ (John 1:38). During the last supper, Thomas said to the Lord: “Lord we do not know where You are going...” (John 14:5). At the tomb, Mary Magdalene asked Him: “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away” (John 14:15). When the Lord asked her to proclaim His resurrection, He guided her to the place where He was going for He wanted her and the disciples to reach a higher degree of knowledge concerning His resurrection.

Before the angels could answer her, the answer came in a practical fashion: the Lord Jesus Christ stood behind her, spoke with her and answered her question. The desire of her heart was to see the Body of the Lord who had died. However, the Lord granted her a greater blessing for the ‘One risen from the dead’ appeared to her. Indeed, the Lord grants us over and above

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<sup>13</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 121:1

<sup>14</sup> Homilies on St John, 86:1

<sup>15</sup> Hom 25. Forty Gospel Homilies, PL 76:1189

<sup>16</sup> Essay 14:12

what we pray for and request.

She turned around probably because she saw the angels acting in an unusual manner such as bowing down towards the Lord. Or their eyes looked in great awe as they turned away from her. Mary Magdalene saw an ordinary person and did not recognize the Person of the Lord. Her psychological condition or her mind was not prepared for meeting with the resurrected One. It is true that she was seeking Him with tears and a broken heart; but she did not realize that He 'is near to those who have a broken heart' (Ps 34:18), and closer than they think. Therefore it is appropriate for us to realize that He is very close to us -more than anyone can imagine- when we seek Him. Indeed, He lives within us, and seeks to reveal Himself to us.

St. John the evangelist does not report that one of the angels informed Mary Magdalene about the Lord's resurrection. Probably this is because the other three evangelists have mentioned it (Matt 28:5-7; Mark 16:6-7; Luke 24:5-7).

\* It seems to us that the Lord appeared to her suddenly, and immediately after she had said: 'they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.' When the angels saw the Lord, their appearance, looks, and behavior revealed that they seen their Master. They wanted to draw Mary Magdalene's attention to Him.

That was how the angels saw Him- as their Master. However, the Lord did not reveal Himself to her in the same manner, as He did not want to scare her when her eyes would see Him for the first time after His death. Therefore He appeared to her as a simple human being so that she thought He was the gardener.

This was expected of a mind that was not fully ready for heavenly matters. Rather than providing a big portion of knowledge all at once, the Lord quietly asked her: **"Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"**<sup>17</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Because she loved, she complained, and she saw Him but did not recognize Him. Her love revealed Him to her, yet her doubts prevented her from recognizing Him<sup>18</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

**Jesus said to her,  
"Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"  
She supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him,  
"Sir if you have carried Him away,  
Tell me where you have laid Him and I will take Him away." [15]**

It could be that the Lord's questions were spoken in a stern manner: **"Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?."** It is as though He was telling her: why have you come here so early?!

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<sup>17</sup> Homilies on St John, 86;1

<sup>18</sup> Hom 25. Forty Gospel Homilies.PL 76:1189

Her behavior was previously reported symbolically by Joseph in the Old Testament. He had acted as a foreign person towards his brothers before revealing himself to them (Gen 44, 45). The Lord was reprimanding her: **“Why are you weeping? I am risen! Whom are seeking? I am here before you! My resurrection is the answer to all your questions, and it fulfills all your needs.”**

Her answer implied the following: ‘Why do you blame me for my many tears? Why do you ask about whom I am seeking? You know the reason for my tears and the purpose of my search.’ As she thought Him to be the gardener, she begged Him to tell her where she could find Him if he had carried the Lord away to another place.

She probably believed that as a gardener he did not want the body of a person, who had been rejected and crucified by society, to be placed in the new graves prepared for his employer and masters. Therefore he had carried Him elsewhere. She asked to take the Body and she would find another tomb where to lay Him. Her love led her to forget the weight she would have to carry in order to move the Body and find an appropriate burial place.

\* Again, Mary Magdalene spoke about the Body as though she was speaking about a dead body that was laid down or carried far away. Her words implied: ‘If you have carried Him away because you feared the Jews, inform me, and I will take the Body.’ Her feminine tenderness and spontaneous love were so great! However, she lacked a sublime vision. Therefore He gave her the message through the sound (of His voice) and not through vision<sup>19</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord asked her about the reason for her sorrow in order to augment her yearning. He asked the woman who was searching to see, in order to inspire in her a stronger charge of feelings and love towards Him<sup>20</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

**Jesus said to her, “Mary!”  
She turned and said to Him  
“Rabboni!” (which is to say, Teacher). [16]**

She searched for Him zealously and lovingly. This qualified her to be the first to hear His joyful voice. The Lord Jesus Christ was pleased to grant her the joy of His resurrection. Consequently, He intended her to testify and preach the Gospel of His resurrection. He spoke to her in the loving tone with which she was familiar, and not in the manner of a gardener watching over the garden. She heard her name uttered through His lips and so she recognized Him. This conforms with what the Lord had said about His sheep who know His voice (John 10:4). One word sufficed and it was the Lord calling her by her name. The church accordingly says: ‘The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping upon the mountains...’ (Song of Solomon 2:8).

She said to Him, ‘ **Rabboni.**’ This is a title that carries an honor that is greater than that of ‘Rabbi.’ It conveys the meaning of ‘My greatly honored teacher.’

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<sup>19</sup> Homilies on St John., 86:1

<sup>20</sup> Hom 25. Forty Gospel Homilies, PL 76:1189

\* Until the moment when the Lord called her by her name, and had appeared to her, she still believed that He had died and asked where He had been laid. He called her by her name and seemed to be telling her: 'May you know the One who knows you.' As soon as she was called by her name, Mary Magdalene recognized her Creator. He was the One she was seeking beyond herself, whereas He was teaching her to seek Him inside her<sup>21</sup>.

**St. Gregory the Great**

\* The reason for her sorrow was that she did not know where to go to comfort herself. However, the time had come when the two angels would announce to her what would transform, to some extent, her sorrow into joy. They asked her not to weep<sup>22</sup>.

\* When she turned around (to look behind her) she thought Him to be someone else (15). However, when she let her heart guide her, she recognized Him for who He really was<sup>23</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**Jesus said to her  
"Do not cling to Me,  
For I have not yet ascended to My Father;  
But go to My brethren  
And say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father,  
And to My God and your God." [17]**

Mary Magdalene did as she was commanded, and went and informed the disciples that she had seen the Lord. She confirmed her experience of having met the Lord who had risen from the dead.

To confirm His resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ allowed His disciples to touch the places where the nails and wounds had been. He also allowed the women to touch His feet and worship Him (Matt 28:9). As for Mary Magdalene, the Lord asked her not to touch Him with her hands for He wanted her to reach out to Him with her heart. Probably the reason for that was that He knew she would imagine that He had risen and would live with them on earth just as Lazarus had done. The Lord wanted her to preach His resurrection and ascension into heaven. He did not arise in order to establish an earthly kingdom. He arose in order to ascend and establish His kingdom in our hearts. The Lord had prepared the minds of His disciples earlier, and had told them about His crucifixion and ascension into the heavens. Therefore He did not want the joy of His resurrection to be transformed into a yearning for Him to stay with them on earth.

Leon Morris explains that the word 'touch' in Greek implies the meaning of 'do not continue to touch' and not 'do not start with touching.' The Lord wanted her to stop touching and it is as though He allowed her to touch Him only for a moment. He wanted to assure her that He had risen with a new life and this shared nothing in common with the old life He had left on earth. Having this new life, He would grant the faithful believers this renewal in the final great

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<sup>21</sup> Hom 25. Forty Gospel Homilies, 193

<sup>22</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 121:1

<sup>23</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 121:2

day of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:51-53).

Once again, as Mary Magdalene experienced His resurrection, He confirms to her that He has not ascended yet to heaven. The time had come to preach the resurrection and to prepare the minds for the ascension. There was no time for temporal relationships or for His physical presence among them. There was no time to speak with Him. The Lord had to fulfill His mission, and it was time to preach the joyful news.

Although He had risen and had proclaimed His ascension, yet He was not embarrassed to call His disciples as His **‘brothers.’**

The Lord sent a message to His disciples through Mary Magdalene. They had deserted Him when He was arrested; and they did not accompany Him to the cross. He did not tell them one word of reproach. It was as though the message He sent was telling them, ‘I forgive and forget, and I do not reproach!’

The Lord sent the message with Mary Magdalene from whom He had cast out seven devils. She was the one who would preach the glad news of the resurrection to the disciples.

In His message to them, the Lord proclaimed His yearning for unity. Their union with Him was His desire. Consequently they would be adopted sons of God and God would be their Father. The Lord Himself would be united with them for the Father would be His God, and the Lord would be the Son of Man who is a representative of all mankind. However, the Lord makes a distinction between His status as the true and eternal Son and their status as children by adoption; since He does not say: **‘our Father and our God’**, Although John and Peter left Mary Magdalene alone in the garden, looking for the Lord and weeping, she ran back to the disciples as soon as she met Him. She returned to preach all the things she had seen, heard and found. She had found the Messiah, the Savior of the world who would prepare them to ascend with their hearts into the Father’s embrace.

**Saint Jerome** responds to the question raised by **Marcella** about the harmony between the words in John 20:16 ‘Do not cling to Me..’ and the words in Matt 28:9, ‘..they came and held Him by the feet and worshipped Him’ ( Mat 28:9). St. Jerome says that in the first case Mary Magdalene failed to recognize the divinity of the Lord. In the second case, the women recognized Him, and therefore were granted the privilege which Mary Magdalene was denied at first<sup>24</sup>.

\* In other words: ‘you are not qualified to touch the One risen from the dead and whom you imagine is still in the grave.’<sup>25</sup>

**St. Jerome**

\* The Lord Jesus Christ taught this woman a lesson after which she knew that He was the Master. That was how she had called Him in her response to Him. That gardener was planting in

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<sup>24</sup> Letter, 59, Question 4

<sup>25</sup> Letter 39:6

her heart the mustard seed just as He would have planted it in His garden. So what did He intend to convey when He told her: **“Do not cling to Me”**? He also added- as though the reason for that needed an explanation, **‘for I have not yet ascended to My Father.’** What does this mean? If human beings cannot touch Him while He stands on this earth, then how could we touch Him when He is seated in heaven? He surely came before His ascension, to His disciples, so they could touch Him (Luke 24:29).. This woman symbolizes the gentile church who did not believe in Him except after His actual ascension to the Father. In this manner the Lord intends the Gentiles to believe in Him. They need to cling to Him spiritually as He and the Father are One..

\* It was appropriate that Mary Magdalene was forbidden to touch the Lord who said: ‘Do not cling to Me..’ because she still did not believe that He was equal to the Father. It conveyed to her that she could not go on having faith based on her current concept. He seemed to be telling her: ‘Do not let your thoughts wander away from all what I have gone through for your sake and without transcending and comprehending that which goes beyond your present condition...you will cling to Me when you believe that I am God and am in no way unequal to the Father<sup>26</sup>’.

**St. Augustine**

\* We believe that this woman wanted to resume her friendship with the Lord Jesus Christ and accompany Him as she had done before. She was so overjoyed that she did not comprehend the huge event. Even though He still carried the same Body, yet He was in a far more glorious state. By forbidding her, the Lord lifted her thoughts so that she would see Him in greater awe and reverence. The words ‘do not cling Me’ actually meant: ‘Do not approach Me in the manner you did previously.’

\* Whereas we saw the Lord all alone at His crucifixion, we do not see Him in that state afterwards. Indeed, He appears among His brothers. On the day of His resurrection, He offered the joyful message: ‘.go to My brethren and say to them; I am ascending to My Father and your Father’ (John 20:17). We hear Him talk to His disciples as His brothers on the day of His glorious resurrection after He had gone through His suffering. As we become sanctified through His redeeming act (the pains of the cross), He not only bears no grudge or embarrassment but also feels greatly pleased to call them His ‘brothers’, (Heb 2:11-12).

\* The bridegroom says: ‘If you desire to open the door of your soul so that the king of glory enters in, then you need to have a sense of yearning in your soul. As the Evangelist reports: ‘for whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother’ (Matt 12:50). It is appropriate that you draw near to the Truth, and to become His partner so that you are never separated from Him.

**St. Gregory, Bishop of Nicea**

\* **“Go to My brethren and say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father.”** Although His ascension was not going to occur immediately, and would happen after forty days, why did the Lord say these words? He desired to raise their thoughts and motivate them to comprehend that He was leaving this world and going to heaven<sup>27</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

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<sup>26</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 121:3

<sup>27</sup> Homilies on St John, 86:2

\* When the Lord would go( to the Father), He would be carrying His victory and conquest in His Body, resurrected from the dead...then some of the hosts would inquire: “who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this One who is glorious in His apparel?” (Is 63:1). And those in His company would answer the guards at the doors of heaven saying: “Lift up your heads, O you gates!...and the king of glory shall come in” (Ps 24:7). As they would need more explanation, and when they will see traces of blood on His side and all the wounds on His Body, they will ask: ‘why is Your apparel red, and Your garments like one who treads in the winepress?’ And His answer is: ‘I have trodden them and trampled them..” (Is 63:2-3)<sup>28</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

\* The Lord asked Mary Magdalene not to touch Him as He had not yet ascended. **He would prepare glorious things and then she could touch Him after His ascension when she would be able to comprehend matters which hands cannot grasp, and have a vision of things not found here below.** The Lord probably intended to inform her by asking her not to touch Him, that she should not consider Him to be just a human being; but that He is the Holy One. He wanted to lead her to ‘lift up your heart and thoughts to heaven and seek for Me there. I am going to ascend to the Father whom I have never left and have never become separated from Him. I will raise you and carry you up to My throne!’

The reason why He should not be touched is stated: ‘... **for I have not yet ascended to My Father ...**’ The heart that does not believe in the equality of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Father would maintain that the Lord has not yet ascended to the Father. But a person who believes in his heart that the Lord is one with the Father since the beginning of times is uniquely enabled to touch Him... Because I have become incarnated, then He is My God. Because you have been liberated from sin, He is become your God. He is My Father and God in a manner that is distinct and different from yours for He gave birth to Me as a God before the beginning of the creation but became created as a man in the fullness of time<sup>29</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

\* It is vital to avoid thinking naively or rashly and tenaciously, that the Lord’s words, ‘**I am ascending to My Father and your Father**’ indicate a person’s equality in honor with the righteous. Therefore it is important to make a distinction: the name ‘Father’ refers to One- that is- ‘He is the Father to one Son.’ Concerning His role, it is a multiple one as He ‘he calls sons through the adoption of many’: Because the Lord Jesus Christ Himself knew that, He who is without sin, has said: ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father.’ He did not say: ‘Our Father’ for He distinguished between the two.

He first said what applies to Him: ‘I am ascending to My Father’ which is the natural relation. And then He added ‘.. and your Father’ that is the result of adoption. For however great is the privilege we have received when we pray ‘Our Father who is in heaven’; yet this is a gift we have received due to God’s merciful love. We call Him Father because we have been transferred from slavery to adopted children, and not because we have been born naturally from

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<sup>28</sup> Commentary on John, Book 6:2888-289

<sup>29</sup> Hom 25. Forty Gospel Homilies, 193-195



our heavenly Father. By the grace of the Father, through the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we have been allowed to say these words. It is due to God's love and His unspeakable mercy<sup>30</sup>.

\* To prevent the thought that in some way He is Father of the Son as well as of all creation, the Lord Jesus Christ made the following distinction: He said "My Father and your Father", which is to say: 'He is my Father by nature, and your Father through adoption.' He did not say: 'I am ascending to our Father', otherwise all creation would be a partner with the only Son (based on His earthly status)<sup>31</sup>.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* If you are seeking Him among the earthly creatures, just as Mary Magdalene was doing, then be careful or He will tell you the words He told Mary: 'Do not cling to Me for I have not yet ascended to My Father.' Your doors are narrow and cannot be lifted up and you are therefore unable to enter in. Go on the way to my brothers, that is to the eternal doors through which you will see the Lord Jesus Christ ascending... The doors of the church are eternal. The prophet yearned for them and proclaimed within its doors the praises of the Lord in these words: "that I may tell of all your praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion" (Ps 9:14)<sup>32</sup>.

\* The Son of God reveals the difference between birth and grace when He says: 'I have not yet ascended to My Father... I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.' He does not say: "I have not ascended to our Father and our God"; and this distinction marks the difference because the One who is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is at the same time our Creator<sup>33</sup>.

\* The Lord's purpose in being incarnated is to prepare for us the path to heaven<sup>34</sup>.

\* The Lord actually told Mary Magdalene: '**Do not cling to Me.**' However, the wholly pure One did not say: "because I am pure." So do you dare to claim, O Novatian, and say that you are pure? In fact, by claiming this, you will be considered impure even if your deeds were pure<sup>35</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* The Lord Jesus Christ was about to sit on His Father's throne, while everyone else remains standing. Even though He became our brother according to the flesh, yet He possesses honor that is wholly different than ours, and to a degree that is impossible to express<sup>36</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord,  
And that He had spoken these things to her. [18]**

Observe how the sin of the human race fell away just in the same manner when it was initiated.

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<sup>30</sup> Essay 7:7

<sup>31</sup> Essay 11:19

<sup>32</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 4:2:25-26

<sup>33</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 1:14:90

<sup>34</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 3:7: 50

<sup>35</sup> Concerning Repentance:1:8:38

<sup>36</sup> Homilies on St John, 86:2

In paradise, the woman was the cause of man's death (Gen 3:6). Now, a woman leaves the tomb to proclaim life for mankind. Mary recounted the words of the One who restored her life to her; and it was a woman who had recounted the words of the snake and which led to death. It seems that the Lord was telling the human race through deeds and not through words: 'Receive the source of life from the hand that had offered the death potion'<sup>37</sup>.

**St. Gregory the Great**

## **2- The Lord's Meeting with His disciples on Sunday Evening**

**Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week,  
When the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled,  
For fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them,  
"Peace be with you." [19]**

We do not hear that the Jews wanted to attack the disciples at that time. It is the weak faith of the disciples that led them to think that their turn would come after the Jews had crucified and buried the Lord. Indeed, no one had touched them since the Jews had been told: "let these go their way" (John 18:8). The goal of the leaders was to get hold of Jesus Himself. Therefore acting against the disciples was useless once Jesus had died in disgrace on the cross and was no longer present. So they considered the matter of the disciples of little importance.

The Lord's appearance in the midst of the disciples while the doors were closed was not a miraculous event. This is the nature of the body resurrected from the dead. Matter cannot hinder or obstruct it. The Lord wanted to confirm that He had risen with the same body. However, it was a glorified body. His resurrection did not mean that He had returned to a normal life on earth. Conversely, it proclaimed the uplifting of believers and ascending while carrying them into the Father's embrace.

The word 'doors' in the plural form occurs only in the Gospel of St. John. The upper room probably had more than one door, or he could have meant that the front door of the house as well as the door of the upper room was both locked. As the disciples were greatly frightened, they were not content to close the front door only.

In the other Gospels, the evangelists underlined how the disciples lived in fear immediately after the resurrection. It was not an easy thing for them to see the One, who had died and had been buried, still alive and appearing to them. Here, however, St. John the evangelist reveals another reason for their fear, and that is 'the Jews.' The disciples felt that their lives were exposed to real danger even after the Lord's resurrection. They feared they would be accused of having stolen the Body.

The Lord appeared on the first Christian Sabbath in order to bless and sanctify that day. The disciples had probably met in order to pray and worship. They might have wanted to discuss the current events of that day. The women, Peter, and John had confirmed that the tomb was empty. Mary Magdalene recounted her meeting with the Lord and reported the message He had

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<sup>37</sup> Hom 25. Forty Gospel Homilies, 195

entrusted her to deliver. He had also appeared to the women on that day (Matt 28:9). He had also appeared to the two disciples on the way of Emaus. He had conversed with them, opened their minds, and inflamed their hearts with love ( Luke 24:13), etc...

They had probably met to pray as they feared they would be arrested, The Jews claimed that the Lord's disciples had gone at night and stolen the Body. Anyhow, the disciples knew how to gather and pray in moments of stress.

The Lord's words: "Peace be with you" were not mere words uttered as a usual form of greeting exchanged among friends. Indeed, these words were a form of unusual blessing that carried power and offered the fruit of the resurrection: inner peace with God, peace for man with himself, peace in the Lord Jesus Christ. A peace unlike the fake peace of the world.

The Lord Himself is chaste. His mother is a virgin as well. Indeed, although a mother, she remained a virgin for the Lord had entered while the doors were closed. In His grave, a new tomb had been cut out of an extremely solid rock. No one had been laid there before or after Him (John 19:41). St. Mary is a closed paradise... 'A sealed source' (Song of Solomon 4:12). According to Joel (3:18) the waters of the river flow from this source<sup>38</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

\* Truly, the Lord was able to enter through the doors without opening them. He is the One who was born and yet the virginity of His mother remained untouched<sup>39</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* The disciples had gathered behind closed doors due to their fear of the Jews (John 20:19). When a person remains in the city of revelation, feeling secure, and overcome by holy meditation- while in fear of evil spirits, and enclosing his senses, that person welcomes the word of God. Then it is revealed to him in a mysterious manner rather than through the senses. It proclaims peace to him, while granting calmness and freedom from lusts...as he inhales this breeze, it grants him the many gifts of the Holy Spirit and the power over evil spirits, while revealing to him the marks and concepts of the divine mysteries.

**St. Mark the Ascetic**

**And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side.**

**Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. [20]**

By entering while the doors were close, the Lord Jesus Christ confirmed to the disciples that His resurrected Body had a new nature. At the same time, He confirmed that it was the same body since it bore the same wounds of the cross. However, this was a glorified body.

The resurrected Lord spoke through His mouth. He granted them a new and sublime peace. He spoke as He carried His wounds in His hands and feet. Therefore He granted them a unique joy by His presence among them. He showed them His hands and side to assure them that He is the same Jesus who was crucified in the same body. The traces of His wounds were a

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<sup>38</sup> Letter 48:21

<sup>39</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 121:4

living testimony of His resurrection. These wounds will continue to be a source of joy and glory until the end of time. They will remain to be a sign of the amazing divine love that is endless and that seeks the salvation of mankind. He had placed a cover shield on the brilliant glory of His resurrected Body so that they could look at Him and speak to Him.

The Lord Jesus Christ continues to spread His hands and expose His side. He embraces us with His love and satisfies our thirst from the source of His amazing blood. Consequently, we learn that since He is living then we are alive through His cross. Death will not be able to destroy us. The wounds of His cross are the language of a love that can tear away our fear of this world. A language of love that grants us a sublime inner joy.

He always grants us insight through the wounds of His cross. We eventually realize that we not only enjoy depth of vision but that we also enjoy His presence among us.

\* Certainly the form of the bodies resurrected from the dead will be in the same state as now, however they will attain a sublime glory. After the Lord's descent into Hades, He had the same body which had been crucified. He showed the disciples the marks of the nails in His hands and the wound in His side.

If we deny the condition of His body because of the manner he entered the room though the doors were closed- and this is not a feature of human bodies- then we need to remember, as well, that Peter and the Lord Jesus Christ each possessed two real bodies since they walked on the water. This too contradicts nature (Matt 22:30)<sup>40</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

### **What are the features of a body resurrected from the dead?**

A resurrected body is comparable to the body of the Lord Jesus Christ after His resurrection. With this body, He came out of the tomb while the sealed stone was still placed there; and He entered the upper room while the doors were closed (John 20; 19-20). He soars over time and place, as well as over physical boundaries and obstacles. It is an ideal body that collaborates with the soul so that it enables man to progress towards the Lord. Such a glorious fellowship, coupled with vision and meeting face to face is ultimately achieved. This does not mean that it is a different body than the one we now have. It is the same identical body we have now dressed in incorruption (1 Cor 15:53)

**St. Augustine** deals cautiously with this problem of **'the nature of the resurrected body'** and says: **(At any rate, whatever the nature of the spiritual body is, and however great is its blessing, yet I fear to speak about it. This is because we still have no experience related to the reality of this subject)<sup>41</sup>.**

The resurrected body possess these characteristics:

1- After the resurrection, the human body becomes spiritual. However, it is recognizable and can be distinguished from other bodies. The saint clarified the expression of **'the heavenly**

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<sup>40</sup> Against Jovinianus, 1:36

<sup>41</sup> De civite, Dei, 22:21

**body’ does not mean the denial of the real bodily nature that the spiritual body possess<sup>42</sup> (The spiritual body does not imply that it is no longer a body. Rather, just as “the living body” implies “life”... “the spiritual body” implies a body that obeys the spirit)<sup>43</sup>.**

2- It is the same body as ours, yet it will be wholly transformed into incorruption. The resurrected body will not possess the imperfections or defects of our bodies **as (it will be transformed wholly into something far better at the moment of the resurrection<sup>44</sup>).**

3- **The wounds of martyrdom will leave their marks on His body.** They will not appear as defects but as clear marks revealing the mystery of great love the martyrs bore for Jesus Christ. These will convey honor, and glory and will not appear as imperfections or defects in the body<sup>45</sup>.

4- The resurrected body will be a glorified one that resembles the body of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

5- (It is possible and reasonable to believe that we shall see the new heaven and the new earth. In this manner, we shall see God more vividly wherever we turn our eyes. He will be present everywhere as He rules the whole universe<sup>46</sup>.)

6- We are introduced to the concept of the spiritual body as a factor that will no longer preoccupy us from meditating on God. It will no longer be a stumbling block for the soul as it will submit to it. According to **St Augustine**, this will be a vital issue as there will no longer be a conflict between the spirit and the body. Indeed, the resurrected body will interact with the spirit – **[the same body that troubles us and makes us continue to sin, will submit to us in the resurrection. It will no longer trouble us with the obstacles it puts in our way as we seek to study God’s divine laws and commandments<sup>47</sup>].**

In his book ‘The Holy City of God’, St Augustine explains this concept in great depth and says: **[The spiritual body will submit to the spirit, yet it will remain a body and not a spirit. Just as in this life the earthly spirit submits to the body yet it continues to be a spirit and is not a body<sup>48</sup>].** Instead of there being a conflict between the soul and the body, there will be a complete union within one spiritual nature, where the body will not rebel against the spirit. **St Augustine explains: [Why do we speak of a spiritual body, O dearly beloved, except that it does not fail to submit to the spirit? Nothing will remain in you that struggles or rebels against you. There will no longer be reason to lament as the apostle does when he says: “The flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh,” (Gal 5:17)<sup>49</sup>].**

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<sup>42</sup> Retractiones 2:3

<sup>43</sup> Sermon 242:8:11

<sup>44</sup> De doctrina Christina, 1:19:18

<sup>45</sup> City of God 2:19

<sup>46</sup> De Civit. Dei, 22:229:3 cf. De Gen ad Lit. 12:35

<sup>47</sup> To Fortunastus 22

<sup>48</sup> De Civit. Dei, 22:21

<sup>49</sup> Sermon, 242:8

\* The outer features of this world will pass away- that is, all the consequences of the fall will end. This will not involve the destruction of the essence or composition of the creation; but just the outer form of the world that will pass away. Then man will be renewed and flourish in the incorrupt form and origin of life. It will no longer be possible to grow old, for there will be ‘a new heaven and a new earth,’ (Rev 21:1). In this new heaven and earth, man will live in a state of constant renewal and he will be engaged in an eternal dialogue with God<sup>50</sup>.

**St Iraneous**

\* The Lord arose with the same body He had at His burial. As Christians, we have been given the promise of the resurrection, and we look forward to experience a resurrection similar to that of the Lord's. He has risen before any of us came into the faith so that His resurrection becomes the basis of our belief. But why? Is it so that we are no longer the same, after the resurrection, as we are now? The Lord Jesus Christ arose and ascended into the heavens with His body. When He lived on earth, His body possessed all its human functions. Therefore this proves that the body that was buried is the same that arose. But will there be a need for food in heaven? We have read that angels had appeared on earth in the form of men (Gen 18). They visited Abraham and ate with him. An angel appeared to Tobias and also ate with him. Do we suppose that they seemed to eat but did not do so actually? Is it not a fact that Abraham indeed killed a calf, baked bread, and laid it on the table? Did he not offer food to the angels and they ate?! (Gen 18:1-9)<sup>51</sup>.

**St Augustine**

\* God, who is loving and merciful, has released the body from its imprisonment, and has liberated it from the slavery of destruction. A slavery that is deadly and bitter. He has granted the body immortality in the eternal life. In this manner, He has granted the human body the gift of holy eternity, making it immortal and alive for ever<sup>52</sup>.

**St Cletet of Alexandria**

**Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you!  
As the Father sent Me, I also send you.” [21]**

The Lord repeated and confirmed His gift, **“Peace to you” [21]**. Through this gift, the disciples would therefore become qualified for the heavenly mission. They would preach, with authority from above, the news of the joyful resurrection. They would act as ambassadors of inward peace for they would become members in the risen body of Christ. The Head would work in them so that they would witness to the world concerning the risen life which they practice through the Holy Spirit.

\*This is what the Lord had said before His crucifixion, “...I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one can take away from you,” (16:22). These words were now being fulfilled in a practical manner. It led the disciples now to have true faith...these were the Lord's first words after His resurrection<sup>53</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

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<sup>50</sup> K Ware: the Orthodox Way :SVSP., p182

<sup>51</sup> Sermon 242:8

<sup>52</sup> Pedagogus 3:1

<sup>53</sup> Homilies on St John, 86:2

**And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them,  
“Receive the Holy Spirit.” [22]**

The Lord granted the disciples the Holy Spirit for the first time on the eve of the first day of His resurrection... It was the culmination of a series of events that had started at dawn. This preceded the Pentecost and it has led many to question the difference between the granting of the Holy Spirit in this passage and the event that took place on the day of the Pentecost.

In the Holy Bible, the verb ‘breathed’ or ‘emphyso’ has been rarely used. However, it is used in the Book of Genesis where it carries much weight. We read at first that ‘the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters’; then we read that God ‘breathed into (man’s) nostrils the breath of life’, and man became a living soul; (Gen 2:7). In the Book of Ezekial, we are told that when the bones of the dead came together, the Spirit breathed into them and granted them life (Ezk 37:9). From the above, we understand that a new creation is born and inaugurated through the breath of the Holy Spirit which was granted to the disciples. It is possible to describe the work of the Holy Spirit as a mission with the objective of leading the disciples to work by the Holy Spirit in order that the world might enjoy the new creation of the resurrected life. He granted them the breath of the Holy Spirit to empower them to carry out the ministry and service of their mission. Thousands of years earlier, God had breathed into the earth and had created Adam into a living being. Now He breathed into the disciples’ faces in order to raise in them the new being; and so that they would be blessed by the gift of the active Spirit working within and through them.

**Fr Maximus the Confessor** comments as follows: [ Since we have been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit (in other words, we have participated in His death and resurrection), we have been granted our first liberation from the corrupt flesh in the name of the Lord and through His Spirit. However, we look forward to the final liberation...as spiritual beings].

\* We know that it is possible to be baptized only in the Church and at the hands of priests. The Church is established upon evangelical principles; and her priests are ordained in the Lord Jesus Christ and authorized to baptize and grant absolution for our sins. Without them it would be impossible to absolve or retain sins since there would be no one to determine such issues<sup>54</sup>.

\* The Lord gave the disciples the power to forgive sins. He also gave that power to the Churches where He had sent the disciples to lay down the foundations; and to the bishops whom they had ordained and who had succeeded them<sup>55</sup>.

**Caprianus the Martyr**

\* Notice that sins are absolved through the Holy Spirit. As for human beings, they undertake this function as they fulfill the service of absolving sins. They do not claim that they are entitled to do so due to some kind of authority they personally possess. In fact they forgive sins in the name

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<sup>54</sup> Letter 73 to Jubauan: 7

<sup>55</sup> Firmilian to Cyprian: Letter 75:16 (on 256 AD)

of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and not in their own name. Man prays the Divine One to grant forgiveness; for man performs the service, but the Almighty grants the blessing<sup>56</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

\* Why were the disciples granted the Holy Spirit on earth at first, and then later as tongues of fire descending from heaven? Because there are two commandments for love: loving God and loving our brothers. The gift of the Holy Spirit on earth promotes love for our brothers, while the gift coming from heaven promotes love for God

Just as there is one love and two commandments, so there is one Spirit and two gifts or blessings.

**The first blessing** is the one the Lord granted when He lived on earth. **The second one** when He went to heaven. By loving our brothers we learn how to develop our love for God. It is true that the one Holy Spirit had lived in the hearts of the disciples from a very early stage in order to grant them faith; however, the gift was not fully or clearly granted except after the resurrection.

This explains why it is written, ‘...for the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified,’ (Jn 7:39). It is important to realize that those who possessed the Holy Spirit acknowledged and proclaimed Him publicly only after the Lord’s resurrection. They did so not only to support the small number of believers but for the sake of many others<sup>57</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

**“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them;  
And if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” [23]**

The Lord Jesus Christ forgives sins (and also expels demons) through His Holy Spirit. This is clear in His words to His disciples after the resurrection, **“Receive the Holy Spirit...”, and then went on to say, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; and if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” [22-23]**

\* The task of the priest is to grant the Holy Spirit, to exercise his right to forgive - through the Holy Spirit- and to retain sins<sup>58</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

\* As a King, the Lord sent the disciples to be rulers, and He granted them the power to be thrown into prison and to come out from there. He assigned that same power to them and that was how He sent them out<sup>59</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

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<sup>56</sup> Of the Holy Spirit, Book 3:18:137

<sup>57</sup> Hom. 25. Forty Gospel Homilies

<sup>58</sup> Concerning Repentance, 1:2:8

<sup>59</sup> Homilies on St John, 86:3



**Pope Gregory the Great** warns against the abuse of such authority. This could occur if a person is driven by personal whims and not according to the nature of the One to whom they are subject. In such a case, the following words would be pertinent, '...to slay the souls that should not die, and to save the souls alive that should not live...' (Ezk 13:19)<sup>60</sup>.

**But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus,  
Was not with them when Jesus came. [24]**

Thomas was characterized by his frankness. His decision was very clear when he stated that he would not believe unless he saw the hands of the Lord and the traces of the nails, and unless he touched the marks of the nails and put his hand in the Lord's side, [25]. This happened during the first day and events reached their peak as the Lord continued to appear. His object was to attract this world and call everyone to enjoy the experience of the resurrection.

The absence of Thomas from the meeting of the disciples deprived him from the golden opportunity of seeing the Lord, hearing His words, and receiving His blessing. He might have been unable to attend – due to a health problem for example- yet what excuse could he have for refusing the testimony of his brothers who told him they had seen the Lord?

\* We have a reason for celebrating the holy liturgy at the beginning of the week on Sundays. Moreover we stand up for we have risen with the Lord, and pray for heavenly matters as we reach out to Him. We observe all this as we consider that this day represents a picture of the age to come. Therefore we consider that this is the beginning of the days of the week and we call it day one and not the first day. Moses accordingly repeats these words in the Book of Genesis: 'So the evening, and the morning were ...'

**St Basil the Great**

\* That past Sunday (the day of the Passover) was the Sunday of salvation. But this Sunday- which comes eight days later, and which we call the Sunday of Thomas- is the commemoration and confirmation of Salvation. The former was the Sunday that stands in between the grave and the resurrection; while the latter one (Sunday of Thomas) is the day God spends to create. Just as He had begun the first creation on day one, He also began His second creation on that same day which is at the same time day one-in relation to the days following it; and day eight – in relation to the days that follow it....and the day He returns to live in heaven.

**St Gregory of Nazianzen**

**The other disciples therefore said to him,  
“We have seen the Lord,”  
But he said to them, “Except I see in His hands the print of the nails,  
And thrust my hand into His side,  
I will not believe.” [25]**

That is how the Evangelist reports to us the event of the first day of the Lord's resurrection, which is also the eighth day of the disciples' deep sense of loneliness and loss. The

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<sup>60</sup> cf. Hom 25. Forty Gospel Homilies, 205

Lord appears to them in a similar way on both days. Then the Evangelist draws our attention to the Lord's wounds so that we might all shout and say with Thomas, **"My Lord and my God!"**

\* Thomas disbelieved the disciples when they told him, "we have seen the Lord." This was not because he mistrusted them. Neither did he discount their testimony or believe that the resurrection was impossible, for he did not say, 'I do not believe you.' His words were, **"Except I see in His hands the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe"**<sup>61</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

## **5- The Lord's Meeting with the Disciples on the Following Sunday**

**And after eight days again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them,  
Then came Jesus, the doors being shut,  
And stood in the midst, and said:  
"Peace be unto You." [26]**

In the first century, it was usual in Palestine to include the first and last day when specific of a specific period of time. Therefore, the words **'after eight days'** would convey to us the eighth day, or after the seventh day...which would be the first Sunday after the Lord's resurrection. That was when the Lord revealed Himself to Thomas... the eighth day being as reference to the age and life to come.

The Evangelist reports another meeting with the disciples while the doors were closed. He had not met with them as a group throughout the week- between Monday and Saturday- in order to confirm that He would no longer accompany them as He used to do before His crucifixion. The time had come to prepare them for His ascension. After the resurrection, His natural place- as the Son of Man resurrected from the dead- was in the heavens. At the start of His ministry, the Lord had disappeared for forty days when Satan had tempted Him (Matt 4:1-3). He wanted to confirm to His disciples that He had come to fight on their behalf, and to offer them His victory. Now He would remain forty days hidden from them, and meeting them only intermittently, to confirm the glory prepared for them by His ascension into the heavens.

The disciples used to meet together weekly on the day of the Lord which was the Christian Sabbath day. He appeared to them on that day to confirm His promise- that where two or three are gathered in His name He would be in their midst- in a tangible manner. Thomas made sure he would be present as he was eagerly expecting the Lord to appear to the disciples.

\* If you were to say: 'Why did Jesus not appear to Thomas immediately, and did so only after eight days?' Our answer would be, 'So that the disciples would inform Thomas and he so that his heart would be more eager. Besides, he would become a stronger and more willing believer as a result'<sup>62</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

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<sup>61</sup> Homilies on St John, 87:2

<sup>62</sup> Homilies on St John, 87:1

\* Is it astonishing that the Holy One, Who- being resurrected and on His way to eternal life- would make His entrance through closed doors? He is the One who had come out of the sealed womb of the Virgin in order to die on earth. He appeared to His disciples immediately after His death to reveal that His body is incorruptible and materially real. He confirmed that His body, after the resurrection is made of the same nature as our bodies, yet different in its aspect of glory<sup>63</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

**Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here,  
And look at My hands,  
And reach your hand here,  
And put it into My side,  
Do not be unbelieving, but believing.” [27]**

\*Note the Lord’s compassion! For the sake of one soul, He revealed Himself carrying His wounds. He came to save each one personally.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* After the resurrection, we will possess the same body, blood, and bones. What will be judged- according to the Holy Bible- will be our deeds and not the physical nature of these elements<sup>64</sup>.

**St Jerome**

**And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God.” [28]**

Thomas was not a doubting person to the degree he believed himself to be. As soon as he saw the Lord Jesus Christ standing before him and as soon as he heard His voice, he no longer felt the need to touch the wounds of His Master. He immediately proclaimed Him and cried out, **“My Lord and my God.”** Probably, just the sight of His Lord made him withdraw what he had told the disciples – that unless he touched the Lord’s wounds, he would not believe- and now he declared to the whole world what he felt in his heart. The Lord what Thomas had said without being informed by anyone.

Opinions differ, and some scholars believe that Thomas declared his faith without touching the Lord’s wounds. Others believe that he actually declared his faith but obeyed the Lord and touched His wounds, even though he no longer needed to do so in order to believe.

\* He saw the Lord’s Body and touched Him; and he comprehended His Divinity that can neither be seen nor touched<sup>65</sup>.

**St Augustine**

\* Just as the Father is God and the Son is Lord; so also the Son is God and the Father is Lord<sup>66</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

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<sup>63</sup> Hom. 25. Forty Gospel Homilies, 201

<sup>64</sup> To Pammachius Against John of Jerusalem, 28

<sup>65</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 121:5

<sup>66</sup> Of the Holy Spirit, Book 3:15:108

**Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you believed.  
Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” [29]**

The Lord did not tell him, ‘You have believed because you have touched My wounds.’ Rather, He said, **“because you have seen Me.”** Seeing the Lord led him to have faith.

\* The Lord, Who has the power to arise without any traces of wounds, retained them so that the doubting disciple could touch them. This would heal his wounded heart<sup>67</sup>.

\* When the doubting disciple touched the wounds in His Master’s Body, the wounds inflicted by his unbelief were healed. The lack of faith displayed by Thomas was more beneficial to our faith than to the believing disciples. When Thomas regained faith by touching the Lord, our minds were released of all doubt, and have become steadfast in the faith<sup>68</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

\* The Lord knew how much the disciples’ hearts were hurting. In order to heal them, He retained the traces of the wounds in His Body<sup>69</sup>.

\* It is possible to confirm that the disciple did not dare to touch the Lord when He asked Thomas to do so as it is not reported that ‘Thomas touched Him.’ However, whether Thomas believed by only seeing Him, or by touching Him as well, he surely saw and believed. What the Lord declared was a reference to what would happen concerning the faith of the Gentiles: “Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed.”

**St Augustine**

## **1- The Aim of the Gospel**

**And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples,  
Which are not written in this book.’ [30]**

The Evangelist reveals the aim of writing this Gospel. It is not intended to present a full documentation of the life, work, and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. St Joh knew a lot which he did not record as his aim was to get every reader to enjoy the living faith and not just to believe. Living faith provides real knowledge which leads to eternal life.

**But these are written,  
That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God,  
And that believing you may have life in His name. [31]**

Believing in Christ as the Messiah and Son of God does not leave a person unchanged and in the same status. This faith leads the believer to enjoy eternal life, rejoice in the Lord’s name and in His person as He is life itself.

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<sup>67</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 48:1

<sup>68</sup> Hom. 25. Forty Gospel Homilies, 206-207

<sup>69</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 38:2

\* ‘... **in His name**’ or through His name, for He is life<sup>70</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

### **The Events related to the Day of the Lord’s Resurrection<sup>71</sup>**

Many scholars have attempted to provide a sequence of events for this amazing first day of the Lord’s resurrection. They based their attempts on the writings of the holy Gospels. Wescott has put them in the following order:

**Saturday** \* Before 6 a.m., Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, went to the tomb (Matt 28:1)

\* Later on, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of Jacob, and Salome prepared the spices and oils (Mk 1:16)

**Sunday** \* The resurrection occurred early in the morning, and it was followed by an Earthquake and the angel came and opened the tomb (Matt 28:2-4).

\* Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, and probably some other women went to the tomb at dawn. Mary Magdalene headed to the tomb immediately, and returned with Peter and John (Jn 30:1).

\* The other women arrived there by sunrise (Mk 16:2). They saw an angel, and received a message for the disciples (Matt28:5 etc; Mk 16:5etc...)

\* Other women came later on while it was still early in the morning, among them was Joanna (Lk24:1 etc). Two angels, who appeared as two young men, appeared to them (Lk 24:4 etc...).

\* Peter and John came to tomb (Jn20:3-10). Mary Magdalene saw two angels (Jn 20:11-13). Other women told the news to the disciples (Lk 24:10 etc...).

\* The Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene (Jn20:14-18; Mk16:9).

\* The Lord appeared to other women on their way home and as they were returning from their visit to the home (Matt28:9 etc...).

\* The Lord appeared to two disciples on their way to Emmaus (Lk 13:24 etc...)

\* He appeared to Peter later on in the evening (Lk24:34; 1 Cor 15:5).

\*He appeared to the twelve while they were gathered with others (Lk 24:36; Jn 20:19).

End of Chapter 20

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**MEDITATIONS INSPIRED BY THE GOSPEL OF ST JOHN,  
CHAPTER 20**

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**YOUR TOMB COULD NOT IMPRISON YOU WITHIN IT!**

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<sup>70</sup> Hom. 87. PG 59:521

<sup>71</sup> B.F. Wescott: (Cf. Leon Morris, p. 696)

\* On the new Saturday, I hurry to your tomb at dawn  
Your tomb could not imprison You within it!  
For you will not rest,  
Until You soar and enter my heart.  
You arose while the stone and seal were still on the tomb  
So that You might enter into my depths  
And place upon them the seal of the first born.  
The stone of sin, however heavy, obstruct Your resurrection

\* May I enter with Peter and John into your tomb  
To see your grave clothes lying there and die with You  
And be covered with them  
May I see your head cover with which you wipe away  
The tears I have shed throughout my days.

\* If an angel spoke to me, my soul would not be satisfied.  
I will not stop from crying until I find and carry You!  
May You call me by Your mouth, For your voice is sweet!  
Say a word, thereby transforming me  
Into a preacher proclaiming the joy of Your resurrection.  
I rush with Your disciples in order to enjoy Your amazing manifestations!

\* May Your Spirit carry me to the upper room  
Where I could share the fellowship with Your disciples.  
You enter while the doors are closed,  
So that no one creeps and intrudes upon our meeting together.  
You reveal Your wounds to me, and I get to understand the mystery of Your love. You grant me  
Your peace,  
Therefore my heart is filled with joy.

\* Indeed, how I long to touch your wounds with my own hands,  
And so cry out saying with Thomas: "My Lord and my King!"

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# A FEAST IN TIBERIA

## OR

### THE CROSSING INTO THE COMING AGE

As the writer concluded the previous chapter by stating his aim in writing his Gospel, some have assumed that this chapter had been added at a later time. However, there is no strong proof supporting that claim, besides, all other transcripts that have been found of that Gospel do contain this chapter. Indeed, the Church has not separated or made a distinction between this chapter and the rest of the other chapters of this Gospel.

Some wonder: what was the need for this chapter after the writer had expressed his aim in writing and seemed to have concluded His Gospel? He began his Gospel by revealing the origin of the eternal Word Who had no beginning. He concluded in the previous chapter by reporting His appearance as the One resurrected from the dead on the eighth day of the Christian Passover and which essentially symbolizes eternity. In this chapter – chapter twenty one- the Evangelist appears to be taking us to the thresh hold of the Coming Age. The beloved St John the Evangelist concludes His Gospel by reporting the meeting of the Lord Jesus Christ with some of His disciples by the lake of Tiberias where He eats with them as though at a banquet. This is like an invitation to enjoy the heavenly banquet.

This chapter is considered to be the long report of the Lord's appearance in Galilee after His resurrection.

\* It is appropriate to note that the Lord is described as though He was someone setting up a final banquet with seven of His disciples. Why did He do so other than to indicate that these alone were filled with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit- Isaiah 11:2,3- and that they would be with Him in His eternal banquet?...The apostle St Paul correctly declares: **"...Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."** (Rom 8:9). What he means is that it will no longer be possible to rejoice upon seeing the Divine glory if a person is not led by God Who lives within him<sup>1</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 25, Forty Gospel Homilies, PL 76:185-6

|                                           |       |
|-------------------------------------------|-------|
| 1- The Lord's appearance by Lake Tiberias | 1-14  |
| 2- His conversation with Peter            | 15-19 |
| 3- His words about John                   | 20-22 |
| 4- Concluding words of St John            | 24-25 |

## 1- The Lord's appearance by Lake Tiberias

**After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and in this way He showed Himself. [1]**

Here St John reports to us one of the instances when the Lord appeared after His resurrection from the dead. It was not a day of worship, nor was the appearance within the Temple, or during a prayer gathering. He appeared on a working day and as they were engaged in their job which was fishing. Our Lord is eager to reveal Himself to mankind even as they perform their work. This is what happened when He sent angels to announce the news of His birth to the shepherds who were staying up all night to guard their sheep.

Earlier, the Lord had appeared several times to the women and to the disciples in Jerusalem and at the tomb. He commanded them to go to Galilee, and promised that they would meet with Him (Matt 28:7, Mk 16:7). This promise was fulfilled as St John reports in this chapter. Some believe that this is the seventh time that the Lord appears after His resurrection, and the third time He appears to the disciples [14]. The meeting reported in this passage occurred on the third day after His resurrection.

The verb 'appear' occurs in the text as 'genoumenis' which has been translated into Hebrew as 'made apparent' to indicate that **'He made Himself visible'**, or 'He proclaimed Himself.' It is as though the natural place for the Lord is to be in the other world after His resurrection; and that these appearances are revelations that He makes to His disciples and to others so that they are assured of His resurrection... This action reveals the sublime state of our Lord Jesus Christ since we can no longer meet Him in this world. He is the One who makes Himself present in this world whenever He wishes. He is the One who becomes visible according to the time and place which He chooses. He did not appear on that shore as a person would do by moving from one place to the other: He suddenly stood there and appeared to His disciples in this manner.

The verb **'He made Himself visible'** could also indicate what went on in the thoughts of the disciples as a result of that. They had not yet experienced the joy of knowing Him after His resurrection. Consequently, He spoke to them as a stranger would do, and called them by using the general term of **'children', [5]**.

\* Do you notice that He neither stayed with them forever, nor in the same manner as before? He appeared suddenly, in the evening, and then vanished. He then appeared another time on the eighth day and also vanished then. After that He made an awesome appearance again by the shore. What does **'appear'** convey? It is clear that He could not be seen except when He



condescended to do so, for His Body is incorruptible and possesses the inseparable purity of a spiritual Body<sup>2</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* He re-established their hope in Him and which they had not regained. The Lord intended to come to them to remove the despair that filled their minds. He returned to them alive and out of the tomb, He made the great proclamation concerning the reality of the renewal of His Body which He presented before their eyes and hands. He could be seen as well as touched, and held so they could examine the traces of His wounds. He did that so that Thomas, who had refused to believe previously, would declare his faith. Earlier, the Lord had breathed the Holy Spirit upon them and they had heard with their ears the words coming from with His own lips: **“As the Father has sent Me, I also send you....If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”** Suddenly, they had become once more fishers of fish and not of men<sup>3</sup>.

**St Augustine**

This scene took place by the shore of Lake Tiberias in Galilee. The disciples had traveled north to the place of their homes and where the Lord met them.

The ‘Lake of Tiberias’ was the name used for the ‘Sea of Galilee’ in the Lord’s times. In the Old Testament it was known as the ‘Sea of Chinnereth.’ In Luke 5:1 it is called the ‘Lake of Gennesaret.’ In about the year 20 A.D., a city was founded on its shores and it was called ‘Tiberias’ after the name of the emperor. So the lake became the Lake of Tiberias.’ This change occurred over several years, and the evangelist has used the name that was popular at the time of writing this Gospel.

**Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin,  
Nathanael of Cana in Galilee,  
The sons of Zebedee, and two other of His disciples were together [2].**

Seven disciples had come to the shore of Lake Tiberias and the Lord appeared to them. He could have done so in compliance with the Roman law which required seven witnesses to testify. The Lord made Himself visible to these seven disciples, among them was Nathaniel whom John had not mentioned after the Lord’s meeting with him in chapter one. Some believe he is the same as Bartholemew, one of the twelve disciples. As for the two disciples whose names are not given, these could be Philip from Bethesda and Andrew from Capernaum.

**Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We are going with you also.” They went out, and immediately got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. [3]**

There is no doubt that the period through which the disciples lived between the time of the Crucifixion and the ascension was filled with obscurity. Even though the Lord’s appearances had opened the doors of hope to them, and had revealed many divine mysteries, yet their

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<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John, 87:2

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 122:2

psychological condition was unstable. The future was unclear, and they could not comprehend the nature of their new life after being physically separated from the Lord Jesus Christ. They had received the mission of preaching to the whole world, but they had not yet experienced the joy of the Holy Spirit that would guide them in their new task. It is true that the Sunday of the Resurrection had replaced the sadness of the Friday of the Crucifixion; yet what was God's plan for them? The situation was a most difficult one and therefore Peter called them to go fishing and they responded in order to do any activity. The time had not come to begin preaching about the Lord and His redeeming action. They had to wait until the Lord's ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit upon His Church.

The disciples did not know how to lead an idle or lazy life. Therefore they went fishing, though not as a form of leisure but in order to work and provide for their physical needs. The apostle Peter called them to go fishing as a source of income to them. Before the Crucifixion, they lived on what others provided in the money box (Lk 8:3). This is the reason why St John the Cassian reports, about monasticism in Egypt, that the monks were committed to work in order to provide for their needs. They had to care for the poor; and they had to consider that their work was a training that developed their spiritual development. The monk was not to be too engaged in these tasks, yet he was not to depend on relatives or others to provide his necessities.

\* By disdaining all wealth, we choose to obtain our daily needs through the work of our hands and without any dependence on the wealth of our relatives. Our reading and meditation on the Bible will therefore become deeper as we will not tend to remain idle if we do nothing else besides that. It is preferable to belong to the working poor according to the example that the apostles have set, or as we have seen in the laws of our fathers. Then we would find much joy in doing so.

**It is also worth noting that there is an even greater danger than the previous one; and that is of obtaining your food through the help of others even though you are physically sound and well built. This is appropriate for those who are weak only...**Therefore it is necessary for everyone to depend on their daily work and the proceeds of his hands for his livelihood. We need to remember the commandment to love which the apostle teaches when he forbids the wealthy from helping lazy people and says: "For even when we were with you, we commanded you this. If anyone will not work, neither should he eat," (2 Thes. 3:10).

These are the words which the **blessed Anthony** told a certain person, and he taught by setting him as an example<sup>4</sup>.

**Fr Abraham**

It is so beautiful for brothers to meet together, not only to worship in Church but also to exchange conversation filled with love. Besides, their reciprocal love would increase if they work together as they will find joy in such practical unity.

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<sup>4</sup> Cassian Conferences, 24:12

St Peter's decision was a natural outcome; even though some feel that it was not according to God's will since he went with his companions without asking God, in prayer, for guidance. That is why they did not catch any fish all night long. Any way it was a practical lesson that demonstrates failure of any human endeavor- whatever the goal- as long as it is not supported by Divine help. This is especially true in the case of fishing for souls for the kingdom of God.

\* The Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Truth, has said: "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God," (Lk 9:62). Why did Peter return to do what he had left? We know the he was a fisherman while Matthew was a tax collector. Peter resumed his work after he had become a believer, whereas Matthew never returned to be a tax collector. That is because obtaining a livelihood through fishing is one thing, while tax collecting is another. There are many jobs that cannot be partially or wholly done without committing mistakes. It is forbidden to resume such jobs after becoming believers as they are associated with sin<sup>5</sup>.

### **Pope Gregory the Great**

St Augustine responds to the following question: 'Since the Lord has said, "...seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt6:32), why was no food provided for them and they had to go fishing?' It was the Lord who had made available the fish in that place so that it could be caught. He made the disciples feel a need which obliged them to go fishing, and consequently, they discovered the miracle which He had prepared for them. Moreover, this incident would strengthen the message proclaimed by the preachers of His Gospel. Indeed, the Bible reinforces itself by the great mystery which makes its imprint on their minds due to the huge amount of fish that was caught<sup>6</sup>.

\* The disciples were not forbidden to pray for the needs required by their work as long as that work was intrinsically legal and acceptable; and as long as this did not affect their apostolic mission which they had to continue doing. They had to pray and work whenever they needed to get their daily food. Therefore no one should think or doubt that St Paul did not achieve the stature of those who had abandoned everything and followed the Lord Jesus Christ. St Paul found it necessary to work with his hands in order to provide for his needs and not be a burden on anyone to whom he preached the Gospel. More significantly, he states that he "...labored more abundantly than they all...", and then he adds: "...yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me," (1 Cor 15:10)<sup>7</sup>.

### **St Augustine**

**But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore:  
But the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. [4]**

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<sup>5</sup> Hom. 24: Forty Gospel Homilies, PL 76:1184

<sup>6</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 122:4

<sup>7</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 122:3

The disciples did not recognize the Lord Jesus Christ. This could have been to the lack of light and visibility as it was too early in the morning, or because they were too far away, or because He had taken a different form as in Mark 16: 12 (on the road to Emmaus).

**St John Chrysostom** says that the Lord did not reveal Himself to them in order to engage them in conversation.

\* Before the resurrection the Lord had walked on the water before their eyes (Matt 14:25). What does the sea indicate other than to the present generation that is so disturbed by the conditions and noise of this passing life? What does the stability of the shore indicate other than the continuity of eternal and endless peace? Since the Lord had actually crossed over beyond the limits of this mortal life, He therefore stood on the shore after His resurrection. Through this act, the Lord was as though telling His disciples about the mystery of His resurrection<sup>8</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

**Then Jesus said to them,  
“Children, have ye any meat? “  
They answered him, “No.” [5]**

The word for ‘children’ in the Greek language is ‘Paidia’ and it is used when a speaker addresses someone with whom he shares strong ties and tender emotions. The Greek word ‘pais’ literally means ‘young children’ or ‘the loving ones.’ St John the evangelist used it when he spoke about the youngest child of one of the nobles (4:49), and he used it again for a new born child (16:21). However, it is possible to use this word for adults, while it may also be used for soldiers. The Lord spoke to the disciples as a father would speak to His dear children. Although He possessed a glorified Body after the resurrection, yet this glory was revealed in the spirit of eternal love and sublime tenderness. Based on their ages, the disciples could not be classified as children, yet they became God’s children and enjoyed His divine adoption.

As a father who is filled with tenderness and concerned with providing their physical need for food, the Lord satisfied all their physical and spiritual needs. Our risen Lord continues to **pass through each of the homes of believers**, especially those of the poor and the needy, and He asks: ‘My children, do you have food?’ He knows they have no food; yet He arouses in them the desire to pray with faith and ask Him to satisfy their need. He does not satisfy their need through a human hand, but He fills them with food provided from stores; and waters them Himself in one way or another by His sources of love. He opens their eyes of their hearts and enables them to see Him and become acquainted with His mysteries.

\* His manner of speech was more like that of human beings and as though He wanted to buy something from them. However, when they indicated that they had not caught anything, He ordered them to throw their nets to the right side of their boat<sup>9</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

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<sup>8</sup> Hom. 24: Forty Gospel Homilies, PL 76:1184

<sup>9</sup> Homilies on St John, 87:3

Their answer to Him was a negative one -‘No-’ which expressed their bitter disappointment as they had worked all night and had caught no fish. They did not want to talk about this not in any detail, for it is hard for a person to speak about His failure.

**And he said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat,  
And you will find some.”  
So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in  
Because of the multitude of fish. [6]**

It seems that, according to their experience as fisherman, they had to throw their nets to the left of their boat when they fished in that part of the lake. However, without knowing who was the One giving them advice, they humbly obeyed and struggled patiently, without raising any objection or assertion of self confidence gained by their long practice in the fishing industry. The gentle conversation of the Lord and His attitude could have obliged them to obey and submit to His advice.

Catching such a great number of fish was a miraculous work. It was made to proclaim the Lord’s care and concern to provide people’s needs; especially for those who had abandoned everything for His sake. It was not done merely to underline the authority the Lord had even over the fish and the seas. **This was a symbolic act in which the struggle of the disciples through the night corresponds to the struggle of the prophets and the holy men of the Old Testament. These struggled to catch souls for the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, they caught nothing. Then the Lord came and opened the doors of Paradise with His Cross. He also granted the disciples the authority to catch fish. Consequently, the boat of the Church was filled with fish.**

The disciples had struggled all through the night, and they felt that they had failed as they had caught nothing. However, the Lord does not disregard or forget the struggle of His children, and in a few moments, He compensated their great fatigue and labor due to a long night’s work. In this manner, the Lord renews the spirit of hope within us. You might be tired as you serve for many long years, yet fruit appears at the last moments of our lives on earth.

Indeed, when the Lord directs to serve for His kingdom, and when we obey Him, there will not be any empty nets. He is the only One who knows where to find the souls that are thirsty for the joy of salvation. Even though there may not be any clear signs marking them, He is the One who will lead us to them. He is also the One who will attract them to the net of His holy Church.

\* We read twice in the Holy Bible that the Lord gave the command to cast the nets.

The first time occurred before His passion (Lk 5:4-6). He did not indicate if the nets should be thrown to the right or left side. The disciples caught so many fish **that the nets were breaking**. The second time occurred after His resurrection, and the Lord commanded the disciples to throw the nets on the right side; and although the number of fish caught was very great, the nets did not get broken.

The righteous are indicated to be on the right side, and the wicked on the left side (Matt 25:33). The first catch indicates the Church at the present time where the righteous and the wicked are gathered. The Church does not choose those who enter her doors as she does not know who she could choose. Look closely at the last catch taken on the right side where the Church of the chosen alone is found, and where there are no wicked deeds. There you will see the fullness of the Lord's glory.

In the first catch, the nets were breaking due to the wicked ones who had entered with the chosen ones. They pierced the nets with their blasphemy. In the second and last catch, many fish were caught and the nets did not get torn. This is because the holy Church, composed of the chosen ones, possesses the peace of her Creator. No obstacles and no divisions exist within her to tear or break Her down<sup>10</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

**Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter,  
"It is the Lord."  
Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord,  
He put on his outer garment (for he had removed it),  
And plunged into the sea. [7]**

Peter '... put on his outer garment', or the fisherman's clothes, or 'ependuteen' which is like a man's coat nowadays.

The words '...for he had removed it' are used to indicate a specific person who does not wear the outer clothes. This expression was also used when Saul took off his outer clothes 'himatra' and lay down naked the whole day and night (1Samuel 19:24). It is reported that David was girded with a linen ephod and then uncovered himself in front of the maids of his servants (2 Samuel 6:14, 29).

**Peter '... plunged into the sea':** clearly, he was close to the shore- 132 yards approximately- and that the water was shallow, since he put on his outer clothes in order to cross over to the shore. If the water was not shallow, he would not have worn his outer clothes so that he could swim to the shore.

John, whom Jesus loved, realized that He was the Lord. Indeed, the Lord reveals His mysteries to His beloved ones. He does not deprive anyone from the joy of knowing Him. Everyone who places his head on the Lord's chest enjoys the divine mysteries. Moreover, a person who accompanies the Lord to the Cross and shares His passion is blessed by the purity of heart and clarity of vision which enables him to outrun others in comprehending heavenly matters. This is how St John reached out to the Lord, and he could not hide his knowledge and consequently proclaimed it. Even though Peter outran him to meet the Master, John rejoiced that all could enjoy what He saw and experienced.

**St John Chrysostom** considered the apostle Peter as being characteristically enthusiastic and jealous, while St John had a calm nature. Consequently, although John was the first to

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<sup>10</sup> Hom. 24. Forty Gospel Homilies, 181-182

calmly recognize the Lord, Peter was to first to reach the shore as he plunged into the sea and swam to Him. He could not wait to go with the others who were with him in the boat<sup>11</sup>.

\* When Peter recognized the Lord, he left the fish and the nets and put on his clothes... he must have been filled with great awe and longing! Although the distance was 100 yards approximately, he could not wait for the boat to reach the shore, and so he plunged and swam<sup>12</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

Although Peter had denied the Lord three times, yet he had shed tears of repentance and experienced a love and friendship that time could never tear away. As soon as he knew that the Lord was standing on the shore, the boat could no longer hold him and he could not wait till it would come to the shore. He threw himself into the water in order to hurry and meet with his Beloved.

\* While the other disciples did not know, the disciple whom Jesus loved told Peter: **“It is the Lord.”** Being chaste, John was the first to recognize the chaste Body and that He was ‘Jesus’ Himself. However, the other disciples did not see Him in the same manner<sup>13</sup>.

**St Jerome**

**But the other disciples came in a little boat;  
(for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits,)  
Dragging the net with fish. [8]**

Two hundred cubits or 100 yards approximately.

**Then as soon as they had come to land,  
They saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. [9]**

Just as the great catch of fish was miraculous, so was the sudden provision of fish placed over the coals and the bread which had been prepared by the Lord Jesus Christ. The disciples had found [9] like those at the house of the high priest (Jn18:18); but this time there was fish over the coals and bread next to them. The scene had a sense of ‘celebration’ to it.

Although the Lord asked them if they had any food, and as though He was hungry, yet He offered them food that did not require or depend on weak human efforts. The Lord has truly invited us to work for His account, but the gladdening fruit and heavenly food, which pleases the Father, are the work of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and the act of His Holy Spirit.

\* The One who desired to grill His Body by pain while He was in the flesh, feeds us with His divinity for He says: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven,” (Jn6:51). Therefore He eats with them grilled fish and bread to reveal to us that He has suffered pain while He was in the flesh, and has offered us food through His Divinity<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Hom. 87. PG 59:522

<sup>12</sup> Hom. 76. PG 59:522

<sup>13</sup> To Pammachius Against John of Jerusalem, 35

<sup>14</sup> Hom. 24. Forty Gospel Homilies, 184

## St Gregory the Great

\* He prepared grilled fish on coals in order to be a tangible proof to the doubtful disciples, who did not dare to come close to Him as they thought they were seeing a spirit and not a body<sup>15</sup>.

St Jerome

**Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish which you have just caught.” [10]**

\* The Lord commanded the disciples to bring of the fish that they had caught in order to clarify that the miracle before them was not a mere imagination.

\* Things seemed to evolve counter to nature. What are these things?

First: They had caught a lot of fish

Second: The nets were not broken

Third: Before they came to the shore, the coals were ready and the fish on top, and the bread with them. These were not prepared from materials that were actually present. They were there through a special Providence and in harmony with the Lord's work before His crucifixion<sup>16</sup>.

St John Chrysostom

**Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land full of large fish,**

**One hundred and fifty and three:**

**And although there were so many, the net was not broken. [11]**

The first time the disciples had gone fishing (Lk 5:11-11), we saw how their nets were getting torn for they were subject to the laws of the world. In this passage, however, **‘the net was not broken’** as it was subject by the laws of eternity.

The Evangelist focused on the number of fish, yet in his mind they did not indicate quantity but quality of existence. We note how he indicated that the wedding in Cana took place on **‘the third day’** (Jn2:1). He also wrote about **seven** miracles, and **seven** sermons. The word **‘God’** occurs eight times in the introductory chapter of the Gospel, and it occurs eight times throughout it. The word **‘Logos’** occurs four times in the first chapter; and forty times in each of the Gospels. As for the number 153, innumerable thinkers have invested it with different meanings across the years.

**St Augustine** presents to us a symbolic interpretation to this miracle. He states that the disciples who went out fishing were seven which is the number that denotes perfection or fulfillment of the times (seven days in the week). The Lord came to them in the morning which stands for the end of all time. Drawing the nets to the shore symbolizes the coming Judgment at the end of time. As for the attempt to catch fish throughout the night, it indicates the ministry before the Lord's resurrection when no one enjoyed the blessing of the resurrection or the spread of the holy Word. The act of throwing the net on the right side of the boat points to the great harvest of believers after the resurrection.. In fact, the net contained big and small fish to convey

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<sup>15</sup> To Pammachius Against John of Jerusalem,34

<sup>16</sup> Hom.76. PG 59:522



that there are the good ones as well as the wicked ones within the Church These will be picked and separated from each other on the day of the Lord. The number of big fish were 153 and this corresponds to the righteous men in the Old Testament (ten is a symbol for the law). Add to them the seven disciples in the new Testament (seven being a symbol of perfection), and the total is 17. The number 153 is the result of adding all the numbers from 1-17.

Some numbers are designated as being three dimensional or three-sided: for example the number 10 is the tripartite of number 4 ( $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10$ ). The number 153 is the tripartite of number 17 and it includes 7 and 1 which make 8. The number of disciples who stood on the shore was 7, and the number 8 stands for eternity.

**St Gregory the Great** notes that every act recorded in the Old Testament is associated to the Ten Commandments. Besides, they are completed and fulfilled in the New Testament through the Holy Spirit who grants seven blessings: ‘...the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord...’The two Testaments are referred to as number 17 [ $7+1$ ]; and all the major events recorded are 17 in number. When this is multiplied by 3, the result is 51. The jubilee is celebrated in the year (50) and we begin with the year 51...this is the year of rest in the Old Testament. In the New Testament we multiply 51 by three (in reference to the Holy Trinity) and the result is 153. This is the number of the chosen ones, from both the Old and New Testaments, who are in the heavenly Church or –in other words-in our heavenly home<sup>17</sup>.

**St Augustine** presents a wonderful comparison between the two miracles of the fish that are recorded in the Gospel of Luke 5:3-7, and in the Gospel of John 21:1-11. **Pope Gregory the Great** used this in his own writing. It is possible to summarize this comparison in the following points with some changes<sup>18</sup>:

1- The first miracle (Lk 5) occurred before the Lord’s resurrection, whereas the second miracle occurred after His resurrection. That is why the first miracle is taken to indicate to **the Church in the present world** which enjoys the blessings of the Lord Jesus Christ. The second miracle refers to **the Church in the world to come, or the Church that comes after the resurrection**. At that time the Church will enjoy the glory of the Lord.

2- In the Gospel of St John, the miracle occurred in the early morning hours and after a very long night. This refers to the appearance of the Church in her full glory with the second coming of the Lord. He will shine upon her with a new morning.

3-In the Gospel of St Luke, the Lord does not ask them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat; but He tells them to go farther into the deep sea. Consequently, their nets were filled with good and bad fish. In the Gospel of St John, the Lord asks them to cast their nets on the right side, and as a result, they caught fish that was all good. The first miracle refers to the Church that is filled with believers; though not all are righteous as the good and the wicked are mixed together and it is impossible to separate them. Inside the Church, there are the true believers who enjoy fellowship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. At the

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<sup>17</sup> Hom.24. Forty Gospel Homilies,182-183

<sup>18</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate122:7-9

same time, there are those who appear to be believers but who are hypocrites and careless about their salvation and that of others. They are wholly preoccupied with satisfying their vanity, or their physical lust and its pleasures, as well as clinging to material matters. In the Gospel of St John, we find the Church, at the onset of the new age, separating the true believers from the wicked ones. The good and righteous will stand at the right hand side of the Lord Jesus Christ as God's blessed children who are entitled to the eternal inheritance; whereas the wicked will have no place on the right hand side of the Lord. They will stand on His left and as though they do not exist as they have no share with the Savior.

4-In St Luke's Gospel, the nets **were about to break**; but in St John's Gospel they were filled with fish, yet we do not hear this expression. The Church is exposed to so much in this world in the form of attacks of conjurors, heretics, and troublemakers that she seems near breaking point due to such divisions. However, the true Church remains mysteriously covered and without divisions in God's sight. All her members remain steadfast members in the one Body of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the heavenly Church- i.e. after the Resurrection- we see one net which will not be exposed to any breaking. Rather, she will glow with the brilliance resulting from her union with the Lord Jesus Christ who is her heavenly Bridegroom.

5-In the first miracle there were two boats: in them were the circumcised people (of the Old Testament, and the uncircumcised (the Gentiles who became believers). In the world, both the Church of the Old Testament and the Church of the New Testament have existed. In both of them, the Messiah has worked in one way or another. However, with the coming of the night, there will not be any distinction, for they will all be found in one boat holding together.

6-St Augustine comments that the boat was about 200 cubits away from the shore. As it contained both the circumcised and the uncircumcised, then the number 100 refers to those standing on the Lord's right hand, and the number 200 refers to both groups standing together and at the same distance. This implies that both groups enjoy the same rewards and the same glory.

- 1- Many fathers have presented different interpretations for the 153 fish. They are all symbolic meanings to this number.
- 2- The fish are described as being big, in reference to believers who are considered to be great in the kingdom of God.

**Jesus said to them.**

**"Come and eat breakfast."**

**Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are you?"**

**- knowing that it was the Lord. [12]**

**"Come and eat breakfast"**- the word 'eat' occurs as a literal translation for the Greek word 'aristeasate.' Some believe that the origin of the word has been used to mean 'breakfast'; as it had been used this way in the writings of Homer, Xenophom, and Plutarch. It was also used to refer to an early meal, or even for lunch. The Lord seemed to be inviting them to 'come and eat breakfast' as it was early in the morning.

As a personal friend, **Jesus said to them “Come and eat breakfast”** [12]. He invites them to the feast He had prepared for them. So they ate and were filled. Nevertheless, a lot of fish was left for them to sell and have the money to buy their daily needs.

They recognized the Lord, although neither the disciples nor the Lord had exchanged any words. It is as though He had carried them into the silence of the heavens where only the language of heavenly love is spoken, and where no human language is heard.

\* **‘...none of the disciples dared ask Him...’**, and none began to speak with Him. They just sat down and looked at Him silently and in great fear and awe **‘knowing that it was the Lord.’** That is why they did not ask Him **“Who are You?”** They could see from His looks that He was changed and they were greatly frightened. Yet in spite of that, they knew He was no one else but the Lord, and this made them control their need to ask.

**St John Chrysostom**

**Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. [13]**

The Lord dealt with them as a friend; and offered to them what they needed. However, they felt shy and because they knew He was the Lord, they did not dare ask: Who are You? In order to open for them this door for meeting with Him, and to prove His great love, the Lord came to them, took the bread and the fish and offered it to them.

St John the Evangelist does not report whether the Lord shared the food with them or not. Surely His risen Body was not in need for food, however He might have eaten in order to confirm that He possessed a real body and that what they saw was not a shadow or figment of their imagination.

\* The Lord made it clear that the miracle was not an imaginary one. However, the Evangelist does not say that the Lord ate with them. St Luke is clear as he reports: ‘...He took it and ate in their presence,’ (Lk 24:43). The Lord ate not because the nature of His Body needed the food, but He humbly ate in order to prove His actual resurrection.

\* He no longer acted as He used to do before...in this incident, the Lord did not look up to the heaven (to bless the food), nor did He do other human actions. This confirmed that the way He had acted before was a sign of His humility. He wanted to make them know that He would neither be staying with them forever, nor in the same manner in which He had been with them before. This explains why St John reports that **‘this was now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples...’**<sup>19</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**This is now the third time that Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead. [14]**

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<sup>19</sup> Homilies on ST John, 87:2

**‘This is now the third time’** that Jesus appeared to His disciples while they were all or partially present together. He had appeared to ten of them (Jn 20: 19); then to eleven of them (Jn 20:27); and then to seven of them (Jn 21:2). Some scholars believe that this was the seventh time that the Lord appeared between the time of His resurrection and the time of His ascension:

- 1- To Mary Magdalene (Mk 16:19; Jn. 20:15-16).
- 2- To the women who went to the tomb (Matt 28:9).
- 3- To two of the disciples on their way to Emmaus (Lk 24:13).
- 4- To Peter only (Lk 24:34).
- 5- To the ten disciples when Thomas was absent (Jn.20:19).
- 6- To the eleven disciples on the eighth day when Thomas believed (Jn 21:26).
- 7- To seven disciples (Jn 21:2), and that was some time between the eighth and fourteenth day after His resurrection.
- 8- To His disciples on a certain mountain in Galilee (Matt 28:16).
- 9- To more than 100 brothers at one time (1 Cor 15:6), if that was not the time appearance as the previous one mentioned here.
- 10- James saw Him (1 Cor 15:7).
- 11- To all His disciples on the day of His ascension into the heavens (Mk 16:19-20; Lk24:50-53; Acts 1:3-12; 1Cor 15:7).

These are the appearances that have been mentioned in the Holy Bible, but we can confirm that there were many other appearances that have not been mentioned.

\* To clarify that the Lord Jesus Christ, after His resurrection, neither stayed for a continuous time with His disciples nor lived with them as He did before, the Evangelist states that **‘This is now the third time that Jesus showed Himself to His disciples.’**

\* When you hear about these events, you become aroused and consider how those who were with Him were happy; and how glad they will be on the Day of Judgment. Let us do our best so that we get to behold that amazing Face. If now we get aroused and become eager just by hearing, and thinking what it would have been like if we had lived at the time when the Lord lived on earth. What it must have felt to hear His voice, see His Face, to come close and touch Him, and serve under His leadership! Then think how great it was to see Him in a Body that was no longer corruptible, and no longer doing human acts. Now He possessed a Body that is guarded by the angels; and consequently, we ourselves have put on pure form that has no mingling with our former selves.

We see Him and enjoy all other blessings that cannot be expressed by any language. I beg you to use every means that will enable you not to lose such a glorious blessing. There is nothing that is impossible if you have the will; and there is nothing burdensome if you are focused and ‘walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory’ (1 Thes 2:12)<sup>20</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

## **1- A Dialogue with Peter**

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<sup>20</sup> Homilies on St John,87:3

The Lord confirmed to His disciples that He is the Creator of both the body and the spirit. He offered them breakfast which He had prepared with His hands in order to provide for their physical needs. Then He became concerned with providing their spiritual food to satisfy their spiritual needs

The dialogue between the Lord and Peter took place after the disciples had eaten and were filled. It could have taken place during the meal when the Lord would have turned to Peter and spoken with him. The Lord had previously met with the disciple, after His resurrection, at least twice or three times but He had not spoken to Peter in that manner. It could be that the Lord wished to console Peter and show him that His repentance had been fully accepted, and that what he had done would not affect the relationship between him and the Lord. After giving him this assurance, the Lord opened the topic. Some scholars believe that Peter did not speak about what had happened as he feared that the Lord would declare other weaknesses or failures that he would face. Peter realized that the Lord knew his inner depths more than he knew himself. The apostle Peter was in need of that meeting with the Lord in order to regain confidence in God's working power in him.

**So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter,  
“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?”  
He said to Him, “Yes Lord, You know that I love You.”  
He said to him, “Feed My lambs.” [15]**

The Lord took this tender and personal initiative towards Peter in order to reinstitute his full fellowship with him. This is a relationship that exists with all those who have become sealed with the seal of the resurrection. The Lord did not use the new name of ‘Peter’ which He had given him, and it was as though He were renewing the promise with him.

**“...do you love Me more than these?”** Some scholars believe that though the Lord asked: Do you love Me more than all the others, He intended to ask if Peter still believed that his love for the Lord was greater than that of the others. Peter had made this declaration when he had said that he would follow to Lord even if he had to die for Him and even if others would deny Him. Peter the son of Jonah did not dare to utter the words: ‘... **more than these**’, for he feared he had a weakness of which he was unaware. He had repented for having declared that he would not deny Him even if all others would; therefore he felt embarrassed and in awe. Peter had learned not to depend on himself and to submit himself into the Lord's caring hands. He therefore said, **“You know....”** He no longer trusted his own testimony, and it was impossible to ask that others witness for him. He asked for the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who perceives the heart and has the power to sustain the weak.

The Lord did not ask him about his repentance for having denied Him three times. He was satisfied to ask about Peter's love for Him. **Repentance is essentially the practice of loving God.** This is what the Lord requires of every sincere repentant. That is why He praised the repentant adulterous woman. He told Simon the Pharisee: “...her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much,” (Lk 7:47).

In order to regain Peter to the ministry of saving souls, the Lord Jesus Christ asked him, **“Do you love Me?”** This reveals that the Lord does not entrust a person with this ministry unless

his heart is filled with love for Him. What that person offers to mankind for its salvation actually consists of offering the Lord Himself. Someone who does not love the Lord cannot minister to souls and cannot be concerned for their salvation since he does not realize their value to Him. The Lord has died for these souls and offered His precious Blood to redeem them. The Lord used the word ‘**aghapas**’ to express sublime love and its honor, Peter, however, is embarrassed to use the same term and humbly used the word ‘**phileo**’ which is used to speak about the love for friends.

\* The Lord asked Peter to **“Feed (His) lambs”...**, and did not mention his denial or challenge what he had done. It was as though the Lord was telling him: ‘You had said that you would sacrifice yourself for my sake, so now I am asking you to sacrifice yourself for my lambs.’

\* Actually, there are so many ways which would endear us to God and would reveal that we belong to the shining chosen ones. One of the most effective ways to win the approval of the Most High is to show a tender concern for our fellow brothers. This is what the Lord asked Peter to do<sup>21</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* When the dead assumes eternal life, and the corruptible assumes the incorruptible and swallows death in the victorious Lord Jesus Christ; then God reigns over all. Consequently, wisdom is not found only in Solomon, or sweetness only in David, or zeal in Elijah and Phineas, or faith in Abraham, or total love in Peter who was asked, **“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?”** Besides, zeal is not only found in the preaching of the chosen fathers, or virtue in just one or two. Rather, God is wholly perfect in everyone; and the fragrance of fellowship with the saints is evident in every set of virtues while God reigns over all<sup>22</sup>.

**St Jerome**

**He said to him again a second time,  
“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?”  
He said to Him, “Yes, Lord, You know that I love You.”  
He said to him, “Tend My sheep.” [16]**

The first time the Lord asked the question so that Peter would compare himself with his brothers, and find out if his love for the Master was greater than theirs. Now that Simon Peter had learned to be humble, and did not answer with pride and confidence in his own power; the Lord no longer compared him with his brothers when He posed the question for a second and third time.

\* If we watch the sheep and are fearful, and are concerned about the sheep, then how much are the sheep more concerned about themselves? Our share is to watch the sheep, and your share is to be obedient. Our share is to vigilantly keep watching, and your share is to be humble sheep. If we seem to be speaking from a higher platform, **we lay ourselves at your feet in fear, for we know the danger of that sublime position**<sup>23</sup>.

**St Augustine**

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<sup>21</sup> Homilies on St John. 88:1

<sup>22</sup> Against Pelagians, 1:18

<sup>23</sup> Sermon on the N.T. Lessons, 96:1

\* Peter's faith had been shaken due to the suffering of the Lord, and now he shed bitter tears as he heard the Lord's tender words, **"Tend My sheep"**<sup>24</sup>.

**St Jerome**

**He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things: You know that I love You."  
Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep." [17]**

In the first two times, the Lord Jesus Christ used the word **'agapas'**; and Peter used the word **'philo'** in his answer which conveys the endearing relationship of love that exists between cherished ones. In the Lord's question for the third time, the word **'philo'** occurs and He seems to be asking Peter, **'Do you love Me, dear friend?'**

The distinction between the two expressions has occupied many of those who have studied this Gospel. Many find that the word **'agapo'** is a general word that denotes love which is based on poised mental thought coupled with practical devotion of one's life for the loved one. As for the word **'philo'**, they find that it refers to emotional love that involves personal tenderness towards the loved one. Therefore the Lord seems to ask His disciple, **'Will you devote your life to Me?'**; and the disciple answers, **'I love You with all my feelings.'**

William Hendrickson makes a distinction between the two expressions as he says: The word **'agapo'** is used generally here, as well as in the rest of the other Gospels, to refer to love offered with one's whole being. It dictates not only the emotions, but the mind too, and plays an outstanding role as it is based on appreciation of the loved one due to obvious reasons. The word **'phileo'** refers to instinctive natural or spontaneous love in which emotions play a main and greater role than the mind or will. In this manner, we could make a distinction between the two expressions: in the first two questions, the Lord asked Peter if he felt a sort of sublime love and richness in his emotions, mind, and active will. Peter's response conveyed that he could not claim to have love that matched such a wonderful standard; but that he was sure that he carried strong genuine feelings of love towards the Lord... even though this was less than the love that the Lord asked for<sup>25</sup>.

C.H.C.MacGregor finds that the first verb denotes the presence of appreciation and respect between the two parties; while the second denotes the presence of personal emotions between two members of the same family<sup>26</sup>.

St Peter was saddened as the third question reminded him of his denial for three times. It is painful to remember our sins even though we have been forgiven. He might have been saddened through fear that the Lord perceived a weakness in his depths of which he was unaware. That is what had happened before when he declared himself ready to die with the Lord.

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<sup>24</sup> Letter 35:1

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Leon Morris: Reflections on the Gospel of St John, Hendrickon Publishers, 2000, p.737.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 737

The Lord invited Peter three times to watch His sheep and care for them through his love for the Owner of the sheep. The Lord had claimed Himself to be like a good shepherd who lays down his life (Jn 10:11). Isaiah accordingly says: 'He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young' (Is 40:11).

\* May the role of love be the factor that feeds the sheep of God. ..those who aim at watching over the Lord's sheep as though they were not the Lord's, but rather owned by them, will be condemned since they love themselves and not the Lord. Such shepherds desire to boast, to possess power, or to make money. Seeking to be obedient, to serve and to please God...what do these indicate other than that you love Me and therefore neglect to feed yourself while you feed My sheep because they are Mine and not yours? Seek My authority and not yours, seek My profit and not yours. In doing so, you will avoid following the path of those who belong to the dangerous times- who love themselves and all the consequences that come along with the onset of these evil ways<sup>27</sup>.

**St Augustine**

\* As surely as he had denied the Lord three times, he proclaimed Him three times. It was night time when Peter had denied the Lord, and now it was daylight when He proclaimed Him<sup>28</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

**“...Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself  
And walked where you wished;  
But now you are old, you will stretch out your hands,  
And another will gird you  
And carry you where you do not wish.” [18]**

Having restored to Peter his status as an apostle, the Lord went on to inform him concerning his martyrdom. In using the words 'Most assuredly' the Lord wanted to confirm that what He was saying was greatly important and serious, and that it would surely be fulfilled.

In his youth, he was free to gird himself whenever he wanted, and to go wherever he wished. Because of this freedom, he submitted himself into the hands of his Savior so that He would gird him and carry him according to His divine will. It would not be according to Simon's plans or those of other believers. He submitted his will to the Lord so that He might be glorified even at his death. For this reason, Peter will be glad to suffer. Even at his death, which would glorify God, he will be glad as he witnesses to the divine Truth.

Wetstein finds that the expression 'you will stretch out your hands' refers to the custom practiced in Rome when a person was crucified. The head of the person was placed on the cross and his hands would be stretched out to the extreme. Then he would be led through the streets of the city where he would be crucified.

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<sup>27</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 123:5

<sup>28</sup> Exposition on St Luke 10:90



Another person would gird him with iron chains and he would be carried to a place against his will. He does not wish to be crucified for having loved the Lord, but because he wishes to live to preach and serve Him.

\* The Lord clearly told Peter about the manner of his death for Peter the apostle always desired to go through dangers and difficulties for the Lord's sake. Therefore He was telling him: 'Rest assured that I will fulfill your desire in that matter, and even in your old age you will meet troubles which you have not experienced in your youth.'

\* What is intended by the expression '**where you do not wish**'? Here the Lord is speaking about natural feelings, the needs of the body, and how the spirit leaves the body involuntarily. Even when the will is steadfast, nature is weak...therefore the expression '**where you do not wish**' refers to natural human feelings<sup>29</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* Love was the end result achieved by this person who had denied his Master. He had lost his path through his own boldness, and fell through his denial. He was washed by his tears, was forgiven by his confession, and crowned by tolerating suffering.

This is where he ended: by dying with complete love for the sake of the One to whom he had boldly promised he would die for Him. He did so when he was strengthened by the Lord's resurrection...the object of his promise which he vowed when he was still immature. The ultimate order of things was that the Lord should die first, and then Peter would die as a result of preaching the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>30</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God.  
And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me." [19]**

Denying the Lord three times had shaken Peter deeply. Therefore the Lord sought to grant him the joyful spirit of hope, and assured him that he would glorify God. He would do so not only through his preaching but also to the very last breath of his life when he would glorify Him in his death. In this manner, he could sing and proclaim: "For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's (Rom 14:8).

Thirty four years later, after this dialogue, Peter's martyrdom took place and it was for the glory of God. He had considered himself unworthy to die in the manner of his Master and therefore requested to be hung with his head downwards. This has been recorded by **Josephus, Prudentius, St John Chrysostom, and St Augustine.**

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<sup>29</sup> Homilies on St John, 88:1

<sup>30</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 123:4

\* There is no longer a reason to fear crossing over from our present life, since we have come to possess a strong example of the life to come through the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, Peter you do not have to fear death any more, for He is alive whom you sorrowed over when He died. The One whom you tried to prevent, driven by your mortal love (Matt 16:21-22), from dying for our sake is alive<sup>31</sup>!

**St Augustine**

\* He did not say ‘you are expected to die’ but he said: ‘...by what death he would glorify God.’ This is intended to teach us that suffering for the sake of the Lord constitutes glory and honor for the suffering one<sup>32</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

It seems that when the Lord told Peter ‘**Follow Me**’, He began to walk and Peter followed Him. However, when he looked behind him, he found that John was also following him. He probably was tested by some kind of curiosity as he wished to know whether John too would be martyred with him.

## **2- The Lord’s Words about John**

**Then Peter turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, Who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said,  
“Lord, who is the one who betrays You?”[20]**

St John does not write his name as he probably felt he was worthy to have his name mentioned in the Holy Bible. At the same time, it was impossible to ignore the special love the Lord expressed towards him.

**St Augustine** comments that John was the one who enjoyed the Lord’s love more than any of the disciples because he was a celibate, and had led a pure life since his childhood<sup>33</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, “But Lord, what about this man?”[21]**

Some scholars find that Peter was a curious person, and was concerned with matters that concerned others rather than focusing on his obligations as the Lord’s disciple. He might have felt jealous of John who had practically leaned and put his head on the Lord’s chest, even though he had not proclaimed never to deny the Lord. Moreover, John had followed the Lord to the Cross, and the relationship between him and the Lord and had not been hurt in the way it had with Peter.

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<sup>31</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 123:4

<sup>32</sup> Homilies on St John, 88:1

<sup>33</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate

\* This is one of the great mysteries of divine love. Even in the case of the Lord Jesus Christ, there was no exception concerning the death of the flesh. Although He is Lord over nature, He did not refuse the Law governing the body He had put on. It is necessary for me to die, but in His sight this does not have any importance<sup>34</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

\* Peter asked the Lord a question concerning someone other than himself; and John was silent, while Peter talked. This illustrates Peter's love and loyalty towards John. He loved him greatly, and expressed it in many instances later on. There are many references to their mutual affection and close fellowship in the Gospels and in the Book of the Acts. He wished to have John as his partner and so he asked the Lord, **“what about this man?”** In other words, ‘Is he going to have the same path as mine?’

**St John Chrysostom**

**Jesus said to him,  
“If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?  
You follow Me.” [22]**

Some scholars explain that the Lord wished to clearly tell Peter that John would not die as a martyr. Ancient historians state that John was the only disciple out of the twelve who did not die in this manner.

The Lord's words **‘...till I come’** do not mean that John would not die until His second coming. Rather, they are intended as a reproach to Peter for his curiosity and preoccupation with the future and with his missionary work. Some other thinkers consider that it is an indirect way of stating that John will not die until the destruction of Jerusalem occurs at the hands of Titus the Roman. Many have interpreted the Lord's words as an indication that John would live to see the Lord's coming to judge Jerusalem and pronounce its destruction. St Peter was martyred in the year 67 A.D. – that is seven years before the destruction of Jerusalem, while St John continued to live for about thirty years after that.

**St Augustine** and other writers believe that the Lord's words mean the following: If I wanted John to live to the Day of My coming, and then took him with Me after being subject to a natural death, how does that concern you? Follow Me so that you might carry your cross. Indeed, history reports and confirms that John is the only disciple who did not die as a martyr but died a natural death. He remained alive when all the others had died as martyrs.

Some seem to believe that the apostle Peter was alone with the Lord when they were talking together. Peter knew how much John loved the Lord and so he thought that he would join them as they walked; but the Lord indicated His wish to leave matters in His hands. He might leave John, and return later to him after He had ended His conversation with Peter.

\* Peter spoke these words as he paid a lot of attention to John. He did not want to be separated from him. Therefore the Lord wished to show him that His love for John was much greater than his. Therefore He said, **“If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?”** Peter had

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<sup>34</sup> On the Decease of His Brother Saytrus, Book 1:4

always been fiery and rash in these matters, so the Lord wished to restrain him and teach him not to go beyond his limits by uttering these words.

\* The Lord teaches us not to mourn, or be upset, or curious. We should not ask questions that seem to be outside the scope of matters directly affecting us<sup>35</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**Then this saying went out among the brethren  
That this disciple would not die.  
Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die,  
But, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?”[23]**

Because John lived long after all the disciples had been martyred, many believers thought that he would not die and that he would live to see the Lord’s second coming. However, St John corrects them as they had really misinterpreted the Lord’s words, and he confirms that the Lord did not say any such thing.

Some thinkers find that the two apostles mentioned here refer to two ways of life within the Church: the meditative and the active. A person who practices a meditative life is not subject to death like the one who leads an active life. Death in the case of a meditative person leads to perfection. This is especially true when the Lord comes. At that time, there will be no need for missionary or charity work, for it will be a time for offering praise and meditating on Him.

\* Nothing should frighten us of death, and nothing should make us sorrowful because the natural life we have accepted has been taken away from us, or we have sacrificed it for His sake and as an obligation to which we have committed ourselves. Who of us wishes to let things continue to be as they are whether for religious reasons or to practice a certain virtue? This is what they thought was the promise given to John. But this was contrary to the truth...he himself denies in his writings that there was any promise that he would not die. We learn from this example that it is inappropriate to hold on to empty hopes<sup>36</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

**St Augustine** writes that what is reported here concerning the two disciples has a symbolic significance. St Peter represents the believer who struggles on earth and witnesses to the Lord through his great love. That is why Peter is considered to be the one who loved the Lord the most; and the Lord had asked him, “**Peter, son of Jonah, do you love Me?**” St John, on the other hand, represents the believer who has enjoyed eternal glory in the life to come. He was not asked the question, “Do you love Me?” for his whole being was absorbed in his love for the Lord. Whereas Peter was the one who loved the Lord the most, John was the one whom the Lord loved the most and therefore he named himself ‘the disciple whom Jesus loved.’ The Lord invited Peter ‘**to follow**’ Him as a loving believer is committed to translate his love into willingness to share in the Lord’s pain and to follow Him to the cross. The Lord said about John: “**If I will that he remain till I come**” where death cannot creep into a believer who enjoys

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<sup>35</sup> Hom. 88 PG 59:527

<sup>36</sup> On the Decease of His Brother Saytrus, Book 2:49

eternal glory. Believers like Peter follow in faith, while those like John enjoy the glory of the resurrection while they live<sup>37</sup>.

### 3- Concluding Words of St John

**This is the disciple who testifies of these things,  
And wrote these things,  
And we know that his testimony is true. [24]**

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the writer records that he is the disciple of the Lord. Moreover, he states that he gives a true testimony of what he saw and heard himself from the Lord; and that his testimony proclaims the truth.

**And there are also many other things that Jesus did,  
Which if they were written one by one,  
I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen. [25]**

Some scholars believe that the last two verses have been added by those to whom St John had delivered the Gospel. They might have done so in order to confirm that the Gospel is a testimony of that trusted disciple.

As we noted in the introduction, this Gospel often repeats the term ‘**the world**’ in order to underline that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Savior of the whole world and not just the Jews.

The miracles and deeds done by the Lord are more than can be counted. Besides being innumerable, they are greatly varied. Consequently, some scholars believe that this verse could be interpreted literally. It is impossible for the world to record fully all the acts of our infinite Lord. His works are unlimited, some are apparent while others are invisible.

The goal of the Gospel is not to include all the work and words of the Lord Jesus Christ. Rather, the purpose is to reveal His character, features, and effect in the life of the believer. The other evangelists have used expressions that reveal the many miraculous deeds of the Lord (Matt 4:23-24; 9:35; 11:1; 14:14, 36; 15: 30; 19:2; etc). For example, St Paul uses an expression from the Lord’s sayings, yet it does not appear in any of the four Gospels (Acts 20:35). What has been recorded in the New Testament about the Lord’s person, and His deeds and words have been food enough for the Church. Therefore she has enjoyed knowing Him, as well as His teachings and His deeds.

Some critics have misunderstood this concluding verse. However, many scholars have recorded similar expressions which have not been criticized. They appear in the works of Eastern as well as Western writers. Such statements involve a certain degree of exaggeration and are a form of expression which also appears in the different books of the Holy Bible. An example of this is what the spy says, in Numbers 13:33: “...all the people whom we saw in it

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<sup>37</sup> cf. St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 124:6-7

are men of great stature...there we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.” In Daniel 4:11, we read: ‘The tree grew, and became strong. Its height reached to the heavens. And it could be seen to the ends of all the earth.’ In Deuteronomy 1:28, we read: ‘The people are greater and taller than we; the cities are great and fortified up to heaven.’ Josephus, the historian, reports that Jacob was given the promise that Canaan would belong to him and his children who would fill all the land where the sun shines- whether it be on earth or in the seas<sup>38</sup>. In the West, Cicero writes that the splendor of the Roman people can barely be surpassed by the glory of the heavens, while the planet earth can scarcely contain it<sup>39</sup>.

\* We do not assume that the writer is specifically referring to the actual area of the earth which cannot contain Roman splendor. Otherwise, how is it possible to write about it if the world could not contain it at the time of writing? It probably could be that it is impossible to understand these writings due to the readers’ capacity.<sup>40</sup>

**St Augustine**

**Amen:** This word is used to conclude all the Gospels. It means ‘Let it be so.’ It would be correct to use it to mean ‘May we have faith in what has been written here, and obedience to what He has commanded us, and may we enjoy His promises to us.’

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<sup>38</sup> Antiques lib. 10 ch.20

<sup>39</sup> Phil. 2:44

<sup>40</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 124;8

## **Meditations**

### **Inspired by the Gospel of St John**

#### **Chapter Twenty One**

- \* My spirit moans with your disciples, and shouts out:  
I have worked hard all night and have caught nothing.  
My experience, potentials, and energy seem useless!  
May You carry me over, O Lord,  
For by Your word I could catch many fish in the nets of the Church.  
Say one word, for souls are lost in waters of the world.  
Not to me, not to me,  
But to You many are attracted by Your Word.
- \* Grant me the love and purity of John so that I may know You  
With the peace of a strong heart, he proclaimed: 'It is the Lord!'  
Grant me Peter's jealousy,  
So that I may run towards you and worship at your feet.
- \* Prepare for me grilled fish,  
Grant me food for my soul,  
So that she would not hunger nor thirst for the world.
- \* I know that You long that I spend time with You.  
You reproach Me in a spirit of love,  
And without hurting my feelings with any word!  
With Peter, who denied You, I proclaim:  
'You know that I love You'  
Yes, I love You.  
Even though my soul moans on account of my sins;  
According to Your words I will tend Your sheep  
You carry me in the palm of Your hand,  
Therefore I will carry my brothers in mine.  
Who can carry the burdens of Your people,  
If You would not carry them all!
- \* I join myself with Peter and here You whisper to me:  
'Do you love Me more than these?'  
You ask if I love You,  
With all my heart, mind, and will  
I devote all my energy to You and to Your children  
O most beloved One  
And I reciprocate your appreciation and pride in me  
O amazing One, who am I to be loved?  
You have made me a member of the divine family!

Therefore I shout with Peter:  
'You know that I love You!'  
You are wholly mine,  
And I am wholly yours, O beloved of my heart!  
What do you wish me to do?

\* I have been spoiled throughout my life!  
Now I stretch out my hands as on the cross  
That I may be crucified with You  
Just as Your disciple Peter, and with my head downwards.  
My life is in Your hands  
For You are the amazing Shepherd of my soul.

\* You astounding acts are so many,  
If I were to write them, the world would not be able to contain these books.  
Rather than record them in books,  
Let Your Spirit engrave them in my heart!  
Then I will become – through Your Holy Spirit  
An open Bible that people may read.

Amen

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*PART TWO*

**A PATRISTIC COMMENTARY**

**THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO  
ST. JOHN**

**PART TWO**

***CHAPTERS 9 TO 21***

**FR TADROS MALATY**

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EGYPT**

In the Name of  
The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
One God.  
Amen.

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## ***INEXPRESSIBLE HEIGHTS OF GLORY***

During the writing of this book, a certain thought crossed my mind and I often hesitated to document it. I felt sad that I had not begun to enjoy the Gospel of St. John earlier on in my life. Had I done so, I would have spent the rest of my days soaring in the glories that this Gospel offers. These are glories that are hard to communicate in any human language.

As I studied the Gospel of St. John, I came to understand the meaning of what Origen, meant when he wrote his meditations and sermons on this Gospel. He stated that he believed he could not complete his interpretation of St. John until he had passed into heaven. Only there would he be able to complete that task! Indeed, I feel that no one can achieve a full understanding of the depths of St. John's writing; and that all would be revealed only as we meet with our glorified Savior and as we partake in His heavenly glory. Only then will we comprehend the amazing implications of this Gospel, and in a way that transcends all that can be said here.

May the Holy Spirit carry every soul into God's divine embrace. May He enlighten the inner vision so that the soul may enjoy all the divine glory and understanding that our amazing Lord wishes to offer to us. Consequently, we will be ablaze with divine love and longingly seek to meet with our Savior.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **A MAN BORN BLIND RECEIVES SIGHT**

#### **THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD**

In the previous chapter, we have read the Lord's proclamation that He is the light of the world (8:12). The Lord tells the Jews that He has come to denounce and dissipate darkness. In this manner, He would pull away those walking in it and carry them unto the light of His glory. The children of Satan (8:44) are in need of the real liberator who would grant them inner enlightenment. They would consequently rejoice with their father Abraham because they would see the amazing day of the Lord (8:56). However, they sought to stone Him. Therefore he disappeared from among them; and appeared to the man born blind in order to grant him sight. This probably occurred a few days or months after that earlier confrontation with the Jews. They should have tried to open their hearts and minds to the One who grants sight. Then they would have realized that He grants insight and understanding as well.

This is the only chapter in all of the Old and New Testament books where there is any mention of opening the eyes of a person born blind. In the Old Testament we read that the light of sight granted to the blind is one of the deeds of the awaited Messiah: "And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness," (Is 29:18); and "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped," (Is 35:5). It is also said of the servant of God (the Incarnate Word): "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light to the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes," (Is 42:6-7). The Psalmist also worships the Lord and says "The Lord openeth the eyes of the blind," (Ps 146:8).

By mentioning the deed of granting sight to the blind and specifically to this one who was born blind, it is as though the evangelists are proclaiming the fulfillment of these prophecies. They are being fulfilled through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, as He is the awaited Messiah. He is the Lord who opens the inner eyes of the heart as well as the physical eyes. In Him the prophecies have been fulfilled; for through Him such acts are achieved that no one else could perform, except God alone or through His name.

The healing of the blind man proclaims the person of the Lord and the reason for His coming: to open the inner sight so that believers would comprehend the mysteries of God. At the same time, the blindness of the proud and hypocritical leaders would be exposed. Sadly, they could not discover their spiritual blindness and sinfulness!

Although this unique miracle is greatly significant due to the creation of the eyes of the man born blind, yet the Evangelist does not mention the name of the man. Neither does he provide any details. Rather, he presents the arguments that were raised as a result of the miracle. We are informed of the dialogue between the Lord and His disciples; that between the Lord and the blind man; and that between the Lord and the Pharisees.

St. John does not underline the highly miraculous act of healing because he is more preoccupied with the blessings mankind enjoy as a result of the Lord's divine work in their lives and thoughts.

The Lord used clay to create the eyes of the man. This serves as a confirmation that He is the Creator and Savior. By asking the blind man to go wash in the pool of Siloam, He indicated the need for baptism as it allows us to enjoy the Light of the Holy Spirit through the new birth. The Jews responded by throwing out the enlightened man. However, he found a place in the Lord Jesus Christ: **The Messiah of the rejected and of the despised.**

Some of the Jewish people realized their blindness, besides many of the Gentiles. These two groups were better than the Pharisees who claimed they had sight in spite of their blindness. By such claims, they had no hope through their own stupidity. In contrast, the tax collector and the adulteress confessed their blindness. Therefore the door of hope was opened to them and they enjoyed ultimate insight and eternal life with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Through confession, it is possible to gain insight; **which progressively enables a person to get acquainted with the Lord Jesus Christ:**

- \* A Man called Jesus (11)
- \* He is a prophet (17)
- \* A Man from God (33)
- \* The Son of God (35)
- \* He is worthy to be bowed down to and worshipped as He is the Lord (38)

This chapter is read on the 'Sunday of Baptism' as it is associated with the mystery of baptism which represents inner insight and enlightenment.

### **1- The Healing of the Blind Man.**

#### **2- Dialogues after the Miracle**

- A- Dialogues between the neighbors and the blind man 8-12**
- B- Dialogue between the Pharisees and the blind man 13-17**
- C- Dialogue between the Pharisees and parents of blind man 18-23**
- D- Dialogue between the Pharisees and the blind man 24-34**
- E- Dialogue between the Messiah and the blind man 35-38**
- F- Dialogue between the Messiah and the Pharisees 39-41**

### **1- The Healing of the Blind Man**

**“Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth.”[1]**

The Lord Jesus Christ passed through the crowd of Jewish leaders and disappeared as they picked up stones to throw at Him (8:59). We then see Him passing by the poor blind man who looks at the Lord. The Lord looked at him in a manner that is different from the

way the other people looked at him. He looked at the man with love and compassion. This is a living picture of the Messiah whom the Jews rejected. They took pride in the temple, while the Lord went through the streets seeking the Gentiles. They were disabled to see Him for they had no knowledge of the prophecies, the Divine law, or the symbols. They were like the man born blind whose place was on the roadside and who was poor and begging in a state of misery. Accordingly, Job says “Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery and life unto the bitter in soul;” (Job 3:20).

The Evangelist does not provide the name of the place through which the Lord was passing by or where He was. However, He was passing by as the Bearer of sufferings and He saw this man begging. The man was sitting in a place where charitable people could give him something to help him survive.

The man was known in the city as the one born blind. No one around him, not even the Lord’s disciples, asked or prayed that his eyes would be opened. May be this was because no one expected that it could happen.

The Lord looked at home so that the poor blind person would find Him. Accordingly, the holy Word states in Is. 65:1: “I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, ‘Behold me, behold me’, unto a nation that was not called by my name.” He first loved us, and He loved us before we knew Him. The apostle says in this context: “when ye knew not God,” (Gal. 4:9).

\* The Lord truly loves mankind and is concerned with our salvation. He wishes to bridle the mouth of the stupid and will not cease from working even though no one listens to Him. The prophet knew that and said, “that you might be justified when you speak, and be clear when you judge,” (Ps. 51:4). Consequently, in this chapter, we find the Lord leaving the temple and healing the blind. He does so after the Jews had rejected His words, accused Him of being possessed by a demon, and had tried to kill Him. He did the miracle to pacify their cruelty and violence and to underline the facts. He did a supernatural miracle that had no precedence. Listen to the healed person who states: **“Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind,”** [23]. May be some physician had opened the eyes of someone who had become blind, but this never happened to one born blind. Upon leaving the temple, the Lord intentionally went to work. This clearly indicates that it is He who saw the blind man and not vice versa. The Lord looked at him jealously and the disciples understood His compassion<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* This blind man represents the human race. Such blindness found a place in the first man through sin. We all have our origins in this first man and therefore have inherited not only death but evil as well. Now if lack of faith constitutes blindness and faith is enlightenment, then who is the believer that the Lord will find at His coming? The apostle, who traces his origin to the family of prophets, states: “...were by nature the children of wrath, even as others,” (Eph. 2:3)... since evil has found roots for itself within us, then

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 56:1

every person has been born mentally blind. For if a person could really see, he would not have needed a mentor: but since he needs someone to guide and enlighten him, then he has been blind ever since his birth.<sup>2</sup>

### **St. Augustine**

**“And his disciples asked him, saying,  
Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” [2]**

The Lord left the temple (Jn. 8:59) accompanied by the disciples who did not forsake Him during His trials. They enjoyed getting acquainted with Him and they were having tremendous new experiences. They noticed how the Lord turned His eyes to the poor blind man. He did not look at him in the usual manner for His eyes were full of love. They too, therefore turned their eyes to the blind man. Yet instead of praying the Lord to heal him, they questioned Him for the reason why he had been born blind.

\* We might wonder: where did this question come from? Our answer would be: when the Lord healed the paralytic man earlier, He told him “Look, you have been made well, sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you” (John 5:14). Therefore the disciples remembered that the man had suffered paralysis due to his sins. However, this could not be applied to this blind man for he was blind since birth. So had his parents sinned? This too cannot be concluded because the child does not suffer punishment due to his parents... the disciples here wondered because of their own confusion and not because they searched for information.<sup>3</sup>

### **St. John Chrysostom.**

There is a popular rabbinical saying (quoted allegedly by the rabbis) ‘There is no death without sin and no pain without evil.’ This saying was justified by them as they based it on the words cited in Ezekiel 18:20, and Psalm 89:32. These words were imprinted in the minds of the Jews, including the Lord’s disciples who did not ask if this blindness was due to sin or not. In their opinion, this matter did not need to be questioned or debated. So the question they asked was: ‘who was the one who had sinned and therefore brought this terrible calamity on that person.’ What confused the disciples was: ‘how could the man have sinned before birth and was consequently born like that? Could this be the result of his parents’ sin?’

Some believe that the soul of a person could sin before it is embodied in the flesh. **Origen the Scholar** believed that some suffer pain before they act wrongfully after birth. Others have depended on human logic to explain Divine Justice and how some are born poor while others are born rich, or why one person is born with sharp intelligence and another could lack it altogether; or why one is born physically strong while another is suffering many ailments. Besides, some have depended on affirming the potential to commit error before birth based on the story of Jacob and Esau when they were still in the womb: “...the children struggled together within her...” (Gen. 25:22).

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<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:1

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St John, 56:1



In the writings of the rabbis they deal with what befalls the sons due to the mistakes of the parents. In the context of the need for a man to avoid gazing at a woman, one rabbi states: 'A man who gazes at the heel of a woman will have a handicapped son born to him.' Another rabbi says that this happens to someone who approaches his wife during her impurity. Still another says that a man who has a marital relationship while his wife still has menstruation would have children who would suffer of epilepsy. There are numerous sayings similar to these and which underline the conviction of the rabbis that the sins of the parents are punished by appearance of flaws in their children and of which the children suffer throughout their lives.

This clarifies that what the disciples said was not inspired by their imagination, for it was the result of teachings strongly imprinted in the minds of many Jews. These ideas were the result of the rabbinical writings and teachings.

Some believe that the disciples had heard about the Pythagorean ideas. These claimed that the soul pre-exists the creation of its body. The Pharisees might have adopted that line of thought too. This is evident in their words to the man born blind: **"... you were completely born in sins," [34].**

Many nations believe in the transmigration of souls. Hinduism is still interested in defining the sin a person had committed when he lived in another body before birth. **Origen the scholar** borrowed a speech given by Jacob that is found in the unofficial Book to the Hebrews where he says: "I am the angel of God, one of the first ranks of the spirits. People call me Jacob, but my true name given me by God is Israel. Plato believes that the air is full of spirits; and that some of these bind themselves to bodies due to their naturally active inclinations. Other spirits detest such a union."

**Jesus answered:**

**"Neither this man nor his parents sinned  
but that the works of God should be revealed." [3]**

Rather than condemn the man born blind or his parents, the Lord directed the disciple's attention to the supreme care of God and His hidden plan. God had allowed this blindness in order to grant that person spiritual insight. Consequently, he would testify to the Divine truth before the violent Jewish leaders and would glorify God.

The Lord Jesus Christ did not say that the man born blind or his parents had not sinned. All mankind had fallen into sin. What this blind man was suffering of was not related to any particular sin. What the disciples and all believers should do is to be preoccupied with God's works and His plan for man. He wants us to enjoy inner sight, to get acquainted with the mysteries of God, and to receive fellowship in His eternal glory.

God's hand works incessantly and through hard and happy times. Under all circumstances, He seeks our salvation. Believers have not been promised a life with no trials or sufferings that afflict all other beings. Conversely, they are faced with more tribulations. However, what comforts them is their understanding that God has a plan for

everything. Besides, because they enjoy Divine grace they feel they are fully content. This is what God has promised us through St. Paul's words: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor. 12:9)

The believer does not complain in the midst of trials. His eyes are fixed on God his tender Father; and his heart is receptive and comprehends God's plan for him.

\* The Lord Jesus Christ is the Savior and He mercifully does what He has not granted in the womb. Surely when God had not given eyes to that blind person, it was not due to some error He (the Creator) did. Rather, the plan was to postpone it until the time would come to do a miracle..... **"Neither this man nor his parents sinned..."** God did not grant what He could have granted. He did not grant what He knew He would grant when the time would come for that need.

The blindness was not due to sin committed by the blind man or his parents; 'but **that the works of God should be revealed in him.**' For when we were born, we were all bound with the original sin. Yet in spite of that we were not born blind. Nevertheless, search carefully for we have been born blind. So who has not been born blind? I mean blind in the heart. Yet the Lord Jesus Christ, who has created both heart and body, heals both of them.<sup>4</sup>

St. Augustine

The Lord's words about the blind man: **"Neither this man nor his parents sinned"**, do not clear his parents of sin. He did not just say, **"Neither this man nor his parents sinned"**, for He added **"but that the works of God should be revealed in him."** Indeed this man and his parents had sinned; however the blindness was not a result of that. It is not valid to punish a person for a sin committed by someone else. This fallacy has been rejected by Ezekiel the prophet who says: "The word of the Lord came unto me again, saying, "What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die," Ezek 18:1-4. In this context, Moses the prophet also says: "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin," (Deut 24:16).

If someone says: How did God tell Moses the prophet "for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;" (Ex 20:5)? Our response would be: "Because this cause cannot be generalized; for it was said of people who had come out of Egypt. This was what it meant: When the Jews left Egypt; they became more experienced through many miracles and wonders. In spite of that, they became more evil than their parents and grand parents who had not seen such miracles. Therefore they were to suffer the same calamities that their predecessors had suffered if they followed the same course

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<sup>4</sup> Sermon on N.T.Lessons, 86:1

of action.

\* The Lord says these words not as someone who wants to indicate that they have not sinned since both that person and his parents have sinned. However, his blindness is not the reason of that.... But it is intended for the proclamation of the Glory of God through him. Someone may say: ‘Why should that person suffer for the glory of God? How unjust, explain to me? Then what if God had never created that man?’ Our response is: ‘The man has benefited from his blindness for he received the healing of his inner vision.’ What benefit do the Jews enjoy as they have eyes yet their condemnation has become greater. They saw yet were incapacitated. What is the harm that befell that man as a consequence of his disability... indeed, because of it, his eyes were opened? Therefore the evils of this present life are not evil, neither are the blessings beneficial. Only sin is evil, whereas disability is not evil.<sup>5</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom.**

**St. Jerome** wrote to Castrutrus of Pannomia to comfort him due to his physical blindness and said:

\* I write to ask you not to consider the physical calamity that has happened to you as the result of a sin...do we not see many idolaters, Jews, heretics and those who adopt different thoughts just wading in the mud of lust. They swim in a sea of blood and violence and are worse than savage wolves and stealthy hawks. In spite of that, they have not been inflicted with this epidemic. They are not inflicted like others and they grow in their arrogance towards God, raising their faces up to heaven. Conversely, we see the saints afflicted with sickness, pain, and need ...If you imagine that your blindness is due to sin; and that your sickness which doctors are often capable of healing are proof of God’s anger, then you seem to consider that Isaac is a sinner. You think that is why he was afflicted with blindness, was deceived, and gave the blessing to the one whom he had no intention to give. We accuse Jacob of sin when his eyesight weakened so much he could neither see Manasseh nor Ephraim (Gen. 48:1). Yet, with his inner vision and prophetic spirit he could foresee the distant future, and that the Lord Jesus Christ would come from a royal line (Gen. 49:1)<sup>6</sup>

**St. Jerome**

It is not appropriate for believers, having comprehended the supreme mysteries of God, to condemn anyone or to consider that matters that befall others are divine punishments inflicted for some hidden sin. If we do so we belittle others even though their sins are apparent. The Jews fell into this error as they considered the righteous One who is without sin, as deserving to suffer and be crucified for some evil or blasphemy he had committed. The Psalmist says: “For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded” (Ps. 69:26). Isaiah the prophet also says: “.....we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement for our peace was upon him and by His stripes we are healed” (Is. 53:4-5)

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<sup>5</sup> Hom. 56.PG 59:327

<sup>6</sup> Letter 68:1

**“I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day;  
the night is coming when no one can work” [4]**

These were critical moments when the Lord turned His eyes to the man born blind. They were moments dedicated not only to heal the man born blind but also to reveal the person of the Lord Jesus Christ: He is the light of the world and the giver of inner vision. In spite of that, no one could discover what lay behind this blindness. Until these moments, even the disciples could not read or understand the book of Divine care. However, the time came later on when it became possible to comprehend this Divine mystery and the supreme Divine work.

The Lord did not perform works in order to underline his power to do miracles. Rather He did so to perform the works of His Father who sent Him. However, He does not say I do the work that My Father has commanded Me to do but He just performed the same deeds of His Father. We notice here the following:

**First:** The Lord came into the world on a mission. He came in the form of the Son of man to fulfill His Father’s will and in complete obedience to Him. The Father’s will is identical to the Son’s will. That is why any person who is obedient shares the feature of obedience with our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Second:** The Lord performs the same works as the Father. This is what He affirms in the Gospel of St. John: the unity of Divine work. This will become evident in the rest of this Gospel.

**Third:** In a spirit of love for humanity and in obedience and union with the Father, the Lord finds pleasure in accomplishing His work. Committed by love, the Lord says:” I must work....”

**Fourth:** The Lord works while it is day; and before the Jews move to kill Him as they are driven by envy and hatred. The period of His service is an opportunity to work openly even if that is done on the Sabbath. This is an invitation for us to move and work and to seize every hour of our lives; lest our work remains unfinished when the day of our lives comes to an end. The Lord has granted us the day so that we may labor (Ps. 104:22-23). Therefore it is appropriate that we do not spoil and idle away the days of our lives. Indeed, we should struggle in obedience to God our Father so that when the night comes we could rest.

**Fifth:** The Lord invites us to work through Him and with Him. The apostle says accordingly:” For we are fellow workers...” (1 Cor. 3:9). For in working with Him, we find peace, honor, and glory. We share with Him in service as long as we are alive and before the night sets in.

\* What do these words convey? What are the ultimate conclusions based on these? So many. What the Lord says implies this: ‘As long as there is light, the nation could believe in Me; and as long as this life goes on, I need to work.’ The night is coming: that is, ‘it is bound to come in the future when no one would be able to work.’ The Lord did not say: ‘I cannot work’ but rather ‘When no one can work.’ This indicates that there will

not be any more time for faith, or service, or repentance<sup>7</sup>.

\* Why had St. Paul called this life 'the night' (Rom. 13:12)? But here the Lord calls it 'the day'? St. Paul is not contradicting the Lord for he is saying the same thing. Even though the words are different, yet the meaning is the same. He says: "the night is far spent. The day is at hand." St. Paul calls the present time 'the night' since he compares it to the forthcoming day. The Lord called the future 'the night' as no time will be left to perform acts of repentance, faith or obedience in the next world if we neglect any sin done in this world. As for St. Paul, he called this present life 'the night' because anyone who persists in evil and disbelief exists in darkness. Therefore he directs his speech to believers saying: 'The night is far spent, the day is at hand.' Believers need to enjoy that light, and St. Paul calls the old life as darkness: 'Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light'<sup>8</sup>.

### **St. John Chrysostom**

In this manner, the Lord directs His words to unbelievers. Their lives here are considered to be 'day' if they are compared with their lives in the world to come. Now, they could enjoy the light of the sun of righteousness in the inner hearts, through living faith and true repentance. As for the world to come, they will be enveloped in darkness where there is no way they could return to the Lord and offer repentance. In contrast, St. Paul directs his words to believers. He considers their previous lives as 'darkness' since they performed acts of darkness. Now, the time had come to travel into the future world where they would enjoy the eternal light of the Lord Jesus Christ. Coming into His presence, our present life appears as the darkest night...

\* Dear brothers, if we always bear in mind the condemnation we have inherited, then we will know that the whole world is blind. Now the Lord Jesus Christ, who grants enlightenment, has come. Satan causes blindness and he has caused all mankind to be born blind, as he is the one who deceived the first man. Let all run to Him who grants light. Let all run and believe and receive the clay made of spit.....let all wash their faces in the pool of Siloam ...This is Siloam: wash your face, be baptized. In this manner you will be enlightened and see while you could not see before<sup>9</sup>.

\* First: Open your eyes to Him who says: 'I must work the works of Him who sent Me' (Refer to John 9:4). A follower of Arius would immediately respond: 'As you see, the Lord did not perform His works but rather the works of the Father who sent Him.' Are these works not His works? What does He say who is Siloam and the Messenger Himself, the Son Himself, the only Son, the one to whom you complain and belittle His status? What is the response of the Lord? 'All things that the Father has are mine' (John 16:15)... He did not say: 'all that the Father has, He has given Me.' Yet, had He said that He would also have revealed His equality with the Father... Hear His words in another verse: "and all Mine are yours, and yours are Mine" (John 17:10). So the doubt ends here:

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<sup>7</sup> Hom 56. PG.59.328

<sup>8</sup> Hom on St John, 56:2

<sup>9</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 85:1

for what the Father and the Son have are in harmony and consist of the same thing. Therefore there is no conflict: what the Lord calls ‘the work of the Father’ are His works too since all that are ‘Yours are Mine’... “For whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner (in the same way) (John 5:19).<sup>10</sup>

**St. Augustine**

Thus the Lord offers Himself as a model. Indeed, He acts on our behalf so that when we disappear within Him we are enabled to perform the same deeds through His Spirit. He did not have to struggle since He performed His Father’s work with inner joy, and in spite of the constant resistance of those around Him. He will continue to act even through our union with Him. Therefore we should not cease to struggle and we should be committed to serve. We need to do so before the night of death comes upon us and the days of our lives come to an end on this earth.

**“As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” [5]**

The Lord Jesus Christ works as long as it is daytime. That means that He works as long as we are able to enjoy His redeeming deeds. For when the day ends and the night of the grave prevails, it will be impossible to benefit any longer of His service. The opportunity to repent and return to Him will have passed away. During the days of our lives, He shines upon us, as He is **‘The light of the world’**: The light of righteousness who gives light to our souls, our minds and all our inner depths.

Earlier, the Lord had proclaimed that His mission involves bringing His light to those sitting in the darkness (John 8:12). As He is the light of righteousness, He grants enlightenment and healing through the rays of His love or with the scope of His wings. As the Head of the Church, He transforms his believers into ‘the light of the world.’ They just have to be fervently fired by divine love to serve others.

\* The Lord said these words so that we may believe that He was speaking about the incarnation; and that it was valid as long as He was a human being. He was in the world for a while, yet as He is God and therefore He is present at all times. In another context, the Lord says: “... I am with you always, even to the end of the age,” (Matt. 28:20)<sup>11</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* Here the Lord reveals that even after His crucifixion, He will grant His tender care to the wicked and attract many to Him because it is still day. However, when the day is over, He will abandon them completely. He proclaims this by saying: **‘As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’** He also told others. ‘...while you have the light, believe in the light...’ (John 12:36)<sup>12</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom.**

The only incarnate Son is the light of the whole heavenly creation and not only of the

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<sup>10</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 85:3

<sup>11</sup> Of The Christian Faith, 3:7 (48)

<sup>12</sup> Hom. 56 PG:59:330

whole world<sup>13</sup>.

### St. Cyril the Great.

\* He is called “The light of the world” due to His act of giving light to the world: what lies within Him is the light.

He is called the resurrection since He tears away that which is dead and sets up the fullness of life within all those who come earnestly to Him.

On account of other acts, the Lord is also called ‘The Shepherd’ (John 10:11-12); ‘The Teacher’ (John 13:13); ‘The King’ (Zech 9:9; Matt. 21:5; John 12:15), ‘the chosen Arrow’ (Ps. 44:6; Is 49:2); ‘The Slave/ Servant’ (Is 49:3); ‘the Mediator and Sacrifice’ (1 John 2:1-2; Rom 3:25) He is also called the ‘ Logos’ as He strips away all that which is illogical ‘alogon.’ He truly transforms us into wise beings acting always in a manner that glorifies God even as we eat and drink (1 Cor. 10:31) Due to such wisdom, we are enabled to fulfill completely and generally all our acts in this life to the glory of God. Through fellowship with Him, we are enabled to awaken and be enlightened. Besides, He watches over us and directs our lives. Clearly, we walk wisely and divinely as He destroys every irrational and deadly matter within us since He is the Word and the Resurrection (John 1:1; 11:25)<sup>14</sup>.

### Origen the Scholar

\* What is this night in which no one can work as soon as it sets in? Listen to what ‘the day’ stands for; then you will comprehend the implication of ‘the night’...let the Lord tell us: **“As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”**[5]. See how He Himself is the day. ‘Let the blind wash his eyes in the day so that he might see the day... Then the night, in a certain manner, corresponds to a person’s lack of recognizing Me. Thus when the Lord is no longer there, no one can work’<sup>15</sup>.

\* It is the night of the wicked. The night of those to whom it will be said at the end of time: ‘Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.’

Now faith works through love. Therefore if we now work- then it is now daytime for the Lord is present now.

Listen to His promise and do not imagine that He is absent; for He Himself has said: “I am with you.” Until when? May we, who are alive, never experience anxiety. As long as we have full faith that His words stand throughout all generation, this is possible.

The Lord said:” I am with you always, even to the end of the age,” (Matt 28:20). There is a time to work, and a time to collect wages. The Lord will reward everyone according to his deeds (Matt. 16:27).

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<sup>13</sup> Explanation on the Gospel. PG 73: 601B

<sup>14</sup> Commentary on John, Book 1:267-268

<sup>15</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate44:5

Go on working as long as you are alive.... For the terrible night will come when all the wicked will faint. In the present, every unbeliever who dies enters into the night where it is impossible to do any work. In this kind of night the wealthy one keeps burning, suffering, and repenting. However, he could not get any relief. He tried to be good when he told Abraham: "Father Abraham, send Lazarus to my father's house...that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment" (Luke 16:27-28)

What a sad person! When you were alive you had time to work. Now you are in the night where no man can work<sup>16</sup>!

**St. Augustine.**

**"When He had said these things, He spat on the ground, and made clay with the saliva; and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. [6]**

The manner of healing the man born blind is unique. It is well known that mud would damage a healthy eye. So how does the Lord make mud with His saliva and anoint the eyes of that man? And why did He not heal him in secret in order to avoid arousing the hostility of the religious leaders? Besides why did He not wait till after the Sabbath and then heal him?

**First:** The Lord confirms that He performs His work in accordance to his divine thought and not according to our wishes and human means.

**Second:** His prime concern is to grant the blind man sight to his eyes and insight to his heart. He is not concerned with the resistance of the Jewish leaders against Him.

**Third:** He did not wait until the Sabbath had ended because it was as a day of rest. Therefore the spirit of the Lord finds rest in doing divine acts and in granting enlightenment and rest to others.

**Fourth:** He sets an example so that we may not postpone doing good works to the next day. Indeed, we should seize every chance to hurry in doing good deeds lest the opportunity is no more there tomorrow.

**Fifth:** The Lord made clay out of spit and anointed the man's eyes with His hands. In doing so He confirms that the secret of that power lies in Christ Himself and in the work of His hands. Everything that proceeds from the Lord Jesus Christ possesses power, life and enlightenment. Indeed, His arm is almighty.

\* Notice that when the Lord sought to heal the blind man, He did so in a manner that could make his blindness even worse, as He applied mud<sup>17</sup>.

\* The Lord took earth from the ground and that is just the same thing He did when He created Adam. It would have been true if He had said: "I am the one who took soil from the ground and formed man." But this would have been very hard on His hearers, as well as too unbearable and repulsive to them. Therefore He chose to reveal His identity

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<sup>16</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate44:6

<sup>17</sup> Hom 4. PG 61:27



through a practical event, which nothing could hinder. By taking earth and mixing it with spit, He proclaimed His hidden glory. Indeed, it was not easy for the crowds to comprehend and believe that they stood before the glorious Creator Himself<sup>18</sup>.

\* If you wonder: ‘Why did the Lord not use water in the mud but rather used spit?’ Our response is: ‘So that the spring of water would not be considered the source of healing. Besides, it is intended to indicate that the power evident in His mouth is responsible for creating the eyes of the blind man and opening them.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* He granted him new eyes<sup>19</sup>.

**St. Paulinus**

\* He formed eyes from clay.

Light emanated from the soil

This is how it happened in the beginning...

He ordered that there be light, and it was born out of darkness.

Similarly, here too.

He made clay out of His spit,

And he offered perfection to that which was lacking in nature and that was the case since the beginning.

This was intended to reveal that what He held in His hands was the power to bring perfection to what was imperfect in nature...

As they refused to believe that He was there before Abraham came, He proved to them, through His deeds, that He is the Son of the One whose hands had shaped the first Adam out of the earth<sup>20</sup>.

**St. Efram the Syrian**

\* He made clay out of the spit and anointed our eyes with it (John 9:6, 7). He made us see clearly (Mark 8:25). He opened the ears of our hearts (Mark 7:33-35) so that we could hear. Therefore we could smell His sweet fragrance (Eph 5; 2 Cor 2:15), and distinguish His name as the aroma of a spilled sweet ointment (Song of Sol 1:3; Phil 2). Now we could taste and see how great the Lord is (1 Peter 2:3; Ps 34:8). Now we can touch Him in the manner that St. John describes: ‘That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the work of life’ (1 John 1:1). Consequently, we have become enabled to kill the Lamb, eat it, and as a result come out of Egypt<sup>21</sup>.

**‘And He said to him,**

**“Go; wash in the pool of Siloam (which is translated, Sent).**

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<sup>18</sup> Hom56.PG59:328

<sup>19</sup> Poem 23. ACW 40:219

<sup>20</sup> Commentary on Tatation’s Diatessaron, 28

<sup>21</sup> Peri Pasha 18, 19 ( Translated by Robert J.Daly- ACW)

## **So he went and washed and came back seeing' [7]**

**‘Siloam’:** It is also known as Shiloh, Silo, and Shiloh. This is a natural spring that lies beneath the strong citadels on the east of Jerusalem, in between the city and the waters of Kidron. Some consider that Siloam is the same as En Rogel, which is mentioned in Joshua 15:7; 18:16; 2 Sam 17:17; 1 Kings 1:9. The waters of this spring were gathered in a great storage for the consumption of the city. A stream flowed out of it that fed the pool at Bethesda.

The pool of Siloam got its water from a spring that originated in mount Zion thus the waters of the Tabernacle “were streams that make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle the most high”(Ps 46:4). These are living and healing waters (Ezek 47:9).

**(Which is translated Sent):** The name is derived from the Hebrew ‘Shalach’ and means ‘Sent.’ This was due either because they considered this spring as a blessing granted by God in order to water the city; or because its waters were channeled through canals or pipes to different regions. Some believe that the name refers to a prophecy by Jacob to Judas that the Messiah would be his descendant: “..... Until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people” (Gen 49:10). Thus it is a symbol for the Lord Jesus Christ, sent from the Father to enlighten and heal souls.

The Lord Jesus Christ is called “the Messenger” for He is the carrier of the covenant (Malachi 2:1). He repeatedly says in the Gospel of St. John that the Father had sent Him. Thus when he tells the blind man to go to the pool of Siloam or Sent, He is calling every soul in need of enlightenment to go to Him. He is the messenger who purifies man from sin, and shines with His light upon him. Consequently, he/she enjoys heavenly understanding, and darkness can no longer have a place in him.

\* Just as the Lord Jesus Christ is also the spiritual rock (1Cor 10:4), so is the spiritual Siloam also<sup>22</sup>.

## **St. John Chrysostom**

The Lord Jesus Christ underlined the obedience of the man born blind. On the one hand, he submitted himself to the Lord, whom he had never seen, and let him put clay on his eyes without any objection or even asking how the Lord could use clay to heal eyes? On the other hand, he obeyed, went and washed in the pool of Siloam. He probably had gone and washed there previously but had not recovered his sight. Besides, surely many others had washed in the pool yet had never heard of any blind person being healed by its waters. Consequently, the Lord proclaimed the virtues of that poor blind man which were evident in his assurance, confidence, and calm.

Note the mind set of the blind man: he was obedient in every way. He did not say: ‘If the mud and spit will truly heal me, why do I need to go to Siloam? Or, if I need to go to Siloam, why is there a need for clay? Why does He anoint me with (clay)? And why

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<sup>22</sup> Homilies on St John, 57:1

does He command me to get washed?’ He did not think of these matters, as he was ready to do one thing only: he was prepared to obey completely the one who commanded him and he was not inclined to do anything to oppose Him<sup>23</sup>.

### **St. John Chrysostom**

The man born blind came to enjoy the light of which he had been deprived before. It is as though he had been granted a new birth that differed from his previous birth. The pool of Siloam represents the baptismal waters that grant inner vision besides purification and redemption from sin. The waters refer to the Messianic age or the Kingdom of the house of David: “In as much as these people refuse the waters of Shiloah that flow softly....” (Is 8:6)

The blind man returned with his sight restored. He could see intangible things and he praised with all his might the One who had granted him enlightenment. Accordingly Isaiah the prophet says: “...your watchmen shall lift up their voices, with their voices they shall sing together; for they shall see eye to eye when the Lord brings back Zion” (Is 52:8).

\* The Lord told the blind man to go and, wash in Siloam. If you were to ask: ‘Why has the Lord not done the miracle immediately? Why did He send the man to Siloam?’ Our response would be: ‘To test the blind man’s faith and in order to silence the arguments of the Jews.’ Besides, it was necessary for all who met him to see him going there with his eyes covered with clay. Such a strange sight would attract everybody’s attention, whether they knew him or not. Everybody would notice him in every detail. It would not be easy to recognize the blind man after his eyes were opened (for his features would be changed). That is why the Lord intended to have many witnesses testifying in different ways by creating a strange sight that would be definitely remarkable... in this manner people would be unable, after the miracle had been done, to deny that it was the same person.

### **St. John Chrysostom**

\* The man washed his eyes in this pool whose name is translated as “sent.” He was baptized in the Lord in a manner that granted him enlightenment. When the Lord anointed him with clay He made him becomes a believer<sup>24</sup>.

**St. Augustine** believes that in making the clay with spit, the reference is to the Word being incarnated<sup>25</sup>.

## **2. Dialogues after the Miraculous Healing**

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<sup>23</sup> Homilies on St John, 57:1

<sup>24</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:2

<sup>25</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:2

### **A. The dialogue between the Neighbors and the Blind m\Man**

The neighbors, who were eyewitnesses to the miracle, knew the blind man very well. Due to the miraculous healing and their great astonishment, they went through three stages of doubt, leading to three questions:

**The first stage:** their doubts in the person of the blind man [8], therefore he assured them he was that same blind man they had known [9].

**The second stage:** Who had made the miracle? And the answer was “A man called Jesus” [11]

**The third stage:** “Where is He?” And the answer was: “I do not know”, [12].

The blind man was completely accurate and faithful in answering all the three questions and according to what he knew at that time.

**‘Therefore the neighbors and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, “Is not this he who sat and begged?” [8]**

The neighbors were astonished as he had been born and had grown among them. They were accustomed to see him blind. Often, he would sit and beg in misery. Suddenly now he could see and his sight was whole for he was walking joyfully everywhere. He had not been able to work on account of his blindness and his damaged psyche. His parents had been unable to support him; therefore he sat by the roadside and begged most of the day. Even his manner of speech and words had become different. Instead of beggars’ words that would were intended to let people give him alms; his words were now full of praise and thanksgiving. All this made his miraculous healing a public event rather than a hidden matter! In spite of that, some were suspicious concerning his identity. There were conflicting views since the healing of a person born blind is something hard to accept. Indeed, according to human knowledge, healing appeared to be impossible in such a case.

\* How tender is God! Wherever He went, He tenderly healed even beggars. In this manner, He silenced the Jews. He did not give special attention to famous or outstanding persons or to rulers. Rather He attended to those who seemed unworthy to receive His attention. Indeed, He had come to save everyone<sup>26</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Some said: “This is he.”**

**Others said, “He is like him.”**

**He said: “I am he.” [9]**

Probably, those who said: **“This is he”** were the ones who had witnessed what had happened to him for everything had been done in public. As far as the others, they did not believe and said:” He is like him.” This was also because his opened eyes made him look different than how he used to look. By saying: “I am he” he testified that he is the same one who had been begging people; but now he was enjoying God’s supreme

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<sup>26</sup> Homilies on St John, 57:1

blessing.

\* He was not ashamed of his former blindness; and he did not fear the anger of the crowd. Moreover, he did not conceal his identity for he wanted to testify to the One who had been kind to him

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Therefore they said to him:  
“How were your eyes opened?” [10]**

When the blind man testified that he was the one who received the blessing of healing, the neighbors asked how it happened. They wanted to know and find the Maker of the miracle. The Psalmist accordingly says:” The works of the Lord are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them,” (Ps 111:2).

**He answered and said:  
“A man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes,  
and said to me: ‘Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed,  
and I received sight” [11]**

He presented the truth simply and according to his experience. He said: “A man called Jesus made clay...” He had not seen Jesus before, but had heard of Him. He heard the Lord’s voice when He commanded him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. He felt that the Lord’s hand put something over his eyes. He discovered it was clay after he had been healed; and that the Lord had made it Himself and anointed his eyes with it.

\* Look how he became a preacher through grace. Look how he preaches the Gospel. Having received insight, he became a confessor. This blind man became a confessor and that agitated the hearts of the wicked. This was due to the fact that they had not received in their hearts what this man had received in his eyes<sup>27</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**Then they said to him:  
“Where is He?”  
He said: “I do not know.” [12]**

Their second question was “Where is He?” Was this question raised due to their doubt in the person who had made the miracle and had broken the law and incited breaking it? On one hand, the Lord had made clay and anointed the eyes of the blind man. On the other hand, He had commanded him to walk to the pool and get washed. May be some asked the question out of curiosity and to find out who was that one that could do such an act; while others could have asked out of a sincere desire to meet Him.

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<sup>27</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:8

The blind man answered: **“I do not know”** as the Lord seems to have withdrawn immediately after He had commanded the man to go to the pool of Siloam. He did not wait until the man would return to thank Him. This reveals that the Lord finds joy in giving freely and without expecting a word of thanks or praise. When He reprimands on account of ingratitude it is intended to teach others who need to be grateful, to rejoice, and to give praise just as the angels do.

\* Notice the Lord’s humility. He did not stay with those whom He healed as He did not seek to gather a reward. Neither did He want to boast nor draw the attention of the crowds<sup>28</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

## **B. The Dialogue between the Pharisees and the Man Born Blind**

**‘They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees.’ [13]**

We would have expected the neighbors to be looking for the Maker of the miracle in order to get acquainted with Him and enjoy being with Him. However, they laid hold of the blind man and brought him to the Pharisees and as though he had committed a crime. They led him as a guilty man who had agreed to break the Sabbath even though his eyes had been restored on that day.

The matter was greater than just presenting it to one or more priests. It had to do with the whole nation and so they brought him before the Sanhedrin. In the minds of the crowds, the Council was responsible for issuing the final verdict. Most of the council members were Pharisees and most did all they could to resist the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of the crowds had brought the blind man to the Council in order to reveal the truth, and expose to the Pharisees how this One, whom they resisted, had created eyes for the man born blind. Consequently the crowds would be attracted and adhere to Him rather than resist Him.

Some writers believe that the word ‘Pharisees’ refers to a secondary committee under the council of the Sanhedrim. This would be made up of high priests and Pharisees. The Council consisted of two committees, each included twenty three members. Each member had the right to judge a few cases. In the big cities, there were similar committees.

**Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. [14]**

**Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight.**

**He said to them: “He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.” [15]**

The Pharisees posed the same question that his neighbors had asked. It was not intended to get the truth from its original source. Rather, they hoped to find a fault that could enable them to accuse the Lord of guilt. In this manner they would be enabled to damage His image before the crowds who had gathered around him.

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<sup>28</sup> Homilies on St John, 57:2

Notice how the man born blind did not get agitated. He did not deny or say anything different from what he had said before. The Pharisees and the other people had brought him hoping he would reject the One who had healed him. Consequently, they were faced with disappointment due to his answers. They got to know fully well the miraculous act of the Lord. That afflicted man had beaten them in every way due to the Lord's miracle.

**St. John Chrysostom**

The answers of the blind man to the Pharisees were identical to those he had given to his neighbors. However, he did not mention that the Lord had "made the clay." This could be due to the fact that he had not seen Him make it. Even though he could have guessed, he did not want to present to an official council a testimony they could oppose. How could he see the Lord making clay when he was blind? He could have avoided mentioning it since making clay is considered work and he did not wish the Jews to accuse the Lord of breaking the Sabbath. For that same reason, the man did not use the expression "He told me...." Besides, the Lord would be accused of tempting people to break the law since He had told him to go to the pool of Siloam and wash. At the same time, he boldly said: "I washed" and he did not fear them!

**Therefore, some of the Pharisees said:**

**"This man is not from God,  
because He does not keep the Sabbath."**

**Others said:**

**"How can a man who is a sinner do such miracles?"**

**And there was a division among them. [16]**

The creation of eyes for the blind man should have been sufficient to silence the Lord's opponents. However, there arose a division among them: one party observed worship literally and were preoccupied with false glory, these considered that the Lord had broken the Sabbath and so had broken the divine commandments. Instead of enjoying the presence of the Lord, they persecuted Him as though He were a criminal: **"This man is not from God."** The other party considered His deed to be a work of supreme love and an execution of the law. Healing, they believed, is a real sign of the Lord's true mission. However, the second party represented a small minority that could not stand up to the angry majority.

At the end of every teaching or the performance of a miracle, there arose divisions among the crowds. The opponents would go to the Pharisees as they were the judges and possessed religious power. However, this time, the division was among the judges themselves. Maybe this led to the postponement of the judgment concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

\* **St. John the Evangelist** reports that **"there was a division among them"** as some loved authority and power so much that it prevented them from recognizing the Lord

Jesus Christ, while others kept silent due to their cowardice and fear from many of the people.

**St. John Chrysostom.**

The Lord intentionally healed the paralytic at Bethesda on a Saturday. He commanded him to get up, carry his bed and walk (John 5:8). He also intended to heal the man born blind by making clay, and anointing his eyes. In the Book of Gemara<sup>29</sup> it says that whoever applies medicine for the eyes on a Saturday is considered sinful, and the Lord also ordered him to go to the pool of Siloam and wash. As Lightfoot mentions, the Lord Jesus Christ broke the Sabbath in a number of ways. Could he not have healed the man on any other day but Saturday and without all these actions? Why did He insist on healing on a Saturday? The Lord did so to underline the true meaning of the Sabbath, for it is intended for resting in the Lord; and in going about doing the Lord's deeds of love and mercy. He wanted to expose the misconception of the literal interpretation and observation of the law which imposed banning essential daily acts and services of love.

\* Those who threw the Lord out continued to be blind. They encouraged opposing the Lord for working on the Sabbath, making clay from spit, and anointing the eyes of the blind man. When he healed the blind man with a word, the Jews opened the door to arouse oppositions....

The Lord had broken the Sabbath (literally) but He was not guilty.

What do we mean by saying: 'The Lord had broken the Sabbath?' He is the Light that came and ended the shadows. The Lord God is the One who instituted the Sabbath. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself was with the Father when He gave the Law. He established it as a forerunner to future events. "Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come." (Col. 2:16)

Why do the shadows cheer us? Open your eyes, O Jews, for the "Sun" is here. **"We know...."** [24]. What do you know, O you who are blind at heart? **"That this man is not from God because He does not keep the Sabbath" [16].**

O miserable people, the Sabbath has been established by the Lord Jesus Christ whom you claim that He is not from God. You observe the Sabbath in a physical manner. You have not received the spit of the Lord on your eyes, and you have neither gone to Siloam nor washed your faces. Consequently, you persist in your blindness; you are blind to the goodness found in this blind man. He is no longer blind in body or in heart. **"For judgment I have come into the world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind," [39]<sup>30</sup>.**

Clearly, He has observed the Sabbath for there was no sin in Him. This is a spiritual Sabbath: when a person is without sin.

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<sup>29</sup> Gemara 14.

<sup>30</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 86:3



Truly, my brothers, this is what God encourages us to do when He commands us to observe the Sabbath: “You shall do no customary (slave) work on it,” (Lev. 23:8). Now go back to the previous teachings and ask for the meaning of ‘servile work’ and listen to the Lord’s words: “whoever commits sin is a slave of sin,” (John 8:34)<sup>31</sup>.

St Augustine

**They said to the blind man again:**

**“What do you say about Him because He opened your eyes?”**

**He said, “He is a prophet.” [19]**

They threw the net before the blind man so that he would deny that the Lord Jesus Christ was the Messiah. He would be thrown out of the Sanhedrin or killed if he did otherwise.

After asking about the manner of healing, the Pharisees asked the blind man about the One who had healed him. They asked for his personal opinion in the Man and his actions. They put on pressure so that he might respond, even negatively and in the manner by which his parents had responded. They wanted him to report what he knew concerning his recovery and to leave the decision in the hands of the religious leaders who would judge the matter. However, he disappointed them as he honored the One who granted healing to him. According to a new law they had set, they issued a decree of exile against the man in order to teach a lesson to others.

This blind man was like the Samaritan woman (John 4:19). Both thought the Lord was a prophet before they became acquainted with the reality of His being the Messiah-**“The Holiest of the holy”** and the One who grants eternal righteousness. The light began to shine in his heart and inner vision just as it shone in his physical eyes. In hearing the man’s words: **“He is a prophet”**, the Pharisees feared the fulfillment of the writings in the Book of Daniel. It mentions that the One who will come from God within three centuries approximately, and while the nation is in darkness and without a prophet, will be the **seal of all visions and prophecies**: the eternal Messiah, whom all generations await: **“Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city. To finish the transgression, to make end of sin, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most holy,”** (Daniel 9:24)

\* Notice the wisdom of the poor man. He spoke more wisely than all the Pharisees. He first said: **“He is a prophet”** [17]. He did not fear the judgment of the Jews or the opposition of those against the Lord and who said: **“This Man is not from God because He does not keep the Sabbath”** [16], and he responded, **“He is a Prophet”**<sup>32</sup>.

St John Chrysostom

### **C. The Dialogue between the Pharisees and the Parents of the Man Born Blind.**

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<sup>31</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:9

<sup>32</sup> Homilies on St John, 58:1

**‘But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and received his sight, until they called the parents of him who had received his sight’,[18]**

Here the word “Jews” is intended to indicate the religious authorities, especially the Pharisees and the members of the council of the Sanhedrin. These did not believe that the man was born blind. Therefore they called the parents to confirm that this was their son and that he had been born blind. They hoped to find some fault that would diminish the value of the miracle in the eyes of the people.

\* Notice the many ways of darkness they used in order to conceal and demolish the miracle. But it is in the nature of truth to work in this manner: it uses the same instruments that evil uses to overcome it. Truth becomes stronger and shines through the same means that were used to blemish or destroy it<sup>33</sup>!

**St John Chrysostom**

**And they asked them saying:  
“Is this your son, who you say was born blind?  
How then does he now see?”[19]**

These leaders could not bear the light of truth. Therefore they posed a question that carried a kind of arrogance and threat to the parents. They were not satisfied with being evil, but also sought to implant fear among the people. They wanted them to share their renouncement of the Messiah and their rejection of divine truth.

\* They did not say: ‘...who was at one time blind.’ Rather, they said: ‘...who you say was born blind.’ They almost seemed to be saying: ‘...whom you have made blind.’

**St. John Chrysostom**

**His parents answered them and said:  
“We know that this is our son,  
and that he was born blind” [20]**

His parents were not embarrassed to admit that this was their son, who due to his poverty and blindness used to beg. As they were not eyewitnesses to his healing, they avoided answering the question concerning the manner he was healed. They also feared to be thrown out of the Temple.

**“But by what means he now sees we do not know,  
or who opened his eyes we do not know.  
He is of age, ask him.  
He will speak for himself.” [21]**

It is true that they were not eyewitnesses, yet they surely knew and were assured by their own son who must have told them himself that the Lord Jesus Christ is the One who had

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<sup>33</sup> Homilies on St John, 58:1

healed him. They used human wisdom and consequently lost the blessing of witnessing for the Lord Jesus Christ. They deprived themselves of offering thanksgiving and testifying the truth for the one who does miracles. They feared mankind so they laid a trap for themselves and their son. In this context, wisdom says: “The fear of man brings a snare but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe,” (Prov. 29:25).

**His parents said these things because they feared the Jews,  
for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ,  
he would be put out of the synagogue, [22].**

Being thrown out of the temple meant being isolated from the worshippers. This was known as *nidui* and it is the lowest form of excommunication in Jewish practice. *Anathema* and *Cheram* were applied to Christians in the period following the Resurrection.

The punishment for confessing that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Messiah was banishment from the Council. Such a person was treated like someone who had denied the Jewish faith. Therefore a person who would witness for the Lord would know that he would be exposing himself to be isolated from worshippers. He would also be considered a rebel and a traitor to the religious leadership. By being banished, such a person was made to realize that he was unworthy of being related to God’s people; and prevented from enjoying the privileges of being one of the chosen people of Israel.

Consequently such banishment had dangerous results: deprivation from joining the people in public worship; being regarded as an outlaw, and consequently being deprived of engaging in commercial transactions. In fact, this would lead to the loss of one’s freedom, and the possibility of sequestering one’s possessions.

\* Being banished from the temple is no longer a wicked matter, for people would expel but the Lord would receive the outcasts<sup>34</sup>.

**Therefore his parents said: “He is of age; ask him” [23]**

\* They asked the parents three questions: Was this their son? Was he born blind? How did he come to see? They admitted to two questions only, while they had no answer to the third one. They did so for the sake of providing the truth. No one else could confess except the one who had been healed.

**St. John Chrysostom**

#### **D- The Second Dialogue between the Pharisees and the Man Born Blind**

**So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him:  
“Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner” [24].**

They called the blind man a second time and they treated him with great respect

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<sup>34</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:10

and honor. They wanted to win him over, so they said: **“Give God the glory.”** In other words: ‘Swear by the name of God that you will tell the truth.’ Then they tried to dictate what they wanted him to say. They wanted him to say that the Lord pretended to be a prophet and that He had transgressed against the law. In this manner, the blind man would please them and they would honor him. Some writers find that this is a legal religious procedure since they intended to issue a very serious verdict. In other words, there was the threat of being expelled from the company of God’s people, or the pronouncement of the death penalty. It is as though they made God a witness against him before banishing or condemning Him to death.

Probably, they intended to convey by their words the following: ‘He is a wicked and sinful man. Therefore give more glory to God as He has used this Man as a tool to work through Him.’

They wanted to follow the example of Joshua when he condemned Achan to be stoned, for he asked him first: to ‘give glory to the Lord God’ (Joshua 7:16) and to hide nothing. He had asked him to confess because there was ‘an accursed thing in Israel.’

Earlier, the Lord had loudly inquired: “Which of you convicts Me of sin?” (John 8:46). No one dared convict Him in His presence. However, behind His back they said: **“We know that this Man is a sinner.”**

\* They did not say anything to the blind man that would make him ashamed to deny that the Lord Jesus Christ had healed him. Conversely, they wished to mask their renouncement in the robe of piety by saying: **“Give glory to God.”** Saying such words clearly indicates their arrogance.

In speaking to the blind man about the Lord and saying: **“We know that this Man is a sinner”**, we ask them: ‘How is it that you did not reprimand the Lord Jesus Christ when He said: “Which of you convicts Me of sin” (John 8:46)?! How have you found out that He is a sinner?’

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* What is the meaning of: **“Give glory to God”**? Renounce what you have been granted. Such behavior would not glorify God; for this would be blasphemy indeed<sup>35</sup>.

**St. Augustine.**

**He answered and said:**

**“Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know.**

**One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see” [25]**

That poor man did not care to please the religious leaders. Nor did he want to be honored by them. In all simplicity, he told the truth. Thus he became a true witness to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>35</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:11

It is as though he was telling them that the personality of the One who had healed me is not a valid matter for contention or argument. I do not need such confrontation. His deed is beyond discussion. All I know is that I was blind, but now I see. This is my experience with Him. Or it is as though he is telling them that if you claim that He is a sinner, then this is a matter I know nothing about. What I know is my trust in Him. This makes me reject what you say altogether. Practical experience is greater and stronger than theoretical discussions. This is the living experience of believers. St. Paul accordingly says: "For you were once in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord." (Eph 5:8)

They sought to transform the work of the Lord into contentions. Then the crowds would be engaged in them rather than enjoy a living fellowship with Him. However the man born blind chose to experience the new enlightened life rather than engage in stupid arguments.

\* Was the blind man truly fearless? This could not be so, or how could he have said: **"He is a prophet"**; and then said: **"Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know."**

He answered in this manner not because this was his way of thinking, or in order to convince himself. **Rather, he wanted to vindicate the Lord from this accusation through his testimony of the facts and not through his own proclamations about Him. In this manner, the defense becomes strong as the good deed in itself acts as a witness against them.** Therefore after a long discussion, the blind man said: "If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing" [refer to v.33]. They were angered and told him: **"You were completely born in sins and are you teaching us?"** If he had responded like that from the beginning, was there anything else they would not have said? Or was there anything else they would not have sought to do?

**"Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know"** It is as though he was saying: 'I am not saying anything in praise of this Man. I do not proclaim anything about Him now. However, I definitely know Him and confirm that He would not have been able to do such acts if He were a sinner.'

In this manner, he removed all doubts from his own mind. He neither damaged his testimony, nor spoke with prejudice. Indeed, he presented a testimony backed by facts<sup>36</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Then they said to him again:  
"What did He do to you?  
How did He open your eyes?" [26]**

They pursued interrogating him but used a different method in the hope of finding something contradictory to his earlier responses. They sought to find something they could hold against the Lord Jesus Christ. The reason why they asked the blind man how the Lord had opened his eyes was to discover if He had used some devilish method to

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<sup>36</sup> Homilies on St John, 58:2

open them. However, the young man became irritated by their unseemly manners and did not respond to them. He answered each question by asking another one and inquiring if they wished to become the Lord's disciples. At the same time he considered himself to be one of the disciples.

**“I told you already and you did not listen.  
Why do you want to hear it again?  
Do you also want to become His disciples?” [27]**

His response was delivered in a spirit of candidness and courage. It was a living testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ. Besides, his question to them was a watershed for they had to choose between two issues: becoming disciples of the Lord just as he himself had learned to do; or end the discussion with him since there was no point in further discussion anymore.

\* What was his answer? Having overcome and disappointing them, he no longer spoke submissively to them. When it was necessary to question and discuss, he spoke cautiously in order to present the proof of his testimony. Now that he had overcome them and scored a great victory, he was encouraged to step over them<sup>37</sup>.

\* Do you see how a beggar can speak courageously before the Scribes and Pharisees? That is how truth is strong and falsehood is weak. When ordinary men adhere to the truth they become glorified; whereas falsehood, even when used by the powerful, turns them to weaklings.

What he said implied the following: ‘You have not paid attention to my words. Therefore I will not continue to speak and answer anymore. You have no goal while you interrogate me; and you do not want to listen in order to get informed. Indeed, you only seek to damage my words<sup>38</sup>.’

\* By asking the question: **“Do you also want to become His disciples?”** the man born blind aligned himself with the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is clear that by saying that, he had become a disciple of the Lord. Now he was speaking sarcastically and this annoyed them greatly. He realized how they felt and therefore pursued to hit them powerfully. He spoke words that were powerful and severe. This was the result of a courageous soul that soared in the heights and that despised their madness. It indicated the grandeur of the honor (of being the Lord's disciple). He was very confident and he revealed that they were insulting the One who deserved admiration. However, he did not care that they were insulting him, and he regarded their reprimands as an honor to himself<sup>39</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom.**

\* What do these words imply: “Do you also want to become His disciples?” As for me, I

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<sup>37</sup> Homilies on St John, 58:2

<sup>38</sup> Homilies on St John, 58:2

<sup>39</sup> Homilies on St John, 58:3

have indeed become His disciple. Do you want to do the same too? Now I can see, and I see without any fear<sup>40</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**Then they reviled him and said:  
“You are His disciple, but we are Moses’ disciples” [28]**

When they could no longer resist the truth, they turned to the language of abuse. This is what anyone who adheres to the truth expects. The Lord says: “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake,” (Matt 5:11). They possessed hearts filled with hatred against the divine truth; murderous, their words were as sharp as the piercing of a sword (Prov 12:8; Psalm 55:21).

They belittled him by saying “You are His disciple.” Although the man had neither seen the Lord yet, nor heard his sermons, yet they considered him a disciple as he witnessed for Him. As for him, he was proud to be the Lord’s disciple.

They boasted of their relationship to Moses the prophet. He was their teacher and they did not need or seek another. Previously, they had boasted before the Lord that they were Abraham’s children. Now they were proud to be Moses’ disciples. However, they were estranged from Abraham’s children and Moses according to their deeds and thoughts. If they were truly Abraham’s children, they would have seen with him the day of the Lord and would have rejoiced (John 5:56). Moreover, if they were truly Moses’ disciples, they would have adhered to the Lord Jesus Christ whom Moses foresaw, rather than resist Him.

**“We know that God spoke to Moses,  
as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from,” [29]**

It is as though they were saying: ‘We are sure that Moses had a divine mission; but we have no proof that this person has been called to serve. Therefore how could we abandon Moses and follow an unknown person and stranger who is assuming to have a divine mission? They presented proof to justify their pride that Moses was their teacher and that God’s Word came to him. Yet, they did not understand that the Lord Jesus Christ was Himself the Word of God become incarnate. Moses was the faithful servant, who was entrusted with the house of his Master. However, the Lord Jesus Christ is the only Son and Owner of the house (Heb 3:5, 6) whom Moses served.

They sarcastically said: “...as for this fellow, we do not know where he is from” [29]. Indeed, they did not and could not know where He came from for they had to search the Old Testament chapters with a real intention to learn. They needed to pray to God to reveal Him to them. If they had searched they would have realized that they lived at a time in which the expected Messiah would come. However, they were like their fathers, who had lived at the time of Jeremiah the prophet who said: “Neither did they say ‘where is the Lord’ ...” (Jer 2:6)

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<sup>40</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:11

\* They did not say ‘We heard that God spoke to Moses’, but rather said **“we know [29].** O, you Jews are you sure what you heard is true? You know this, yet you consider what you see is less trustworthy than what you hear? You have heard about one person but you have not seen him; while you have not listened to the other though you have seen Him<sup>41</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Is this how you follow the slave and turn your backs on God? In doing so, you are not following the slave since He himself leads to God<sup>42</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**The man answered and said to them:**

**“Why, this is a marvelous thing**

**that you do not know where He is from, yet He has opened my eyes,” [30]**

The blind man was astonished that the Jewish leaders considered the Lord to be a novice or foreigner to divine ministry. Indeed, He had done works that Moses the prophet had not; such as opening the eyes of someone who had been born blind. The whole city got to hear about this miracle as the blind man had sat and begged on the roadside. People from all parts of the land had seen him and were certain that this was the man who was blind in the past.

He was now there, standing and walking and witnessing to the supreme work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The blind man was astonished that the Lord had created and opened his eyes through his care and supreme authority. Now, he was astonished that these blind leaders sat and occupied the seats of judgment yet they could not see the evident truth, although he had presented to them the following facts:

\* The Lord had opened his eyes and this was a reality and fact that could not be denied.

\* God does not listen to sinners (Ps 66:18). Yet these leaders claimed that this man was a sinner.

\* God listens to the pure that do His will.

\* In history of the world, we do not hear of anybody who has opened the eyes of a blind person. Even Moses did not perform such an act.

\* If the Lord Jesus Christ did proceed from God then he would have had no power. In this manner they had set up a trap; but they fell into it themselves.

**“Now we know that God does not hear sinners;**

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<sup>41</sup> Homilies on St John, 58:3

<sup>42</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:12



**but if anyone is a worshipper of God and does His will, He hears him,” [31]**

The word ‘sinners’ in this verse occurs in the Greek text as ‘*hamartooloom*’ to indicate atheists or unbelievers. Its antonym is ‘*theosebees*’ which means ‘worshipper of God.’ God does not listen to someone who is a lip worshipper and prays to be saved while through his behavior and in his heart he/she insists on adhering to evil and finds pleasure in doing it.

\* The Lord here does not only reveal that He is without sin; but that He has given God great pleasure as He does God’s will. The leaders considered themselves ‘worshippers of God’ and God fearing. Besides they claimed to do ‘His will.’ It is as though the blind man is saying: ‘It is not enough for people to know God, for they need to do His will’<sup>43</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Our perception through faith enables us to see that this blind man was also blind at heart because he too had sinned. We will mention in what respect he had sinned:

First: He thought the Lord was a prophet and he did not know that He was the Son of God. Therefore he answered as a sinner: “...we know that God does not hear sinners,” [21].

If God does not answer sinners, then what hope do we have?

If God does not hear sinners, they why do we pray? Why do we confess all our sins and beat on our chests?

Besides, remember that tax collector who went up to the temple with a Pharisee (Luke 18:10). While the Pharisee stood boastfully before God and recounted all his personal merits; the tax collector stood in a corner, looked down, beat his chest while admitting his sins. This tax collector who had confessed his sins, left the temple vindicated and better off than the Pharisee.

**Therefore God definitely hears sinners. Indeed, the person who uttered these words (verse 31) had not yet washed the face of his heart in the pool of Siloam.**

The mystery had passed before his eyes, yet his heart had not been blessed by His grace.

When did that blind man wash the face of his heart? When he went to the Lord Himself after the Jews had banished him. When the Lord found him, He said to him “Do you believe in the Son of God?” And the man answered: “Who is He Lord that I may believe in Him?” Indeed, the man had seen the Lord with his eyes; but had not seen Him with his heart? No, he had not yet seen Him with his eyes. Wait and see how he would see Him....

And Jesus said to him: **“You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.”** Did the man doubt? No; he had washed his face now. The man had spoken with ‘Siloam’, which means ‘sent’; and who is that One who has been ‘sent’ other than the Lord Jesus Christ?...He is Himself Siloam. **The man born blind at heart drew close to Him, heard, believed, and worshipped Him. He washed his face and therefore**

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<sup>43</sup> Homilies on St John, 58:3

saw<sup>44</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* Similarly, in the Book of Exodus, the priests, who entered into the Lord God's presence, had to consecrate themselves so that God would not depart from them, (Ex 19:22). This also applied to those who came before the holy altar to serve: they had to have no sin or they would die (Ex 28:43)<sup>45</sup>.

**Caprianus the Martyr**

\* We need to put these matters before us and apply them very carefully. We need to consider very seriously these matters as we anoint priests. It is important to choose only those who are upright and clean. Consequently they would be worthy to offer sacrifices to the Lord in holiness. Such ministers would be qualified to have the ear of the Lord who will hear their prayers. They would offer petitions for the peace of God's people<sup>46</sup>.

**Caprianus the Martyr**

**“Since the world began, it has been unheard that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind” [32].**

Since the beginning of all time, before the time of the fathers and prophets, we have not heard of anyone, not even Moses, who opened the eyes of a man born blind.

**“If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing.”[33]**

The blind man came to a correct conclusion. That is if this Man were not from God, He would not have been able to do anything. But He is the source of all goodness and no goodness can be achieved without Him.

**They answered and said to him:  
“You were completely born in sins,  
and are you teaching us?”  
And they cast him out.’ [34]**

It is as though they were telling him: ‘It is because of your former sins that you have received a just reward. Therefore you came into the world in a deformed condition and without eyes. You do not deserve to share in worshipping God with other believers. How is it that you take on the role of teacher to the leaders?’ They then issued the order to deprive him of sharing in worshipping God. Because they were unable to answer to his words, they used their authority to deprive and banish him.

They despised and humiliated him by saying: “You are not like other persons who were born with sin. Rather, they said: **“You were completely born in sin.”** You are completely corrupt. You have corruption in your soul as well as in your body. These are

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<sup>44</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 86:2

<sup>45</sup> Letter 63 to Epictetus: 2

<sup>46</sup> Letter 69 to Asturica: 2

the signs of corruption that have left their mark on your deformed body and blindness. Besides, they probably thought that his extreme poverty and need to beg were indications of divine anger due to his sins.

They belittled his words and were surprised: how could this illiterate fool, who could not know even the light of the sun since he had never seen it, and who has been sitting and begging, now assume the place of a teacher and stand before the leaders of thought and knowledge?

Due to their pride, they rejected to learn; especially from someone of lesser rank and learning. However, a good person does not reject to learn on a daily basis, and until the last breath of life. Such a person can learn even from young children. To reject learning is foolishness itself and a form of ignorance.

As he touched their conscience, they could not tolerate him and so cast him out. Probably, they called the guards or soldiers to take him away, by force if needed.

When the learned leaders were unable to discuss, they proudly issued the order to cast him out. They threw him out but they could not isolate him from fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. They imagined that he was not worthy of being a member in the Jewish temple, and they did not comprehend that he was qualified to be a member in the body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They did not realize that their judgment would fire back on them. According to them, the man was completely born in sin because he was born blind. Now he had been cleared of his blindness, and therefore the One who had healed him was also able to tear away and remove his sins. This is the work of God.

\* These matters have been recorded that we may be guided by them.

The blind man and beggar, had not yet seen the Lord. He displayed courage and uprightness before being encouraged by the Lord. He stood up before all the murderers who had listened to the devil and were being driven wildly by him. They wanted to condemn the Lord by any means. But the man did not submit to them or proved cowardly. By his courageous confrontation, he silenced their mouths. He preferred to be cast out rather than betray the Truth.

How much more should we be courageous when we speak with those who accuse Christians, and when we need to silence their mouths rather than submit in weakness? Indeed, we are empowered as we have experienced faith for a longer period; we have seen hundreds of miracles performed through faith. We have received greater blessings than this blind man as our inner eyes have been opened. As a result, we have become acquainted with unspeakable mysteries and have been called to such great honor. We believe that we ought to show courage as we speak to those who attack Christians. We should be able to silence them rather than bow down in submissive weakness.

We can stand up for the truth only if we have courage, are grounded in the Holy

Bible, and earnestly follow the Word while abandoning all carelessness<sup>47</sup>.

. **St. John Chrysostom**

\* What does ‘completely’ convey in this verse? Blind to such an extent that even the eyes are blind.

However, He who opened the man’s eyes also delivered him ‘completely’: He who had brought light to his features, would also grant him resurrection and seat him on His right hand<sup>48</sup>.

\* When they cast the man out, the Lord welcomed him. As much as he had been banished, he had become a Christian to the same degree<sup>49</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

### **E- The Dialogue between the Lord Jesus Christ and the Man Born Blind.**

**Jesus heard that they had cast him out  
and when He had found him, He said to him:  
“Do you believe in the Son of God?” [35]**

It is clear that the Lord was looking for the man and wanted to find him. He did find him when the Pharisees had thrown him out and deprived him of being a member of God’s people. His parents probably had refused to welcome him to their home for fear they would have the same treatment and fate. The God of the banished and abandoned found him. He is the Father of orphans and the advocate of widows. He is the One concerned about all those who have no one to look after them.

The Lord’s words: **“Do you believe in the Son of God?”** are synonymous with ‘Do you believe in the Messiah?’ These are two inseparable elements (John 1:34, 49; 10:36; Matt 16:16; Mark 1:1).

**St. John Chrysostm** believes that the Lord Jesus Christ granted the man the yearning for Him before revealing Himself<sup>50</sup>, because He saw the blind man’s courage and love of the truth. That is applicable to everyone who seriously seeks for the truth and is fearless in confronting falsehood. Through love, truth would consequently attract such a person and then reveal himself.

\* Those who undergo terrible persecutions and insults for the sake of the truth and for witnessing for the Lord and Messiah, receive special honor...

The Jews had cast him out of the temple and the Lord of the temple found him.  
He was isolated from destructive companionship and he met with the Source of

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<sup>47</sup> Homilies on St John, 58:4

<sup>48</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44

<sup>49</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:15

<sup>50</sup> Homilies on St John, 59:1

salvation.

He was humiliated by those who humiliated the Lord, so the Lord of hosts honored him.

That is how the Truth grants rewards.

Similarly, when we relinquish the possessions of the world, we will truly gather confidence in the world to come. If we face troubles on earth, we will find rest in heaven. If we are insulted for the sake of God, we will be honored in this life and the one to come<sup>51</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**He answered and said:**

**“Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?” [36]**

It is clear that the man had not seen the Lord until that time. However, he had heard His voice when the Lord ordered him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. Now, he discovered that he stood before the One who had healed him and so he believed in Him.

We do not hear of any dialogue between the man born blind and the Lord before he was healed. This is different than when the Lord healed the infirm man of Bethesda. Some explain this by stating that the blind man had not yet seen or heard of the Lord due to his extreme poverty and need to beg. No one had stopped to talk with him, or told him about the Lord Jesus Christ and His amazing deeds. That is why the Lord did not ask him the same question he put to the paraplegic: “Do you want to be healed?” When the blind man was deprived of human friends and suffered for his inferior status and isolation, the Lord came to satisfy his needs and to fill his depths with Divine Love.

Some thinkers confirm that the unbelief of the man born blind was not an intentional choice. It was the result of a lack of opportunity to hear and meet with the Lord. This is why, after he had been healed and gone through the many debates around him, and after being banished, the Lord found him. Then He asked him: **“Do you believe in the Son of God?”[35]**. The man’s answer revealed his yearning to have faith: **“Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?” [36]**

\* The man born blind asked the Lord: “Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?” because he had not yet recognized Him even though he had been healed by Him. Before he came to his Benefactor, he had been blind. That is why he did not respond and say immediately: ‘I believe.’ Instead his response came in the form of a question: “Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?” These are words that come from a soul that is eagerly yearning for the Lord.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘And Jesus said to him:**

**“You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you” [37].**

A person does not need to travel far in order to meet with the Lord Jesus Christ

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<sup>51</sup> Homilies on St John, 59:1

for the Lord is standing by and is very close. St. Paul accordingly says: “Do not say in your heart ‘...who will ascend into heaven?’- that is to bring Christ down from above- or ‘who will descend into the abyss?’- that is to bring Christ up from the dead-. But what does it say? “The word is near you” (Roman 10:6-8).

The Lord had opened the eyes of the blind man so that he may look and see Him. If receiving his sight brought joy to the man, then seeing the Son of God brought him a far greater joy. This was a joy that surpassed the gift of gaining his physical eyes. Seeing the Son of God brought a greater joy to his heart and was more than all the lights of the world could bring. Here we are, presently, enjoying inner insight and therefore seeing the Lord and comprehending the mystery of His being the only Son of God. Truly, we can join the Psalmist in praise and say:” in your light we see light” (Ps 36:9)

**Then he said:” Lord, I believe!” And he worshipped Him. [38]**

By saying: “I believe”, the man conveyed: ‘I believe that you are the Messiah.’ To prove his true faith, he fell and worshipped Him. He had not seen Him before, and he had met with the religious leaders who had strongly resisted the Lord. Yet he had experienced personally how his eyes had been opened. Therefore he believed in the Lord’s divinity, worshipped Him, and glorified Him as his Savior. His inner vision was opened and he became acquainted with the divine mysteries. In contrast, it was impossible for the members of the Sanhedrin to comprehend or believe these mysteries.

The man born blind believed and confessed his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. There was no need for discussions since he experienced this amazing divine miracle and had gained spiritual insight. He believed in his heart and confessed with his tongue before the Lord, before the people, and even before those who resisted the Lord. In this manner, the rejected reed became a tree planted in the spiritual waters and filled with fruit.

‘He worshipped Him’, and so honored Him in a manner that was different from simply thanking another person. He bowed before Him in a manner worthy of worshipping God. In this way, he expressed his faith: by publicly and fearlessly witnessing; and by humbly worshipping God. John the Evangelist does not report anything more about this man after he had worshipped the Lord. Yet the words of the Lord indicate clearly that he had become perceptive, followed the light and lived accordingly.

The man born blind bowed down before the Lord and probably in the presence of the Pharisees. Therefore the Lord commented instantly before them about the fruit of His divine mission in this world. Some believe that this speech occurred in another meeting with the Pharisees and did not take place after the man had worshipped the Lord immediately.

The Lord Jesus Christ had come into the world as a Savior and not as a Judge. However, when the wicked non-believers reject His service they fall into condemnation. The Lord’s divine mission has split humanity into two parties: one party admits its blindness and

consequently believes and accepts the light; the other party believes that they can see already and consequently reject the faith. Rejection keeps them in the darkness while the work of the Messiah becomes a sentence condemning them. In this manner, the world is split into believers and non-believers: This is the clear line of thought in most of the Lord's speeches, which are recorded in this Gospel. His redeeming deeds or His preaching are the essence of life, while they bear the smell of death to the dead. A great light has shone over the Gentiles, granting them light and releasing them from slavery (Is 61:1); but Israel has been stricken with pride and due to its blindness has thrown itself into the circle of death.

\* With his face washed and his conscience purified, the man finally recognized the Lord. He knew Him not only as the Son of Man, according to his earlier knowledge, but as the Son of God who had taken on our body. **So he said, "Lord, I believe" ...**<sup>52</sup>

**St. Augustine**

#### **F- The Dialogue between the Lord and the Pharisees**

**And Jesus said:**

**"For judgment I have come into the world,  
that those who do not see may see,  
and that those who see may be made blind." [39]**

These were amazing moments that drew the attention of all those standing there. The crowds as well as the disciples and a few Pharisees were amazed as the man born blind bowed and worshipped the Lord Jesus Christ. He proclaimed his belief that the Lord is the Son of God. We believe that such a sight must have drawn the attention of the heavenly hosts as well as those who watched the faith of that person. He was true with himself and faced the resistance against the truth by the highest-ranking religious leaders. Such a sight brings joy to the Lord's heart because He desires everyone to enjoy the heavenly light; and not because He is in need of someone to witness for Him.

The Lord had previously proclaimed that He had not come into the world to condemn it, but had come to save it (John 3:17). By shinning on those that are sitting in darkness, those enlightened by His light become a cause of condemnation to those who have loved the darkness more than the light (John 3:19). They condemn themselves because they stumble and fall into the ditch and because they are blind leaders of the blind (Matt 15:14)

The Gentiles who had been sitting in darkness for ages received the light of knowledge and true vision. However the Jews, who pretended to be the children of the light and the possessors of spiritual knowledge, abused God's longsuffering and mercy. They lost their redemption as they rejected it. They were stricken with spiritual blindness. The blind Gentile was able to become acquainted with the divine mysteries; while the Pharisees, who possessed knowledge, were ignorant of these mysteries. The man born blind had not read the Holy Books. He might have heard some Holy verses and stories

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<sup>52</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate, 44:15

about the history of salvation and simply and faithfully accepted the teachings. In contrast, these leaders had studied and researched these verses thoroughly and upheld some interpretations. However, they did not sincerely seek to know the truth. Therefore they were not qualified to comprehend the clear references to the Messiah.

The mystery behind their blindness lay in their arrogance and belief that they could see: they knew Moses and that they were his disciples; they knew the Sabbath and kept its laws; and they also knew that the man was completely born in sin.

\* A serious warning! **‘Those who do not see may see,’ [39].**

Great! This is the work of the Lord. It is a proclamation of the power of healing!

But what is it that you add in this verse, O Lord? **‘Those who see may be made blind?’ [39]** These are the Jews. Do they see? According to their claim, they do see; yet according to the truth, they do not see.

So how **may** they **see**? They imagined that they did. So they believed and imagined that they were protecting the law against the Lord Jesus Christ...those who did not admit their ignorance, became more hardened. Truly, the verse says: **‘Those who see may be made blind.’** Indeed, those defenders of the law, the professors and teachers of the law and its interpreters crucified the Founder of the law.

O what blindness took hold of a part of Israel (Rom 11:25). What do these words mean: **‘Those who do not see may see’?** ‘Until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in’, (Rom 11:25). The whole world has fallen into blindness, but the Lord has come **‘that those who do not see may see and that those who see may be made blind’...**

What serious blindness? They killed the light, but the crucified light has enlightened the blind<sup>53</sup>!

\* Now is the daytime to make the distinction between the light and the darkness!<sup>54</sup>

\* You have received the law, you want to keep it, yet you are unable to do so for you have fallen due to your pride and you see your weakness. Yearn for the Messiah, confess to him and believe. The spirit has been added to the letter of the law and by this you can be saved. If you tear away the spirit from the letter ‘the letter kills.’ If it is killed, then where is hope? As for the spirit, he gives life (2 Cor 3:6)

**St. Augustine**

**St. Augustine** makes a comparison between the letter and the spirit. The stick that Elijah gave to his servant Hegazi, when the widow’s son was dead, did not revive the dead except when Elijah himself came. The same applies to benefits of the law that we have received from God. We need God Himself to be present so that we may enjoy the

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<sup>53</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 86:4

<sup>54</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:16



power of the Resurrection<sup>55</sup>.

**Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him:**

**“Are we blind also?”[40]**

The Pharisees realized that the Lord was speaking about spiritual blindness. They therefore asked Him if He was directing his words at them. Their question was the result of their arrogant souls that could not enjoy the blessings of the grace of God.

They were preoccupied with their honor before the people. They wanted to appear as the ones who possessed knowledge and who occupied the academic seats. They considered the accusation of blindness- which was the result of their unwillingness to learn- to be a deadly stroke. They revealed their inner blindness through their words ‘**Are we blind also?**’ They revealed what lay in their depths as they considered all the people to be blind. That the Lord would include them among the blind people was something that had not occurred to them. They considered that He had humiliated them and committed an unforgivable mistake. They were not accustomed to hear any criticism from any one.

\* The words of the Pharisees to the Lord: “...are we blind also” echo their words in another verse: “... we are Abraham’s descendants and have never been in bondage to anyone. We were not born in fornication” (John 8:33-41). This was similar to the response here.

**Chrysostom.**

**Jesus said to them:**

**“If you were blind, you would have no sin;**

**but now you say “We see” therefore your sin remains.” [41]**

Had they admitted their ignorance, they would not have fallen into condemnation. However, their mouths testified against them since they claimed they had vision, were able to comprehend the truth, and could distinguish it from falsehood. They claimed to have vision, saw divine truth, and understood the law and the prophets. Consequently, they isolated themselves and their sin remained.

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<sup>55</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 86:5

## Inspired by Chapter 9

### O Lord, Grant Me Inner Vision!

- \* Your eyes behold me lovingly, as to someone born blind!  
We have inherited a blind vision from our father Abraham;  
Therefore we no longer enjoy the beauty of your brilliance!
- \* There are many, even among those who surround you, who condemn me!  
But because of your love, you pray for the healing of my heart and its vision.  
You are the day that does not cease to work; you are the light that dissipates the  
darkness within me!  
May you shine upon me so that I may become the child of the day.  
May my eyes never experience sun set O Sun of Righteousness!
- \* You are the Creator and you have formed me from the earth with mud.  
You grant vision to my eyes.  
Through your word, I come to you, for you are 'Siloam' the 'Sent' from the Father.  
I wash in your blood, consequently my vision is enlightened.  
I see the gates of heaven opened and welcoming me!
- \* My soul is heavy from constant discussions with friend and stranger.  
There are no more places in my heart for more words.  
Your deeds are fully appeasing and witness to your divine power,  
Your practical love silences rebellious tongues!  
Your light shines within me, it cannot be overcome by the powers of darkness.
- \* With the man born blind, I do not fear expulsion  
When all reject me, you appear to me,  
When I am cast out  
I find you bearing the Cross outside the gates.  
You are the God of the banished and the rejected.
- \* May they all be engaged in lengthy talks,  
But I will bow and worship before you,  
And enjoy the fellowship of your brilliance and the everlasting gladness of Your  
heavens!

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## CHAPTER TEN

### THE GOOD SHEPHERD

The Lord's discourse on the good shepherd takes place after the healing of the man born blind. The Lord reveals the clear difference between the shepherd who cares for his sheep and the hired servants. In other words, He indicates the difference between the Lord Jesus Christ who yearns to deliver mankind and the Pharisees who are preoccupied with their personal honor, authority and profit.

In the previous chapter, the Lord reveals how much He wishes to grant to every soul the gift of vision thus enabling it to become acquainted with the truth. And what is the truth other than comprehending that He incarnates the Word of God, and is the good Shepherd who sacrifices Himself for the sake of His sheep? This chapter is considered as the extension of the Lord's discourse with the Pharisees. The Pharisees had displayed at the end of the previous chapter great hostility towards the Lord. They opposed Him as they considered that they were the teachers and shepherds of God's church. Hence there was no place for the One who had broken the law among them. They demanded the people not to follow Him because He had not been sent by God. The discourse in this chapter reveals those groups: The real shepherds, the hired servants, and the thieves that hide under the guise of shepherds.

#### **The Lord Jesus Christ Satisfies All Our Needs**

The Jews who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ were banished from the Sanhedrin. They no longer had any right to enter the temple, to participate in Jewish worship, or practice the rites pertaining to purification and feasts, etc.... Therefore this Gospel intends to proclaim that the Lord Jesus Christ satisfies all the needs of those cast outside the temple. In Him, they can fulfill all their needs, for He has come to replace the authority of all Jewish institutions and the privileges attached to them. He does so in a supremely divine manner.

**John 1:** The Jews take pride in Moses, the recipient of the law. As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He is the Word, who is with the Father and One with Him: He grants grace upon grace.

**John 2:** The Jews take pride in the rites of purification according to the law. As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He transforms the waters of purification into a new and unique wine.

**John 5:** The Jews boast of literally observing the Sabbath. As for Jesus Christ, He proclaimed that the true Sabbath is observed when He does the work of God the Father, (John 5:16-18).

**John 6:** The Jews boast that their fathers ate the heavenly manna in the wilderness. As for the Lord Jesus Christ, He is the real Passover, the heavenly manna who saves

mankind from the waters (He walked on the water in the same manner as when He crossed the Red Sea with His people).

**John 7-8:** On the Feast of the Tabernacles, He offered Himself as the living water and the true light.

**John 10:** Instead of the Feast of Dedication, He offered Himself since the Father had consecrated Him to bring salvation to the world.

The Evangelist presents this eighth discourse by the Lord Jesus Christ as He focuses on His sacrificial care. It comes right after the healing of the man born blind who had then been banished from the Sanhedrin. The real disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ is banished from the Jewish fold or from the literal slavery to the law. Therefore he enjoys membership in the Lord's fold (because his eyes have been opened to behold the mysteries of the kingdom).

|                                          |              |
|------------------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>1- The Good Shepherd</b>              | <b>1-21</b>  |
| <b>2- Union with the Father</b>          | <b>22-39</b> |
| <b>3- The Lord at the Baptismal font</b> | <b>40-41</b> |

### **1- The Good Shepherd**

In this parable the Jewish nation appears as a fold of sheep, [1]. The Lord Jesus Christ is the good Shepherd who comes through the door designed for that purpose (through the door of the prophecies) and to care for the sheep. The Holy Spirit opens the door to Him and the real fold responds to Him. He heals their eyes and they behold the Shepherd. He leads the fold away from the literal law [3], from apostasy, and from unbelief. At the same time, those who adhere to the literal interpretation of the law reject Him, [4, and 5].

#### **In this parable, we distinguish the following:**

- A. The Lord Jesus Christ, and not the law, is the door to the fold. He is the new Door [7].
- B. All the literally minded Jewish leaders who reject the Lord are thieves, [8].
- C. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Savior who sacrifices himself, [9, and 10].
- D. The Lord is a sacrifice of love and dies on behalf of His fold, [11-15].

The good Shepherd has another fold that consists of the Gentiles. These will be embraced with the Jewish believers and the Lord will gather and form them all into one fold, which is the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 4:4-6).

E. This one fold will interact with the unique sacrifice and voluntary death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Lack of faith results in failure: failure to offer anything other than confusion and wicked blasphemy.

**“Most assuredly, I say to you,  
he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door,  
but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber,” [1]**

The sheep enter the sheepfold at night. Usually this is built close to the shepherd’s house. The sheepfold has one door and it is watched by the guard. Therefore anyone who intends to steal has to creep in by jumping over the wall of the sheepfold.

The Lord Jesus Christ describes Himself as the shepherd who cares for his sheep. The Church in this world is like a pasture that embraces within it the sheep scattered abroad, (John 11:52). Within the Church, the sheep are united as one holy fold that is guarded by the holy shepherd. Because of His care, He becomes as a fiery wall protecting them, (Zech 2:5). The use of the fold as a symbol for the Church is relevant as the sheep bear the features of meekness, calmness, and submissiveness as they come into the shepherd’s embrace. They also adhere to one another.

The Lord Jesus Christ presents this analogy because sheep, characteristically, are unable to defend themselves against any attack. They depend fully on the care and vigilance of their shepherd. They also depend on getting their food and drink from the shepherd who leads them. Even in countries that enjoy heavy rainfall, sheep need someone to lead them for long periods to the drinking spots. They do not search on their own. Besides, they do not begin to enter into the sheepfold, even if they are pursued by danger and threatened by savage beasts, unless the shepherd leads with one or two other sheep and enters through the door. Then the rest would follow behind him or behind these sheep.

\* Dear holy brothers and sisters, we could meet any of these three personalities and we need to determine which are the ones whom we love, the ones we ought to tolerate, and those we should be cautious of. Indeed, the shepherd is to be loved, the hired slave is to be tolerated, and the thief is to be watched and not trusted.<sup>1</sup>

**St. Augustine**

\* Note the characteristics of the thief: first, he enters unannounced. Second, he does not enter according to the Holy Books, for this does not interest him, **“He does not enter the sheepfold by the door”, [1]**. Here, the reference is to those who came before and to those who will come after Him: the anti-Christ and the pretentious Messiahs, such as Theudas and Judas (Acts 5:36) and those like them.

The word ‘**door**’ in the Lord’s words **“(those) who do not enter the sheepfold by the door”** refers to the Holy Books. These are the doors that bring us to God. His Word opens to us the way to be acquainted with God, protecting us and preventing wolves to enter in. As a door, the entrance is shut in the face of newsmongers and maintains us from their deceptions. Indeed, we are embraced so that we do not get deceived. Through the holy Word we get to know the shepherd, and recognize those who

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 87:5

are not. That explains why the Lord told the Jews:” you search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; these are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39). This indicates that Moses and all the prophets are witnesses; and the Lord adds: “All those who listen to the prophets come to Me” and “if you believed in Moses, you would believe Me”...He clearly uses the word ‘climbs’ (goes up) rather than the word ‘enters’ since climbing is the act of a thief who intends to jump over the wall. A thief does so even though it exposes him to danger.<sup>1</sup>

### **St. John Chrysostom**

\* They proclaimed that they were not blind. In spite of that, they could really have possessed sight only if they had become part of the Lord’s fold.

How could they claim to see the light whereas they acted as thieves who oppose the light? It is due to their falsehood, pride and excessive haughtiness. That is why the Lord speaks these words. We too are intended to receive valuable lessons from this discourse as we keep the Lord’s words in our hearts and think about them. In the daily stream of life, there are many who are generally perceived as righteous good men, women, and innocent people. Those who keep the commandments, honor their parents, refrain from adultery, do not kill or steal, do not witness wrongly against anyone, and obey all the other requirements of the law. Yet these are not Christians and they arrogantly ask: “Are we blind also?”...

They work with no goal in mind, and they do not enter from the door leading to the sheepfold.

The atheists might say: ‘We live uprightly’.

Yet, if they do not enter through the door, what good intentions are they displaying and how could they be so arrogant?...

No one can hope to have a good life if he lacks knowledge of life, that is if we do not know the Lord Jesus Christ and if we do not enter the sheepfold through the door!<sup>2</sup>

\* There are philosophers who present excellent discourses on virtues and failings. They distinguish between them and provide their definitions. They conclude by presenting a logical and accurate chain. They fill up books and protect their wisdom by giving long talks. They boldly ask people to follow them and to join their team if they wanted to live happily. However, they do not enter through the door. Such people intend to destroy, kill and murder<sup>3</sup>.

\* Can a Pharisee utter anything righteous?

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 59:2

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 44:2

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 45:3

The Pharisee is a thorn, so how can we harvest grapes out of a thorn (Matt 7:16; 12:33).

O Lord, that is why You have said: “Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works, (Matt 23:3).

Do you order me to gather grapes out of thorns when you tell me: “Do they reap grapes from thorns?” The Lord answers you and says: “I do not order you to gather grapes from thorns, but to look and notice well, for often when the grapes hang above the ground they could be entangled with the thorns”. My brethren, sometimes we find a vine that has been planted but is surrounded with thorns, and so its branches become entangled with them. The one who wishes to gather grapes does not gather it from the thorns but from the vine that is entangled with them.

In the same manner, the Pharisees were full of thorns. Yet because they occupied the seat of Moses they were surrounded by the vine and the grapes. These are the good words and commandments hanging from them. May you gather grapes without being pricked by the thorns? When you read “Whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works”, be careful for if you do what they do, then know that you will be pricked by the thorns. Therefore in order to reap grapes without getting hurt by the thorns, “... observe and do what they say, but do not do according to their works”.

Their acts were the thorns and their words were the grapes. Yet, the source of the grapes is the vine, which is the seat of Moses<sup>1</sup>!

\* My conscience is not at ease on account of your praise, for how can you praise what you cannot see?

Yes, may God Almighty, who sees, praise me. Yes, May God mend whatever He finds in me that is displeasing in His sight.

I do not claim to be wholly perfect. I beat upon my chest and pray God: “Have mercy and let me not sin”. I believe that I speak in His presence and pray for your salvation. I ask nothing of you. I constantly rebuke the faults and sins of my brethren; I bear difficulties; my mind torments me; and I constantly reproach but I encourage them as well. All those who remember my words are witnesses that I rebuke those who commit sin without causing any distress<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“But he who enters by the door  
Is the shepherd of My sheep”. [2]**

The shepherd of the sheep is the owner of the sheep. He cares for each one of them and brings them into the sheepfold through the door because he possesses authority. He enters inside to help them all: “I will feed My flock and I will make them to lie down,” says the

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 87:13

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 87:14

Lord God. “I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong and feed them in Judgment” ( Ez 34:15-16).

**“To him the doorkeeper opens**

**And the sheep hear his voice**

**And he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out”. [3]**

\* We do not commit a big mistake when we assume that Moses is the doorkeeper for he was entrusted with keeping the teachings of God<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* May we not be confused in understanding His words, my brethren. He does carry the symbols of both the door and the doorkeeper. For what does the door indicate? It is the way to enter in. And what does the doorkeeper represent? He is the one who opens the door. Therefore who is the One who opens it other than He Himself in order to be revealed and seen?<sup>2</sup>

**St. Augustine.**

**“And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them**

**And the sheep follow him, for they know his voice”. ‘[4]**

The good Shepherd does not send his sheep into a field where there are no wolves. Indeed, He stresses that He sends them ‘in the midst of wolves’ (Matt 10:16). Therefore, He goes before them so that if the wolves attack they would be attacking Him; and He would transform them into gentle sheep. The Lord has gone before His sheep to the pasture of the Cross and of sufferings so that the sheep would not fear the road leading to Golgotha. Therefore, they will not fear death and for as long as they are in the company of the Crucified Lord.

\* The shepherds would be doing the opposite of that if they were to walk at the back of their flock. However, the Lord indicates in this passage that He is the One who leads His followers to the truth.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“Yet they will by no means follow a stranger,**

**But will flee from him,**

**For they do not know the voice of strangers”. [5]**

The sheep, who are unreasoning creatures, know their owner and adhere to him. Because they do not know the voice of strangers, they flee from them. Accordingly, the Bible says: “The Ox knows its owner” (Is 1:3)

**Jesus used this illustration,**

**But they did not understand the things which He spoke to them. [6]**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 59:3

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 46: 4



**St. John Chrysostom** comments that the Lord used this verse to indicate the distinction between Himself and the false Messiahs. He attempted to clarify this in every possible way.

**First:** His teachings from the Holy Books testify to Him. Conversely, false Messiahs attracted people away from God's word.

**Second:** The sheep obey Him, as they believe in Him. They did so, not only when He walked on earth, but also after His death and ascension into the heavens. Conversely, false Messiahs are forsaken by the sheep. This is what happened to Thaeudas and Judas: their followers 'were scattered' (Acts 5:36).

**Third:** False leaders act like rebels and they cause upheavals. Conversely, when they sought to crown the Lord as king, He disappeared from among them. They then asked Him if it was right to pay taxes to Caesar. He ordered them to pay and He Himself paid taxes, (Matt 22:17).

**Fourth:** The Lord Jesus Christ came to save the sheep, grant them life, and so 'may have it abundantly' [10]. In contrast, false teachers deprive the sheep from enjoying even this temporal life; for they flee to save themselves in times of danger.

The Jews did not understand the implications of the Lord's parable. They neither understood that He is the good Shepherd, nor that the hired servants were those who seek their personal profit rather than that of the sheep. Besides, the thieves are those who seek personal honor even if that results in the death of the flock.

The Pharisees were unable to understand the Lord's words. They were the ones who claimed to be the teachers of the people. They claimed they possessed knowledge and did not need to learn anything. They held in their hands the Word of God, yet they misinterpreted it due to the hardness of their hearts and the blindness of their inner vision.

**Then Jesus said to them again,  
"Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep" [7]**

The Lord is the door of the pasture, the door of the Church. He closes the door not with the intention of imprisoning the sheep, but with the intention of protecting them from wolves, thieves and so that they may not perish. He is the wisdom, the power and the righteousness. He who enters through the door enters into the Lord's embrace and enjoys all these gifts. He is the door that is closed to wolves; yet He is the door of love that is open to allow the sheep to enter and go out to meet with Him in the fellowship of brotherly love. That is why the Lord calls Himself 'the door of the sheep'. A wolf cannot pass through Him (the door) unless he becomes transformed into a real lamb.

He is the royal and divine Door that allows us to enter before the divine throne and enjoy the heavenly life.

It is astonishing that the Shepherd was treated as a thief. They came to Him

carrying swords and clubs in order to capture Him (Matt 26:55). They did so because He had not entered through those thieves and hungry wolves and He had not taken their permission before ministering to the people. Instead of being His disciples and following in the way of the spirit, they expected Him to be their disciple. They expected Him to follow their spirit, which opposed divine truth and real shepherding love.

When the Lord leads us to the Father, He calls Himself ‘the door’. When He watches over us, He calls Himself ‘the Shepherd’. So that we might not think that His sole mission is to bring us to the Father, He calls Himself ‘the Shepherd’<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord Jesus Christ is everything: all the names are appropriate: He is everything that He proclaims<sup>2</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

\* To those who need joy, He becomes a vine. To those who need to enter, He stands as a Door<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* He Himself is the door. Let us come and get acquainted with Him. Let us enter and rejoice that we are truly in Him<sup>4</sup>.

\* The prophets came before Him: so were they thieves and burglars? God forbid. They did not come as distinct beings from Him for they came with Him. When He came, He sent missionaries yet He occupied their hearts. Do you wish to know how they came with Him who is ever present? Surely He became incarnated in the fullness of time, but what does ‘ever present’ mean? ‘In the beginning was the Word’, (John 1:1). Those who carried the Word of God came with Him. The Lord said: “I am the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). Since He is the truth, then those who came with Him are truthful. However, there are many who by separating themselves from Him are thieves and burglars. In others words, they came to steal and destroy!<sup>5</sup>

\* **‘...But the sheep did not hear them’**: this is a point of great importance. Before the Lord came to earth, for He humbly came in the flesh, righteous people heard Him and believed that he would come in exactly the same manner by which He came to us.

Times change yet faith does not...there are changing times, yet there is one Door to true faith. That Door is the Lord Jesus Christ, and we see both past and all present believers entering through Him....

The apostle says: “... and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: that Rock was Christ”, (1 Cor 10:4). Notice how the

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 59:3

<sup>2</sup> Commentarium in Joannem 1.PG 14: 50 S 9

<sup>3</sup> Catech. 10. Pg 33: 665B

<sup>4</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 45:8

<sup>5</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 45:8

faith remained unchanged, but the signs have changed. In the past, the Rock was Christ, whereas for us Christ is on God's altar... many believed in the past - Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, all the other patriarchs and prophets- all these prophesied concerning the Messiah. These are the sheep that heard the Lord. They heard only the Lord's voice and not that of anyone else<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“All who ever came before me are thieves and robbers,  
But the sheep did hear them” [8]**

\*The Lord here is not speaking about the prophets as the heretics claim. Many who had believed in the Messiah had listened to the prophets and were convinced by them. The Lord is speaking here about Thaeudas and Judas as well as others who incited rebellion. It may seem as though the Lord was praising the fact that **“The sheep did not hear them” [8]**. Yet nowhere do we hear the Lord praising those who did not listen to the prophets. On the contrary, He reproaches and severely condemns them. He says, “The sheep did not hear them” as He is referring to the trouble making leaders<sup>2</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**“I am the door.**

**If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture’. [9]**

He who enters the pasture through the Lord, the divine Door, not only escapes from thieves and burglars, but also enjoys real liberty. He enters and leaves with full freedom. He enters into the Father's embrace to enjoy His divine fatherhood. He leaves to go into the world in the company of the incarnate Son in order to witness to the divine love, and to attract many others to the divine pasture. He redeems and guides many, through the Spirit, to God who is their salvation. Consequently, He rejoices and is glad with them; and all become filled from the pasture of love: they enjoy the promise of glory and look forward to the day of the Lord. They will have fellowship in the glory of God for they have been saved from the teeth of the lion. They will consequently live in supreme happiness.

The sheep enter through the door and find themselves in the Lord's embrace and feel they are in their Father's house. These are neither strange nor evil sheep. These are the owners of the house who move in complete freedom. When they come in they settle down as though in their father's home. They are able to move about freely and when they come in they settle down as they would in their own homes. In fact, they would have gone out to work for a while, yet only to return and rest!

\* The Lord explains that “...the sheep find safety and security. He uses the word ‘pasture’ to indicate his care, His provision of food and His power and authority over

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 45:9

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John, 59:3

them. The sheep remain inside the sheepfold and no one can cast them out. This is what happened to the disciples for they entered and went out and became leaders to the whole world. We find that no one could cast them out<sup>1</sup>.

### **St John Chrysostom**

He is not just ‘**a way**’ among many other ways; the Lord is the only way that leads us to the embrace of the Father. In this sense He is the Door and we cannot enter into heaven through any door other than through Him: He is the only Door.

\* Let us elevate our thoughts above those of the Jews. They admit in their teaching that there is one God. Yet what does this mean when they deny Him and they worship idols? They also reject God as being the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this way, they contradict their prophets who confirm this in the Holy Books. The holy Word says: “The Lord has said to Me “you are My Son: Today I have begotten you” (Ps 2:7).

Until today, the Jews collectively set themselves against the Lord and against His anointed (Ps 2:2). They believe they can have the Father as their friend while they separate and neglect to worship the Son. They disregard the principle that no one comes to the Father except through the Son who says “**I am the way...**” (John 10:9; 14:6)

Therefore how can the person who rejects the door that leads to the Father and denies the door qualify to enter in the presence of God (the Father)? They contradict the words of Psalm 88 which say: ‘He shall cry to Me ‘You are My Father, My God and the Rock of My salvation’. Also ‘I will make him My first born, the highest of the kings of the earth’,.. (Ps 89:26, 27)

### **St Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* Truly, we believe that we enter into the sheepfold when we become engaged in training our inner thoughts; and we go out when we get engaged in work outside it. The apostle accordingly states that the Lord enters into our hearts through faith (Eph 3:17). We enter into the Lord means that we submit ourselves to that good faith and wisdom; and with that same faith we go out with the Lord and work with others in the world. The Psalmist says: ‘Man goes out to his work...’ (Ps 104:23); the Lord Himself says: “Let your light so shine before men” (Matt 5:16). We believe that the Lord implies that the faithful would lead a blessed life inside the sheepfold as well as an even more blessed life outside... since no one can go out through the door- that is through the Lord Jesus Christ and go towards that eternal life which lies ahead - unless he enters the church through that same door or that same Lord Jesus Christ. This is where his flock lives in this temporary life, which is endured through faith<sup>2</sup>.

\* “...and find pasture” refers to both situations: inside and outside: the faithful will find true pasture as He satisfies those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. This pasture can be found through the One who said: “Today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 59:3

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 45:15

23:43)<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* The faithful sheep enter to find faith; and progress from faith towards vision. They move from belief to meditation and find pasture (food) to eternal nourishment.

His flock will find pasture because everyone who follows Him with a pure and innocent heart will be refreshed with eternal food.

What do the pastures of these flocks indicate other than the eternal joys of Paradise, which are constantly green?

The pastures where the chosen ones feed are found in the presence of God Himself. When we see Him, our hearts are filled with the food of life to the end.

Those who avoid and escape from the traps of temporary pleasures rejoice in these pastures of eternal perfection. There, the Heavenly hosts sing praise and there the faithful join the heavenly dwellers<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Gregory the Elder**

**“The thief does not come except to steal and to kill and to destroy.**

**I have come that they may have life,**

**And that they may have it more abundantly”. [10]**

Deceitful shepherds are the thieves. They do not enter through the door of love but with a deceitful spirit and with wicked intentions. By their deceit, they kill and destroy souls. Whereas, the shepherd offers a better life; the thief is engaged in the killing and murdering of souls. Entering stealthily into the sheepfold causes death; whereas the coming of the good Shepherd, the incarnate Word, grants eternal life.

The Shepherd has come to His flock in this world in order to redeem, sanctify, and glorify them. He does so to restore to them the life they have lost. They will not return to the condition they were in before sin; for they will find the richness of eternal life, which is invincible by death. That is why the Lord says: **“more abundantly”**.

\* If you asked ‘Tell me, what could be better than life?’ Our answer would be: ‘The heavenly kingdom’. However, the Lord until that point in time had not used these words but repeatedly used the word ‘life’ since it was the clearest thing known to His hearers<sup>3</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* **“I have come that they may have life”**: That is the faith that works through love (Gal 5:6). **“And that they may have it more abundantly”**: refers to those who patiently endure to the end. They will then go out through that same door: that is through faith in

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 45:15

<sup>2</sup> Hom 15. Forty Gospel Homilies. PL 76:1127

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St John, 59:3

the Lord Jesus Christ. As true believers they will die and attain a better life when go to the place where the Shepherd abides and where they will die no more<sup>1</sup>.

\* If we consider the world as a great home, then we perceive the heavens as a dome and the earth as a road or passage. The Lord wishes to save us from earthly matters and so say with the apostle: “we are citizens of heaven”. Adherence to earthly matters results in the death of the soul. This is contrary to the life for which we pray and say: “Let me live”!

**St. Augustine**

**“I am the good Shepherd.**

**The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep”. [11]**

The prophets of the Old Testament foresaw the Lord Jesus Christ as the good Shepherd, (Is 40:11; Ez 34:23; 37:24; Zech 13:7). The disciples experienced Him as the bishop of our souls (1 Peter 2:25), as the Chief of the Shepherds (1 Peter 5:4), and as the Great Shepherd (Heb 13:20).

That explains why the title of ‘the Good Shepherd’ holds a special attractive power for Christians throughout all generations. Even to those who have not seen shepherds in their lives, yet they feel the warmth of His shepherding and care. Just as the flock of sheep cannot face life without its shepherd, so do Christians feel when they face wickedness and the evil world: they look to the divine Shepherd who protect themes from evil, satisfies their needs, and leads them to the pastures of Paradise.

By saying “**I Am...**” the Lord is using the theological language. “ I am Jehovah” for He is the only and unique divine Shepherd.

The Greek word for ‘good’ is ‘*kalas*’ and it differs from other Greek words that are also translated as ‘good’. For example, ‘good’ is also used to translate these Greek words: ‘*agathos*’ which indicates an inner staircase; ‘*dikaio*s’ which indicates an upright person. However, the word ‘*kalas*’- according to Abbot Smith’s Lexicon- indicates a goodness that has a special form as it is combined with beauty. E.V. Rieu has translated the expression: ‘I am the good Shepherd’ into ‘I am the beautiful Shepherd’. In any case, the expression ‘the good shepherd’ is an endearing one, for it conveys a goodness that appeals to the flock. Besides feeling the goodness of the Lord’s care, the flock also enjoys His attractive presence or their attraction to Him<sup>2</sup>.

The care of ‘the good Shepherd’ is unique in quality. It involves not only good care, as the Shepherd is preoccupied with His sheep. It is as though He has nothing else to do in heaven and on earth but to care for them. He not only cares for each soul and especially the one that is gone astray; but He does what is even greater for ‘ **He gives His life for the sheep**’.

In the region of Palestine, the shepherds were endangered because of thieves and

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 45:15

<sup>2</sup> cf Leon Morris, p 377

savage animals. David was faced by a lion and a bear when he was young and watching over his sheep, (1 Sam 17:34-36). Amos, the prophet, tells us about the shepherd who saved two legs or a piece of ear from the lion's mouth (Amos 3:12). At the time of the early fathers, we hear Jacob telling his uncle: "...that which was torn by the beast I did not bring to you: I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, whether stolen by day or stolen by night", (Gen 31:39). That reveals how the work of shepherding involves dangers. However, we never hear of a shepherd who willingly goes to his death for the sake of his flock. It is true that he would be exposed to death but it is for his personal benefit, and as the owner of the sheep rather than for the sake of his flock. In contrast, the good Shepherd willingly and happily faced death to save each lamb of his flock.

The good Shepherd sacrificed Himself in order to offer to us His precious Blood. With that Blood, we may wash our souls and get cleaned of all sins as well as drink it as the mystery of eternal life. The amazing thing is that the Shepherd grants His faithful servants the joy of serving and therefore to spend and be spent (2 Cor 12:15). They do so for the sake of the people and in just the same manner endured by the apostle St Paul.

### **The Analogy between the Lord Jesus Christ and the Shepherd**

The Lord did not choose randomly the figure of the Shepherd as an analogy for Himself, for this carries important meanings:

**First:** The shepherd wears **cheap clothes** when he watches over his sheep even though he may own the flock and however big it is. He does so because he often sits on the ground and his sheep surround him. He also carries in his hands the wounded or unsteady ones, which might be covered with dirt. Similarly, the incarnate divine Word came to share our earth, carry us in His hands. Moreover, He acted as a substitute for us and bore our sins in order to atone for them.

**Second:** To watch over his flock, the shepherd **walks before his sheep** so that they would follow him. Similarly, our Savior opened the way to heaven by passing through the cross. He did so in order to enable us to share in His sufferings and consequently enjoy fellowship in His glory.

**Third:** The shepherd often holds **a shepherd's cane** which is shaped as a U at the top. This is intended to lift a lamb if it falls into a hole. Similarly, the Lord holds His Cross, which symbolizes every manner of divine tenderness, and which also indicates the severity and punishment necessary for our constant progress.

**Fourth:** A shepherd often seeks the shade at noontime and sits and **plays on his flute** while the sheep gather around him. One of the features of the shepherd is his joy amid the troubles and heat of temptations. Similarly, we find in our Shepherd the source of real joy.

**Fifth:** The shepherd is intensely concerned about **one lost sheep** more than the remaining ninety-nine. He does not rest until he brings it back to the fold (Matt 18:12-14;

Luke 15:3-7).

\* **‘I am the good Shepherd’**: the Lord speaks here about suffering and underlines that it brings salvation to the world. He was not obliged to come; therefore He presents the model of the shepherd and the hired servant once more<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom.**

\* The Lord speaks of Himself as the **‘Shepherd’**. He also says that He is the **‘Door’**. Both are mentioned in the same place: “I am the Door” and “I am the good Shepherd”. At the head, He is the door and in the body [7, 11]... He is the Shepherd...the one who enters through the door is the Shepherd; whereas the one who goes through another way is a thief and burglar who misguides, scatters, and destroys. Who is the one who enters through the door? He is the one who enters through the Lord Jesus Christ. Who is that one? He is that person who emulates the Lord’s sufferings...<sup>2</sup>

\* Were the (apostles) shepherds? They definitely were shepherds. So how can there be one shepherd? As we have stated earlier, **they were shepherds as they were members of the Shepherd**. They rejoiced in that Head and under His Head, they enjoyed full harmony together. They lived with one Spirit and in unity with one Body. Therefore they all belonged as members of that one Shepherd<sup>3</sup>.

\*What is the meaning, therefore, of presenting the only good Shepherd to the good shepherds, other than teaching the concept of unity in the good Shepherd? The Lord has clarified this meaning throughout His service. Here we remind you, our beloved ones, of the Gospel words: “Listen to what I present of you: I have told you **‘I am the good Shepherd’** because all the others- the good shepherds- are My members”. One Head, one Body, one Savior. This applies to everyone who embraces the shepherds, and the shepherds of the Shepherd, and the flock under their care.

This is exactly what the apostle says in 1 Cor. 12:12: “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ”. Therefore, this is all about the Lord Jesus Christ: for a good cause, He embraces within Himself all the good shepherds. They constitute the One who says: “I am the good Shepherd”. I alone and all the others with Me are united together.

He who shepherds without Me, shepherds against Me: “He who does not gather with Me scatters abroad” (Matt 12:30). Let us hear how this unity has brought greater strength, for He says: **“And other sheep I have which are not of this fold”, [16]<sup>4</sup>**.

\* We ask and implore you, in the name of His saints, to love the Church as in a marital relationship. Love the good Shepherd for the Bride is most beautiful. She never deceives anyone and does not seek to destroy anyone. Also pray for the scattered sheep: that they

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<sup>1</sup> Hom 59. PG 59:349

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on N T Lessons, 87:3,4

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 46: 7

<sup>4</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 88:5



may come and get to know Him; that they may love Him and **become one flock under one Shepherd**<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* How could I not love you who have loved me so greatly? Although I am black, **you have laid down your life for the sake of your sheep** (John 15:13). You are their Shepherd.

No one has greater love than this; for you have sacrificed your life to grant me salvation.

Tell me, then, where is your pasture? When I find the pasture of your salvation, I will be filled with the heavenly food. Without this no one can attain eternal life. When I run to you, O Divine Source, I will drink for you have made it to overflow in order to water and refresh all who come to you.

Upon striking your side with the sword, water and blood gushed out immediately (John 19:34). Whoever drinks from it becomes a source of living water springing up into eternal life (John 4:14).

As you shepherd me, I will rest peacefully during noontime and in the light where there is no shade. There is no shade at noon for me as the sun sends its rays straight downwards. Yet you will make the light of noontime a comfort to those you feed and **you will gather your children in your bed** (Luke 11:7).

No one deserves to rest at noontime except the Son of light and day (1 Thes. 5:5). The person, who has separated himself from the darkness of the night until the dawn, will rest at noontime with the Son of righteousness (Matt 4:2)<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Gregory of Nicea**

**“But he who is a hireling and not the shepherd,  
One who does not own the sheep,  
Sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees;  
The wolf catches the sheep and scatters them”. [12]**

This flock is exposed to savage wolves that deceive, capture and destroy (Act 20:29). It is also exposed to thieves who capture the sheep to offer them as sacrifices to the enemy of goodness; or who steal their food. Often the wolves appear in sheep's clothing (Matt 7:15)

In both verses 12 and 13, the Lord tells us about careless shepherds. He calls them ‘hirelings’ because they serve in return for money or reward and not out of true love for God's people. Their greed for money or for food is what drives them to shepherding. Truly, those who serve the altar eat of the altar; those who preach the Bible also live by it.

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 88:10

<sup>2</sup> Song of Songs: St Gregory of Nicea. Translated into Arabic: Dr George Nawar, 1993, Sermon 2

However, their hearts are concerned with the salvation of souls and not with what they could gather as a reward for their ministry.

\* The Lord proclaims that He is just as His Father. He, like Him, is the Shepherd and the sheep belong to Him<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

The hireling who flees upon seeing a wolf and abandons the flock commits a mistake. The 'Mishnah' states that the shepherd is obligated to face one wolf, yet vindicates him if he is faced by two or more wolves since he cannot deal with such a situation. As a hireling he has no obligation to protect the flock, if he were attacked by two or more wolves, since his life would be exposed to danger.

\* The hireling works as long as he does not see a wolf approaching, and as long as he does not see a thief or a burglar. However he escapes as soon as he catches sight of any of these...

Hirelings ascend through another path... for they ascend an account of their pride...

Those who are not in union with the (Church) have another path: they are arrogant and seek to corrupt the flock.

Now note how they ascend. They state: we are the ones who sanctify, absolve, and choose the righteous...

The wolf is the devil that lies down and waits to deceive. His followers are also deceivers. It has been truly said that they wear sheep's clothing; while they are intrinsically savage wolves (Matt 7:15).

The hireling may find a person engaged in evil conversation, or in soul destructive emotions, or in corrupt and defiling acts; and yet he says nothing to him- such as 'you are committing sin', or reprimanding him in order to save him from losing what is good for his soul. Strangely, that hireling seems to be an important influential person in the Church (who expects to receive benefits since he is a hireling). We believe that this is the meaning of **"the hireling when he sees the wolf coming (he) leaves the sheep and flees"**. He does not even tell the wrongdoer: "You act wickedly". This does not constitute merely taking physical flight but a flight of the soul. The one we see physically standing there has, in this situation, escaped in his heart. Seeing a wrongdoer and not telling him "You are committing sin" indicates condoning and agreeing with that person's acts<sup>2</sup>.

\* The hireling here does not possess a good character. However, he is useful in other ways or he would not be called a hireling. Neither would he have received a wage from his employer. Therefore who is that hireling who is blamed and yet is useful too? There

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 59:3

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons: 87:20

are some who serve in the church and St. Paul tells us the following about them: "...for all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:21). What does 'seek their own' imply? It refers to those who do not love the Lord unconditionally; for they seek temporal benefits and profits, and lust to be honored by men.

\* There are hirelings among us too. Yet only God knows about them for He examines and reveals what is in their hearts<sup>1</sup>.

\* Let us be aware of the fact that even hirelings are useful. It is true that there are many within the church who seek earthly benefit. However, they also preach about the Lord Jesus Christ and through them the voice of the Lord is heard. As a result, the sheep follow the voice of the Lord who speaks through the hirelings. In this manner, the sheep do not follow the hirelings, for they actually follow the voice of the Lord who speaks through the hirelings. The Lord Himself indicated the need to listen to the hirelings in these words: 'The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their work' (Matt 23:2-3). What does He say other than that we should listen to the voice of the Shepherd as He speaks through the hirelings?<sup>2</sup>

\* Listen to the apostle as he is overwhelmed by such matters. He states that some preach the Bible out of love, while others out of some 'weakness' and not sincerely (Phil 1:16-18). However, what they preach is the truth, whereas the preachers themselves are not upright.

Why is the person who preaches the truth not upright? Because he is not seeking God and is seeking some other benefit from the Church.

Seeking God is an act of purity as God is the legitimate husband of the soul.

Praying God for other things besides Him indicates an impure intent while seeking God.

Notice, my brethren, that when a wife loves her husband on account of his wealth she is impure. Evidently, she does not love her husband but loves his gold. If she loved her husband, she would have loved him in his nakedness and poverty. If she only loved him due to his wealth, what would happen if he became suddenly poor? She would probably reject him for she did not love the man but loved his riches. Had she truly loved her husband, she would have loved him all the more when he became poor for she would love compassionately as well<sup>3</sup>.

\* We need to love God who created the wealthy man, rather than love the wealthy man: God promises to give us Himself and nothing else. Find something that is more precious than Him and He will grant it to you. The earth, the heavens, and the angels are beautiful,

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 46:5

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 46:6

<sup>3</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 87: 9

yet the beauty of the Lord, their creator, exceeds all beauty.

Therefore, those who preach God as the loving God; and those who preach Him for His sole praise are the shepherds of the flock and not the hirelings.

The Lord Jesus Christ desires this kind of purity from the soul and He accordingly tells Peter:” Peter, do you love Me” (John 21:16). What does ‘do you love Me’ imply? Are you pure? Is your heart free of adultery? Do you seek Me and not personal gain from your church? If you are truly pure, then ‘tend My sheep’ for you can therefore be a shepherd and not a hireling<sup>1</sup>.

\* The shepherd preaches the Lord Jesus Christ in truth; whereas the hireling preaches in pretense (Phil 1:18) as he seeks some other benefit. Yet both preach the Lord Jesus Christ...and Paul, who is a shepherd himself, is glad to have hirelings. Indeed, these work when they can and they are useful as long as they are able to preach... It is rare for the (apostle) to find a shepherd among many hirelings, for the shepherds are few whereas the hirelings are numerous. Yet, what does the Word say about hirelings? “Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward” (Matt 6:2). What does the apostle say about the shepherd? ‘If anyone cleanses himself...will be a vessel of honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work’ (2 Tim 2:26). ... not prepared for certain matters, but “prepared for every good work”<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“The hireling flees**

**Because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep”. [13]**

**St. Augustine** likens the hirelings to fences covered with thorns and the vines bearing grapes lean on them. These hirelings work as ministers for their own benefit. However, we need to enjoy the grapes of the vine which is supported by the thorns. Indeed, these grapes are the fruit of the vine, not of the thorns.

The apostle presents an example of these thorns which support the vine: “Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife and some also from good will. The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely...only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; in this I rejoice, yes and will rejoice” (Phil 1:15-18)<sup>3</sup>.

\*This is where the difference lies between the shepherd and the hireling: one seeks his safety regardless of the sheep; while the other seeks the well being of the sheep regardless of his own needs.

In the past, Ezekiel reprimanded the (hirelings) and said:” woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?” (Ezk 34:2 LXX). Indeed, they failed to do so and this is the worst kind of wickedness. It is the root of all

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 87:10

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 87:11

<sup>3</sup> cf St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 46:6

other evil as the following words reveal: ‘The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost for they looked after themselves and not after the sheep’ (refer to Ezk 34:4).

St. Paul also reveals the following: ‘...for all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus’ (Phil 2:21); and “Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well being (1 Cor 10:21)<sup>1</sup>.

#### **St. John Chrysostom**

\* A person becomes an hireling when he occupies the position of a shepherd yet does not seek the benefit of the souls. He aspires to attain earthly benefits and rejoices in receiving the honor of high posts. He follows the temporary tendencies and enjoys the honors offered to him: These are his rewards ... such a person cannot stand and act when the flock is endangered.

As he now receives honors and enjoys temporal benefits, such a person fears fighting dangers which could cost him the loss of what he loves... When a wicked person invades the company of humble believers, he becomes that wolf that attacks the flock as he tears their minds with temptations. Besides, such an hireling cannot endure the responsibility of protecting the flock

The soul is destroyed while such a person indulges in earthly benefits. Such an hireling has no zeal to fight temptations. He has no love that drives him. While all his concern is to get external benefits, he carelessly allows internal damage to happen to his flock<sup>2</sup>.

#### **St. Gregory the Great**

**“I am the good shepherd,  
I know My sheep  
And am known by My own”. [14]**

The Psalmist interacted with the Lord and good Shepherd in the Psalm of the Shepherd (Ps 23) where he reveals the extent of the Lord’s supreme cares for His flock.

Good shepherding reveals reciprocal love and acquaintance between the shepherd and his flock. The Shepherd knows his flock based on his closeness to them rather than on more regimental knowledge drawn from scholarly books. He relates to his sheep and they relate to Him, and so they become his subjects who are qualified to know Him.

God knew Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, therefore He called Himself “The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob”. Paul knew his great Shepherd and considered Him his Lord and God! It is through such loving shepherding that every sheep in the flock hears his shepherd who assures him and says:” I will be his God and he shall be My son” (Rev 21:7).

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 60:1

<sup>2</sup> Hom 15. Forty GospelS Homilies

The Shepherd knows His own sheep for He watches them attentively and lovingly. He knows them, therefore He gladly sacrifices Himself for them. St. John accordingly, says: ‘We love Him because He first loved us’ (1 John 4:19). St. Paul also says: “But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God” (Gal 4:9).

The loving eyes of the Shepherd draw the sheep’s eyes to Him. Just as the shepherd shows his love by his practical acts and union with them, so the sheep get to know Him and find pleasure in uniting with Him. This is the new covenant: The covenant based on love between God and His subjects. Hence they comprehend the words of their shepherd who says: “I know whom I have chosen” (John 13:18). The flock respond with firm faith in the shepherd and say with the apostle: “...for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day”, (2 Tim 1:12).

\*The Lord is the good Shepherd. What kind of shepherd was Peter? Was he not a good shepherd? Did he not lay down his life for his sheep? And who was Paul? And who were the other apostles? What about the blessed bishops and martyrs?... What about St. Caprianus? Were not all these good shepherds? Yes, they were all good shepherds. However, it is not merely because their blood was spilled, but because it was spilled for their sheep. They humbly laid down their lives out of love and without any haughtiness.

What do you say, O Lord and good Shepherd? For you are the good Shepherd as well as the good sheep. What do you say? Grant us ears and help us to comprehend. The Lord says: “I am the good Shepherd”. What about Peter? Was he not a shepherd or was he evil? Indeed, he was a shepherd and a good one. Yet he is truly nothing compared to the power of the Shepherd of shepherds and His goodness. Yet, Peter was a shepherd and he was good. Besides, all the others who are like him are good shepherds<sup>1</sup>.

\* The Lord Jesus Christ is the door I pass through to come to you. Through Him I have access to your hearts rather than to your homes. I enter through the Lord. He is the Lord within me and he is the One you desire to hear. Why do you seek to hear the Lord through me? Because you are His flock and you have been bought by His Blood. You know your worth - it is not paid through me; yet I am the instrument that preaches Him. It is He, He alone, who is the Buyer and He has poured His precious Blood- the precious Blood of the One who is without sin<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father;  
I lay down My life for the sheep”. [15]**

The Lord did not only desire to sacrifice, even die, for the sake of His sheep; but as a good Shepherd, He also confirms: **“I lay down My life for the sheep”**. He actually fulfilled the plan of sacrifice. He offered His life as a ransom to buy the sheep. He bought

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 88:6

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 47:2

the sheep and He was killed as He loved them. The flock is not brought as an offering on behalf of the Owner as in the Old Testament. Conversely, the Owner presents Himself as an offering for the sheep.

**\* “I am known by My own...as the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father”.** The Lord’s words ‘I will relate to My sheep and they will adhere to Me’ indicate how He will relate to His sheep and how they will respond to Him. It all begins with the manner by which the Lord and Father knows His true only begotten Son, the fruit of His essence; and how the Son knows the Father, who is the true God. He forms Him out of Himself. Similarly, if we strive to belong to Him, we will be considered part of His family and His children. Truly, we are His offspring (Acts 17:29) and we carry the name of the Son. It is all because of Him who proceeds from the Father and born of God, a true God, who became man and took our nature except for sin<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Cyril the Great**

\* He is the Father who knows that He begat Him. He also knows that He is born of Him. In brief, let us refer to the words of the Bible: ‘No one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son’, (Matt 11:27; John 10:15; 17:25)<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* The Lord Jesus Christ knows the Father Himself and we know Him through the Lord Jesus Christ...for He says: “No one has seen God at anytime. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him (John 1:18). This is how we get knowledge as He reveals it to us<sup>3</sup>.

\* Remember that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Door and the Shepherd. He presents himself as the door in order to be revealed. He is the Shepherd too, who allows us to enter through Him. Truly, my brethren, as a Shepherd, the Lord grants his followers (members in his Body) the power to become like Him. Peter, Paul, all the other apostles, as well as all good bishops were shepherds. Yet, none called himself the “Door”. The Lord distinctly used the term to refer solely to Himself. In short, Paul did the work of a good shepherd as he preached about the Lord Jesus Christ. He could do so because he had already entered through the ‘Door’. However, the unruly flock began to cause divisions, and to open other doors... then Paul said that he was not a door: “was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Cor 1:12-13)

**St. Augustine**

**“And other sheep I have which are not of this fold,  
Them also must I bring  
And they will hear My voice;  
There will be one flock and One Shepherd”. [16]**

The good Shepherd presents to us in this passage a confirmation of the unique and

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<sup>1</sup> PG 74. 653 AB

<sup>2</sup> Essay 4:7

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 47:3

reciprocal knowledge that exists between the Father and the Son. It is the sign that indicates their unity in thought, will, and work (their oneness in the Divine Essence). This is a model of the knowledge that exists between Him and ourselves: we are His beloved followers who find their eternity by submitting to His will and power; and by working through and by Him! The Lord then speaks about the other sheep that are from other nations. These are the sheep that He will gather with those of the house of Israel to form one flock under One Shepherd.

The Lord confirms His positive role in acquiring the Gentiles as His people. He says: “...**Them also must I bring**” as indeed, He is the One who offers His Blood as the price for salvation. It is He who works, through His Spirit which is within people, to attract them to Himself. Yet, this does not occur against their will. He opens the hearts of His believers and so enables them to love all mankind. All are invited to enjoy the protection of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. At the same time, the Lord confirms His all-inclusive plan in order to destroy the haughtiness of the Jews. They imagined the Messiah would come to them alone, and that they were the unique flock of God. Therefore, they considered the Gentiles as dogs among the flock.

By saying ‘**I must**’ the Lord confirms the obligation of love. His Divine love obligates Him to offer His life gladly as a sacrifice to redeem His flock.

The Lord will bring everyone from all the nations to the true pasture- to the one holy Church. He will open the heavenly gates of the Church for all to enter in. After having been lost in the desert for so many years, the Lord will claim them all as His own since they are the flock that He has created. He is concerned about their salvation and offers His Blood as a ransom for their redemption. Thus he restores them to honor and glory.

These sheep, whatever their origin, for they will come from many Gentiles nations, will hear the voice of the One Shepherd and believe in Him. Faith is the outcome of listening. Therefore, they will be attracted to Him and be united as members in one body with one Head. The apostle says: ‘There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope in your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, through all and in you all’ (Eph 4:4-6). In this manner, the unity of the flock is achieved, or the unity of the church, through the oneness of the Shepherd.

\* It is as though the Lord is saying: Why are you astonished to see these people following Me. My sheep hear My voice; when you see other sheep following me and listening to My voice, you will be greatly amazed.

\* ‘**Them also must I bring**’: the word ‘**must**’ does not mean ‘**necessity**’. It is a proclamation of what will truly take place. It is as though the Lord is saying: ‘Why are you astonished that these people follow Me when My sheep hear My voice? Indeed, you will see others following Me and hearing My voice and their amazement will be greater’. Do not be confused when the Lord says: ‘**not of this fold**’ for the difference is in the law only. St Paul says: “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything” (Gal 5:6)



**“Them also must I bring’ [16].** The Lord reveals that both have strayed and intermingled. They were without shepherds for the good shepherd had not yet come. He therefore proclaims their unity in the future when they will become one flock. This conforms with Paul’s declaration: “... so as to create in Himself one new man from the two” (Eph 2:15)<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**\* ‘Tell me, O you whom I love, where you feed you flock? Where you make it rest at noon? For why should I be as one who veils herself by the flocks of your companions? (Song of Solomon 1:7)**

Where do you go to pasture, O Good Shepherd who carries all the sheep on your shoulders? Indeed, you are truly carrying one sheep on your shoulder and that is our human nature.

Show me the green pastures  
Lead me to the still waters (Ps 23:2)  
Guide me to filling food  
Call me by my name (John 10:16) so that I may hear your voice. I am your sheep:  
Grant me eternal life<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Gregory of Nicea**

\* The Lord confronted the Pharisees in various ways. In this passage, He enables them to perceive that they are about to lose their role as shepherds of His people as He Himself will take charge of their needs. He indicates that the intermingling between the flocks of the Gentiles and those who reveal good will among the people of Israel would be His concern and that His rule would embrace all and not the Jews alone. His light will shine over the whole world. He wants the true knowledge of God to be known, from the beginning, not to Israel alone, but that it may spread to all who live under the heavens<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Cyril the Alexander**

\* There are two boats (Luke 5:2) out of which the Lord called His disciples. These point to the two nations (the Jews and the Gentiles). When they pulled in their nets, they caught a huge amount of fish that almost caused the nets to break. The Bible states: ‘They filled both boats’. The boats symbolize the Church. Although she consists of two nations yet they are united together in the Lord even though they come from distinct and different places.

We would like to mention here the two wives who had one husband, Jacob: Leah and Rachel are symbols for these two nations (Gen 29:23, 28). So are the two blind men who sat on the road side and the Lord granted them vision (Matt 20:36). If you search through

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 60:2. PG:353

<sup>2</sup> Song of Songs: St Gregory of Nicea. Translated into Arabic: Dr George Nawar, 1993, Sermon 2

<sup>3</sup> PG 74:656 c.

the Bible carefully, you will find that the churches are really one church. They are not two and there are symbols to indicate this fact in many parts of the Bible<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\*Finally, the offerings that are presented to God proclaim that the gathering Christian adhere together through inseparable love. That explains why the Lord called Himself the Bread, whose body is formed out of the union of many grains. This is a reference to His people who are united into one. Similarly, the Lord calls the pressed wine, produced from the clusters of grapes and very small grapes, integrating together as His unique Blood. In the same manner, the Lord indicates that this mixture of sheep constitutes one unified people<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Caprianus, the Martyr**

**“Therefore, My Father loves Me,  
Because I lay down My life that I may take it again”. [17]**

Those who believe that the Father possesses the feature of divine Justice, while the Son has divine mercy are mistaken. These imagine that the Son is filled with love for mankind and that He has offered Himself as a sacrifice of love to remove the anger of the Father. Moreover, some Gnostics in the second Century believed that the God of the New Testament (the Son) came to save the world from the God of the Old Testament because He is an angry God! Here St. John confirms that the offering of the Lord Jesus Christ arises from the Father’s love to us. It is the fruit of the reciprocal love between the Father and the Son. This is because divine love is a feature of the Holy Trinity and is not solely a feature of one hypostasis to the exclusion of the other two in the Trinity.

The only begotten Son is the object of the Father’s love since the beginning of all time. He became incarnate in fact and enjoyed the Father’s love as the Son of Man who offered His life as a sacrifice on men’s behalf. He willingly became a servant and sacrificed Himself for the sake of the world in order to win and bring men to God, His Father. This is expressed in these words about the suffering and faithful servant: ‘Behold! My servant whom I uphold, My elect in whom My soul delights! I will put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles’ (Is 42:1).

Through the divine plan, He offered Himself as the ‘way’. By entering into Him, we share with Him the feature of practical sacrificial love and trustworthiness. Hence we participate in His crucifixion and death to become a source of joy to the Father through Him. Through his sacrifice, the Lord Jesus Christ redeemed mankind and brought them to his Father. By uniting with him, we are granted the glorious power of being sacrificed and crucified with Him.

The Lord speaks about His death when He says: **“I lay down My life”**; and about His resurrection as He says **“take it up again”**. He has the power and it would have been impossible for all the forces of darkness to act in any manner without His permission. He

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on the NT, 87:6

<sup>2</sup> Letter 67 Asturcia....:2

has the power to lay down His life and to take it up again. In this simple manner, the Lord presents death and resurrection: there is no fear in facing death and no astonishment when we contemplate His resurrection.

\* **“....because I lay down My life”**: may the Jews no longer boast for they cause trouble yet they possess no power. Let them arouse trouble as much as they want; yet if I did not want to sacrifice My life, what would be the result of such disturbance?!

The Jews should not boast that they have won; for it is the Lord who has willingly sacrificed Himself...

You know the words of the Psalm: “I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustained me” (Ps 3:5)...

It is My pleasure to do so...

However, glory must be offered to God the Father; to encourage us to glorify our Creator, the Psalm says: ‘I awake for the Lord sustained me’. Do you think that the Lord Jesus Christ was deprived in any way of His power: whether the power to die or not, or the power to rise up again? These words could be misinterpreted if they are not properly understood... read this verse in the Bible: “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up”. The Evangelist adds and says: ‘But he was speaking of the temple of His body’, (John 2:19-21)<sup>1</sup>.

\* By the power of the Word, He lay down Himself and takes it up again by that same power of the Word<sup>2</sup>.

\* **“This command I have received from My Father” [18]**: The Word did not receive the command in words, for in the Son -The only Word of the Father- rests all commands. When it is said that the Son receives from the Father what the Son in essence possesses, the implication is that He grants Him the life already indwelling in Himself (John 5:26). Thus the Son has life in Himself. He does not lack any power which the Father has not given to his begotten Son.

The Father has not added any gifts and as though the Son was imperfect at birth. The Begotten of the Father is wholly perfect and He carries all the blessings at His birth. In this manner, the Son has been granted equality with the Father and He was never begotten in a state of inequality with Him<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* What other statement could reflect such a level of perfect human features than this. We consider our Lord a beloved One because He died on our behalf? What is the consequence? Was He not beloved before that? Did the Father begin to love Him and we

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 47:7

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 47: 13

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 47:14

were the cause of the Father's love to Him? They said that He was a stranger to the Father; that He was a deceiver who had come to kill and destroy. That is why the Lord told the Jews: 'There is nothing that obliges Me to love you; yet the Father loves you. Besides, He loves me too because I lay down My life for you.' The Lord wishes to underline a further point and that is that He did not come against his own will. If that were so, how does My act result in love?<sup>1</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

**"No one takes it from Me,  
But I lay it down of Myself.  
I have power to lay it down,  
I have power to take it again.  
This command I have received from My Father". [18]**

He lays Himself down to take it up again, for He is the Holy God who will not see corruption (Ps 16:10). He became incarnate by His own will. He delivered Himself and so offered His Body to be a sacrifice. In this manner, He would receive it from the Father as a glorified Body. As a result, He opens to us the Door of the resurrection since He Himself is 'The Resurrection'. Through that, He has granted us the right to enjoy the glorified body that is enabled to share with the soul her heavenly glory. The Lord stresses that His death is achieved by His full willingness. He holds the power to die and to arise. Such a sacrifice is the reason for His joy as well as for the joy of the Father. He submitted the matter into the hands of the Father in total obedience in order to fulfill His will. The Father's will is one and the same as the Son's will.

\*The Lord desired to eat the Passover (Luke 22:15); to willingly offer His life as well as take it up (John 10:18). Thus His desire has been fulfilled.

**St. Augustine**

\*He lay down His life in order to glorify us. However, He possessed the divine authority to lay it down and to take it up too... His goodness is evident here: He voluntarily lays His life down- now you also observe His authority to take it again<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* As they often sought to kill Him, He told them: 'Unless I want that to happen, you will work in vain'. Through the first preposition, He gives proof to the second: Through His death, He gives proof to the Resurrection. This is what makes it all strange and amazing. Both have been put into a new perspective that defies the norm. Let us reflect carefully on the Lord's words: "I have power to lay it down". Who does not possess the power to lay down his own life? Any person has the ability to kill himself. However, The Lord said that this was not so, yet how can it be? "I have the power to lay it down in this manner and no one can do so without My will." Such an authority does not belong to mankind, for we do not have authority to lay it down by any means other than by killing ourselves. If we were to fall into the hands of enemies and they had the power to kill us; then they

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 60:2

<sup>2</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 2:25-26

would kill us even against our will. This is not true in the case of the Lord Jesus Christ; for even though others conspired against Him, He still had the power not to lay His life down.

Indeed, He is the sole One with the power to lay down His life. He revealed that He possesses that same authority to take it up again.

Do you not observe how He used the first instance to prove the second one: How by His death, He revealed that His Resurrection cannot be questioned?<sup>1</sup>

\* The Lord says: **“This command I have received from My Father”**. If you were to ask the Lord: ‘What is this command’; He would answer: “It is that I die on behalf of the world.”

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord informed us in advance that during His sufferings he would separate His soul from His body voluntarily: **“I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it of Myself. I have power to lay it down, I have power to take it again.” [17,18]**

Indeed, David the prophet – according to St. Peter’s great interpretation- perceived the Lord and said: ‘For you will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will you allow Your Holy One to see corruption’, (Ps 16:10; Acts 2:27,31). For His divinity -before His incarnation, after His incarnation, and after His sufferings- is not subject to change. He is, as always, the same at all times- with the same nature. He will remain as He is forever. When he became incarnated, the Almighty completed the plan for our benefit: He temporarily separated the soul from the body. However, this occurred without the separation of the Divine from either of them. Both (soul and body) which were once united, were reunited through Him once more. Hence he grants all humanity a new beginning; and an example of what will occur in the Resurrection of the dead. All the corrupt will be raised in incorruption and all the dead transformed into living beings<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Gregory, Bishop of Nicea**

**“Therefore, there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings”. [19]**

This is the third time that a division occurs among those listening to the Lord Jesus Christ (John 7:43; 9:6). It is due to the enemy of goodness who is doing everything to spoil the Lord’s work.

The Lord spoke about His practical endeavor to sacrifice all His life for His sheep and to die that they may live. Some could not bear this supreme divine love and so they imagined the Lord was driven by the devil to speak these words, or that He had a

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 60:3

<sup>2</sup> Against Eunomius 2:13

deranged mind. While the Lord desires to grant us eternal glory, some resist and abuse Him. The Pharisees led the crowds to reject His words and therefore there was a division among them.

**And many of them said: “He has a demon and is mad.  
Why do you listen to Him?” [20]**

Some accused the Lord of being possessed by a devil and that He was mad. So why listen to Him? He was unaware of His words and was just hallucinating. Until today, this is the same accusation raised against the Lord Jesus Christ. As He speaks through all those who witness to the truth and speak of the heavens and eternity; listeners still regard such speakers as unrealistic and deceptive

The Pharisees even belittled those listening to Him since they encouraged Him to spread His teachings.

Non-believers are not satisfied with merely rejecting the divine word. They ridicule Him and urge others to resist Him. Often, they consecrate their energies to oppose those who listen to Him and say: **“Why do you listen to Him?”**

\* They became ice cold towards the sweetness of His Love and burned with the desire to harm Him. They stood at a great distance away from Him while they were right next to Him<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* Every good virtue, and above all gentleness and meekness, purify us and make us to be different from wild beasts. Virtue makes us worthy to compete with the angels. That is why the Lord often speaks about this and commands us to be gentle and humble. He not only speaks about that, for He also teaches us these through His acts... these people called Him a demon and a Samaritan. They sought to kill Him and threw stones at Him... In spite of that, he did not reject them; and although they conspired against Him, He answered them with great humility<sup>2</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Others said:  
“These are not the words of one who has a demon.  
Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?” [21]**

This group could not tolerate the subjection of the Lord to humiliation and insult of being a demon; even though they might not have believed that He is the Messiah, the Son of God. Indeed, His teachings did not embody the violence and corruption of Satan and his kingdom. Moreover, Satan would be unable to do His Miracles and deeds.

\*The Lord does not deny that He is possessed by a demon. He remained silent as He had

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 48:2

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John, 61:1

already presented through His deeds the proof of who He is. Therefore, there was no need to reprimand them especially that there were those who opposed the others. So the people were split and confronted each other. That is not the only reason why the Lord remained silent. He also tolerated their insults with great gentleness in order to teach us the degree of His gentleness and patience.

**St. John Chrysostom**

## **2- Unity with the Father**

**Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem and it was winter. [22]**

Here we also find a discussion between the Jews and the Lord Jesus Christ within the temple. It was the **Feast of Dedication**, *Hanukkh*, in the winter. This feast celebrated the memory of Judas the Maccabean and his deeds in 164/165 B.C. He had purified the temple from the corruption that occurred under Antiochus Epiphanies, the Syrian, three years earlier (1 Mac 4:36-59). Antiochus had forced the Jews to worship idols and forbade the circumcision of children, and observation of the Sabbath. This Feast is mentioned in greater detail in 2 Mac 1:18. The Jews regarded the return to freedom as though they had risen from the dead to enjoy life again. In memory of this, they celebrated a yearly feast on the twenty-fifth day in the month of Kislev. This parallels approximately the beginning of the month of December. The feast extends for nine days amid great lights. This feast is celebrated not only in Jerusalem, as other feasts are, but everyone celebrates in his own area as is the case with the Feast of Purim (Esther 9:19). As the Jews were celebrating the Feast of Dedication of the temple [22], the Lord proclaimed that He is the One whom God had dedicated and sent into the world [23].

**And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch. [23]**

**Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him:**

**"How long do you keep us in doubt?**

**If you are the Christ, tell us plainly". [24]**

The Lord was walking in the temple, in Solomon's porch. This lies in the eastern part of the house of nations, which is the largest house in the area of the temple, it surrounds the inner buildings. This does not mean that it was Solomon who had constructed it since the temple had been destroyed and then rebuilt. However, it continued to be called **Solomon's temple** after the name of Solomon- the first one who had built it- due to his great fame.

The Lord walked alone as one would do who is interested in observing the actions of the Council of the Sanhedrin, They were gathered there; and where we are told: 'God stands in the congregation of the mighty; He judges among the Gods. How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? (Ps 82:1-2). He walked there to offer help to every needy person. He answered all questions in order to open the door to all

who wished to walk with Him in the porch. On the eighth day of the Feast, the Lord was asked if He is the Messiah, and He answered:

- A- The flock know the real Messiah, His divinity and His mission [25-27].
- B- He saves His flock and gives them safety and peace [28-29]
- C- The Lord confirms the Oneness of Essence with the Father. The Jews realized that the Lord Jesus Christ was equating Himself with the Father [30-31].
- D- He defended His divinity through His works and through prophecies in the Holy Bible [32-39].
- E- If the Jews considered their judges to be gods [34-39] because they represented God, then why do they stumble and find difficulty to recognize the true Son of God whom the Father has sent? [36]

He had come to His house and His Father's house. He had come to serve all the souls who sought Him. However, they banded together, as one man, with wicked intention; and asked Him why He kept them in doubt and if He is the Christ to tell them so. Some interpreters consider that the question conveyed an evil accusation.

It is as though they were saying: Why are you drawing people's hearts and encouraging a spirit of cheating and deception? Absalom did that when he rebelled against David his father, and tried to snatch away his throne. Or as though they were saying: why do you deceive the simple-hearted in order to win them as your disciples? The question appeared to be good and as though they really wanted to learn the truth.

They knew that the Messiah would be a king. But they believed, according to their minds, that He would be an earthly king. Therefore, they asked Him to give them a clear answer to that effect. This would enable them to report Him as someone who is a rebel and traitor to the Roman authorities.

The Jewish leaders did not blame themselves for their own corrupt hearts and minds. They blamed the Lord who attracted the crowds and some of the leaders; therefore causing confusion and division in the council of the Sanhedrin. They lay the blame on the Lord and accused Him of leaving them in doubt and confusion. Rather than blame themselves for not accepting the truth, not wishing to learn, they blamed Him. It is as though the Jewish leadership was seeking to pick a quarrel with Him: "How long do you keep us in doubt"? How long will you attract our souls? Be clear and proclaim your Identity! His works bore witness that He is the awaited Messiah. However, they probably needed a clear declaration in order to convict Him once He would state that He is the awaited Messiah.

Some interpreters find that the question was a true reflection of their inner conflict. On the one hand, they sensed His holiness- perceived through His deeds; and they recognized His stature. On the other hand, they feared for their positions; and their corrupt souls prevented them from accepting Him. They wanted a Messiah shaped according to their whims; one who would achieve and grant their temporal aspirations.



They desired to appear as individuals who sought knowledge. Although St. John the Baptist witnessed clearly before them; the heavens declared the Lord's identity. The Lord also spoke to them and declared that He is the light of the world, the good Shepherd and the giver of eternal life. Moreover, all His deeds witnessed to His Person.

Some interpreters find that the word '**us**' is used here to denote '**our lives**'. They draw on the use the Lord made when He said: "I have power to lay (**My life**) down" to convey His death. Some Jews may have felt that the Lord's teachings about loving and forgiving one another would utterly destroy their lives as a Jewish nation. Caiaphas expressed this when He said: "If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, the Romans will come and take away our place and our nation" [11:48].

\*The Lord perceived their intentions when they asked their wicked question. They had surrounded Him and asked: "How long do you keep us in doubt". It appeared as though they asked out of zeal to learn. However, their purpose was devious and corrupt and filled with hidden ulcers... they were not asking with the intent to learn which seemed to be their goal<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Jesus answered them:**

**"I told you and you do not believe.**

**The work that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me". [25]**

The Jews asked for a clear and frank answer- a yes or a no- This was impossible since their concept of the 'Messiah' was totally different from those in His divine Plan. In spite of that, the Lord Jesus Christ put His finger on the problem: They did not lack the knowledge, but they lacked the will to believe in His works that witnessed to His Person (John 14:11). So the problem lay within them and not in the need to reveal Himself to them. In order to efface their excuses, the Lord indicated that He had informed them previously by words as well as by deeds. He had proclaimed previously that He is the Son of God and the Son of Man who possesses the power of life within Himself; and that He has the Authority to judge... Does this not refer to the Messiah? They pretended that the Lord had left them in doubt; but He confirmed that they were not willing to believe. He referred to His deeds and His life- for He is the One with no sin- His deeds and His acts testify to the reality of His unique Person.

On the one hand, the Lord desires to present all true knowledge- on condition that the person seeking it is sincere- just as He did with the Samaritan woman (4:26); and with the man born blind (29:35-38). Some of His followers recognized Him from the start (1:41); while others gathered around Him when they realized that He is the awaited Messiah. The Lord had previously proclaimed to the Jews: "... before Abraham was, I am" (8:58), and consequently they wanted to stone Him. They had heard enough about His identity and so they accused Him of blasphemy since He had equated Himself to God (5:18).

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies 61. PG 59:361

\* The Lord here reveals to the Jews that His deeds speak more loudly and more clearly than His voice and words.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“But you do not believe,  
Because you are not of My sheep,  
As I said to you”. [26]**

The Lord puts the blame on them because they had deprived themselves from belonging to his flock. Therefore, how could they recognize Him? They did not belong to His flock due to their lack of faith and not due to lack of evidence to His Person. They had no excuse. There existed a flock that believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as a result of His words and deeds. They recognized His voice which gives meaning to their lives. This flock condemned unbelievers who lacked faith and had not joined the Lord’s flock. Moreover, they neither recognized Him as the awaited Messiah, nor His voice. Consequently, they followed other shepherds.

\* It is as though the Lord was telling the Jews the following: ‘You have not followed Me because you do not belong to my flock and not because I am not a Shepherd. The Lord said these words in order to encourage them to want to become His own sheep. He wants to wake them up and plant this desire in them<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\*The Lord answered and stated that He is the Son of God. How did He answer? Listen: **Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep”** [25-26]... they are sheep through faith. They are sheep by following the Shepherd. They do not belittle their Savior. They are sheep as they enter through the Door and as they go in and out to find pasture, and they are sheep as they enjoy eternal life. But what is the implication of these words: **“...you are not of My sheep”** [26]. The Lord perceived that they had chosen eternal destruction and would not receive eternal life through His Blood!<sup>2</sup>

**St. Augustine**

**“My sheep hear My voice  
And I know them  
And they follow Me” [27]**

The Lord presented to them the marks of His flock. These are they that hear His voice and recognize that it belongs to their Shepherd. They know the sound of His love and care. Therefore they adhere to Him and get acquainted with Him in new depths. They qualify to be recognized by Him and as the apostle says: “The Lord knows those who are His” (2 Tim 2:19).

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 61:2

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 48:4

\*This is the pasture- remember the words of the Lord earlier: **“They will go in and out and find pasture”**. We enter into the faith and go out when we die. As we enter through the door of faith, we- as believers- quit the body. By going out through the same door we can find pasture; that good pasture is called eternal life. In this pasture, no leaf is dry for all plants are green and flourishing. There is vegetation that is said to be evergreen and it is found and exists only there<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“And I give them eternal life,  
And they shall never perish;  
Neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand”. [28]**

In order to convince them of the misery that sets in as a result of rejecting to adhere and belong to Him, the Lord presents the positive aspect. These are the gifts of a blessed life which His flock enjoys. In other words, they enjoy a heavenly eternal life. In contrast, life on earth is full of fatigue and pain. His flock are protected by the Holy Spirit and the enemy cannot touch them. The Psalmist accordingly says: ‘This poor man cried out and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him and delivers them’ (Ps 34:6-7). The Lord knows His flock well: He knows their needs as well as the resistance of the devil who faces them. However, they are protected in Him.

The Lord offers here the gift of eternal life to those who believe in Him. Besides, He reveals the security that they enjoy in Him; for they are kept safely in His hand. This is something they would not enjoy if they changed to the teachings of the Pharisees. By joining the Lord’s flock, believers are granted protection which they could never get through any other means. St. Paul says in this context: ‘For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable’ (Rom 11:29)

The flock of the Lord are a gift that the Father delivers into the hands of the Son; and they remain safely in His hands as well as they rest in the hands of the Father. In other words, they are protected by the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ as well as of the Father.

The word **‘perish’** is used here to indicate the fearsome eternal destruction. Consequently, being saved from such a destiny cannot be over evaluated. The word ‘snatch’ indicates violent action used against a person. No one can protect us from such violence except the powerful Hand that holds and shields us.

\* **‘... shall never perish’ [28]**.... what can the wolf do? What can a burglar- a thief do? They can only destroy those who are singled out for destruction. The apostle says of such sheep: ‘The Lord knows those who are His’ (2 Tim 2:19); and ‘for whom He foreknew, He also predestined... whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called these He also justified; whom He justified, these He also glorified’ (Rom 8:29-30). The wolf does not snatch any of these sheep, neither can a burglar steal them, nor can a thief kill

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 48:6

them<sup>1</sup>.

St. Augustine

**“My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all;  
No one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand”. [29]**

St. Ambrose explains that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of the Father as well as of the Son. He is the Hand of both Father and Son. Hence, the sheep hear the Lord’s voice and no one can snatch them from the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit<sup>2</sup>.

\*The Lord Jesus Christ says: **“... no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand”**: in this manner He indicates that His hand and His Father’s are one in terms of power and in essence for they are the same.

His words **“...neither shall any one snatch them out of My hand, My Father, who has given them to Me...”** are intended for the Jews so that they would not accuse Him of being disobedient to God.

St. John Chrysostom

\* Are the Father and Son one hand, or can we say that the Son Himself is the Father’s hand? If we understand that ‘the hand’ stands for power, then the Father and Son have one and the same power. However, if we understand it in the same way used by the prophet: ‘... to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?’ (Is 53:1); then the arm of the Father is the Son Himself. Yet, we should not understand this as though God had a human form, or that He has human physical members. Indeed, we should comprehend that all things were made through Him<sup>3</sup>.

St. Augustine

**I and My Father are one”. [30]**

The Lord does not say ‘I and My Father are identical’ But ‘I and My Father are one’. This indicates a union of love and work as well as a union in the essence. Therefore it is a unique unity which no other creature can attain. Indeed, this union is the supreme model of union to which an adherer to God aspires as he seeks to unit with Him.

This discussion about unity is related to the care of the Son and Father watching over a believer: no one can snatch a believer out of the hands of the Son or the Father. It is as though divine care is a unique entity of love between the two icons of the Father and the Son. The ultimate purpose of this care is to make believers carry this icon/hypostasis of unity.

\*The Lord Jesus Christ proclaims: **“I and My Father are One”**. He uses the word **“One”** as there is no separation of authority or of nature. Yet, he uses in another place the

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 48:6

<sup>2</sup> Of the Holy Spirit, 16:114

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 48:7

word **“We”**: He does so in order to make us realize that the Father and the Son are united in one nature without mingling in the elements/hypostasis: thus we believe that the perfect Father gave birth to the perfect Son<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* Understanding needs to come after faith so that it is the reward of faith...<sup>2</sup>

\* The Lord says and that truly: **“I and My Father are One”**. What does ‘One’ imply? That we are one in nature and in essence<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* **“I and My Father are One”** [30]. The Lord then adds: **“... the Father is in Me and I in Him” [Jn10:38]**, in order to clarify, on the one hand, the Divine Unity; on the other hand, the Unity in Essence. Hence, both are One. Yet, this is not like a (one) object that can be split into two. Moreover, it is not like someone who is called by two names- once ‘the Father’ and another time ‘the Son’.... for the Father is Father and cannot be the Son and the Son is the Son and cannot be the Father.... Thus they are two beings or hypostasis.

Nevertheless, they are one in nature: for the begotten is not unlike His Father: He is in His image and all that the Father has are the Son’s too (John 16:15). Therefore, the Son is not another God since He did not come from outside... Otherwise there would be many other gods. Both are one in their being, one in nature and one in divine unity. As we have explained, the rays are the light and not a source other than the sun or other than the light. They do not result from participation with the light but they are wholly and intrinsically begotten of the light, so such a child is ultimately one with the light- no one can say that there are two lights. Although the sun and the rays are two things, yet the rays of the sun that give light to everything through the rays are one<sup>4</sup>.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic**

The Jews could tolerate the Lord Jesus Christ so far; but they could no longer bear to hear Him say: ‘I and My Father are One’. you can see that the Jews understood what the Arians could not. They were angered by this saying and felt that He could not have said these words ‘I and My Father are One’ unless it implied equality between the Father and the Son<sup>5</sup>.

\* The Word of God came to mankind to transform them into gods; therefore, what would the Word of God who resides Himself in God be other than God?

If mankind become gods through the Word of God and if by having fellowship with Him they become gods, then could the one through Him they have access to fellowship be any other but God?

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<sup>1</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 1:1:9

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 89:1

<sup>3</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 98:2

<sup>4</sup> Discourses against the Arians, 1:23 (3,4)

<sup>5</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 48:8

If the lights that shine are gods, could the light source that gives light not be God?

You have been enlightened by the light, therefore you have become numbered as children of God. If you drew away from the light you would fall into doubt and find yourselves in darkness. However, that light does not come near (to be enlightened) for He cannot withdraw from Himself<sup>1</sup>.

\*Sometimes we may say: “We live in God and He lives in us”; but can we say: ‘We and the Father are one?’ We live in God because God embraces us; God lives in us because we have become altars of God... Yet, could you say: “He who has seen has seen the Father” in the same way that His only begotten Son said it (John 14:9)... ‘I and My Father are one’? Get acquainted with the supreme distinction of the Lord and with the gift granted to the servant. **The distinction of the Lord is equality with the Father and the gift of the servant is fellowship with the Savior**<sup>2</sup>.

St. Augustine

### **Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him’ [31]**

For the second time, His opponents wanted to stone the Lord Jesus Christ. According to them, He had blasphemed and so deserved to be stoned. He had claimed His oneness with God. The Jews did not comprehend His real identity and therefore could not bear His words.

The unique unity between the Father and the Son, which is at the core of the divine Shepherd’s work, is the source of our inner enlightenment, of our comfort and our inner peace. This unity was unacceptable to the Jews - indeed they considered this as blasphemy against God.

The sin of blasphemy is a killing and deadly sin in the Jewish faith. There is no need to bring the accused to judgment or to hear his defense and the person is punished immediately. The Mishnah mentions that if a person steals a holy vessel, he can be punished without judgment by those who are eager to do so. The same thing applies if a priest serves before a defiled altar. The Mishnah states that his brothers, the other priests, do not bring him before a court but he is carried out of the temple by the younger priests who then smash his brain with clubs. It is a terrific sin that deserves a horrible punishment. With that same understanding the Jews considered that there was no need to bring to Lord to be judged. Indeed, they went outside the temple building to find stones, picked them up and carried them to stone Him. They did not have any consideration for the holy place itself or that it was not right to execute stoning in its vicinity. Their anger was so strong and their pretense to be zealous for God’s glory drove them to behave in this manner.

### **Jesus answered them**

**“Many good works I have shown you from My Father.  
For which of those works do you stone Me?” [32]**

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 48:10

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 48:10

The Lord did His divine acts as a living testimony to His identity. These are stronger than discussing and using words. Indeed, these are an easier means to understand the truth.

What does the Lord intend to use the words **‘from My Father’**? Would it not be enough to have said: ‘Many good works I have done?’ he actually intended to confirm that He and the Father work together. The same work the Son does proceeds from the Father. If the Holy Son declares that His good acts come from the Father then how much more should the weak creation declare that all goodness found in us to the grace of God that works within us?

The Lord defied them saying: “...which of you convicts Me of sin?” (John 8:46), and no one could answer back. So how could they stone someone whom they could not convict for even one sin?

The Lord says: **“For which of those works”**, in other words ‘which kind of acts’ that no other creature in heaven or on earth can do since they are acts pertinent to God Himself.

**The Jews answered Him, saying:**

**“For a good work we do not stone you,**

**But for blasphemy and because You, being a man, make yourself God” [33]**

The Jews could not deny the works done by the Lord. However, they were unable to tolerate His words as they considered that He had dared to equate Himself to God. They said to Him: **“You, being a man, make yourself God”**; whereas the Evangelist proclaims throughout his whole gospel that the Lord Jesus Christ became Man while He is truly God.

**Jesus answered them: “Is it not written in your law; I said you are gods?” [34]**

The word **‘your law’** is used here in its broad sense as it refers to the whole Old Testament. The quote of the Lord is taken from Psalm 82:6; and it is directed at the Hebrew Judges who represented the authority of God. The Psalmist goes on to say: ‘But you shall die like men and fall like one of the princes’ (Ps 82:7). Since this was said about the Judges of the Old Testament, then what could be said about the Lord Jesus Christ whom God has sanctified and consecrated to save the world?

In using the word **‘your law’**, the Lord does not intend to break away from the law. Indeed, He regards it to be the Word of God which cannot be criticized or dismissed [35].

\* God has not only created us from nothingness, but He has granted us unconditional life with God through the free gift of the Logos. However, mankind has rejected spiritual matters and has become corrupted through Satan’s deceitful lies. Consequently, their corruption has doomed them to die and have become corrupt in nature.

Yet, God planned to open an escape from that natural condition by granting mankind fellowship with the Logos. In this manner, their goodness is being restored.

When the Logos lives among mankind, they will not die on account of their natural state of corruption. In this context, Wisdom says: ‘When God created us, He did not intend for us to die; He made us like Himself. It was the Devil’s jealousy that brought death into the world...’ (Wisdom 2:23)<sup>1</sup>.

\* The Lord Jesus Christ became Man in order to make us gods. He revealed Himself in the flesh so that we may comprehend the plan of the invisible Father. He tolerated humiliation from men, so that we may inherit everlasting life. While He Himself was untouched by harm in any manner- since He is above all sufferings and incorruptible, as He is the Logos and God Himself, He comforts men who suffer and all those for whom He underwent all this humiliation. He protects them throughout all pain they endure for His sake<sup>2</sup>.

\* Indeed, the Lord became incarnated so that we may become gods. He proclaimed Himself by appearing in the flesh to enable us to comprehend the thought of the invisible God. He accepted shame to grant us the inheritance of incorruption<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic**

\* “You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High”: For this end the Word of God became incarnated. The Son of God became the Son of Man. Hence, when the man enters into the Logos and accepts to be adopted, he becomes the Son of God. There is no other way that we can attain incorruption and immortality. But how could we have acquired incorruption and immortality, unless incorruption swallow up corruption and immortality annihilate death and so enabling us to be adopted as children?<sup>4</sup>

**St. Irenaeus**

\* Listen to the words of the Psalmist: ‘I have said: You are gods; all of you are children of the Most High’ (Ps 82:6). God calls us with this intention: so that we do not become human beings. Rather, God wants to be in a better condition when we are no longer human. This is possible if we first recognize the reality that we are human beings, **only then can we humbly progress to such heights**. We need to be cautious and should not believe that we are worthy while we are unworthy. Otherwise, we will not only lose what we are but we will also not attain the stature we do not possess<sup>5</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“If He called them gods, to whom the Word of God came  
And the Scripture cannot be broken,**

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<sup>1</sup> On the Incarnation 4 (5)

<sup>2</sup> De Incarn. 54 (3)

<sup>3</sup> Oratio de Incarnatione Verbi, 54. PG 25:192 BC

<sup>4</sup> Adv. Haer 3:19 (1)

<sup>5</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 1:4



**Do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world,  
“You are blaspheming”; because I said: “I am the Son of God?” [36]**

\* What are the Lord’s words concerning such an attitude: ‘ If those who receive this honor through grace do not find it wrong to call themselves gods, then how is it that you reprimand Me who naturally am the Son of God?’<sup>1</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Someone may wonder: If the Father has sanctified the Lord Jesus Christ, was there a time when He was not sanctified? The Father has sanctified Him in the same manner by which He conceived Him. When He was begotten, He received the power of being sanctified for the Father conceived the Son in holiness. If the Holy One (the Son) had been sanctified before, then how could we say about God the Father “... hallowed be your Name...”?<sup>2</sup>

**St. Augustine**

**“If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe in Me. [37]  
But if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works,  
That you may know and believe that the Father is in Me and I in Him”. [38]**

The Lord Jesus Christ invites His opponents to consider and examine His works so that when they perceive that they are done by His Father, they would believe in Him. By examining His deeds, they will know and believe. The verb occurs in the Greek language and conveys ‘you will begin to know’ or ‘you will come to know’. Some writers interpret the word ‘you may believe’ as ‘you will continue to know these matters’. Hence, it is not enough to know the beginning of such knowledge; but it is necessary to continue learning.

\* Believe, therefore, that God’s presence is evident in (the Lord’s deeds). Do you believe in deeds and not belief in the presence (of the Doer)? Then from where do the deeds spring if they are not preceded by His presence?<sup>3</sup>

**St. Ambrose**

\* Do you not see how the Lord testifies and gives proof that there is nothing in Him that denotes that He is less than the Father and that He is equal to Him in every way. The similarity in the deeds, and as they speak for themselves, act as a proof of His uncontested authority<sup>4</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Therefore they sought again to seize Him,  
But He escaped out of their hand. [39]**

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<sup>1</sup> Hom 61. PG 59:364

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 48:10

<sup>3</sup> On the Mysteries, 3:8

<sup>4</sup> Hom 62. PG 59:369

Instead of speaking with Him, their only answer was to make another attempt to catch and kill Him.

**‘And He went again beyond the Jordan  
To the place where John was baptizing at first  
And there He stayed’. [40]**

Of their own full freedom, they were able to accuse Him unjustly, to plan to catch and kill Him, and to arouse anger against Him. However, they could not overcome Him and achieve their plan because they had not been allowed by God to do so up to that moment.

\* It was the habit of the Lord Jesus Christ to withdraw quickly after speaking strong words. He did so to alleviate their anger. By distancing Himself, the pan of their fury would calm down. This is what the Lord did at that time.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\*They had failed to catch Him as they had lost their grasp on faith. The Word became flesh, yet it was not hard to save His body from physical hands. In order to grasp the Word in your mind you need to perceive the Lord Jesus Christ correctly.<sup>1</sup>

**St. Augustine**

### **3- The Lord Jesus Christ at the Place of His Baptism**

**Then many came to Him and said:  
“John performed no sign,  
But all the things John spoke about this Man were true” [41]**

Due to the hostility they displayed towards the Lord Jesus Christ, He traveled to the other side of the Jordan and to the place where St. John the Baptist use to baptize those who came to him. He went there not out of fear He would be killed. He had come to the world to save the world through the Cross; but that had to be at a specific time.

That place held great memories for the Lord Jesus Christ and his disciples. This where St. John the Baptist had witnessed about the Lord, saying: “Behold! The lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”. Probably, those who lived in the area still remembered and repeated St. John’s testimony. St. John had been martyred and passed away, yet the fruit of his testimony appear even after he had left this world: the inhabitants remembered and hade believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. St. John had not done one single miracle, yet they believed his testimony without the need for miracles.

\*Since the Jews had believed St. John the Baptist who had not done even one miracle, then it would be logical to find them believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. Just watching His miracles indicates the sublime nature and greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**St. John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 48:11

**And many believed in Him. [42]**

\* Due to His many deeds they were attracted to Him. Moreover, they remembered St. John the Baptist's words when he said: "He who is coming after me is mightier than I" (Matt 3:11). They had also heard the Voice from the heavens and had seen the Holy Spirit that had appeared as a dove.

**St. John Chrysostom**

## Chapter 10

### **May You carry Me in the Palm of Your Hands and Wash me in Your Blood!**

\* In the midst of the persistent roaring world,  
I see a glowing face; I hear a gentle inviting voice!  
It is Your face, who is fairer than mankind!  
It is Your unique voice that attracts all my feelings!  
You are the good Shepherd, the beloved of my soul!

\* You are the Shepherd, the Door and the Guardian.  
You are the Shepherd who walks before me, in order to kill every savage wolf.  
You are before me to lead me into your unique heavenly pastures.  
You are before me to ascend on the Cross, in order to wash me with Your pure Blood!  
You carry the staff to kill my enemies and with it You punish me tenderly and gently;  
You lead me to come into Your embrace. You carry a flute to proclaim Your joy in me.  
Then Your joy overwhelms me, O source of all happiness.

\* You are the Door and the Guardian  
How can we enter into the Father's embrace except through You?  
O Door of the Divine embrace?  
Is there any other door but You by which to enter?  
You are the Guardian, You lead me to You. You enclose me within You.  
Thus the enemy cannot enter in with me or touch me!

\* How can I repay such unique and supreme care?  
Grant me union with You, and then I will become a shepherd through and with You!  
I will love You and so shepherd Your sheep through and with You!  
My joy will be complete as many will be saved and I will find pleasure in sharing with  
You the spirit of true shepherding.

\* Your care has made you willing to die and rise again.  
By Your power you sacrificed Yourself and delight those in the graves.  
Grant me the glory of sharing Your Cross with You.  
Grant me the goodness as I enjoy Your Resurrection!

\* On the Feast of Dedication You walked in Solomon's porch.  
Now the porch of the King of Peace is within me.  
May You enter and walk, so that I may walk with You and hear Your voice  
May You celebrate a constant feast of renewal upon Your altar that is within me!

\* May you proclaim within me that You are One and equal with the Father.  
I believe, O my Lord, for I have seen and enjoyed Your deeds!

Your works witness to You  
You have turned my grave into an altar  
You have transformed my heart into Your heaven.  
You have turned my darkness into light.  
You have proclaimed Your presence within me!  
What more could I desire!

\* \* \*

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### RAISING LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD

#### THE GIVER OF THE RESURRECTED LIFE

St. John tells us the story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead which probably occurred on the Saturday preceding the Lord's entry into Jerusalem. Thus this event took place a short while just before the last week of the life of Jesus on earth. **The miracle is not recorded in the other three Gospels; and some explain that this is because Lazarus was still alive when these were written. The belief was that such reporting could have caused him many problems. As for St. John, he wrote his Gospel after Lazarus had passed away.** The Evangelist presents the miracle to reveal the person of the Lord Jesus Christ: He is the Resurrection, the Giver of Life; and the Conqueror of death. The Lord was ready to deliver Himself to death and to be buried in a grave; yet He wanted to confirm His authority to lay down as well as raise Himself only when He wanted. The miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead is the last miracle that St. John records; and he gives many details in his account of it.

The event takes place in a small village called Bethany or House of suffering or of pain. There was a family that the Lord Jesus loved very much and who lived there. This family opened their hearts as well as their home to the Lord Jesus. They wanted Him to rest there; and they knew how to talk with Him. In the midst of the bitter and dangerous pain caused by death, the two sisters sent Him a message: "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick" [3]. The sisters did not ask for the healing of their brother. Moreover, they did not ask the Lord to leave His service and visit them in their difficult circumstances.

Lazarus died and the Lord told His disciples: "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." The Lord called death as a sleep for any person who adhered to the Lord Jesus Christ -to the Resurrection- is not touched by death. Death for such a person is seen as a blessing and a time of rest.

Four days after the death of Lazarus, the Lord Jesus Christ came to the Village. Martha met Him and began to reproach Him: **"Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now, I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You"** [22]. The Lord assured her that her brother will rise up again. She proclaimed her faith that her brother would rise again at the last day. Therefore the Lord told her: **"I am the resurrection and the life"** [25].

The Lord could not bear to see the tears of the sisters and **'Jesus wept'** [35]. He sympathizes with us! He is amazing in His love for mankind. He could not bear to see their tears, and He says: "Turn your eyes away from Me, for they have overcome Me" (song of Solomon 6:5). He went to the grave and asked the mourners to roll away the stone that sealed the grave; so Martha said: **"Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days!"**

**St. Augustine** comments that the raising of Lazarus from the dead is not a source

of amazement, but rather a source of joy to us. He explains that it is not surprising that the One who has the power to create people into the world is able to raise the dead, yet what makes us rejoice is that He grants us the resurrection and blesses us with salvation<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Augustine** notes that the three other Gospels mention that the Lord raised three people from the dead. He finds that, these miracles carry implications that relate to our salvation: the Lord raised these bodies to indicate the resurrection of our souls.

The Lord raised the daughter of one of the rulers of the synagogue. She was lying in her home (Mark 5:41-43)...may everyone be concerned about his soul; for in sin there is death: sin is the death of the soul. Sometimes we commit sin just in our thoughts. You might find pleasure in what is evil and agree to go along. You are mistaken; for this agreement brings you death. However, it is an inner death since evil thoughts have not matured or become transformed into committed acts as yet. The Lord proclaims that He wishes to resurrect such souls to life. He raised this young girl who had not been carried out for burial yet. She lay dead at home. It is as though sin was not apparent till that time in her life.

Nevertheless, if you not only embrace a feeling of pleasure in evil thoughts but also engage in evil acts, it can be concluded that the dead one has been carried outside the door. Then you would be carried outside and actually carried to your grave. In spite of that, the Lord still raised such a dead one to life when He restored the youth alive to his widowed mother. Repent when you sin for the Lord will raise you up and restore you to the church who is your mother.

The third example of death is that of Lazarus. This is a serious case of death that is particularly marked by sin turned into a habit of committing evil. Falling into sin is one issue, whereas committing sin out of habit is another matter. A person who falls into sin, but promptly submits to reform, rises up to life quickly for he has not fallen into the net of evil habit and has not been laid into the grave so far. However, a person who has submitted to the habit of evil doing is someone who has been buried and of whom this saying is true: **‘there is stench’**. This is because that person is characterized by bad reputation. All such people have become used to commit crimes and have abandoned morality... in spite of that, the power of the Lord Jesus Christ is no less overwhelming and is able to restore life to them. We know and see people, daily, who become transformed and move away from the most evil habits. They become receptive to a kind of better life more than those who blame them... may no one despair or give in<sup>2</sup>.

\* Out of all the miraculous deeds done by the Lord Jesus Christ, the raising of Lazarus from the dead occupies a rank of first importance in the preaching of His Word<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

## **1- Informing the Lord that Lazarus is sick**

## **1- 16**

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate cf. 49:1

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 49:3

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 49:1

|                                                                |               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>2- The Lord travels towards the home of Lazarus family.</b> | <b>17- 33</b> |
| <b>3- Raising Lazarus from the dead.</b>                       | <b>34- 44</b> |
| <b>4- Effects of raising Lazarus from the dead.</b>            | <b>45- 57</b> |

## **1- Informing the Lord that Lazarus is Sick**

**Now a certain man was sick  
Lazarus of Bethany,  
The town of Mary and her sister, Martha. [1]**

**Lazarus:** Probably the Hebrew name is ‘Eliazer’ that means ‘Jehovah helps him’.

**Bethany:** An Aramaic name that means ‘house of misery’ or ‘of suffering’. It is the name of a village in the south east of Mount Olives- about two miles from Jerusalem. Today, it is known as Elazaria as a reference to the raising of Lazarus from the dead. We read about Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38 etc... that they lived in Galilee. If this is true, then they probably did not change their residence there at that time. It is clear that that home keeper was Martha, the other sister, who hosted her younger sister. St. John mentions Mary first though she is the younger one. The reason could be that Mary was the better known in the early church. She is the one who washed the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ with sweet smelling oil (12:3). Besides, she is the one who chose the ‘good part which will not be taken away from her’ (Luke 10:42).

**Mary:** A Hebrew name that means ‘rebellion’; **Martha:** The feminine word for the Aramaic word that means ‘educator/lady’

**It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil  
And wiped His feet with her hair,  
Whose brother Lazarus was sick. [2]**

\* This Mary is not the adulterous woman mentioned in the Gospel of St. Luke (7:37-50); for the one mentioned there is one who had committed many bad deeds. The Mary mentioned here by St. John is an honorable woman steadfast in virtue. She persevered in hospitality to the Lord<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying:  
“Lord, behold, he whom you love is sick”. [3]**

No prayer could be simpler than this short prayer. It is full of confidence and submission of the matter into hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were satisfied to present the case to Him without asking for anything, without requesting the Lord to come to solve the matter and support them. Probably, they did not ask Him to go to them because of what they had heard a little bit earlier (in the previous chapter) how the Jews in Jerusalem had tried to stone Him; and how He had gone beyond the Jordan to disable

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:1



them from achieving their intentions. Therefore the sisters did not wish to put Him in a dangerous, life threatening situation. At the same time, Lazarus was a friend of the Lord's and so they were satisfied with informing Him of their brother's sickness. They were confident that the Lord would definitely do something.

The sisters neither mentioned the kind of sickness, nor their relationship to Lazarus who was their brother. They just indicated that he is the one **'whom You love'**. We know that the Lord loves all mankind; everyone could sense His gentleness, tenderness and love. However, the expression used by the sisters reveals that the Lord Jesus Christ devoted a special loving relationship with the sick. The sisters did not indicate in their message if the sickness was serious. They might have done so to avoid disturbing Him.

\* Why did they not act as the honorable centurion- He left his sick one and went to the Lord. Why they did not go to Him instead of sending Him a message? They had great trust in the Lord and they had strong family ties. Besides, they were weak women overwhelmed with sorrow<sup>1</sup>!

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* It is enough for you to know, for You are not like those who love and forget. If God did not love sinners, He would not have descended from the heavens to the earth<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**When Jesus heard that, He said:**

**"This sickness is not unto death,**

**But for the glory of God,**

**That the Son of God may be glorified through it". [4]**

The Lord proclaimed that this death was not a final one in this life. It was a temporary one that was allowed so that God may be glorified through His power to raise the dead.

Some scholars consider that the word **'glorified'** is used here to indicate an act that a person willingly does due to his love and wish to serve others even though it appears to be below his actual rank. This word is often used in this sense throughout St. John's Gospel. Such acts do not impose obligations on others. This is especially true when the Lord speaks about the crucifixion as the glory of the Son and the Father, where the Son sacrifices Himself to grant the redemption and eternal glory of sinners. Our Savior is eternally driven by His love to work miracles. Often the subject of the raising of Lazarus from the dead is associated with the glory of the Lord's cross for this miracle anticipated and prepared for His eventual crucifixion.

\* We appropriately get astonished at the sisters of Lazarus. After they had heard that their brother's sickness would not end in death. They found him dead. However, they were not shaken when events proved contrary to that. In spite of everything, they hurried to the

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:1

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 49;5

Lord and did not utter a bad word<sup>1</sup>.

\* Notice that the Lord states that the glory due to Him and to His Father is one and the same: **‘for the glory of God’**; then Lord goes on to say: **‘that the Son of God may be glorified through Him’**.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Glorifying God does not add anything to the honor due to Him. Yet it adds to our honor, this is clarified by the Lord’s words: **‘not unto death’**. For even that visible death is not death in itself but rather was used to perform a miracle leading people to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently, they would escape from the real death<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**‘Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus’. [5]**

The reference here is to the Lord’s love for Martha as she is the older sister, then to Mary and Lazarus. The Lord felt comfortable with the family as a whole. Each member felt he had a personal relationship with the Lord who cared and loved them. Each member felt that he had a special place in the Lord’s embrace and love.

\* If you were to ask: ‘Why did the Evangelist state clearly here that the Lord loved Lazarus?’ Our response would be: ‘So that we may not be disappointed nor abandon the Lord when good men, who are steadfast in virtue and loved by God, get sick<sup>3</sup>’

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* One is sick and two are sorrowful: however, the One who loves them is the Rescuer of the sick. He is even more powerful as He raises the dead and comforts those who mourn<sup>4</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“So when He heard that he was sick,  
He stayed two more days in the place where He was”. [6]**

With the Lord Jesus Christ, there is for everything an appropriate time. It depends on His divine thought and not on our own human timing. At the wedding in Cana, His mother had told Him ‘they have no wine’ (John 2:3). He answered: “My hour has not yet come”, (John 2:4). In these circumstances, we would expect that the Lord would hurry and go to Bethany to support His loved ones. However, we find that He remains where He was for two days. **He knows the right time for every work.**

In all the previous miracles, the Lord was concerned with underling His love to all sufferers. Here, He delays as He wishes to underline a certain fact through His love for the whole family. He wanted to confirm that He is ‘the Resurrection’ for the time of His

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<sup>1</sup> Hom 62. PG 59:369

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 49:6

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:1

<sup>4</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 49:7

death and resurrection were about to happen. That is why the Lord did not hurry to heal Lazarus of his sickness, and He did not go immediately after his death. Indeed, He let him remain in the tomb until the fourth day and until his body decayed. In this manner, everyone who grants life and resurrection even after the body has decayed.

\* Why did He stay? So that Lazarus may breathe his last breath and be buried. In that manner, no one could claim that he had not died and that he was just in a deep sleep; or that he had fainted but had not died. For this reason the Lord waited for two days when decay takes place and the sisters would state that there is ‘**a stench**’ [39]<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Then after this, He said to the disciples:  
“Let us go to Judea again.” [7]**

By telling His disciples: ‘**Let us go to Judea again**’ [7], the Lord underlines His mercy even to those who are undeserving. Although Judea was not ready to receive Him, He requests to go another time to those who had rejected Him. The Lord does not cease to offer opportunities to every soul, even though it had rejected Him before, so that it might find pleasure in Him...

\* Why did the Lord inform His disciples here about His destination. Note that He did not do so in any other instances. They were in great fear, therefore He notified them in advance to avoid confusing them should any surprises occur.<sup>2</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

**The disciples said to Him,  
“Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You  
And are You going there again?” [8]**

Just a few weeks ago the Jews wanted to stone Him in the temple during the Feast of Dedication (John 10:31).

\* They advised Him because they wanted to save the Lord from death. Yet, He had come to die in order to save them from death<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* They were concerned about His safety, but they were even more so about themselves. They were not perfect and it was on this account that Thomas was shaken with fear and said: ‘Let us also go, that we may die with Him’. This was because Thomas was the weakest and had the least faith than the others. Nevertheless, see how the Lord encouraged them by His words: “**Are there not twelve hours in the day?**” [9]<sup>4</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> Hom 62, PG 59:369

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:1

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 49:8

<sup>4</sup> Homilies on St John 62:1

**Jesus answered:**

**“Are there not twelve hours in the day?**

**If any walks in the day, he does not stumble,**

**Because he sees the light of this world’.** [9]

Our path is full of stumbling blocks. He who walks in the light does not stumble. However, those who remain in darkness will stumble. He on whom the sun of righteousness shines will be enlightened; and he will soar from glory to glory. Stumbling, blocks will appear trivial to such a person. Indeed these will be the cause of his victory and crown. As for those who follow the lusts of their bodies, the thoughts of the evil world, and the pride in his heart, these will continue to stumble. Moreover, they will present endless excuses.

The Lord did not fear death for He is the light before whom the powers of darkness will not be able to stand. In the same manner, all those who stay under His wings will walk fearlessly throughout his days of estrangement. They will walk free of fear, confusion and anxiety.

The Jews, like many other nations, used to divide the day from sunrise to sunset into 12 sections or hours that extend or decrease according to the different seasons in the year.

The journey from across the sky does not begin at night when man leaves the earth. It begins in the daytime when he is struggling through life; while he is confident that, through the grace of God, he is moving towards his eternity. God granted us the hours of the day as valuable opportunities to work. These are precious when we spend them appropriately, otherwise they become worthless.

\* The Lord indicates that He is the day. He has chosen 12 disciples and says: If I am the day and you are the hours, do the hours give advice to the day? The hours follow the day and not vice versa. He indicates that He is the spiritual day. May the hours listen to the Day, may they preach in the daytime for you become known and enlightened in the daytime. Through hourly preaching, the world gets to believe in the Day. He has summed it up in His brief words: “Follow Me, if you do not want to stumble”

**St. Augustine**

**“But if one walks in the night, he stumbles**

**Because the light is not in him’.** [10]

\* The Lord spoke these words to reveal that anyone, who feels there is no evil within him, will not be touched by any fearful matter. Conversely, those who do evil will be caught in it. Therefore we should not be afraid for we are doing nothing that deserves death. Or He could be saying that those who see the light of this world are safe. And if this is truly the case, then how much safer are those who are with Me and as long as they do not isolate themselves from Me?! The Lord encouraged His disciples by these words and added that the purpose of their trip to Judea was necessary for them since they had to go to Bethany and not to Jerusalem [11, 12]<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:1

**These things He said, after that He said to them:**

**“Our friend Lazarus sleeps,**

**But I go that I may wake him up”. [11]**

The Lord calls a believer **‘our friend’**. He did say ‘My friend’ for we have signed a covenant with God by which He has made us not only His friend, but a friend of the whole Church, since He is a member of that Church. The death of Lazarus did not mark the end of the friendship between Lazarus and the Lord and the whole Church. He remains a friend of the Lord and of the whole church throughout all ages.

\*It is as though He is saying: ‘This time I am going there with a different purpose. I was there earlier in order to discuss and struggle with the Jews. However, I am going this time in order to raise our friend, Lazarus’<sup>1</sup>.

St. John Chrysostom

The Lord speaks about death and calls it **‘sleep’**. Sleep indicates physical rest as it helps restore the energy of the body. Thus a person wakes up to start in new day fully active and energetic. This is true as well in the case of the sleep of death; for a believer, when he goes to sleep, rises up into a new life armed with new potentials in a new world.

\* Truly, it is not said about saints that they are dead, but rather that they are laying down or resting.<sup>2</sup>

St. Jerome

In the eyes of his sister, Lazarus was dead. However, in the Lord’s eyes, he was sleeping. He is dead in the eyes of mankind who are unable to bring him back to life; whereas the Lord can very easily raise him out of the grave and as though He is simply waking up Lazarus from his sleep. By His power, the Lord speaks with him as with someone who is asleep. Similarly the Holy Bible speaks to others as though they were asleep and who are most probably dead. In that context, the apostles says: “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope’ (1 Thes 4:13). That is why he also speaks about them as those laying down to rest. The Lord had informed them previously about His resurrection. In that manner, all the dead are resting or laying down - whether they are righteous or wicked<sup>3</sup>.

St. Augustine

**St. Augustine** believes that all the dead are more like people asleep. However, some may have happy dreams, while other have nightmares. Or they are like people in a temporary storage area. However, some - like Lazarus, the poor man - enjoying being in his father Abraham’s embrace; while the foolish rich man suffered great thirst and could not find anyone to grant him a drop of water ( Luke 16:19-31) Everyone will be called

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:1

<sup>2</sup> Against Vigiantius, 6

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate cf. 49:9

out to receive according to his deeds<sup>1</sup>.

\* You might be disturbed when you would be called a ‘widow’ only because you have lost a good husband. We agree with you that in this world there are few men who are as good as your man. Few are like him: loving, noble, humble, devoted, wise and pure.

Indeed, if he were completely destroyed and altogether beyond recovery, then this would be a great catastrophe and the cause of great sadness. However, what actually happened is that **your husband has sailed to a quiet harbor and has gone on a journey to God to whom he really belongs**. Therefore we should not mourn and instead rejoice.

**For this death is not death. Rather, it is a kind of migration and a transfer what is bad to what is better: from the earth to the heavens; from living among mankind to being with angels and archangels; even better for we will be with God who is Lord of the angels and archangels.**

When your husband lived, he served the emperor and he was surrounded by the dangers of the wicked and their tricks. Now, he has moved into the other world where nothing like it exists. Therefore as much as you are sad that God has taken such a good and honorable person, you need to rejoice **that he has gone to a more secure and honorable place and is relieved of all the dangers of the present life. Indeed, he is now safe and enjoying great peace.**

Surely, we do not need someone to inform us that heaven is much better than the earth. Therefore, why do we mourn when someone departs from this world to go to the other world?!

If your husband were one of those who lead shameful lives that displease God, you would be justified to mourn and weep. Indeed, you would be justified to do so even while he was here and alive. However, as much as he is among the friends of God we need to rejoice while he is alive as well as when he departs and lays down to rest.

We need to do so as the blessed apostle tells us: ‘having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better’ (Phil 1:23).<sup>2</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Then His disciples said, “Lord, if he sleeps he will get well’. [12]**

Sleep is often a good sign that a sick person is healing. That is true especially when it is a deep sleep. That is why when the Lord said that Lazarus was asleep, the disciples believed that it was no longer necessary for Him to go to Judea in order to heal him. They considered that he had begun to heal through that deep sleep. The disciples could not imagine they had to take a two or three day trip with the Lord and go to an area that had

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate cf. 49:9, 10

<sup>2</sup> Letter to a Young Widow, 3

resisted Him just to wake up a friend out of his sleep.

**‘However, Jesus spoke of his death,  
but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep’. [13]  
Then Jesus said to them plainly,  
“Lazarus is dead”. [14]**

\*The Lord used the word ‘sleep’ to underline that He rejected boastfulness. Then He added the word **‘dead’** when they did not understand!<sup>1</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe,  
nevertheless let us go to him’.[15]**

When Lazarus died and everyone had lost hope he would awake again, the Lord moved in their direction to proclaim that He is the hope of those who have no hope and that He is the helper of those who have no one to help them. When mankind says: ‘Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, we ourselves are cut off’ (Ezek 37:11); then Lord God says: ‘Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people and brought you up from your graves’.

\* Why does the Lord say **‘for your sakes’**? In order to avoid doubt or suspicious of deception, I am informing you in advance about the death of Lazarus. Do you notice how the disciples were not completely comfortable in their roles and how unaware they were of the power they had? This was due to the great fear that filled their hearts. Besides, they suffered much anxiety and difficulty within themselves. When the Lord said that Lazarus was ‘asleep’, He added ‘I go to wake him up’ as He did not wish to inform them about what He would do actually. The Lord constantly teaches us to avoid vain glory, and useless promises. However, He did that in the case of the centurion when the Lord told him; ‘go and I will heal him’ (Matt 8:7). This was because of the man’s great faith. If someone were to say: ‘how did the disciples think that Lazarus was asleep? How did they not understand that the Lord was speaking about death when He said: “I go that I may wake him up”. It is foolish to understand that the Lord would travel fifteen hundred *stadia* in order to wake Lazarus up. Our answer is that the disciples believed the Lord was speaking in the mysterious manner which He often used when He spoke to them<sup>2</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

The Lord did not say: ‘Let us go to console his sisters’. Rather, He said ‘let us go to him’. This is because death cannot separate the Lord Jesus Christ and His church from a departed one. Everyone would go to Him in love and meet with him as a living member in the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord said **‘let us go’** and not ‘I will go’. He intends to include the whole church to go with Him and meet with those who have rested in sleep.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:1

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:2

**‘Then Thomas, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples:  
“Let us also go,  
that we may die with Him” [16]**

**‘Thomas’** is the equivalent of the Greek word ‘Didymus’ which means ‘a twin’. The disciples were annoyed because of his words. It was hard to understand his intention—was he showing courage and therefore a disregard for death? He seemed to agree that they should all go with the Lord Jesus Christ and get exposed to the death awaiting Him. It was as though he were saying, like Ruth “where you die, I will die and there will I be buried” (Ruth 1:17). He preferred to be in the Lord’s company, even if that would cost him death; rather than live and not be in the company of the Lord. Or did he speak in this manner out of fear or as a kind of objection?

\* The disciples dreaded facing the Jews and Thomas was the most fearful. Therefore he said **‘Let us go that we may die with Him’**. In fact, he was the least determined and the least steadfast in his faith compared to the other disciples.

\* Some believe that he wanted to die (with the Lord Jesus Christ). Yet that was not the case as the words come from a person who was scared. However, the Lord did not reprimand him but rather supported him. Later on, Thomas became unvanquished and stronger than all the others. The amazing thing is that we see this weak person before the crucifixion took place. After the crucifixion and his belief in the Lord’s resurrection, he becomes more zealous than any other person. Great is the power of the Lord Jesus Christ! That same person who dared not go with the Lord to Bethany, is the same one who could not visibly see the Lord and yet traveled alone the whole world to witness for Him. With that mission, he lived among nations where killing was rampant, and where they sought to kill him<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

## **5. The Lord’s Journey to Lazarus’ family.**

**‘So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days’. [17]**

Other evangelists record some of the events that occurred during this journey towards Bethany. For example, the healing of the blind man in Jericho, the meeting with Zacchaeus and his conversion. Although the Lord loved Lazarus and his sisters and was on His way to raise him from the dead, yet, He did not dismiss the needs of others. Wherever He went, He made good deeds.

**St. Augustine** finds that the four days that elapsed with Lazarus in the tomb refer to human stages. The first day is the day Adam and Eve fell and sinned and so death reigned on Adam and all his children. The second day refers to mankind who have broken the natural law and testimony of God. The third day refers to breaking the Law of Moses. The final fourth stage refers to the period when the Gospel is being preached and the

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:2



Lord Jesus Christ has granted a new resurrected life to those who have died in sin<sup>1</sup>.

The Jews held a belief that the soul continues to roam around the body for three days after death; and that on the fourth day it departs having lost all hope of returning to the body again<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, on the fourth day all hope for the person to return to the world once is lost.

**‘Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away’ [18].**

The Lord Jesus Christ had done countless miracles in Galilee. From among all the miracles He did in Jerusalem, St John the Evangelist chooses to recount those with special significance to the people and leaders. For example, he recounts the healing of the paralyzed man at Bethesda who had been infirm for thirty eight (38) years; the healing of the man born blind; and the raising of Lazarus on the fourth day after his death.

Bethany is about two miles away from Jerusalem and the Jewish mile is equivalent to four and half kilometers.

\* The Evangelist intends to mention this to inform us that the village of Bethany is close to Jerusalem. Probably this would explain why so many people had gone there<sup>3</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary to comfort them concerning their brother’. [19]**

According to Jewish tradition, mourning lasted for about one month. The first three days were known as ‘days of mourning’; followed by seven days, known as ‘days of condolences’. During the days of mourning the members of the house did nothing and would not even return someone’s greeting. However, during the days of condolence they did nothing more than their needs: they slept on bedding laid out on the floor, they did not wear shoes, and neither washed nor used oil on their bodies. They covered their heads but did not read out of their law or Mishnah or Talmud. During the rest of the thirty days, they did not shave, wear white clothes or new ones; neither did they mend any damage in the clothes they wore to the funeral<sup>4</sup>.

The word **‘Jews’** is used in this Gospel to refer to the opponents of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why some scholars believe that these people, while opposing the Lord, felt the extent of this catastrophe and so came to Martha and Mary. They had not come for a brief visit. Indeed, they intended to stay with the family of the departed one for two or three days. This was observed especially when the departed was the head of the household.

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate cf 49:12

<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, p. 409

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:2

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Adam Smith Comm. On John

\* How could they comfort the sisters when they knew that the Lord loved them? Had not the Jews declared that anyone who confessed that this person was the Messiah would be banished from the Sanhedrin? Our answer is: they offered condolences either on account of their loss or because the sisters were respected and were more honorable than others. Or it could be that those who had come were not evil since many of them had believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him, but Mary was sitting in the house’. [20]**

It seems that Martha was eagerly awaiting the Lord’s arrival. She needed Him to comfort her and her sister. Upon hearing that He was on the way to the house, she abandoned all decorum and traditions of mourning as well as the mourners who were visiting her; and hurried to meet the Lord. She left the house as well as the village and met Him outside. As for Mary, she remained in the house- probably her sorrow prevented her from moving quickly; or it could be that she had not heard of the Lord’s arrival.

Some scholars believe that Martha was the older one who managed the house (Luke 10:40).

\* If we were to say: What was Martha’s intention when she left without her sister and went to meet the Lord? Our answer would be: She wanted to speak to Him privately and inform Him of what had taken place. However, when He revealed great hope, she went and called Mary. At that time, Mary was suffering the deepest degrees of sorrow.

Do you not see how great her love was?

This is the Mary of whom the Lord had said: “Mary has chosen that good part” (Luke 10:42)

Someone may say: ‘How did Martha appear more fervent than her?’ She might have appeared as such, but she was not actually. For Mary had not yet heard of His arrival. Indeed Martha was weaker; when she had listened to the Lord’s words, she spoke like a child who was learning to walk: ‘Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days’ [39]. In contrast, Mary immediately believed, and did not speak as Martha, although she had not heard the Lord’s words of hope<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Then Martha said to Jesus: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died”. [21]**

Martha’s words are the same ones Mary said later on. This indicates that they had not yet fully comprehended the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ. They had not yet realized that He is present everywhere. They believed that His presence could have prevented

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:3

death from touching their brother. Moreover, they trusted His tenderness and gentleness compassion. Yet, their faith was as a shaking reed which the Lord would support and strengthen rather than break it.

**“But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You”. [22]**

Martha blamed herself and corrected her words with the Lord Jesus Christ. She believed that if the Lord asked of His Father anything -her brother’s resurrection- even though her brother had died- His request would be answered. She dared not ask Him to resurrect her brother. However, she asked for that indirectly and left it up to Him to decide whether to raise Lazarus or not.

She believed that if the Lord prayed God for anything, He would get it. However, she did not realize that He was Life and that He possessed life in Himself: what He did was done through His own power for He is One with the Father.

\* Do you see their heavenly wisdom (Mary and Martha)? Even though their resolve was weak, yet they did not collapse into wailing when they saw the Lord. They did not indulge in excessive sorrowful expressions of mourning, such as we would if we saw a number of our acquaintances entering our home in such a situation. The sisters considered the Lord Jesus Christ to be a Teacher and so they believed in Him. However, they did not comprehend the extent of His sublime honor and power. This is evident in Martha’s words: **“I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You”**. The sisters spoke to the Lord as they would to someone who is steadfast in virtue and therefore all his prayers would be answered<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Jesus said to her: your brother will rise again.’[23]**

The Lord’s response to Martha reveals deep humility and compassion, for He tells her: **“Your brother will rise again” [23]**

\* In this manner, the Lord dismisses her words **‘whatever you ask’ [22]**, for He did not say ‘I ask’. What did He say? **“Your brother will rise again”**. He could have said: “Woman, you continue to look down below. I do not need help from anyone, for I do everything by my own power”. However, this would have been a serious stumbling block to her. By saying **“Your brother will rise again”**, the Lord spoke as one who chose to speak in a moderate tone<sup>2</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Martha said to Him,  
“I know that he will rise again in the resurrection the last day” [24]**

The subject of the resurrection from the dead was deeply rooted in the minds of

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 62;3

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John, 62;3

the Jews. Only the Sadducees rejected it. The holy books that were written after the exile were full of teachings about that subject (2 Kings 7:9, 14, 23, 36; 12:43; 14:46; Eccl 5:1-7, 17; 6:6, 7). Jewish writings such as those by the historian Josephus and other translations speak about that.

**‘Jesus said to her,**

**“I am the resurrection and the life.**

**He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live”.** [25]

\* By these words, the Lord revealed His authority. He revealed that He did not need anyone to help Him since He Himself is the life. Had He been in need of someone else, how could He have been the resurrection and the life? In spite of that, the Lord implied this in His words rather than declaring it openly<sup>1</sup>.

\* He demonstrated that He is the giver of all goodness, and that it is appropriate to ask of Him<sup>2</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“And whoever lives and believes in Me**

**Shall never die.**

**Do you believe this?”**[26]

It is as though the Lord was telling her: ‘You say that your brother will arise on the Day of Judgment. Who will raise him up other than Me who grants resurrection and am the source of life? Since I have authority to raise him on the last day, would it be hard for me to raise him now? In this manner, the Lord Jesus Christ opened the door of hope before her. He supported her faith and revealed Himself to her. He is not merely a person. Rather, He is the giver of life and of the whole of existence.

Everyone who believes, even though he dies according to the flesh, will arise and fully enjoy fellowship in His glory. He will no longer die after the death of the body; but will appear in a glorified body with the soul. The believer will thus practice the resurrected life forever. The Lord does not say that the believer will not go through the gate we call death. Rather, He states that the life He grants continues through death: Death cannot delete the life that the Lord Jesus Christ has granted to us.

\* Note how the Lord uplifts Martha’s mind. It was not His intention to just raise Lazarus; for He wanted Martha and all those present to learn of this resurrection. That is why He spoke these words before He raise up Lazarus<sup>3</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

The Lord asked Martha **“Do you believe this?”** It is as though He were asking her to have the kind of faith that defies nature and death. Her answer came with steadfastness and firmness- there was no hesitation and conveyed affirmation.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:3

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:3

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St John, 62:3

**She said to Him, “Yes Lord,  
I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world”. [27]**

Martha declared her confession of faith with all due sincerity: **“You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world”, [27]**. This is the same confession of faith that the apostle Peter declared and for which the Lord praised him (Matt 16:16-17). Her confession of faith includes three main issues:

- Jesus is the Messiah, the One the fathers and the prophets awaited. During the 1<sup>st</sup> century, many of the Jews awaited His coming eagerly.
- He is the natural Son of God (Ps 2:7)
- He came into the world to form it into His holy church: this would include all peoples and not the Jews only.

Since He is the Messiah and Savior of the world and the natural Son of God who had descended to the world to raise it, then He is definitely the life and the Resurrection.

\* The Lord certainly raised her humble opinion of Him so that she would not consider Him to be just someone in the crowd. She did not call Him Lord unknowingly, for she did so to restore the honor due to Him. She spoke these words to honor Him and this is revealed again in the words she spoke later on. She neither laughed nor joked and had no doubts at any point<sup>1</sup>.

\* It seems to us that the woman did not understand the Lord’s words. Even though she realized their gravity, yet she did not fully comprehend them. That is why she gave a different response to the question she had been asked<sup>2</sup>.

\* She did not say: ‘Raise my brother’. Rather, she said: **“I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world”**.

St. John Chrysostom

**‘And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called her sister, saying:  
‘The Teacher has come,  
And is calling for you”. [28]**

Martha did not wait to hear praise on account of her faith. However, she gained new concepts through this meeting with the Lord. In a short while, she had gained a new experience. She then went to call her sister so that she might share the pleasure she had received. The Lord had asked about Mary as she had not come with her sister. Martha called her secretly because she was surrounded by many mourners. Maybe some of them- men or women- were opposed to the Lord and could not tolerate Him. Martha feared her invitation might cause a disturbance that would prevent Mary from coming out quickly to

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 62.PG 59:181

<sup>2</sup> Hom 62. PG 59:372

meet with the Lord and enjoy His comforting presence.

We make the following observations about her secret conversation with her sister concerning the Lord's arrival:

**First:** She called Him **'Teacher'**/ *Didaskalos*. His consolation does not involve more emotions. Rather, He reveals love, tenderness and unique facts of faith. He is able to attract His beloved disciples and friends to divine consolation.

**Second: 'He has come':** The One whom we have been awaiting for so long, and whom we often have prayed for His coming.

**Third: "He is calling for you":** for He has inquired about you by name. This is because He cares for you and seeks your peace and desires to console your heart.

**'As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly  
And came to Him'. [29]**

Upon hearing the Lord's call from her sister's lips, **'she arose quickly and came to Him.'** **St. John Chrysostom** comments on this noble behavior and credits her for behaving with true philosophy- in other words, with the wisdom that does not seek trivial, unprofitable matters; but rather, that which is truly for her good. On account of her wisdom, she was blessed. Who would imagine that a woman who had lost her brother a few days earlier, and was surrounded by many mourners, who were wailing and weeping, would hurry out at once? Upon hearing about the Lord, she does not wait for Him to come to her and console her? Rather, she ran outside the village to meet the Lord; while the woman around her imagined that she was going to the tomb to weep over her brother!

How badly is our need to divert our eyes from the bitterness that enfolds us in the midst of our tears and trials. We need not be concerned about the burdensome mourners who are unable to offer true peace. Indeed, we need to let our inner depths hurry towards the One who comes to us and fills us with His heavenly consolation. Let us truly avoid all formalities, so that we may lift our hearts with the Holy Spirit of God to our Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is the Healer of our souls and bodies. He is the One who grants life and resurrection. He is the Almighty who constantly initiates love.

How much does the soul need to depart from the midst of the valley of tears, leave all the problems which destroy her and ignore every human comment. The soul needs to do so in order to get away and move in hope towards the One who alone is able to transform her through His Holy Spirit, satisfy her, and raise her to everlasting life!

The constant preoccupation with our sorrows results in a depression that is far more bitter than actual sorrows themselves. In contrast, meeting with the Lord Jesus Christ grants us the gladness of the resurrected life and its constant rejoicing.

\* Note, for example, how this woman received her reward through her genuinely wise behavior. When there were all those women sitting around her, when she was weeping and sorrowful; yet she did not wait and expect that the Lord should come to her. Neither did she ask for what seemed to be her right (for sorrowful women are handicapped by this

epidemic which is that they exaggerate their condition besides they're actual misery). As for Martha, she did not behave that way and as soon as she heard, she rose quickly and ran to Him<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Now Jesus had not yet come into the town,  
But was in the place where Martha met Him’. [30]**

With divine wisdom, the Lord Jesus Christ moved exceedingly slowly in order to give Martha the opportunity to hurry and call her sister. He also gives Mary the chance to hurry and come to Him. They would then go together with Him to the tomb where He would transform their sorrow into sublime joy. In the same manner, the Lord seems to be slow in solving our problems although He seeks our happiness. He wishes to give us the opportunity to turn to Him and express our inner most thoughts with living faith and steadfast hope. Then we may hurry to Him to discover His sublime and hidden divine plan for us.

\* St. John reports that the Lord Jesus Christ **‘had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him’**. He was walking slowly so that no one would think that He was propelling Himself to do a miracle. Rather, He was waiting until they would ask Him for that.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Then the Jews who were with her in the house, comforting her,  
When they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out,  
Followed her, saying,  
“She is going to the tomb to weep there”. [31]**

Martha called her sister secretly, informed her that the Lord had asked about her [28], she pulled her away from her weeping and away from the mourners, and made her hurry towards the Lord. In this manner, Mary, by her quiet movements, attracted all those who were with her in the house even though they did not know where they were going. Her love to the Savior, which she demonstrated in a practical way, attracted many to come into contact to see the One who raises the dead.

\* She did not go alone, but rather attracted the Jews who were in her house. With great wisdom, Mary called her sister secretly to avoid disturbing those who were gathered in her home. She did not indicate the reason for her conversation. Surely they would have returned to their homes had they overheard. However, now that she went out crying, they followed her. Probably, this would have confirmed the death of Lazarus<sup>2</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Then, when Mary came where Jesus was and saw Him,**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 63:1

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John, 63:1

**She fell at His feet, saying to Him,**

**“Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died”. [32]**

The Lord did not enter the village, or the home of Lazarus and his sisters. He only met the sisters and then went with the crowd to the tomb. He Loves His work, and He had come to go to the tomb where He would fulfill His task without delay.

\* This Mary was more eager than her sister, Martha. She was neither embarrassed before the crowd, nor of the suspicions which took hold of many concerning the Lord. Many among the mourners were His enemies and these said: **“Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?”** However, when the Master came, she banished all deadly thoughts, and resolved with a strong will to honor the Teacher<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

## **6- Raising Lazarus from the Dead**

**‘Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping**

**And the Jews who came with her weeping,**

**He groaned in the spirit and was troubled’. [33]**

This situation reveals that the Lord Jesus Christ has indeed become a person with human emotions. He empathizes with those suffering and weeps with those weeping: He is a Man of sorrows (Is 53:3). He was never seen laughing, but he was seen weeping in more than one situation

\* The Lord said nothing to Mary. He did not utter the words He had said to her sister, Martha due to the big crowd who was present. It was not the time to say anything; yet He revealed His human nature humbly for He did not desire them to imagine that He was more than that.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* You may become troubled involuntarily, whereas the Lord Jesus Christ chose to be troubled voluntarily.

The Lord Jesus Christ became hungry. However, this is only because He wanted it to be so.

He was sad. This is a fact; yet it was as He willed it to be. He has the power to be one or the other; to be moved or to be unmoved. That is because the Word had taken on a soul and body. Therefore He carried in Him the same human nature yet this was united with the holy Word and at one with the Lord, Jesus Christ. In this manner, the Word who possesses sublime power, uses weakness at His will- therefore He was **‘troubled’<sup>2</sup>**.

**St. Augustine**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 63:1

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine; On the Gospel of St John, tractate 49:18



**And He said: “Where have you laid him?”  
They said to Him, “Lord, come and see”. [34]**

\* If you were to ask: Why did the Lord ask this question? Our answer would be: He did not wish to make the first move. He wanted to know from them what had happened and to pray Him to make a miracle. This was because He wanted to clear the miracle of all false claims.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord Jesus Christ will come to your tomb. He may find Martha, the woman who offers righteous services and Mary who sincerely holds the word of God. Mary is like the holy church of God that has chosen the good path. They wept and He tenderly shared their grief.

When you will die, the Lord will find many weeping. He will say: “Where have you laid her/ him?” In other words: at what point is she/ he condemned?

What is her/ his rank among the repentant?

I wish to see the one over whom you are weeping, so that I may be moved by his tears. I will find out if he actually has died of sin; then I will treat him with forgiveness.

The people tell Him: **“Come and see”**.

What does ‘come’ mean? That the remission of sins may come, may life and resurrection be granted to the departed one... May Your kingdom come to this sinner as well<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* How amazing! The One who came to raise Lazarus from the dead appears not to know where he had been buried, and He asks **“Where have you laid him?” [34]**. Many of the fathers correctly comment that God, who knows all things, appears as someone who does not know the place of darkness. Neither does He know evil nor evil ones. Accordingly, when Adam sinned in Paradise, God asked: ‘Where are you? (Gen 3: 9). On judgment day, God will tell the wicked: ‘I do not know you’ (Matt 7:23). In this passage too, the Lord asks **“Where have you laid him?”**

\* I do not see you in My light and in the righteousness which I know<sup>2</sup>.

\* What does “see” convey? Be patient: for the Lord perceives and is moved. That is why we ask Him to ‘look at our humility and pain and to Him forgive us our sins’ (Matt 9:13)<sup>3</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**‘Jesus wept’. [35]**

In the Greek version, the verb ‘wept’, used in this passage, is used in a form that is different to the form used to describe the weeping of Mary when she was surrounded

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<sup>1</sup> Concerning Repentance 2:7:54-55

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 49:20

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 49:20

by mourners. Here, it does not convey the loud wailing like them. Rather, it conveys that tears ran down His face. It is just a practical testimony to His deep feelings before the crowds; conveys how He shared the pain of the sorrowful who had not yet learned how to deal with death. The crowds saw in the Lord's tears a living testimony of how much the loved Lazarus [36].

**St. John Chrysostom** observes that every thing the Lord did was intended, by His divine wisdom, so that the crowds would benefit as a result of the miracle. On the one hand, he did not tell Mary, who was surrounded by the crowds, what He had told Martha when He met her alone earlier. He had spoken then about raising Lazarus. The crowds heard Him - many of them were hostile towards Him- they would have left and returned to Jerusalem and would have missed the resurrection of Lazarus. On the other hand, He confirmed His humanity in these moments so that the crowds would not resent any words regarding His divinity.

He wept silently. He was troubled and then took a deep breath as someone trying to control His agitation. He asked about the spot where the tomb was.... All this aroused questions in the mind of the Jews. They wished to know what He would do without resenting Him.

\* What did the Lord Jesus Christ do? He did not enter into any form of dialogue with Mary at that time. He did not tell her what He had said to her sister as it was not convenient as there was a crowd. All His acts were measured and done with great humility in order to confirm His human nature. He wept silently and delayed the miracle at that time. It was going to be a great miracle and He was about to make a serious act that would lead many to believe. He did not want to do in the absence of the crowds for then they would find it hard to believe. They would stumble and not benefit by its greatness. He acted in a manner that would not make Him lose His catch. Therefore, He provided many proofs to testify to His humility and confirm His humanity. He wept and was troubled. Normally, sorrow arouses feelings and when He groaned in the spirit- in other words, He controlled His agitation and asked: **"Where have you laid him?"[34]**<sup>1</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord wept for Lazarus whom He would raise from the dead. He undoubtedly set an example to be like Him and to weep over our dead ones. It is true that He did not give us a commandment to do so; besides we have been granted the faith that they would rise up again to eternal life. In the Book of Wisdom, we are told to weep over the dead as one would who has suffered from great harm. However, we are then advised to be comforted as sorrow may lead to death and a sad heart may deplete strength (Sirach 38: 16- 19)<sup>2</sup>.

**St Augustine**

\* To reveal that He has true human feelings, the Lord mourned for the one whom He would raise from the dead<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 63:1

<sup>2</sup> Letters, 263

<sup>3</sup> Letter 60:7

**‘Then the Jews said:  
“See how He loved him!”[36]**

When the Jews saw the tears of the Lord, they said: **“See how He loved Him.”[36]**. We too, when we see His Blood dripping from His body on the cross, we worship Him and say: “See how He loves us!”

\* Do you notice how the Lord showed no sign that He would raise Lazarus? He went, not as someone who would raise Lazarus, but rather as one who would mourn over him. That is how the Jews thought that the Lord was going in order to mourn and not to raise him. This is apparent from their words: **“See how He loved him” [36]**.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘And some said,  
“Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?” [37]**

In their ignorance, they imagined that the Lord’s tears indicated disability and incapacity to act. They did not realize that these were tears of love and compassion. Besides, just healing him, they could not understand that He could still raise Lazarus from the dead even after his body had decayed.

\* The Jews in this passage admit that the Lord had opened the blind man’s eyes. However, they denied His power to bring Lazarus back to life.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself,  
Came to the tomb.  
It was a cave  
And a stone lay against it.’ [38]**

It should not be understood that when the Lord was troubled He had lost His inner peace. Just as He had descended to take the form of man and live among us as a full and real human being, He voluntarily allowed Himself to feel agitated in order to empathize with the troubled and consequently carry them into His divine peace.

**Jesus said:  
“Take away the stone”.  
Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him:  
“Lord, by this time there is stench,  
For he has been dead four days” [39]**

The Lord ordered them to lift the stone so that all the bystanders would see the dead body lying in the grave. They would also smell the door and so be assured that he had decayed. Then when Lazarus would walk out of the grave, they would not imagine him to be a phantom but that it was his body indeed.

Martha's objection probably came after they had started moving the stone and she had smelled the odor.

\*Why did the Lord not call Lazarus while He was farther away from the tomb, and then bring him afterwards before their eyes? Or rather, why did the Lord not raise Lazarus while the stone still sealed the tomb? The Lord is He who can, with His words, move the body and reveal it in full life once more. Would it have been too hard for Him to roll the stone just with His word?

The One who has the power, with His words, to make him, who was bound and wrapped in grave clothes, to walk... would it have been hard for Him to make the stone move?

So why did He not do so?

In order to make them witnesses of the miracle. Consequently, they would be unable to repeat what they said concerning the miracle of the man born blind: "It is he"; "It is not he". Now their hands and their presence at the grave are truly a witness that this is the person who had died.

If they had not come, it would have appeared as a vision or that this was a person replacing the other one.

Now, they had come to the spot, raised the stone and had heard the command to untie the dead who was bound in grave clothes. The dear ones who had carried him to the tomb knew from the grave clothes who this was. The sisters did not stay behind (away from the crowds), and one of them said: "**There is a stench, for he has been dead four days**" [39]. We believe that all these matters were sufficient to silence those with wicked tendencies for they had become witnesses of the miracle<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord will come and order that the stone which has fallen on the sinner's shoulders be lifted away.

He could have moved the stone with a single order; for even mute nature wishes to obey the Lord's orders.

He could have moved away the stone covering the tomb by the power of His silent work. Remember that at the peak of His sufferings many stones moved from over the tombs of the dead and suddenly they became opened.

However, He ordered the men to remove the stone from over the tomb of Lazarus so that unbelievers would believe what they saw as they watched the dead man raised up.

Besides, this miracle carries a symbol that grants us the power to alleviate the burden of sin and the heavy pressure it exerts on the culprit. We have to do our share in moving the burdens, while He resurrects and delivers from the graves those who liberate themselves of their bonds<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* The statement: "**He has been dead four days**" truly refers to a condition of the soul that progressively occurs over four stages:

First state: as though a lustful provocation within the heart.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 63:2

<sup>2</sup> Concerning Repentance, Book 2:7:56

Second: acceptance

Third: transforming it into an act.

Fourth: transformation into a habit.

Some people shake off wicked matters and cast them out of their mind as though they found no pleasure in them. Others find pleasure even though they do not find them acceptable. In this case death does not set in, yet it institutes a certain beginning. Besides the sense of pleasure, there is an added sense of compliance. Condemnation of the person instantly occurs then.

Have complied, the sense of agreement progresses and gets transformed into apparent deed.

And deeds get transformed into habits. This leads to a kind of frustration to the extent of being described as **“having a stench for he has been dead four days”**. That is why the Lord came and with Him all things are feasible. In this case, however, there seemed to be a problem. He was troubled in the spirit and revealed the need for great and loud objection in order to resurrect those who had become cruel out of habit. Yet, at the Lord’s cry the bonds of necessity exploded. The forces of hell were terrified and Lazarus returned to life once more. Truly, the Lord rescues even the one who had been dead four days and saves him from wicked habits. Only to the Lord does he appear to be asleep; and he is the one the Lord desires to resurrect<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* Even if you were lying in your grave, the Lord raises you up, even though your body has decayed!<sup>2</sup>

**St. Jerome**

**The Scholar Origen** believes that when the Lord Jesus Christ issued the order to **“take away the stone”**, Martha delayed the execution by her words: **“Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days”** [39]. After that, they lifted it away.

These moments- between the order and the delay, convey a sort of lack of faith. The words: **‘...if you would believe you would see the glory of God’** were not fulfilled. **Moments of delay are moments of lack of faith and rebellion**

\* We need to believe that the period of delay in executing a command constitutes a time of rebellion for the person who executes the command later on... Therefore, we need to remember the words: “Come back to the Lord quickly. Don’t think you can keep putting it off”, (Sirach 5:7); and the saying: ‘Do not say to your neighbor, go and come back and tomorrow I will give it, when you have it with you’ (Pro 3:28). We have to consider that Martha was guilty and that the words **‘Then they took the stone from the place’** were added later on. These should have been written immediately after the words: **‘Jesus said, “Take away the stone.”’**<sup>3</sup>

**Origen the Scholar**

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 48:6

<sup>2</sup> Letter 147:9

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on John, Book 28:19 -22

\* The Lord said: **“Take away the stone”** [39]. Take away the burden of the law and preach grace: “for if there had been a law given which could have given life truly righteousness would have been by the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” (Gal 3:21-22). Hence ‘take away the stone’<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**‘Jesus said to her:**

**“Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?”[40]**

\* Truly, faith is a great blessing! It works great deeds for those who adhere to truth as they enjoy many blessings.

Through faith, people can perform acts in the name of God. The Lord Jesus Christ aptly said: “ if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, move from here to there, and it will move” (Matt 17:20). Again, He says: “... he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also, and greater works than these...” (John 14:12). What does the Lord mean by “greater works than these? The reference is to the deeds done by the disciples, such as the mere shadow of Peter that raised a dead man. In this respect, it revealed more effectively the Lord’s power. It is less astonishing that while He was alive the Lord did miracles than that after His death others could- in His name- do greater works than His. This is an irresistible proof of the resurrection. For people to believe in the resurrection because they had seen in happening is one thing- even though some could claim it is a vision. It is another matter to see miracles happen by merely calling the Lord’s name - that is greater than His deeds when He lived among men. It is impossible to disbelieve in such a case, unless a person is devoid of feelings.

Hence faith is a great blessing when it is the product of sensitive feelings, great love and a fervent soul.

Indeed, faith makes us wise. It hides our human debasement and discards our excuses. It lends us philosophy (or wisdom) concerning heavenly matters. In other words, it explains the matters which human wisdom cannot discover. Faith can fully and successfully comprehend heavenly matters.

Therefore, let us adhere with faith and let us cease depending on presenting excuses for ourselves<sup>2</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying.**

**And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said:**

**“Father, I thank You that You have heard Me”. [41]**

These are awesome moments, when the stone is moved away and the body is revealed as the terrible stench fills the air. At the same time, the Lord is standing there and addressing the Father, thanking Him for answering. On the one hand, the Lord is

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 49:22

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John, 63:3

confirming His relationship with the Father. In this manner, He confirms His divinity to those present; not that He is Beelzebub, head of devils, who exorcised devils according to the claims of some leaders. On the other hands, He was setting an example to the bystanders.

\* Once more and as always, we comment that the Lord did not seek own to be honored as much as He desired our salvation. **He was not concerned with presenting sublime heavenly statements. Rather, He sought to say what would attract us to Him.** This explains why His sublime powerful statements were scarce and indirect in contrast to His many humble, lengthy sayings and discourses.

He did not utter sublime divine statements to ensure that this would not be a stumbling block or destructive to those who would come after Him. However, the Lord did not refrain completely from uttering such statements completely so that those living in His time would not stumble too. Indeed, those who crossover from debasement to perfection could benefit from sublime individual teachings to become fully knowledgeable. As for those with weak minds, if they could not constantly hear words uttered at a lower level, they would not ever come to the Lord.

In fact, after the Lord had spoken sublime words such as these, the Jews wanted to stone, persecute, and kill Him for they considered Him guilty of blasphemy... when He equated Himself to God, they said: “This Man blasphemes!” (Matt 9:3). And when the Lord said: “your sins are forgiven” (10:20), they called Him a demon. When He preached that anyone who hears His words becomes stronger than death (John 8:51) and that “the Father is in Me and I in Him” (John 10:38) they abandoned Him. On another occasion, they resisted Him when He said that He had come down from heaven (John 6:33, 60)

Now, the Jews could not tolerate such sublime teachings even though the Lord labored rarely presented complicated issues. Had the Lord’s teachings been loaded with sublime teachings constantly, would they have come and listened to Him?

Consequently, He said: ‘...just as the Father has told Me, so I speak’ (John 12:50), and ‘... I have not come of Myself’ (John 7:28). Then they believed.

Clearly, they believed and as the Evangelist reports: ‘As He spoke these words, many believed in Him’ (John 8:30). Therefore if simple, humble teachings do work and attract people to have faith while sublime words scare them away, then the Lord used simple means to reach His hearers<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* For our own good, the Lord offered thanks. He intended us not to identify the Father and the Son as one icon and as a result of their mutual involvement in one and the same act. Indeed, He intended to reveal that it was not obligatory for someone deprived of authority to repay His blessings. On the contrary, because He is the Son of God who claims He always possesses divine power. He could cry out **“Lazarus, come forth”!** This is definitely an order and not a prayer<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 64:1

<sup>2</sup> Of the Christian Faith:4:6:72

\* He prays as the Son of Man, and orders as the Son of God.<sup>1</sup>

**St Ambrose**

\* When someone lifts his eyes towards the heavens, he should do so respectfully. He should also raise sanctified hands especially when offering prayers, without 'wrath and doubting'. (1 Tim 2:8). As a person raises his eyes in meditation and thought and as the hands are lifted to achieve work, the soul is lifted up and is glorified. This is similar to Moses who lifted his hands up (Ex 17:11), and when a person prays: 'Let... the lifting up of my hands (be) as the evening sacrifice' (Ps 141:2). As a result, intangible enemies are overcome, while Israelite thoughts (having a vision of God) that are within us become victorious<sup>2</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

**"And I know that You always hear Me,  
But because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that  
You sent Me". [42]**

Here, the Lord clarifies that the relationship between the Father and Son does not require such a prayer. It is intended for those present who need to believe that the Lord has a relationship with the heavens.

\* To 'hear' does not imply 'obedience'. Rather, this is an eternal union. In the same manner, the Holy Spirit is said to listen to the Father and glorifies the Son. The Spirit glorifies as He has taught us that the Son is the image of the intangible God (Col 1:15), the brightness of His glory, the upholder of His power (Heb 1:3)<sup>3</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

\* How would the Lord be more powerful than His disciples if He worked miracles through prayer?

It is appropriate to say that they did miracles through prayer. Indeed, they often did miracles without prayer as they just used His Holy Name. Now, since His name carried that much power, and then He needed to pray, then His name would have had no effect. And what prayer did the Lord need when He created mankind?

The Lord's equality to the Father is apparent in many instances. He said: "Let us make man in Our image". (Gen 1:26). What could be weaker had He needed prayer?

Let us study His prayer: **"Father, I thank You that You have heard Me."** Who prayed these words at any on time? Before saying anything, He said **"I thank You"**: the Lord underlined that He does not need to pray as He says: "that You have heard Me". This indicates that he does not lack power, but rather that He and the Father possess one and the same power.

If you said: why do his words take the shape of a prayer? Our response would be: hear the answer from Him and not from me - as He says: **"... because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me"**. The Lord gives the real reason for His prayer. He does not want people to suspect that He is opposed to

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<sup>1</sup> Of the Christian Faith:3:4:32

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on St John, Book 28: 36-37

<sup>3</sup> Of the Holy Spirit, Book 2 :12:137-138



God, or to say that He does not come from God<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“Now when He had said these things, he cried with a loud voice,  
“Lazarus, come forth!” [43]**

The Lord could have raise Lazarus, His dear friend, with a soft whisper or even silently. However, he shouted with a great voice and called His loved one: **“Lazarus, come forth”**. He did that so that those present become convinced that the Lord has raised him through His own personal power. He did not use another person’s name, but rather gave an order and the dead arose. Probably, the Lord shouted out loud so that those present would realize that the soul of Lazarus was not inside the tomb. Rather, the Lord was calling the soul to come out of hell and out of a seemingly very distant place. Moreover, He wanted them to realize that He is the One who tells Isaiah the prophet: “I am the Lord, there is no other. I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: (Is 45:18).

The Lord spoke to make us realize that He is the One who will come on the last day and speak. Then the dead will hear His voice and come to life (John 5:25).

The Lord called him by his name ‘Lazarus’ as though awakening him from a deep sleep. God told Moses that He knew him by name. This was a sign of personal concern and interest. He did not say to him ‘get up’ but rather said ‘come forth’. The presence of the Lord, the Giver of life, offered him life, but the order was given to him to move.

\* Why did He shout out loud as though He did not wish to act in the Spirit and command silently? He wanted to reveal the implication of the words: ‘...in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet... the dead will be raised incorruptible’ (1 Cor 15:52). Raising the voice is the response to the sound of the trumpet. He shouted **“Lazarus, come forth”**. Why did the Lord use the name but for the purpose of removing all doubt that it is Lazarus who was raised and not any other person, on that the act of resurrection occurred accidentally and not by His order.<sup>2</sup>

**St. Ambrose**

\* The Lord Jesus Christ did not tell Lazarus: “In the name of My Father come forth”. Neither did He say: “O Father, resurrect him”. Why did He not use such expressions though He seemed to pray and had already demonstrated His independent authority? This is again an aspect of His wisdom, His words revealed His humility and His deeds revealed His power... they could bring no charge against Him other than He did not come from God. They deceived many by this accusation. Therefore He confirmed by His words and by many examples due to their weakness He provided evidence and many teachings to underline this point. He could have used his power in many other ways to reveal how He was in harmony with the Father and at the same time possessed intrinsic honor. However, the crowds had not attained that level of understanding yet<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 64:2

<sup>2</sup> On Belief on the Resurrection: 2:27

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St John, 64:2

\* The Lord did not say ‘Arise’. Rather, He said: **“Come forth”** as He spoke to the dead one as though he were alive. So who could equal this authority?

Had He done that without possessing power, what would have made Him more significant than the disciples who said: “Why do you look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?” (Act 3:12)

Had the Lord not used His power and not said anything more than what the disciples had said about themselves, then the disciples would have really appeared to be wiser than Him as they rejected praise and glory. In another context, they report why they did so. “We are also men with the same nature as you...” (Acts 14:15). They said these words because they did nothing out of their won power and they wanted people to realize and admit that as well. As for the Lord, when they applied this principle to Him, was it not necessary to dismiss such doubts by using His authority in this situation?

However, the Lord did exactly the opposite of that as He said: **‘...because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe’, [42]...** therefore they may believe that I do not need to pray (to ask)<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Now, what is the purpose of saying **“Come forth”** other than to reveal that which is hidden?

He who confesses is empowered to come forth.

To **‘come forth’** would have been impossible if he was not alive and he would not be alive if he had not risen again. Therefore, through confession a person comes to understand himself and glorifies God<sup>2</sup>.

\* Contemplate the condition of Lazarus: he came out but he was all bound with grave clothes. He was truly alive through confession yet he had not become liberated...he was bound up as he was still tied in the cloth. What does the church do in conformity with the words spoken to her ‘what you loosen will be forgiven’? This is exactly what the Lord told His disciples to do in this context: **“let him loose him and let him go”**<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* Do you need a stronger evidence that the faith of others can save someone else? Lazarus had been dead and several days had gone by: his muscles had deteriorated and his body had actually decayed. How could someone who had been dead for four days have faith and personally pray to the Lord?

Nevertheless, what the dead one lacked was available in his two real sisters. When the Lord came, one sister worshipped Him; and when He asked: “where have you laid him?” She answered: **“Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days”**. The Lord answered: **“If you would believe you would see the glory of God”**. It is as though He were telling her: ‘have faith which can resurrect the dead body’.

The sisters had such strong faith that it retrieved the dead from the gates of hell.

If mankind could have such faith and are willing to vouch for one another, then it is possible for the dead to rise again. Would it not be of greater benefit to yourself if you had that pure faith?

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 64:3

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 17:2

<sup>3</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 17:3

Indeed, even if you were an unbeliever or had little faith, the Lord and Lover of mankind would be merciful to you when you repent.

On your part, it is appropriate to have a sincere set of mind and say: ‘I believe Lord, help my unbelief’ (Mark 9:24). You need to pray like the apostles: “Lord, increase our faith”. Hence if you have a little faith, you will receive a greater share from God<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* Note that ‘the Lord gives freedom to the prisoners’ (Ps 14:6-7) and grants peace to those of a humble spirit and who humble at His word (Is 66:2). He may be calling me as I lay in the grave of sin: **“Jerome, come forth”**<sup>2</sup>.

\* As I am still lying in the grave of my sins, bound up with the strings of my wickedness, I await the order of the Lord according to the Gospel: **“Jerome, come forth”**<sup>3</sup>

**St. Jerome**

\* O you who rests in the darkness of the conscience, in the corruption of your sins, as someone imprisoned for a crime, come forth. Admit your sins so that you may be vindicated for ‘with the mouth confession is made to salvation’ (Rom 10:10). If you acknowledge the Lord’s invitation, the bars will be broken and the chains will be loosened. Indeed, the dangerous physical decay and stench will be removed<sup>4</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

**‘And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes,  
His face was wrapped with a cloth.**

**Jesus said to them: “Loose him and let him go”. [44]**

How did Lazarus come out though he was bound hand and foot? He came out as someone limping or crawling and he needed someone to remove the grave clothes from his body.

Needless to say that raising Lazarus from the dead resulted in great commotion in all Jerusalem. Many had come there preparing for the Passover feast. This was not a natural event or a miracle that anyone had witnessed before. This was especially astonishing to those who had smelled the stench due to the decayed body.

\* St. John the apostle reports that Lazarus **‘who had died came out’** so that we may see what the Lord has done and to witness to His authority. St. John reports: **‘he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes and his face was wrapped with a cloth’** so that no one would think that this was an imaginary account. The fact that he came out all tied up is just as amazing as his resurrection. The Lord’s words to ‘loose him’ are intended to reveal that this is truly Lazarus since they had to go near him and touch him. To indicate that the Lord’s intention is totally devoid of grandeur appears in His words “loose him and let him go”. He clearly does not follow or lead Lazarus and did not want to walk with him to show him off.

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<sup>1</sup> Essay 9:5

<sup>2</sup> Letter 4:2

<sup>3</sup> Letter 7:3

<sup>4</sup> Concerning Repentance, Book 2:7:57-58

\* We need to pay attention to that too: we need to present deeds worthy of the Lord. Not only do we need to pray so that the dead come to life, but we also need to search and call the one in the cave and grave to attend to matters outside the tomb.

We need to realize that there are many Lazarus types until today. After they had become the Lord's friends, they got sick and died. They have become as the dead in the grave in the land of the dead and with the dead. However, through the Lord's prayer, they have come to life again and they have been invited to come out of the grave by the Lord's loud voice.

Anyone who trusts the Lord comes out bound up with the clothes of death due to his earlier sins. However, his face is still tied up so that he is unable to see, or walk, or do anything because of the bonds of death. He remains in this situation until the Lord Jesus Christ commands the able ones to release him and until He tells him to walk<sup>1</sup>.

\* Such a person comes out in response to the Lord's voice, yet he is still tied up in his sins. He is alive because he has repented and has heard the Lord's voice yet he has not been liberated from the bounds of sin. He still cannot walk immediately with freed feet. He is not yet liberated to fulfill sublime matters, since his hands and feet are tied up with straps like those grave clothes.

Due to the death that adheres to the straps tying his hands and feet and covering his face with ignorance, such a person remains surrounded with bonds.

That is why the Lord does not only wish that person to live and still remain in the grave and be tied up away from the issues of life outside... Therefore the Lord tells those who are able to serve Him: **"Loose him and let him go"**, [44]<sup>2</sup>.

Origen the Scholar

## 7. The Effect of the Miracle of Raising Lazarus from the Dead

**'Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary  
And had seen the things Jesus did,  
Believed in Him.'**[45]

Many of Mary's Jewish friends believed in Him [45]. Most of them had come from Jerusalem which is the nearest city to the village of Bethany. The people of Jerusalem were known for their opposition against the Lord Jesus Christ. Some presented a report of these events to the Pharisees [46], who gathered a council of the Sanhedrim and planned to kill the Lord. Caiaphas, the high priest foretold that one man should die for the whole nation [49-52].

As usual, the fruit of this amazing miracle lends a fragrance of life to life and the smell of death to death. Many believed in the Lord when they saw what He did, while others went to the religious leaders and Pharisees. They went either to arouse them, or to present a testimony of what had occurred, or to invite them to the faith. The response of these leaders and Pharisees was rebellion and opposition towards the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first group of mourners found that there was no need to consult with the

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on John, Book 28:54

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on John, Book 28: 57-59

priests and Pharisees. They felt that opposing the divine truth should come to an end. Thus the visit to the sad home became the reason that converted them to real faith. They experienced the truth of the wise man's saying that 'it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting (Ecce 7:2). They had come with a sincere intention to comfort Mary and Martha. Therefore they came out comforted by the work of God and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Giver of resurrection. Indeed, 'he who waters will also be watered himself' (Pro 11:25). That is why no one should cease to do good works as long as he has the power to do so. (Pro 3:27).

Why does the Evangelist state that 'they had come to Mary'? Why did he not also say 'to Martha'? It could be that Mary was better known in Jerusalem so that most of the people had come to comfort her. Some scholars consider that Martha tended to work and move around while Mary was inclined to join calm gatherings (Luke 10:38-40). A person who tends to work does not find time to meet with the mourners, whereas the one inclined to calmness desires to sit with them.

**'But some of them went away to the Pharisees  
And told them the things Jesus did'. [46]**

This group represents those who worship superficially. The truth is obvious, and the divine deed is tangible; yet they went to report the event despite their knowledge of the leaders' antagonism towards the Lord.

**'Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said:  
"What shall we do? For this Man works many signs" [47]**

The chief priests and Pharisees recognized that they could not oppose or deny the truth for the miracle just shouted it out. Therefore they gathered a council. They realized that the decisions of the Sanhedrim would not be fruitful. The people had gathered around the Lord and such danger threatened the safety of the whole nation. The council was gathered to take practical steps by which they could get rid of the Lord Jesus Christ rather than to deliberate or issue instructions to the people.

They colored the issue with a dangerous political aspect. They analyzed the situation in a manner that defied the truth. Actually, the Lord Jesus Christ had not ceased in doing many unique miracles such as healing the man born blind and raising Lazarus from the dead. These deeds attracted people to Him. They believed in Him and accepted Him as King and the awaited Messiah who would lift up the fallen tabernacle of David. In this manner the Sanhedrim would lose its power and the religious leaders would lose their authority. If the Romans would sense that the people had crowned a king, they would invade the land with an army, seize Jerusalem and destroy the temple. There would be no one to oppose or object to that. In this manner, the Romans occupied the land politically and religiously.

\* These leaders disguised their envy and jealousy under the screen of protecting the Jewish nation and the temple. To them, this was the most holy place in the world. Besides, it was the grandest and greatest building.

Notice how the Jews acted: they should have been astonished and amazed at the

resurrection of Lazarus. However, they wished to kill the One who had resurrected the dead.

How could they be so foolish and imagine that they could send to death the One who conquered the death present in the bodies of others.

Note how the religious leaders and Pharisees spoke of Him as they would of any person and said: **“What shall we do? For this Man works many signs?”** ...and yet you ask what to do? You should have believed in Him and sought to His forgiveness. You should have worshipped Him and not have thought that He was a person.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him  
And the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation”.  
[48]**

**The Scholar Origen** wonders if those who reported to the Pharisees did so in order to allow them to repent and believe, or to arouse them against the Lord so that they would hurry up and plan to discard Him. Origen is inclined to agree with the second possibility.

\* What the high priest and Pharisees feared came to be fulfilled in a symbolic way. The high priest represents the lusts of the body that oppose the lusts of the spirit. Therefore, it was impossible for him to conquer the greatest High Priest who is the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, the Lord has occupied the seat of the high priest but on a heavenly and eternal level. Instead of adhering to the Pharisees’ literal teachings, we experience the joy His of His Holy Spirit. There is no more place for the Pharisees. Concerning the Romans and their occupation of the Jews, they represent the church of nations that has become the New Israel. This Church has become the occupant of the seat of old Israel and constitutes a sanctified nation and priesthood as well as owner of divine promises<sup>1</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

\* ‘The heathen have been snared by the destruction of their own hands and their feet have been caught in the net they had hid (Ps 9:15). This is the condition of the Jews.

They said that they would kill the Lord to prevent the Romans from coming and occupying their nation and positions. When they killed Him, these consequences happened to them. When they executed what they thought would prevent such consequences, they were unable to escape what they feared. The One who was killed lives in heaven and those who killed Him met their reward in hell<sup>2</sup>.

\* It is as though they had said: If the Romans saw that the Lord Jesus Christ created anxiety in the nation, they would suspect we rebelled against them and they would destroy our city. We would then ask one of them: when did you hear the Lord teaching rebellion? Did He not recommend the payment of the tribute to Caesar? When you tried to crown Him king, did He not escape? Has He not led a simple life without any

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<sup>1</sup> cf. Commentary on John, Book 28:86-97

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John, 65:1

boasting? He neither owned a house nor any other kind of property?

These claims did not reflect their expectations. They just made them out of envy. Indeed, the One who had healed the sick and taught about the virtuous path in life and recommended submission to the leaders, did not arouse rebellion. On the contrary, He destroyed rebellions and dismantled it

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘And one of them, Caiaphas,  
Being high priest that year, said to them:  
“You know nothing at all”. [49]**

According to the law, the high priest is ordained to serve for life (Ex 40:15). They inherit the office which runs down from Aaron and his children. However, the Romans authority interfered and took the authority to exile and appoint a high priest whenever they wished and at any time. Moreover, they did not observe the law except for the rule regarding the lineage of priesthood. The historian Josephine records that Caiaphas is the name by which he was popularly known; that his real name was Joseph. He was a high priest for eight or nine years. He was deposed by *Vitellius* probably and was exiled in Judah<sup>1</sup>.

The Romans did not consider that the Lord Jesus Christ opposed their empire. They were not concerned about His popularity because he recommended submission to the authorities and the payment of the tribute to Caesar. Indeed, he asked St. Peter to pay the tribute for both of them. When He was judged, we find Pilate exerting several times an effort to release Him.

**‘Nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people,  
Not that the whole nation should perish.’ [50]**

\* The high priest had to wear the breastplate of judgment the ‘Urim and the Thummin’ (Ex 28:30); to pray God to grant him righteous judgment. This matter seemed to have been neglected completely. Thus the high priest presented his advice to the council dictated by his wicked envy and not by consulting God. He presented what seemed to be logical and truthful according to human philosophy. His words seemed to be based on correct thinking. However, the truth was that it was all based on wicked sentiments. He driven by a strong desire to get rid of the One who had revealed their wickedness and seized their popularity. Isaiah the prophet says: ‘Justice is turned back and righteousness stands afar off; for truth is fallen in the street and equity cannot enter’ (Is 59:14).

**‘Now this, he did not say on his own authority,  
But being high priest that year,  
He prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation.’ [51]**

\* Caiaphas did not speak out of his own resources and he was not aware of the meaning of his own words even though he uttered a prophesy. In the writings of St. Paul, ‘we meet teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the thing which they affirm’

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<sup>1</sup> Antiq. 18 c. 3

(1 Tim 1:7). This is not the condition of a wise person whom king Solomon describes in the Proverbs: ‘The heart of the wise teaches his mouth and adds learning to his lips’ (refer to Pro 16:23)<sup>1</sup>.

### Origen the Scholar

\* Do you see how the leadership of the priesthood is powerful? Caiaphas qualified to be the head of the priesthood; even though he actually lacked the traits that would qualify him, he prophesied without realizing what he was saying. His mouth was touched by Grace, but He did not touch his unclean heart. Many others foretold matters before they occurred even though they had failed in being qualified for that role. Examples of such people are: Nebuchadnezzar, Pharaoh, and Balaam. Notice the power of the Holy Spirit and how He could use a sly mind to utter words carrying amazing prophesies<sup>2</sup>.

\* What is the implication of the words ‘**being high priest that year**’? Like many other matters, this too had become corrupt since these offices were bought (with money). The high priest was no longer a life time office and lasted for one year only. However, in this case the Holy Spirit was present. Yet, when they lifted up their hands against the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit abandoned them and switched to work in the disciples. This was proclaimed by the veil of the temple being torn in two and as the Lord breathed His last (Mark 15:38); when the voice of the Lord saying: “See! Your house is left to you desolate” (Matt 23:38). Josephus, who lived a short time after that, says that certain angels, who had remained with them in the hope that they would relent from their wickedness, abandoned them<sup>3</sup>.

### St. John Chrysostom

**“And not for that nation only,  
But also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were  
scattered abroad.”[52]**

These two verses are provided by St. John the evangelist to show how God uses even the evil of the high priest to give testimony for the truth. Moreover, his words predict the redeeming work of Christ for the Jews as well as for God/s children all over the world: both Jews and Gentiles.

Who are the children of God who are scattered abroad? They are the believers from all nations. They will come together as members of the one Body of Christ. **Origen the Scholar** considers that Israel, according to the flesh, after being scattered, will also accept to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Then they too will come to join and be one with Him<sup>4</sup>.

‘Then from that day on they plotted to put Him to death.’

\* They really sought to do so before for the Evangelist reports: “The Jews sought all the more to kill Him (John 5:18). The Lord Jesus Christ also asked them: “why do you seek to kill Me?” (John 7:19). Previously, they sought to kill Him, but now they decided to do what they had set their minds upon and they moved to fulfill it.

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on John, Book 28:172-174

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John, 65:1

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St John, 65:1

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Commentary on John, Book 28: 185



**‘Therefore Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews,  
But when from there into the country near the wilderness, to a city called  
Ephraim and there remained with His disciples’. [54]**

**Ephraim** is a small village near Bethel. The Holy Bible mentions it again in 2 Chronicles 13:19. It is also mentioned by Josephus<sup>1</sup>.

It is believed that it is the same village mentioned in 1 Kings 5:46; 2 Kings 12:27. Joshua had given it as part of the lot of the tribe of Judah (Joshua 15:9). Both Josephus and St. Jerome state that Ephraim was about 20 miles away from Jerusalem. Some Scholars believe that the Lord Jesus Christ stayed there from January 24 to March 24: that is for two months<sup>2</sup>.

\* We believe that these words and similar ones have been recorded as the Word wishes to warn us against sudden and irrational deeds in an attempt to struggle with death for the sake of truth, (Sirach 4:28), and martyrdom.

On the one hand, it is right not to avoid confession. Besides we should not hesitate to die for righteousness sake whenever we are involved in a struggle and confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. On the other hand, it is not less important to avoid falling into a great dilemma. Indeed, we need to avoid that as much as possible not only because the result is not clear to us, but also so that we do not become responsible for arousing those who do not actually wish to spill our blood. Otherwise, these would commit a crime and become worst sinners and more evil. That would be the case if we sought our own profit and did not care about those who plot against us and our death. Because of us, they would be sentenced to greater punishment- that is if we focused on ourselves and give no consideration to others. Then we would have saved ourselves by our death while there was no imperative need for that<sup>3</sup>.

\* **‘Ephraim’** means ‘giving fruit’. He was the younger brother of Manasseh , which means ‘forgetful’ who left the people behind him ‘ as in forgetfulness’ and this gave rise to the Gentiles. When the Lord ‘turns rivers’ into a wilderness and the water springs into dry ground, it is because of the wicked who live there (Ps 107:33-38). However, the Lord transforms the wilderness which belongs to the Gentiles into wells of water and their dry land into sources of life<sup>4</sup>.

Origen the Scholar

**‘And the Passover of the Jews was near  
And many went from the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to  
purify themselves. [55]**

\* The Jews wanted to paint their feast red by the Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. On that day, the lamb was killed and it has become a feast for us through His Blood. The Jews had planned to kill the Lord: the One who have descended from heaven to suffer. He

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<sup>1</sup> War, b4, c8, s 9.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Adam Clarke Comm.

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on John, Book 28: 192-194

<sup>4</sup> Commentary on John, Book 28: 214

wanted to go near the place where He would suffer because His hour had come.<sup>1</sup>

**St. Augustine**

\* What an amazing purification while harboring a determination to commit a crime, with murderous intentions and hands that would spill Blood!<sup>2</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

**‘Then they sought Jesus and spoke among themselves as they stood in the Temple,**

**“What do you think - that He will not come to the feast?”[56]**

The people of Ephraim probably looked for Him where He left their city. He might have gone to Jericho or its suburbs. Maybe those who were looking for Him had been sent by the high priest and were trying to find out so that they would notify him as to where the Lord was staying during the feast celebrations.

\* They seized the Feast of the Passover to plot against Him. Besides, they considered this was a good time to commit a crime. He would fall into their hands since He would come to celebrate the feast<sup>3</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Those who were looking for Him and those who were not doing so are to be blamed. Therefore, may we look for Him so that we might have and hold Him for ourselves and not so that we may kill Him<sup>4</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**‘Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a command,  
That if anyone knew where He was, he should report it, that they might seize Him.’[57]**

\* Let them come to our church to hear from us where He is. Let them hear this Gospel... He has left (and has ascended), He is present here. He has returned yet He has not left us. He has carried His body to heaven yet He has not withdrawn His glory from the world<sup>5</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 50: 2

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John, 65:2

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St John, 65:2

<sup>4</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 50:3

<sup>5</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 50:4

## Chapter 11

### **May You shout my name with a loud voice and say: Come Forth**

\*Mary and Martha sent You a message concerning their brother

“The one whom You love is sick”!

Now my faithful fellows plead for me before You and my brothers who rest in Paradise intercede before Your throne

Who can lift me up from my sickness but You, O Healer of souls and bodies!

\* Sickness has struck in my whole being, it occupies my thought, heart and all my senses. Corruption occupies my inner being.

Who will rescue me of this corrupt body but You, O You who is the Resurrection!

\*May You hurry to my grave!

For I have caused trouble even to You!

For I am the subject of Your love

May You shout with Your divine voice and call my name and may You say: “come forth”

By coming to my grave, You have granted me the resurrection after being dead.

Death is neared in the presence of the Resurrection!

I admit my sin and I enjoy the apostolic absolution according to Your promise. (Matt 16:19)

\*Through You, I enjoy the rejoicing resurrected life!

Indeed, You have restored to me the joy of Your Salvation!

And the mourning has become transformed into an eternal feast!

My brethren on earth and in heaven glorify You.

For You are the Deliverer of souls from the corruption of death!

\* I do not possess the words

Yet my life has become a living testimony for Your sublime works.

May many believe in You.

As they see You glorified in my weakness!

May the enemy of righteousness and his army go wild

For they cannot tolerate the light of the Resurrection in me!

\* Finally, allow me to pass by the graves with You so that You may call each one by name.

How sweet is Your voice as You shout saying: “Come Forth”

O what an enjoyable celebration.

As the souls come out of their graves, shining with Your glory!

And so many are transformed into heavenly brides

Decorated and ready for the eternal and perpetual marriage!

AMEN

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### SUPPER IN BETHANY

The previous chapter closed on a depressing picture. The Jewish leaders began a dangerous war against the Lord Jesus Christ. Together with the scribes, they believed that the Lord had betrayed the Sanhedrin. However, we find in this chapter that there are faithful believers who will witness for the truth. They will glorify the Lord and witness for Him in spite of an overwhelming atmosphere of hate and hostility.

The testimony of such believers glorifies the Lord on all levels: on the personal level- as in the case of the sister of Lazarus; and on the communal level- as displayed during the Lord's entry into Jerusalem. Moreover, the heavens witness to Him; and so do the Old Testament prophets; some leaders; and finally the Lord testifies for Himself.

|                                                     |                    |                |
|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| <b>1- Anointing the Lord's Feet with Spikenard</b>  | <b>Chapter 12:</b> | <b>1-11</b>    |
| <b>2- The Lord's Entry into Jerusalem</b>           |                    | <b>12 -19</b>  |
| <b>3- The Greeks Honor the Lord Jesus Christ</b>    |                    | <b>20 - 26</b> |
| <b>4- The Heavens Glorify the Lord Jesus Christ</b> |                    | <b>27 - 36</b> |
| <b>5- The Prophets testify to His Glory</b>         |                    | <b>37 - 41</b> |
| <b>6- Some Leaders Witness to His Glory</b>         |                    | <b>42 - 43</b> |
| <b>7- The Lord Witnesses for Himself</b>            |                    | <b>44 - 50</b> |

#### **1 - Anointing the Lord's Feet with Spikenard**

**'Then Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany,  
Where Lazarus was which had been dead,  
Whom He raised from the dead'. [1]**

After the Lord had raised Lazarus from the dead, He went to make a friendly visit to his home. It was six days before the feast of the Passover. The home in Bethany was close to Jerusalem, and the Lord's visit seemed to be a preparation for the celebrations of the feast. The Lord wants us to prepare ourselves for spiritual events.

Another factor was that the hour of His crucifixion was drawing near and so He went to Bethany as He knew they would set up their nets to catch Him. He could have escaped and destroyed their nets. However, He had come specifically to offer Himself on our behalf and as a living sacrifice of love.

It was a friendly visit to the home of Mary and Martha whom he loved greatly. He knew that He would be physically separated from them soon. Therefore this was a farewell visit which would be marked by His love and comforting words. Such farewell words would provide support on the day of His trial which was drawing near.

Finally, the Lord had also come to Bethany, after having raised Lazarus, in order to follow up the effects of His deed. It is as though He had come to water what He had planted, and to sanctify it so that it would yield adequate fruit.

The Lord came on the Jewish Sabbath and the feast of the Passover was to be celebrated six days later. Now was the time when each family would choose the lamb which they were going to offer on the day of the Feast. They had to isolate the lamb in a shed for five days and then offer it as a sacrifice on the sixth day which would mark the day of the Passover Feast. Now, here was the Lord who is the true Passover and the Lamb of God. He had come of Himself in order to isolate Himself. He delivered Himself into the hands of His loved ones. They would anoint Him with spikenard and tears on the day following His arrival. Voluntarily, He dedicated His life to be a sacrificial offering on behalf of the whole world. After His visit to Bethany, the Lord He would enter into Jerusalem on the day that would be marked as the Christian Sabbath day (Palm Sunday).

**‘There they made him a supper;  
And Martha served:  
But Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him’. [2]**

The family offered thanksgiving in a practical manner. The Lord was the One who had raised the head of the family from the dead. They made dinner and each of the three members of the family played a different role. Lazarus sat among those who were gathered around the Lord and he witnessed for the One who had granted Him life. Martha served, while Mary proclaimed her love by anointing the Lord’s feet. Some scholars believe that this was the same event that took place in the house of Simon the Leper (Matt24:6). Others believe that these were two separate events. The dinner here takes place in the house of Lazarus and his sisters. The fact that Martha was serving proves that point. The dinner mentioned in the Gospel of St Matthew took place on the third day of the Passover week, whereas this dinner occurred six days before the Feast. The two occasions may have occurred in Bethany: during the first dinner, Mary used about one measure of the spikenard; while she used all the spikenard she had on the second occasion, (Mk 14:3).

Martha served at the table to express her great appreciation. She considered it to be an honor to serve the Lord in any manner she could. Previously, the Lord had compared her service to that of her sister Mary who had been sitting at His feet. In spite of that, she did not quit the service she did.

**But Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him’ [2]...**the presence of Lazarus testified to the resurrection that the Lord had granted him. He sat down to confirm that the Lord had truly restored him to life.

\* The Lord was eager to visit the person He had raised from the dead. He wished to rejoice on account of the gift of a renewed life. Similarly, the Lord comes to the meal that

the Church prepares for Him to celebrate the One who has risen and is now sitting on high<sup>1</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

\* It is clear that the dinner was held in Martha's home as those who loved the Lord received Him in their homes.

The Evangelist tells us that '**Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him**' as this proves the reality of his being restored to life. After so many days Lazarus was there, actually alive and eating with those present<sup>2</sup>

**St John Chrysostom**

\* Every time that the Lord raised someone from the dead, He asked for food to be offered to that person. In this manner, no one would imagine that the event is an imaginary one. For this reason, after Lazarus had been raised, he is reported to be present at the table and sharing a meal with the Lord<sup>3</sup>.

**St Jerome**

**'Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly,  
And anointed the feet of Jesus,  
And wiped his feet with her hair:  
And the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. [3]**

**'The pound':** a Greek and Roman measure equivalent to about 200 Drahmas.

**'Nardine'/ spikenard:** a kind of expensive fragrance that people of the ancient world competed to possess. It is mentioned in the Book of the Song of Solomon (1:12; 4:13, 14). The quality of its purity indicated that no wax or resin was added to turn it into a cream.

Mary expressed her love by pouring a pound of pure and costly oil, rubbing the Lord's feet with it and drying it with her hair. Consequently, the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. She had offered the most valuable thing she owned in order to honor the Lord. With great love, she anointed His feet. It was common to anoint the head but she did not do that. Surely some oil must have run over the Lord's clothes as she poured a whole pound of it. She is like the human soul who speaks to her Bridegroom and King and says: "While the king sits at his table, my spikenard sends forth its fragrance", (Sg of Sol. 1:12)

Mary had poured the fragrance of her love and its smell continues to fill the House of the Lord across all generations. The Father smells it as it carries the sweet smell of the Lord Jesus Christ, (2 Cor 2:15). We, the believers, smell the fragrance after so many

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<sup>1</sup> Concerning Repentance, 2:7:60

<sup>2</sup> Hom. on St John, 65:2

<sup>3</sup> Against Jovinianus, 2;17

centuries and desire to offer our whole life as a sweet fragrance of love to Him who has loved us first.

\* Martha served. This fact indicates that the meal was served in her house...Mary did not serve for she was a disciple. On this occasion she acted spiritually and not as though she had been called to serve. Moreover, she did not offer her services to all the guests in general. She honored the Holy one solely. She approached Him as her God and not as a person. Consequently, she anointed His feet and wiped them with her hair. She did those things as she believed in Him and in that her concept was different from many others<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* The spikenard is a symbol for righteousness. It weighed one pound. However, it was a rare and costly fragrance. In the Greek language the word 'faith' has its origin in the word 'faith' and is synonymous to it. One prays to act righteously for 'the just shall live by faith', (Rom 1:17).

Wipe the feet of Jesus...in other words, walk in the Lord's footsteps to reap the fruit of a righteous life.

Wipe His feet with your hair: offer whatever you have which exceeds your needs and give it to the poor. In this manner, you will be wiping the Lord's feet. Hair seems to be an unnecessary addition to the body, therefore present something that is in excess. Even though it exceeds your needs, yet it will be of value when offered at the Lord's feet.

It could be that the Lord's feet on earth are needy; or could He be talking about something other than the members of His body when He says: "Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me", (Matt 25:40). Therefore offer whatever exceeds your needs; and yet you will be offering what would be welcome to His feet<sup>2</sup>.

\* **'...And the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment' [3]:** The world is filled with the fragrance of the Lord's personal reputation of righteousness; for a good reputation is like a refreshing fragrant smell. Those who walk in wickedness and bear the name of Christ actually bring dishonor to His name. We are told that because of such people 'the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles', (Rom 2:24). If through the wicked people are led to blaspheme against the Lord, then it is through the righteousness that the name of God is honored.

Listen to the Apostle when he says: "For we are the fragrance of Christ in every place". In the Song of Solomon, we find these words: 'Because of the fragrance of your good ointments your name is as ointment poured out' (Sg of Sol 1:3).

**St Augustine**

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<sup>1</sup> Hom 65. PG 59:391

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 50:6



\* This fragrance is not different than the one which the bride used and whose fragrance reached the bridegroom: 'While the king sits at his table, my spikenard sends forth its fragrance' (Sg of Sol 1:12).

The Gospel mentions that when the oil was poured over the Lord its fragrant smell filled the house where the meal was being served. It appears that the woman who had poured the oil had predicted the mystery of Christ's death. The Lord proclaimed the act she had done by saying: "For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial..." (Matt 26:12).

The Home which became filled with the sweet odor is symbolic of the whole creation and the whole world for **"...whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman has done, be told for a memorial of her"**. The fragrance of her act would spread as the Gospel is being preached **'for a memorial to her'**. In the **Song of Solomon**, we are told that the smell of spikenard spreads out from the bridegroom to his bride. In the Gospel too we are told that the sweet smell of the Lord filled the whole house. That sweet fragrance will fill the whole Body of the Church everywhere all over the world<sup>1</sup>.

**St Gregory of Nicea**

**'Then one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son,  
Who would betray Him, said...' [4]**

\* As the sweet smelling aroma of the Lord spread, it brought to some the breath of life, whereas it brought the smell of death to others, (2 Cor 2:14-16). This sweet smell became the smell of death for Judas.

**St Augustine**

\* [in a speech addressed to the emperor, Theodosius wrote the following:]

'Therefore, O emperor, I address my words not only to you but they also are about you. Notice how God seeks to judge severely. Therefore as much as you have been glorified, it is fitting that you accordingly submit to your Creator. It is written: 'when the Lord your God brings you into a strange land, and you eat and drink of the fruit of others, do not say: 'Because of my strength and righteousness I have received this'; for it is the merciful Lord who has granted you these things'. Therefore to show your love for His Body (that is, for His Church) offer water for His feet and kiss them. In this manner you will forgive those who have fallen and committed sin. Besides, you will have corrected and comforted them through your love for peace.

**Pour oil over His feet so that the whole house where the Lord Jesus Christ sits becomes filled with your sweet odor. Then will all those sitting there enjoy your fragrance. In other words, honor the humiliated. Then will the angels rejoice because they have been pardoned because they rejoice when one sinner repents, (Lk 15:10). Moreover, the apostles rejoice, and the prophets are filled with gladness<sup>2</sup>.**

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<sup>1</sup> Song of Solomon: St Gregory of Nicea. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar: Sermon 3

<sup>2</sup> St Ambrose: 50:26

**“Why was this fragrance not sold for three hundred dinarii,  
And given to the poor?”[5]**

In the middle of this heavenly scene where the sweet aroma of the Lord attracted all hearts towards the heavens, there was the stench of persistent greed, treason, and betrayal that came from the heart of a disciple who seemed to belong to the Lord’s party. His heart could not tolerate the sweet smell of the Lord which grants life: it became the aroma of death to death, (1 Cor 2:16).

The woman’s deed made Judas uncomfortable as he considered it was an act of squandering a big sum of money. He calculated that the value of the spikenard was about three hundred denarii. It could have been spent on the poor. He was unable to comprehend the invaluable price of love which cannot be calculated. Judas was a disciple who preached the good News; yet he did not love the spirit of preaching and of love. For him, preaching became his official career and job. It did not bear the sweet smell of love which fills the ‘Church’ which the ‘House of God’.

By seeming to care for the poor, Judas had found the excuse that would enable him to attack that act of love. The devil too transforms himself to appear as an angel of light. He used human wisdom to calculate the service of the poor versus the proclamation of love to the Lord Jesus Christ. All the while, he concealed in his depths his greed and love of money for he was a thief and stole from the treasury box.

That traitor could not tolerate that act of love. How could Mary pour fragrance that could have been sold for three hundred denarii? Yet he was able to sell his Master for thirty pieces of silver. She put three hundred denarii under the Lord’s feet and considered this as nothing. As for Judas, he put his Master under thirty pieces of silver and considered his Master as nothing when measured by that trivial amount.

**‘This he said, not that he cared for the poor;  
But because he was a thief,  
And had the bag,  
And he used to take what was put in it’. [6]**

Some scholars explain that the name ‘Ischriot’ means ‘bearer of the money box’.

Judas had no feelings for the poor had he did not care about them. The ministry for the poor was only an opportunity for him to steal the money. Why did the Lord trust him with the money box? Rather, He could have given that task to Peter or John who were trustworthy. It could be that Judas sought to get the job and attained what he wanted. It could be that the Lord permitted that to happen so that he would have no financial need that would drive him to sell his Master.

Throughout generations, the Church continues to have a very small number of sanctified members who lay and offer all their possessions at the Lord's feet. As a result, the sweet aroma of the Lord who lives within their hearts fills the whole Church. The Church also includes those who hide behind formalities and money boxes in order to steal what belongs rightfully to the Lord, and to sell Him for the price of a slave. However, the Lord does not expose them for He gives them the chance to examine their depths, discover their wickedness and renew their lives by repentance. Then they would go back to their Savior.

\* The Lord was very patient with Judas who was a devil, a thief, and a traitor. He permitted him to be accepted among the innocent disciples. These faithful ones knew that such an honor was a reward for loving Him, (that is, being united with the Body and Blood of the Lord)<sup>1</sup>.

\* Watch and learn how this Judas had not become corrupt only when he accepted the bribe to betray His Master to the Jews...he did not perish at only that moment. Actually, he was evil and a thief from the time he became a follower of the Lord. He followed Him physically but not sincerely. He became the twelfth disciple; yet he had no share in the apostolic blessing...and when he died, another was appointed so that the number of apostles was then met<sup>2</sup>.

\* He is the One that angels serve... so why did He have a money box? He intended to demonstrate clearly that His Church would be obligated in the future to have a money depository.

Why did the Lord delegate a thief to hold that responsible job other than to teach the Church to be longsuffering towards thieves?

Nevertheless, the one who has the habit of stealing the money box did not hesitate to deliver his Master for the sake of money<sup>3</sup>.

### **St Augustine**

\* The Love of money is a terrible issue. It corrupts the ears and eyes; and transforms a human being into something worse than a savage beast. It strips a person from his conscience and of any ideals of friendship, brotherhood, or thoughts of personal salvation. His greed attracts him away from all that as it becomes like a fierce woman who subjugates all those she captures...

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<sup>1</sup> Letters, 43

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 50:10

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 50:11

Greed transformed Gehazi into a leper instead of being a disciple and prophet. It destroyed Ananias and Saphira with him; and it turned Judas into a traitor.

Greed corrupted the Jewish leaders...it caused hundreds of wars, and filled the streets with blood and the cities with wailing and mourning<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**‘Then said Jesus,**

**“Let her alone: she has kept this for the day of my burial”’. [7]**

Judas condemned her, and considered that Mary had acted unwisely. He judged that she had wasted money on something useless; and the money could have gone to the poor. In contrast, the Lord proclaimed that she had performed a sublime prophetic as she had predicted His burial and the rituals involved. Through her love, she could perceive the Lord’s sufferings, His death, and His burial; and her deed proclaimed the sweet aroma of redemption.

We have never heard of someone whose body was anointed and prepared for burial while he was still alive. Yet the Lord considered the spikenard as burial material for His body which would not see corruption. He had delivered His Body as a sacrifice and a spiritual food when He instituted the Eucharist on Holy Thursday. On that day, and as he willingly offered his Body, He acknowledged the procedure for His burial. In this manner, the Lord confirmed His free and holy will to accept death and burial for the sake of the world, thereby granting us the power and joy of His resurrection

\* The Lord indicated the motive for Mary’s act when He said: **“Let her alone: she has kept this for the day of my burial”**

**St John Chrysostom**

\* Note, dear ones, that the Lord did not say: ‘You speak those words because you are a thief’. He knew Judas was a thief; yet the Lord tolerated him and did not condemn him. In this manner the Lord sets the example for us to show tolerance towards evil people within the Church<sup>2</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**“For the poor you have with you always;  
But Me you do not have always”. [8]**

These words carried a hidden significance and they referred to two acts. On the one hand, there was a purpose hidden behind Judas’ pretense of loving the poor. While claiming to help them, He was delivering His Master to death in a horrible deed of betrayal. On the other hand, there was the amazing act of Mary. She embraced and honored the Body that had been delivered up to die. She gave Him the costly spikenard which was the most precious thing she had. The Lord

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 65:3

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 50:11

secretly admonished Judas because he claimed to love the poor. He then turned to Mary and praised her because she seized upon an opportunity that would not recur for **‘Me you do not have always’**.

Mary prepared the Body of the Lord for burial while He was still alive. Therefore she was praised by the Lord Himself. Nicodemus and Joseph prepared the Body after His death. They were honored too, though this is not comparable to the honor given to Mary. She had offered one pound of precious oil, while they offered hundreds of pounds. Nevertheless, the first offering to the living Body was far more superior to the second one.

Mary continues to invite us today to anoint the living Body of the Lord Jesus Christ. We can do so by serving His members: the poor, the suffering, those who have been banished, and those who have no one to look after them. Indeed, God has said: “You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land,” (Deut 15:11). Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea invite us to honor the Lord’s Body by honoring the members who have passed away, i.e. the saints and martyrs.

It is unwarranted to carry out one task at the expense of another. Our love for the poor should be in harmony with our love for the saints who are still alive. Through prayer and constant thanksgiving, these saints express love towards God as well as towards all mankind.

\* The Lord Jesus Christ sought to limit the evil in Judas. He did so by treating him with great humility. By not speaking about His knowledge that Judas stole from the money box, the Lord made a statement that would become an obstacle to the wicked desire of Judas. Moreover, the Lord’s words would strip Judas of any form of self defense<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

When we speak about His divine presence with us, the Lord Jesus Christ is with us constantly. When we speak about His physical presence, He is the One who told His disciples: **“Me you do not have always”, [8]**.

**St Augustine**

**‘Then people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there:  
And they came not for Jesus’ sake only,  
But that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead’. [9]**

Many of the Jews had heard about Lazarus being raised from the dead. It was the talk of the whole city. Therefore people came not to see the Lord but to see the one who had been raised from the dead. They did not come to hear the Lord, but they came to see and verify the story about the one resurrected from the dead. These people had come to

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 65 PG 59:391-392

honor Him rather than to arrest Him or report Him to the authorities. Some had come to confirm their faith in Him by listening about the miracle of the resurrection from the mouth of Lazarus himself. Others had been driven to come out of curiosity. How could a person arise from the dead, what had he seen when he was dead, and what news can he tell about the other world? During these days of feasting, Lazarus became an amazing center of attention for many wanted to see and hear him.

**‘But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death;’ [10]**

**St Jerome** wrote a letter to *Marcella* in which he praises *Blaesilla*, the daughter of *Paula*, whose husband had passed away seven months after their marriage. She then suffered from a dangerous disease. This drove her to have faith and she dedicated all her energy towards serving the Lord. This caused a tide of strong attacks against her. **St Jerome** considered her to be the new Lazarus because she enjoyed what was similar to being resurrected from the dead.

\* Her previous life had been characterized by a kind of carelessness. She was bound by the ropes of wealth and she seemed to be like a dead person lying in the grave of this world. However, the Lord was greatly disturbed and troubled spiritually and cried: “*Blaesilla*, come forth”. She arose at His call, came out, and sat and ate with the Lord, (Jn 12:2). The Jews angrily threatened her and demanded that she be put to death because the Lord had raised her from the dead, (Jn 12:10). She was content as the apostles offer glory to God. *Blaesilla* realized that she was indebted with her life to the One who had restored life to her. She could now embrace the feet of the One whom she had feared as a Judge just a short while ago...what greater comfort could she find to help her face the words of her opponents...these seemed lighter than smoke?<sup>1</sup>

**St Jerome**

\* Did not the Lord have the power to raise those who had been killed since He had the power to raise those who were dead? (In other words, could He have raised himself when the Jews sought to kill Him)?

When you were plotting a violent death for Lazarus, were you disarming the Lord of His power?

If you thought that those who had died a natural death were different from those who had been murdered, than just stop and think again. The Lord went through both these situations: He raised Lazarus who had died a natural death, and He raised Himself after having been murdered<sup>2</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**‘Because on account of Him, many of the Jews went away,  
And believed on Jesus.’ [11]**

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 38:2

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 50:14

As more hearts were fired up with the desire to see the Lord Jesus Christ, and as faith in Him increased, so did the jealousy of the chief priests become more intense. They consulted together; and could find no other means to solve the situation other than by killing Him. They exerted every effort to distort His image before the crowds so that they would abandon Him. Their attempts were futile due to the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. There could be no better proof that the Lord Jesus Christ was the Messiah than raising someone from the dead. The Lord had granted Lazarus life because He is real Life.

## **2-The Lord's Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem**

**'The next day a great multitude had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem' [12],  
'Took branches of palm trees,  
And went forth to meet him,  
And cried out:  
"Hosanna:  
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!  
The King of Israel!" [13]**

The palm tree branches are symbols of victory. That is why Cicero who had won many trophies was called 'the man of many palm branches'. The Lord overcame the powers of darkness through His death. That is why He was worthy to have bearers of palm branches pave His way.

Besides, carrying palm branches played an important role during the Feast of Dedication. It was a sign of rejoicing. Similarly, the Lord is our reason to celebrate- He is our Feast as He brings joy to our hearts.

King Solomon states that the soul loved by her bridegroom- who is the Lord Jesus Christ- is similar to a palm tree: "I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of its branches..." (Sg of Sol: 7:8).

Coptic (Egyptian) Christians observe the tradition to compete in buying palm branches, weaving, and decorating them with flowers. They often place a specially cooked loaf (Korban) in the shape of a Cross as part of the work. All this has the purpose of expressing the joy of the soul as she prepares to receive her victorious Bridegroom. It indicates a heart that is glad because of her heavenly King, the Savior of souls from all corruption. Many people continue to preserve the woven palm branches from one Palm Sunday until the next Palm Sunday is celebrated. This indicates the continued expression of welcome to the King within the hearts, as well as within the family inside their home.

The people shouted words of welcome taken from Psalms 118:25-26. This reveals how the people's welcome was in harmony with the spirit of the Holy Bible. It was the result of their perception that He was the awaited Messiah; whereas the religious leaders were struck with spiritual blindness.

Although He came as a poor person lacking glory, yet the crowds welcomed Him as a King and Savior of Israel. They perceived that He was the righteous King who came in the name of the Lord (Ps 2:6). They accepted His kingdom wholeheartedly, and they expressed their feelings by shouting **“Hosanna!”** or ‘Hoshaana’ which means ‘He has redeemed us’.

The crowds opened their hearts to receive the Lord of glory, and they seemed to sing with the Psalmist, saying: “Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in: the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle” (Ps 24:7, 8).

Palm tree branches are also a symbol of praise and a sign of victory. The Lord came to conquer death by dying. With the power of His Cross He defeated the prince of death.

The word that the crowds used to cheer the Lord was **‘Hosanna’**. Some writers who know the Hebrew language believe that the word indicates a positive state of mind. This is similar to our use of certain expressions. For example, to indicate grief, we say “How sad”; to indicate joy, we say “Ha!” surprise-“Wonderful”; and astonishment- “Oh”. ‘Hosanna’ belongs to that same class of words and cannot be translated into Latin or Greek. There are many such expressions, like: “He who tells his brother ‘Rakka’” as this is a tool of astonishment and expresses anger<sup>1</sup>.

**\* “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!” [13].**

We get a better meaning of the words **“...in the name of the Lord”** when we realize the implication to be ‘... in the name of the Lord God’. It is also appropriate to understand that He comes in His own name for He is the Lord<sup>2</sup>.

**\* What kind of intellectual dilemma must the Jewish leaders have suffered as they heard such great crowds proclaiming that the Lord Jesus Christ was their King!**

But what Honor does the Lord receive by being king of Israel?

What is the great thing for the Lord of Eternity to become king over mankind?

The Lord’s reign over Israel is not intended for the collection of a tribute, or for the exchange of swords among soldiers, or to defeat His enemies in a declared war. Actually, He is King of Israel as He rules with kingly power over their inner natures; as He plans their eternal concerns; and as He attracts those who have faith, hope, and love to focus on Him and His divine kingdom. Being the Son of God and equal to Him, His act is one of humiliation that does not involve any elevation or grandness. He is the Word and by Him things were made. He willingly became the King of Israel. It is an act of tenderness and does involve any addition of power. Indeed, the One whom they called the King of Israel on earth is called the King of angels in heaven<sup>3</sup>.

**St Augustine**

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate, 51:2

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate, 51:3

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 51:4



**‘Then Jesus, when he had found a young donkey,  
Sat on it; as it is written, [14].**

The Lord was used to walking when going from one place to another. However, He was now riding on a donkey with astonishing humility. He was not riding like king Solomon- in a carriage (Sg of Sol 3:9-10) decorated with ‘pillars of silver, supports of gold, and covered with purple’. The Lord’s glory was not a materialistic one. Since His kingdom was not of this world, He did not carry any appearance of grandness.

He **‘sat on it’**: we are not told that ‘He rode it’ as the Evangelist wished to underline the Lord’s status as He sits on the throne.

What is briefly reported in this passage has been reported with elaboration by the other three evangelists, (Matt 21:1-16; Mk 11:1-11; Lk 19:29-48).

**“Fear not, daughter of Zion:  
Behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt”. [15]**

The prophet asks the daughter of Zion to look up and see her humble and meek King who fills her life with the joy of victory. Therefore he invites her to rejoice and be glad for her King has come to tear away her fear and anxiety. The prophecy of the prophet Zechariah has been fulfilled: ‘Rejoice greatly (do not fear), O daughter of Zion; ... behold, your King is coming to you: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding on a donkey, and upon a colt the foal of a donkey’ (Zech 9:9). He did not come to take revenge of His enemies- Jews or Romans. Rather, He came so that His heavenly peace and sublime glory may fill them. This is what St Luke expressed in these words: ‘Peace in heaven and glory in the highest’ (Lk 19:38). St Augustine comments on that and says:

\* She was told ‘Fear not...’ as she would get to know the One whom she would glorify now. She was encouraged to dismiss fear for He had come to suffer. By pouring His Blood, He will erase your sins, and restore you to life. Concerning the colt who had never had someone sit on him before, (according to the other evangelists), that was a reference to the Gentiles who had rejected the law of the Lord. As for the donkey...he was a symbol of His people, who came from Israel, and submitted to learn about the manger of their Master<sup>1</sup>.

**St Augustine**

“Fear not, daughter of Zion...” for most of those who ruled over the Jews were cruel and unjust. They delivered the people to their enemies and put a ransom to stimulate their attackers...this was not the case with that humble One. It was evident as He rode on a donkey, and did not lead an army as He entered the city. He just sat on a donkey<sup>2</sup>.

St John Chrysostom

**‘His disciples did not understand these things at the first:**

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 51:5

<sup>2</sup> Hom 66. PG 59:395-396

**But when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him,  
And that they had done these things to him'. [16]**

The disciples were unable to comprehend the real implications of the unfolding events and what they entailed. They could not see how the prophecies of the Old Testament were being fulfilled. It was only after the Lord was glorified upon His resurrection that He opened their hearts with love and their minds with the spirit of knowledge. Only then did they realize how they had been granted the joy of the new covenant, and which the prophets had longed for in the old times.

The Evangelist reports this observation about the disciples to indicate their disability to understand that these events fulfilled the prophecies. He states that they remained in this state until the Lord was glorified through His crucifixion and resurrection. Then they understood. Before that, they were like young children who acted without understanding the context of the events unfolding around them. As soon as they reached a stage of maturity, they were able to perceive the divine mystery which lay behind these events. They finally realized that this was God's plan for salvation

\* Do you notice how the disciples did not know most of the prophecies about the Lord Jesus Christ as He had not revealed these to them? Moreover, they did not understand His words: **"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,"** (Jn 2:19). In another Gospel, we are told that: **"...this saying was hidden from them"** (Lk 18:34); and they did not know that He would rise from the dead...

Note the philosophy of St John the Evangelist and how he did not shrink away from revealing how the minds of the disciples were dim at first.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* St John was not ashamed to admit the ignorance of the disciples. Later on, he reveals their knowledge. However, he was not concerned with honoring people for he preached to glorify the Spirit.

**St Cyril the Great**

People have held different perspectives concerning this unique procession:

1-**The Lord Jesus Christ** viewed it through the Cross and considered it to be a procession of glory. The hour had come for the Son of Man to be glorified by offering Himself as the Passover Lamb sacrificed on behalf of the world. Then He would carry believers over from slavery to Satan into the heavenly Canaan.

2- **The people of the Old Testament** looked on this procession while they were in hell and found it to convey the fulfillment of the symbols and the prophecies. The time had come which they had so longingly anticipated for years. They had awaited the One who would carry them into Paradise and bringing them heavenly treasures.

3- **The disciples** watched the procession but understood nothing! They experienced a condition of great confusion!

4- The chief priests and the Pharisees watched and saw the procession as a great threat. It would cause utter destruction to their position and personal desires.

5- The crowds conceived the procession as a herald to a new age, for that One had come who would free them from the Roman occupation and grant them temporal glory!

6- Finally, the heavenly hosts watched the procession with amazement at the humility of the incarnated Word of God. The One who owned heaven and earth sat on a donkey and was being proclaimed by weak human beings...what were the implications of His humility and His love for mankind?!

**‘Therefore the people that were with him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb,  
And raised him from the dead, bore witness.’ [17]**

The reason why all these crowds had come out to meet Him was the miracle He did when He raised Lazarus from the dead. At the same time, it was an opportunity to speak about this miracle, Therefore many got attracted to Him. This increased the envy of the Pharisees all the more. They lost all hope of restricting the Lord’s popularity and power. They could find no other solution to get rid of Him but to kill Him. The Lord had preached often, and had done countless miracles; yet raising Lazarus from the dead attracted the crowds to Him. Nothing could overwhelm and destroy a person like death; and nothing could bring a person more joy like the resurrection from death.

\* Many had resisted being converted immediately until they believed in this miracle<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**‘For this cause the people also met him,  
Because they had heard that he had done this sign, [Jn 12:19]  
The Pharisees therefore said among themselves:  
“You see that you are accomplishing nothing?  
Look, the world has gone after him”. [19]**

At this time, all the fears of the religious leaders became real. The chief priests and Pharisees felt especially threatened as matters seemed to slip beyond their control. Indeed, all the people had joined together in a procession that shook the city. On the hand, the Pharisees were faced with the reality of their inadequacy “...**you are accomplishing nothing...**” [19]. On the other hand, they felt that the whole world had gone and followed the Lord. In this context, the reference is made to the Jewish world—that is every one had become attracted to Him just as a disciple would be. Therefore the Pharisees felt that any further delay in getting rid of Him constituted a danger that would be hard to remedy.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 66:2

\* The Pharisees were referring to the crowds when they said: “...**the world has gone after him.**” The Holy Bible usually uses the expression ‘the world’ to refer to the creation and to those who walk wickedly. The Lord had told His disciples: “**The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil,**” (Jn 7:7)

St John Chrysostom

### 3- The Greeks Honor the Lord Jesus Christ

**‘Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast’.**  
[20]

Some pagan converts, who were Greeks, desired to see the Lord Jesus Christ. This incident could have taken place a day or two after the Lord had come into the city for the Lord had spent the first day doing general services.

Some scholars believe that these were Jews who had been dispersed and had adhered to the Hellenic culture and were therefore called Greeks, like for example Cornelius and the eunuch of Kadago. Besides, the Jews accepted some Gentiles who were naturally inclined to worship God yet were not familiar with the law of Moses and the prophets. At the same time, there were Gentiles who respected righteous Jewish people and allowed them to worship while they lived among them. They even allowed them to attend their religious gatherings within the established limits. Such Gentiles were the ones whom the Jews considered to be foreigners.

Other scholars believe that these pagans were Gentiles. They note that the Jews in older times had allowed some Gentiles to travel to the temple during the feasts. It is as though they foretold the destruction of the veil that separated the Gentiles from the Jews through the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. These Gentiles used to come to the temple to worship without eating the Passover.

At the Lord’s birth, He attracted the magi from the east. They worshipped Him and offered gifts. They also witnessed for Him in one way or other in the royal palace and among the priests and high priests. When He was crucified, He attracted the Greeks from the west who for the pleasure of seeing Him. It appears that the Lord had come to bring together the east and the west so that all may become one fold under one shepherd. By His birth and death, He opened the way of faith to the Gentiles so that all may enjoy Him. The Macedonian man became entitled to appear to the apostle Paul in a dream and cry out: “Come over...and help us”, (Acts 16:9).

These Greeks did not participate in the procession that took place when the Lord made His entry into Jerusalem. It could be that only the Jews were allowed. However, they were able to find out how to participate spiritually as they proclaimed their sincere desire to see Him. It was as though they joined in their own language and shouted with the Jews, “Hosanna (Redeem us) in the highest”!

Although there was a great crowd around the Lord Jesus Christ, these Greeks did not lose their hope of fulfilling their heart's desire and wish to see Him.

\* They were potential converts (i.e. accepting the Jewish faith) and therefore had come to the feast and requested **"...to see Jesus"**<sup>1</sup>, [21].

**St John Chrysostom**

**'Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee,  
And asked him, saying,  
"Sir, we would see Jesus"', [21].**

Some writers believe that these Greeks knew Philip, and that they lived close by in Bethsaida- the Gentile area of Galilee. They had probably attended some of the Lord's gatherings and had seen Philip sitting next to Him.

Their message to Philip conveyed their special appreciation of the Lord and their eagerness to meet and speak with Him separately. They had come to the feast, yet they were not impressed with the grandness of the temple, or with the great throngs coming for the feast. Moreover, they had not come to see the wonders and miracles that the Lord did. All they wanted was to have Him for themselves as they yearned to see Him and speak with Him.

Sadly enough, during the Christian feasts- especially during the big feasts of Easter and Christmas- many Christians are so preoccupied with the preparations for the feast that they do not yearn to see the Lord Jesus Christ and to meet personally with Him.

Some scholars believe that these people came from Phoenicia or from Syria. They were probably inhabitants of the Decapolis which is close to the Pool of Genasereth and Bethsaida.

\* Note how the sought to kill Him, whereas the Gentiles sought to see Him.

Nevertheless, there were also Jewish people who shouted: **"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!"**

We find in the crowd some who belonged to the circumcised as well as others who belonged to the uncircumcised. This is like two walls in a house, each having a different direction. Yet they meet and exchange the kiss of peace and share the one faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us therefore listen to the voice of the Cornerstone: **"The hour has come that the Son of Man be glorified"** [23]. Some may think that the Lord was referring to Himself and that He would be glorified as the Gentiles wanted to see Him. But that is not the case for the Lord was actually referring to His vision of the Gentiles. They were going to come into the faith from all nations. This would occur after His suffering and

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 66:2

resurrection. The apostle accordingly says: “that hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in,” (Rom 11:20). When the Greeks came to see Him, the Lord seized the occasion to announce the future fullness of the Gentile. They would believe after His hour had come; and when He Himself would be glorified in heaven, then the Gentiles would come into the faith<sup>1</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**‘Philip came and told Andrew:  
And in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus’. [22]**

It is so wonderful when servants work together! They both came to the Lord to present to Him the souls that yearned to know Him. Philip probably debated with Andrew what they should do. He had often heard the Lord say that He had come to save the lost sheep of Israel. Together they agreed to bring the matter to the Lord.

\* Philip went to Andrew as he was his senior. He presented the matter to him and did not act with authority as he had read: ‘Do not go into the way of the Gentiles,’ (Matt 10:5). That is why he spoke and sought the advice of the disciple, then brought the matter to the Lord<sup>2</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**‘But Jesus answered them, saying,  
“The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified”. [23]**

**St John Chrysostom** states that the Lord had previously told the disciples: “Do not go in the way of the Gentiles”, (Matt 10:5). However, as the hour of the crucifixion drew nearer, the door to the Gentiles would be opened and the time for preaching to the Gentiles had come.

The Lord accepted to see them. His words that “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified”, are intended to encourage the Gentiles to come and get acquainted with Him. The Lord saw that the fields were white and ready for the harvest. It is a moment of glory for Him as the doors of His Church were opened to receive all mankind. It happened as a reaction to the Jews who had rejected Him and had departed from the fold of believers. The Lord’s vision would be fulfilled through His death and resurrection. It would be like a mustard seed placed in the earth to bring much fruit. The disciples and apostles were the first Jews to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. These Greeks were the first Gentiles to believe in Him after the Cross tore the veil which separated heaven from earth- and the Jews from the Gentiles.

It was necessary for the Lord to be glorified through His death and resurrection in order to establish His glorious Church consisting of Jews and Gentiles. His love obligated Him to die. In order to redeem the world which had been destroyed by corruption, it was

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 51:8

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John, 66:2

necessary to wash it from sin, sanctify it, and glorify it in heaven. These are the many mustard seeds and the harvest of His redeeming act.

The hour had come and no one would ever comprehend the depth and mystery of that time except God alone. This was the hour of glory to the Father as well as to the Son. Three years had gone by while the Lord was performing His wonderful deeds and preaching to the crowds. Now the time had come when the seed would fall into the earth, get buried, and die. The time of the winepress had come. The prophet Isaiah had a vision of it earlier and he had heard the Lord's words: "I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me", (Is 63:3).

The hour had come when the Lord would stretch out His arms on the Cross and accomplish the reconciliation between the Father and mankind. Moreover, He would embrace the Jews and Gentiles together as members of His one Body.

\* Do you want to be convinced that He willingly suffered? Others do not know what will happen to them and they therefore die involuntarily. However, the Lord had foreknowledge and said: "The Son of Man will be delivered and crucified". Do you know why? Why did that 'Friend of Man' not prevent death? In order to prevent the whole world from being destroyed by sin. "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed...and they will condemn Him to death". So 'He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem', (Matt 20:18; Lk 19:38).

Do you really want to know how the Cross brought glory to the Lord Jesus Christ? Listen to His words and not our words. As Judas the traitor was about to betray the Lord of the house, he sat at His table and drank of the cup of His grace which grants salvation. He then left to shed the innocent Blood: 'Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his head against me,' (Ps 41:9). Judas was still holding in his hands the gift of His grace when he planned to betray the Lord and receive a price for delivering Him to death...As soon as he heard the Lord's words, "You have said it", he went out, (Matt 26:25). Then the Lord said: ""The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified". That indicates, my beloved one, how the Cross came to stand for the glory due to the Lord.

Isaiah was not ashamed of being hacked in pieces. Would the Lord be ashamed of dying on behalf of the world?!

**"Now the Son of Man is glorified" (Jn 13:32).** This did not mean that He was without glory previously. In fact, He had been crowned with the glory due to Him even before the creation of the world (Jn 17:5). He has been eternally glorified for He is God. Now He would be glorified as He suffers patiently.

The Lord was not forced to offer His life up. Moreover, He was not obligated to accept death but voluntarily accepted it. Listen to His words: "I have power to lay it down, and I have power that I may take it up again," (Jn 10:18). In other words: 'I deliver Myself willingly to My enemies; otherwise this would not have occurred.

The Lord came with a plan that He put down Himself in order to suffer. He was pleased with that noble deed, and smiled at His crown of glory while taking pride in bringing salvation to mankind. He was not ashamed of the Cross for it was intended to be the salvation of this world. He was not an ordinary man- in fact, He was the incarnated God<sup>1</sup>.

**St Cyril of Jerusalem**

**“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies,  
It remains alone:  
But if it dies, it produces much grain...” [24]**

However much the world progresses, it is still unable to comprehend the mystery of harvesting much produce from one mustard seed; or how the harvest gets transformed into flesh, blood, and bones of a human body and of animals. Similarly, the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection, which constitute the foundation upon which the glorious Church is built, will remain to be an incomprehensible mystery to mankind.

The Greeks had come to see the Lord. Why did the Lord tell them the parable of the grain of wheat? He intended to underline that they could not see Him as He is unless He would come over to them by way of His death and resurrection. He would then enter their world, and would carry them in Him. He is the Way that would attract their hearts to Him. He would carry them over so that they would speak through Him and cross over with Him into the Father’s embrace. They would become ‘of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones,’ (Eph 5:30).

\* If you wondered what the Lord meant when He said: “...unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain...” our explanation would be as follows: The Lord was speaking about His crucifixion. It is as though He was saying: ‘This is what will happen with the grain: it will die and then it will bear much fruit. If this happens to seeds, then it is much more appropriate and essential for this to happen with Me’. However, the disciples were unable to comprehend the words of the Lord.

\* Our present life is beautiful and full of pleasure. However, this not true for everyone, and it is only valid for those who cling to it. Therefore, if someone looked up at the heavens and perceived the beauty there, he would hate this life and disregard it immediately. This is because the beauty of any object attracts someone who has not seen something more beautiful than it. However, when something better appears, that person will hate the earlier object. Therefore if we choose to look up and see the beauty and sublimity of the Kingdom up there, then we shall liberate ourselves of our present bonds...for our present emotional inclinations are a form of bondage straps...Listen to these words: ‘If you are unable to tolerate my death bravely, or rather, if you do not die, then you will attain nothing’<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Essay 13:6

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John: 67:1



## St John Chrysostom

The grain of wheat became a rare object in the field of Judas for it had died there. In contrast, the oil overflowed like streams in the house of the pagan widow<sup>1</sup>.

## St Jerome

**“He who loves his life shall lose it;  
And he who hates his life in this world shall keep it for eternal life”. [25]**

A person who loves himself more than he loves the Lord Jesus Christ, or who loves his temporal life more than his eternal glory destroys himself. In contrast, a person would surely enjoy eternal life if he destroys himself like the grain of wheat; glorifies the Lord and shares His suffering and death.

The Lord’s death has changed the meaning and values of death. It has also altered our view of life. Death has become a requirement that is necessary to the promotion of a full and fruitful life. Where there is no death, there is no real life. When a person buries the ego, the Lord who is ‘life’ proclaims Himself in him. When a person seeks ‘himself’ then the Lord does not find a place for Him within. Consequently, that person loses the Source of his life.

A new life in the Lord Jesus Christ becomes evident in anyone who dies to his old life and crucifies the world. Such a person experiences the warranty of eternal life.

\* If you asked: ‘How does someone who loves his life destroy it?’ Our answer would be: ‘Whoever indulges in the lusts of the soul and allows her to cross over the appropriate limits represents such a person who loves his soul and destroys it. That is why Wisdom warns us and says: “Don’t be controlled by your lust, keep your passions in check. If you allow yourself to satisfy every desire, you will be a joke to your enemies’ (Sirach 18:30, 31). This is because lusts obstruct the path that leads the soul to virtue.

The Lord’s words: “...he who hates his life in this world shall keep it for eternal life” carry the same meaning. If you asked: ‘What does ‘he who hates his life’ imply? We would answer: ‘It is someone who neither submits to life nor obeys it when it commands him to do evil deeds.

The Lord did not say: ‘He who does not submit to it’; rather He said: “he who hates his life’. Just as we find ourselves unable to tolerate hearing the voice or seeing the face of someone we do not like, so we need to step away immediately from our soul if she commands us to disobey God’s commandments.

## St John Chrysostom

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 54: 16

\* If you love, then be ready to suffer loss. If you wish to attain life in the Lord Jesus Christ, then do not fear to die for His sake<sup>1</sup>.

**St Augustine**

This is surely a deep and strange proclamation. It defines the degree to which a person loves his life to the extent of wanting to destroy it. Moreover, this would drive him to hate his life in order to preserve it! If you love your life in a sinful manner, then you truly hate it. However, if you love your life in a righteous manner, then you actually love it even though you hate it. O, how happy are those who despise their lives and so preserve it: for their love does not result in the destruction of their life<sup>2</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**“If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me;  
And where I am, there my servant shall be also:  
If anyone serves Me, him will My Father honor”. [26]**

First, the Lord presented a new meaning for death and life in the light of His Crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Now, He presents to us a new meaning for service and the ministry. Being a minister does not involve the mere offering services to others. It implies achieving union with the true and unique Servant- the Lord Jesus Christ- and joining and following Him on the road to Gethsemane.

When someone desires to serve and witness for the Lord, the first step he needs to take is to follow Him. That means he needs to become a disciple, learn, obey, and walk with the Lord on the path of the crucifixion and burial. As a result, he would arise and produce much fruit. May a minister/servant forsake worldly pleasures as he focuses on eternal happiness. May he get to be united with the Eternal One and so receive eternal glory from the Holy Father Himself.

Having this new meaning gives a minister the reward for his services. Indeed, he finds himself in the company of His Lord- sharing in His suffering as well as in His joy. Truly, whoever enjoys fellowship with the Lord, and devotes his life to witness for Him, is honored by Him in ways neither he nor others can ever imagine: ‘Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever,’ (Daniel 12:3). The Lord also says: “Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me may be with me where I am”, (Jn17:24). As he serves, a servant finds the unique opportunity to speak with the true Servant- the Lord Jesus Christ. On his way and during a minister’s service, the Lord reveals Himself and the Father and so grants His servant divine knowledge.

Anyone who preserves the honor of God and works through Him, the same is honored by God Himself: “...he who waits on his master will be honored” (Prov. 27:18).

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 51:10

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 51:10

By saying this parable, the Lord intended to lead the Greeks, who had come to see Him, to focus and adopt His view of working for His Kingdom. His words reveal the glory which is prepared for those who work in His vineyard. In this manner, He transforms the beautiful yearning to see Him into a serious task. By working for His kingdom, they would be enabled to see Him in His eternal glory. At the same time they would enjoy this glorious fellowship.

\* The Lord was speaking about death and the requirements made on those who followed Him. They had to work, and to follow up those they served constantly... “If any man desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me”, (Matt16:24). In other words, He says: ‘Be always prepared for dangers, for death, and for departure from this world’. Having stated the difficulties of serving Him, the Lord presents the rewards. What kind of rewards are they? ‘Being His disciples, and being there- wherever He may be found, and underlining that the resurrection always follows death<sup>1</sup>.

\* But where is the Lord Jesus Christ? He is in the heavens. Therefore may we transport our souls and minds to the heavens even before we the resurrection. Why does the Lord indicate that the person who serves the Lord Jesus ‘... him will My Father honor; rather than saying ‘I will honor him’? The reason is that the disciples had not yet attained the correct concept concerning the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, they did comprehend deeply all that concerned the Father<sup>2</sup>.

#### **St John Chrysostom**

\* What honor could be greater for the adopted son than to be in the company of the only begotten Son? It is true that he does not attain the rank of a deity, yet he becomes a partner in eternity?<sup>3</sup>

\* The Lord wishes us to understand that those who serve Him should not be seeking their own interests. Rather, they should be seeking to serve and please Him, (Phil2:21). He seems to be stating the following: “He who does not follow Me does not serve Me”. This is the implication of the words “Let him follow Me”. It means: Let him walk along My path and not in his own way. In another passage, it is written: “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked”, (1John 2:6)<sup>4</sup>.

\* Everyone is a minister of the Lord just as the Lord is a minister Himself. By serving in His footsteps, a servant will be greatly honored by the Father who will grant him fellowship with the Son. Consequently, such a minister’s joy will be complete for evermore<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Hom 67. PG 59:401

<sup>2</sup> Hom 67. PG 59:401

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 51:11

<sup>4</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 51:12

<sup>5</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 51:12

\* My brothers, when you hear that “Where I am, there My servant will be also” do not think that this applies to good priests and bishops only. Rather, it is intended to encourage you also to serve the Lord within your own means: by living uprightly, by offering donations, by preaching in His name and spreading His teachings as much as possible ...<sup>1</sup>

**St Augustine**

#### **4- The Heavens Glorify the Lord Jesus Christ**

**“Now is my soul troubled;**

**And what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour:**

**But for this purpose I came to this hour”. [27]**

The Lord spoke about the need for Him to suffer and to die. As the Son of Man, He lifted His heart and said: “Now My soul is troubled”[27]. Indeed, these are strange words coming from the Lord especially after the disciples had witnessed Gentile strangers seeking to meet Him. Then they heard Him say “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified”. However, because He had truly become incarnated, it was natural that His soul got troubled in the face of all that cloud of suffering that enveloped Him. He probably saw through that cloud the sins of all humanity. It appeared before Him so that He would carry them upon His shoulders; and offer Himself as a burnt sacrifice and redemption for our sins.

While the Lord comforted His disciples, and told them “Let not your hearts be troubled” (Jn 14:1), yet He says “Now My heart is troubled” [27]. His troubled heart releases our hearts from being troubled: His pains constitute the mystery of our eternal peace. By His own will and pleasure, the Lord carried the burden of our sins. In spite of His joy, it was inevitable that His heart got troubled due to the immensity of our sins. He carried the weight of our weakness in order to grant us a Spirit of power.

His troubled heart is the expression of holy sadness that generates joy in the hearts of believers. It gives joy to the Father as it reconciles Him with mankind. It causes angels to rejoice as well. His heart got troubled as He entered the narrow path leading to the Cross. In this manner, we are enabled to share in His pain and enter with Him into the heavenly glory. His pains would endure for an hour and it had now come, and then they would pass away. These would be replaced by eternity which is infinite. Some scholars explain that the Greek word used indicates anxiety rather than fear<sup>2</sup>.

The Lord’s words to the Father reveal the joy He finds in carrying the Cross. He says: “...for this purpose I came to this hour...” [27]. In order to carry us to a life of submission and humility, He cries: “Father, save Me from this hour...,” [27].

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 51:13

<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, p. 450

\* These words do not reflect His divinity. Rather, they reflect His human nature which rejects death and holds on to this present life. In this manner, the Lord underlined that He was not exempt from human suffering. He revealed that holding on to this present life is not a sin, just as hunger and the need for sleep do not constitute failings. The Lord had a body that was untainted by sin, yet it was not released from natural physical needs. That was the wisdom for giving Him a body.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord took the form of human weakness in order to teach us, that when we are sad or troubled, to say: "...O, my Father, ...not as I will, but as You will...", (Matt 26:39). In this manner, a person is transformed from being human to being divine as he prefers to do the Father's will rather than his own<sup>1</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**"Father, glorify thy name".**

**Then came there a voice from heaven, saying,**

**"I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again". [28]**

The incarnate Son submitted to the Father's will by offering Himself as a sacrifice. The Father proclaimed His acceptance through the resurrection which also brings glory to the Father. At this point the Lord indicates the link between death and glory (the resurrection). Although His soul is troubled, He does not ask that this sentence of death be removed. Indeed, the passage into the resurrection brings a reciprocated glory: the glory of the Son and the glory of the Father.

The Lord refers to God Himself as well as to all His characteristics by using the words 'Your Name'. The Father Himself is glorified, as well as His wisdom, mercy, love, holiness, righteousness, etc...All that is achieved through the redeeming act of the Lord.

The Voice of the Father is heard saying: "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again," [28]. It is as though He was saying: 'I have achieved My plan through You. I have sent You to be atonement for the sins of the world. I have executed justice which will never be void of My love and mercy. You have completed My work. That is why You offer Your Blood on the Cross, and I accept it as a sacrifice of love. Your death and resurrection glorify Me and fulfill My mission towards My beloved: Man. I have glorified You and will glorify You at Your death and at Your resurrection'.

The Lord Jesus Christ was glorified through His teachings, His loving deeds, and the wonders and miracles He did. He was glorified when He was tempted in the wilderness when the angels later appeared and served Him. He was glorified at His baptism when the Voice of the Father was heard bearing witness for Him, and when the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove, (Mk 9:7). At the time of the transfiguration, He was glorified as He appeared with Elijah and Moses and spoke about His 'decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem', (Lk 9:31). He would be glorified through the astonishing events that were going to take place during His arrest, judgment, and

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 52:3

crucifixion. He would be glorified by His resurrection, ascension, and the granting of the Holy Spirit to His disciples. He will ultimately be glorified through his disciples who would successfully preach and spread His Gospel throughout the whole world.

\* The words of the Father: “I have glorified it and will glorify it again” may lead you to wonder: ‘Where is His glory?’ Our response is: ‘The Lord has been glorified throughout the previous ages; and He will be glorified after His resurrection.’

**St John Chrysostom**

\* Although they could not accept the gift of Truth, yet they involuntarily recognized Him. In their ignorance, they spoke mysterious words and this resulted in great testimonials from the Son and the Father. In the Book of Job we read: “...the thunder of His power who can understand...” (Job 26:14; LXX).<sup>1</sup>

**St Ambrose**

\* “...and I will glorify it again,” [28] when the Lord will arise after His death. Then death will have no authority over Him. Indeed, when He ascends into the heavens as God, His glory will cover the whole earth<sup>2</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**'The people therefore who stood by, and heard it,  
Said that it had thundered.  
Others said,  
“An angel has spoken to him”. [29]**

Some scholars note that the Voice used a language known to the Jews but not to the Greeks. Consequently, the Jews said that an angel had spoken to Him; whereas the others thought that it had thundered. In St John's book 'The Revelation' the voice of one of the living creatures is likened to thunder, (Rev 6:1).

\* You might ask: ‘How could they imagine such a thing?’ Our answer would be: ‘It could be that the Voice could not be identified; or could have occurred too quickly. This could have been a challenge to those who were physically slow, while others were able to hear the Voice clearly.

**St John Chrysostom**

**Jesus answered and said,  
“This voice did not come because of Me,  
But for your sakes’ [30].**

The Lord did not need the Voice from heaven to encourage Him. The Voice had come for the sake of those present and so that they would believe that the Father had sent Him.

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<sup>1</sup> Of the Holy Spirit, Book 2:6:55

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 52:4

This would sustain the disciples during the Lord's sufferings and keep them from stumbling. They would find comfort in that Voice just as It filled the Lord with joy.

The Voice could have come for the sake of the Greeks who had come to see Him. They had not seen His deeds and miracles. They had just heard about them. Therefore the Voice from heaven was intended to witness for the Lord in their presence.

What did the Father recommend to His Son? To offer eternal life to mankind. This was something no other being in heaven or on earth could do.

\* It is as though He was saying: 'This Voice was not intended to inform Me of something I did not know. Indeed, I know all the hidden matters known to My Father. Truly, this Voice came for you'. The Lord then led them to ask Him what the Voice had said. However, they were so astonished that they did not ask.

**St Augustine**

\* Just as the Voice uttered by God was not intended for the Lord but rather directed to those present; similarly, the Lord's soul was troubled on account of those present and not on account of His own situation<sup>1</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**"Now is the judgment of this world:**

**Now shall the ruler of this world be cast out". [31]**

\* This is the Voice of the Father whom the Son knows and comprehends His depths. The Voice had come to proclaim the judgment of this evil world, the defeat of the devil- 'the ruler of this world'-and his eviction after being stripped of all power. Satan loses all his sphere of influence as believers proclaim their victory in the arena of battle. Satan exits in great weakness and utter defeat after having won many rounds earlier. That is how Satan loses in his struggle with the Lord Jesus Christ. His defeat continues as he wrestles with believers who are members in the victorious body of the Lord.

St John writes in the certitude of faith and says: "I have written to you young men because you are strong, and the Word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one," (1John 2:14). He also says: "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world- our faith" (1Jn 5:4). Those who enjoy the redeeming act of God also sing praises and say: "Now salvation and strength and the kingdom of our God and the power of His Christ have come; for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; and they did not love their lives to the death," (Rev 12:10-11).

Through the Cross all those things, which human beings plotted against the Lord Jesus Christ and all what Satan devised in an attempt to get rid of Him, ended in the defeat of

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 52:5

evil and the destruction of Satan's power. The ruler of this wicked world cannot stand before the Ruler of life. The apostle says appropriately: "But you denied the Holy One, and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, and of which we are witnesses," (Acts 3:14-15). St Paul also says about the Lord Jesus Christ: "...that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil," (Heb 2:14).

The Lord spoke with the certainty of being victorious over death. He knew that His death would restore the light of knowledge to many souls and liberate them from the bonds of Satan.

Note that the word 'judgment' is not used with a definite article. This is because the Lord was not referring to the final judgment. Rather, He was referring to the judgment that would begin with His redeeming act. Simeon the elder prophetically says: "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel; and for a sign which will be spoken against" (Lk 2:34).

\* If you wonder: 'What does glory mean?' Our answer is: According to the Lord Jesus Christ, it is that "...now the ruler of this world will be cast out".

\* What do the words 'the judgment of this world' imply? According to the Lord: "It will be a condemnation and disaster". How and in what manner? Satan had killed the first Man as he led him to sin and so was condemned as a criminal. However, there is no sin in the Lord Jesus Christ. So why was he delivered to die? Why was the mind of Judas set on destroying the Lord? Why then is the world to be condemned through the person of the Lord? In the court of justice, the charge against Satan will be: 'Well, you caused the death of all mankind as they have all been found guilty of sin, but why have you killed the Lord Jesus Christ? Is that not due to your wrong doing? Therefore the whole world will be avenged through Him<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* Speaking about the judgment that was about to take place, the Lord says these words: "Now is the judgment of this world"; whereas the final judgment would be withheld until the time when the living and the dead would be judged.

That is why Satan has taken hold of mankind and possesses them since they have been charged of sin. Therefore all mankind stand as criminals waiting to be condemned. He rules over the hearts of unbelievers, deceives, and enslaves them. He tempts them to forsake the Creator and worship the created. However, thousands of believers, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, have become liberated from the power of Satan. Through the Lord's death, His resurrection, and the Blood He has poured for the remission of sins, believers have become united into His body. As a result they have become followers of the Head.

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<sup>1</sup> Hom 67: PG 59:403



This is what the Lord intended when He spoke about the ‘judgment’. This is the true distinction. It indicates the separation of those who belong to Him and therefore have become liberated from Satan.

\* Now the Lord informs us of what He knew: after His sufferings and glorification. Many of the Gentiles spread throughout the world would become believers. Satan had ruled over their hearts but they would reject and cast him out. Through faith they would renounce Satan<sup>1</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**“And if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself”. [32]**

Satan will be cast out and thrown into hell. In this manner, He would lose the kingdom he had set up among mankind on earth. While the Lord ascends above the earth through the Cross, the enemy descends. The Lord ascends through the Cross in order to enable His followers to ascend with Him into heaven.

We have previously stated that St John the Evangelist looks up to the Cross as a means of elevation (3:14; 8:28) since it is the crowning glory of the Lord.

Here the Lord attributes to Himself the task of drawing **“...all peoples to (Himself)”**. In another passage, the Lord attributes this to the Father, (Jn 6:44). He draws the soul through the attraction of love and not by forceful subjugation or violence. Accordingly Hosea says: “I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love, I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them,” (Hosea 11:4).

The souls that were estranged from Him could not tolerate meeting with Him due to their darkness. Now it became possible for them to enjoy His light and be attracted to Him. He would be lifted up to heaven and would attract the souls of those who love Him to join and share the heavenly joys with Him.

The Lord uses the expression **‘all peoples’** to stress the efficiency of the Cross in attracting the heavenly and earthly members to join into one Body. The Blood poured on the Cross would reconcile them all to Him. All will be united in the Lord Jesus Christ. We read that: ‘...all things (will be reconciled) to Himself...having made peace through the Blood of His Cross,’ (Col 1:20). The ultimate Plan is to “gather together into one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth...in Him,’ (Eph 1:10). Moreover, the Lord underlines His attraction to all mankind- Jews and Gentiles- yet He does not seek to attract any against their wishes or through forceful subjugation.

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 52:6

\* This means that the Lord attracts those who believe even if they are of the Gentiles. He says that He will **‘draw all peoples’**. It is as though these were being arrested by a tyrant and were unable to come to the Lord on their own. These peoples seem unable to escape from the hands of the tyrant who holds them. In another passage, they are considered ‘exiles’ as the Lord says: ‘...how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man...,’ (Matt 12:29). He spoke these words to confirm His power, and to indicate here that those attracted Him are the same as those whom he had considered earlier as being exiled.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord Jesus Christ had become a curse on our account in order to redeem us from the curse of the Law. Then why does it amaze us that He submits to the Father on our account too? Accordingly, He wishes us to submit to the Father, and according to His holy words: “...No one comes to the Father except through Me,” (Jn 14:6). He also says: “And I, if I am Lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself,” (Jn 12:32). The Lord is perceived to have submitted to the Father when His believers are taken into account; for all believers- and indeed all mankind- are considered members of His Body. However, He is considered as insubordinate when unbelievers are taken into account; for they are members of His Body, yet they do not submit to faith<sup>1</sup>.

**St Jerome**

**“This He said, signifying by what death He would die,” [33].**

The Lord Jesus Christ was lifted up upon the Cross and the whole world looked upon Him. Hanging there between heaven and earth, He was seen as someone who deserved such punishment.

The crowds had heard His sermons and seen the thousands of miracles He had made; yet few remained loyal to Him and remained as His disciples. However, once He was crucified He attracted the whole world to Him. Many became believers and continued to love Him loyally.

**‘The people answered Him:**

**“ We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever,  
And how can You say: ‘the Son of Man must be lifted up?’  
Who is the Son of Man?”[33]**

The people of Israel expected something different than what the Lord proclaimed. They had heard the Voice from heaven, and the words of grace that he had spoken with His mouth; yet they could not believe that He would ascend, or in other words that he would die. They would not believe even though the Old Testament had foretold His death, still

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 55:5

He was the Priest for evermore (Ps 110:4); and the eternal King (Ps 89:29). In the Book of Daniel, we are told about the Lord that: "...to Him was given domain and glory and kingdom. That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed," (Daniel 7:13, 14). In the Book of Ezekiel, we read the following: 'David, My servant, shall be king over them forever,' (Ezek 37:25). The people remembered the words about His immortality; yet they forgot the prophecies concerning His death, and how He would sacrifice Himself to die (Is 53:12), and how His feet and hands would be pierced.

**"Who is this Son of Man?" [34]** They did not ask this question in order to find out His identity. Rather, it reflected their belief that He was the Messiah, the priest and the eternal king. Now they were surprised to learn that He would die. They became doubtful because He proclaimed that His death was imperative.

\* They knew that the Messiah would be eternal and would possess eternal life. Had they not also read, in the same context, about His suffering and resurrection in many other passages in the Holy Bible?

Isaiah the prophet places the two issues side by side, and says: 'He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before His shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth,' (Is 53:7). David also links the two issues in the second Psalm as well as in many other passages. Moreover, Jacob- the father of the holy fathers, revealed His sufferings and resurrection, and at the same stated that: 'He bows down, He lies down like a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse Him?' (Gen 49:9). Nevertheless, the Jewish leaders imagined that they could silence Him and prove that He was not the Messiah. They would use the same issue – that the Messiah would reign eternally- to make their point.

Notice how they handled the matter craftily. They did not say: 'We have heard from the law that the Christ will not suffer or be crucified'. Rather they said the following: "We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever...". Yet what they said did not constitute any real objection since the Lord's suffering did not obstruct His immortality. That is why we believe that they understood many matters which they claimed to be suspicious; and which they intentionally chose to handle deceitfully. Therefore they asked: "Who is this Son of Man?" They said so slyly and the implication was: 'We ask you not to believe that we say this about you. Do not think that we oppose You due to any enmity between us. Rather, we do not know about whom You are speaking. We are just expressing our opinion<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**Then Jesus said unto them,**

**"A little while longer the light is with you.**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 68:1

**Walk while ye have the light,  
Lest darkness overtake you,  
For he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going”. [34]**

The Lord indicated that His death was temporary through His words: “Yet a little while is the light with you...”. It is like the sun whose light does not end but just gets hidden for a while and then shines again. His words to the Jews to “...Walk while ye have the light lest darkness overtake you ...” are intended to motivate them to believe in Him.

He also told them that “...he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going”. How many things had the Jews done up till that moment without being aware of their deeds. They seemed as someone walking in the darkness. They thought they were on the right path whereas they were walking in the opposite direction: they observed the Sabbath and protected the law; they avoided certain foods yet they did not know the right path to take<sup>1</sup>.

**“While you have the light, believe in the light,” [36]:** What was the time frame that the Lord was indicating? Was He referring to the present life as a whole; or was He referring only to the time before His death? We believe He meant both for many came to believe in Him even after His death. On account of His inexpressible love for mankind, He uttered these words to encourage people to believe<sup>2</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**“While ye have light, believe in the light,  
That you may become sons of light.”  
These things Jesus spoke,  
And departed, and was hidden of them. [36]**

The Lord was concerned with their salvation, therefore He asked them to be preoccupied with their inner depths. This would enable them to walk in the light as long as they had the light, and avoid becoming sons of darkness. Rather than engage with them in worthless arguments, the Lord directed them to issues that would lead them to salvation and growth. He asked them to enjoy the light since He had become incarnated and dwelled among them. Consequently, He would carry them into the eternal heavenly light.

Our life consists of few opportunities which may not come again. Therefore it is appropriate to capitalize on every chance that comes our way to live in fellowship with the Lord. Our Gospel is the light that enlightens the soul. Anyone who rejects its light stumbles into darkness. As for those who enjoy its light, they become children of the light, (Lk 16:8; Eph 5:8); and of the sons of daylight, (1 Thes 5:5).

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<sup>1</sup> Hom on St John, 68:1

<sup>2</sup> Hom. 68 PG 59:405

The Lord warned them that they would yearn to see just one of the days of the Son of Man but would not be able to see Him, ( Lk 17:22). He also told them that the kingdom of God would be taken away from them and given to the Gentiles, (Matt 21:43).

\* **“While ye have light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”** In other words, ‘that you may become My sons’. Note that the Evangelist had reported from the beginning of his Gospel that those who believe ‘were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God,’ (Jn1:13). Here the Lord said that He was the One who gave birth to them. He intended to make them realize that the deeds of the Father and the Son were one and the same<sup>1</sup>.

\* St John the apostle reports that the Lord Jesus Christ **‘departed, and was hidden of them’**. If you asked: “What was the Lord’s intention by being ‘hidden of them’? They neither carried stones nor blasphemed against Him as they had done before. So why did He disappear?” Our answer would be: “The Lord knew how much their hearts were filled with anger and rebellion. He did not wait for that anger to be vented into the sphere of action, but He disappeared to calm their evil.

**St John Chrysostom**

The Lord concluded by giving them advice to seize the opportunity of His presence so that His light would shine and dispel their darkness. He explained that time was short and the period left before His departure was very near. He then disappeared to avoid entering into further arguments, and to provide them with the chance to think seriously about their attitude towards Him.

## **5- The Prophets Testify to His Glory**

**‘But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him’. [37]**

St John the Evangelist presents the testimony of Isaiah the prophet for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ; and the Jew’s rejection of Him because ‘they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God’.[43]

The Evangelist tells us that that the Lord **‘had done so many signs before them’ [37]**, yet in spite of that ‘they did not believe in Him’. On the contrary, the Lord’s deeds drove them to be envious and to resist Him. They had not only heard about His miracles, but He had done these ‘before’ them. The Lord had not acted secretly but openly and there were many witnesses. Nevertheless they did not believe for their inner eyes were struck with blindness, and their lusts had hardened and corrupted their hearts.

**‘That the word of Isaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke,  
“Lord, who has believed our report?  
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” [38]**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 68:1

The prophecy of Isaiah was therefore fulfilled as the Jews did not believe the prophetic testimonies and divine proclamations. Moreover, they rejected the ‘arm of the Lord’ which was revealed in His power, authority, and miracles<sup>1</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**‘Therefore they could not believe, because Isaias said again, [39]**

St John the Evangelist reveals the condition of the Jews who were characterized by stubbornness and opposition towards God and His prophets. Ever since they lived in Egypt, and even when they left that land and traveled through the wilderness, they rebelled against Moses and Aaron. They did not spare one prophet, and as Elijah the prophet told the Lord God: “...for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, thrown down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword; I alone am left; and they seek to take my life...” (1Kgs 19:10). St Stephen the Martyr said: “You stiff necked and uncircumcised in hearts and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit, as your fathers did so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold to coming of the Just One, of whom you have now become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels, and have not kept it”, (Acts 7:51-52).

An endless chain of rebellion against the work of God, and a constant persecution of prophets have blinded their inner sights and disabled them from seeing. Their hearts had become hardened and they could no longer enjoy the blessing of faith!

\* Note, once more, that the words ‘for’ and ‘said’ do not refer to reason for the lack of faith but they do refer to the situation itself. Isaiah did not say that this was the reason for their unbelief. Rather, he said these words because they did not wish to believe. Therefore why has the Evangelist not say this, rather than show that their lack of faith was due to the prophecy and not that the prophecy sprang from their lack of faith? St John chose to deal with the subject in a positive manner, therefore he wrote: “Therefore they could not believe, because Isaias said again” [39]. He wished to underline the lack of error in the divine Word in many varied ways; and that what Isaiah had predicted earlier had become fulfilled and had not fallen away<sup>2</sup>.

\* ‘Therefore they could not believe’ was used to replace ‘They did not want to believe’. Do not be astonished...he did not say that it was impossible for them to be virtuous; but that due to their unwillingness they lost the capacity to believe<sup>3</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* In defense of free will, no one would venture to deprive us of praying and asking God to ‘lead us not into temptation’. However, no one denies the role of the will and ventures to make excuses for sinfulness. Let us turn to God attentively as He issues His commandments and offers His support. In both cases He informs us of our commitment

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 53:2

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John, 68:2

<sup>3</sup> Hom 68. PG 59:406

to obey and His support as we apply them. Some become ever so lofty and vain due to an exaggerated sense of confidence in their own will; while others stumble into negligence due to an exaggerated sense of lack of confidence.

The first group says: ‘Why do we ask God and not strive ourselves to conquer temptation since we are capable of everything?’

The second group says: ‘Why do we need to struggle to live righteously when it is all in God’s hands?’...

On the one hand, we need to thank God for the power He grants us. On the other hand, we need to pray that our limited power does not fail us completely. This is similar to faith that works through love, (Gal5:6). God grants every person a certain measure, so that we should boast about God and not about ourselves<sup>1</sup>.

\* No wonder they were unable to believe: they had so much pride in their own will. This led them to ignore the righteousness of God and seek their own righteousness. The apostle comments about them saying that they ‘have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God’, (Romans 10:3). They were proud of their power rather than of their faith, and so they fell against the stumbling Stone. That explains why the expression ‘they could not believe’ is used, while the implication is that they did not want to believe. In the same manner, we are told the following about the Lord our God: ‘If we are faithless, He remains faithful, He cannot deny Himself, (2 Tim 2:13). This has been said about the Almighty One: ‘He cannot...’<sup>2</sup>.

\* These Jews ‘could not believe’. It did not mean that these people could not change into better people; but that as long as their thoughts continued along that path then they would be unable to believe. As a result, they were blind and hardened in their hearts: by denying their need for divine help, they could not get help<sup>3</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**“He has blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart;  
Lest they should see with their eyes,  
And understand with their heart,  
Lest they should turn so that I should heal them.”[40]**

They could not believe because they did not want to believe. They neither asked God for His help nor for His grace to support them. Therefore the grace of God did not open their eyes to see the truth and to enjoy salvation. This is the meaning of the words: “He has blinded their eyes...” Their resistance damaged their inner vision and they were not granted healing from the Physician of the heart and body. They became similar to those whose eyes God had blinded. Their persistence and lack of desire to enjoy the truth

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: on the Gospel of St John, tractate 53:8

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: on the Gospel of St John, tractate 53:9

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: on the Gospel of St John, tractate 53:10

disabled them from attaining the living faith. This is the subject of Isaiah 6:9, where the reference could be about the judgment that would be pronounced upon them as a nation.

\* Consider how the sun dazzles the weak sighted. It is not due to its normal nature. This also applies to those who are inattentive to God's words. In the case of Pharaoh, we are told that God hardened his heart. Similarly, all those who continue to resist God's Word will be in that same condition

This is the style of the Holy Bible: it is written: 'God gave them over to a debased mind', (Romans 1:28)...The Bible does not present God as the One who inflicts such conditions, but reveals that these happen through the evil in others. The Bible intends the hearer to be in great fear as the Word says: 'God hardened' and 'gave them over'.

In order to underline that God does not deliver or forsake us unless we want it to be so, we need to hear what the holy Word says: 'But your iniquities have separated you from your God.' (Is 59:2 LXX). Hosea says: 'Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children,' (Hosea 4:6 LXX). The Lord Himself said: "How often have I wanted to gather your children...but you were not willing?" (Lk 13:34)

Having known this, may we exert every effort not to abandon God. Indeed, let us be greatly concerned about our own souls, and love one another. May we not amputate our members, for this is the action of mad men. As we see them in wicked situations may we deal with them all the more gently<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**'These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of him. [41]**

Isaiah the prophet said these words when he saw the Lord's glory. He spoke about the Lord when He saw Him seated on a high throne and His train filled the temple. The glory that Isaiah saw was the glory of Jehovah. In this context, St John the Evangelist said that this was the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ as he perceived Him to be Jehovah. In the Aramaic translation, it is written: 'My eyes have seen 'Shakinnah' the Lord, (Is 6:5). As 'Shakinnah' denotes the divine light or the divine presence, then what Isaiah saw was the light or the brilliance of God: the rays of His glory and the image of His essence, (Heb1:3).

\* If you asked: 'Whose glory did Isaiah see?' Our answer would be: 'He saw the glory of the Father'. You might say: 'Then how does Isaiah speak about the glory of the Father, while John the Evangelist speaks about the glory of the Son, and while Paul the apostle speaks about the glory of the Spirit?' Our answer would be: 'They were not like those concerned with the hypostatic (compound) nature. By speaking in this manner, they intended to clarify one essence or rank present in them. As proof of that, the features of the Father are identical to those of the Son, and those of the Son are identical to those of the Spirit.

**St John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 68:2-3



\* What Isaiah saw was not God as He really is but it was a symbolic means that was within the scope of the prophet's vision and comprehension. Moses had also had a vision of God, but in spite of that we find him telling Him: "Now therefore I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You," (Ex 33:13); for Moses had not seen God as He really is... "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is," (1Jn 3:2)<sup>1</sup>.

**St Augustine**

## **6- Some Leaders Witness to His Glory**

**'Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in him;  
But because of the Pharisees they did not confess him,  
Lest they should be put out of the synagogue': [42]**

Some of the leaders, like Nicodemus for example, believed in Him, (Jn3). They considered Him to be a teacher sent by God. Joseph of Arimathea is another such example, and he was the one who later went to Pontius Pilate to take the Holy Body. He received the blessing of burying the body in his own newly built grave. There were also many others who believed in their hearts but did not dare to proclaim their faith publicly. We will discuss the Sanhedrin at the end of this chapter God willing.

Elijah thought that he was the only one who worshipped God. He did not realize that there thousands of people who had not bowed to any idol; but God saw them whereas they were unknown to men. This happens in every generation: there are a few undisclosed faithful ones who are esteemed by God but not by men.

**'For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God'. [43]**

Some did not proclaim their faith as they feared losing their temporary honor. That was due to their love of receiving honor from people more than seeking the glory of God. The Lord Jesus Christ therefore told them: How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?

\* These were the Lord's words: "How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?" (Jn 5:44). In this sense they could really be considered as slaves and not as rulers; since they had strayed away from the faith and followed their lust for vain glory.

**St John Chrysostom**

## **7-The Lord Witnesses for Himself**

**Then Jesus cried and said,**

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 52:12

**“He who believes on Me, believes not on me,  
But in Him who sent me.” [44]**

This was the final point which the Lord made in the sermon directed to those wicked ones who persisted in their lack of faith. It is the continuation of the sermon that was interrupted in verse 37. The Lord cried out loudly to underline His great zeal for their salvation.

In this situation, the Lord confirms His mysterious unity with the Father: anyone who believes in the Son believes in the Father who sent Him. He who sees the Son also sees the Father as well; and he who honors the Son honors the Father too.

\* The expression “believes not” implies that belief is not limited to the physical form or to the limits of the person seen by the eyes. The Lord here indicates our need to believe that He was not a mere human being. It is vital for us to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as being both God and man (at the same time).

**St Ambrose**

\* It is as though the Lord was saying: ‘Why are you afraid of believing in Me? Having faith in Me is transmitted through Me to the Father. In the same manner, your denial of Me affects Him too. Note how the Lord uses every means to clarify that there is no difference in the Essence<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* Honoring the Father includes honoring the Father, and this does not diminish His divinity<sup>2</sup>.

**\* Now, when the Lord says: “He who believes on Me, believes not on me, But in Him who sent me” [44],** what can we understand other than that He appeared as a person to mankind whereas He remained being the Invisible since He was God? So that no one would imagine that He was nothing more than that which they saw, the Lord indicates the need to believe in Him as being equal to the Father in rank and in character...for he who believes in the Father needs to believe that He is the Son; and he who believes in the Father needs to believe that He has a Son. In such a manner, he who believes in the Father needs to believe in the Son<sup>3</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**“And he that sees Me sees Him who sent Me.” [45]**

\* What does all this mean? Does it mean that God has a body? This is impossible! The vision that the Lord is speaking about is in no way associated with the body. Vision here

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<sup>1</sup> Hom 60.PG 59: 408-409

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 90:5

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine; On the Gospel of St John, tractate 54:2

implies mental vision and the Lord indicates that His essence is the same as that of the Father. Here the Lord proclaims fellowship in one and the same Essence<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord said these words [44] so that no one would believe that He was a mere person, that is, that he was just the Son of Man. In the next words [45] He intended everyone to believe that He was equal to the Father...

The Lord Jesus Christ sent out His apostles...yet it was impossible for any one of them to say: "He who believes on Me, believes not on me, but in Him who sent me." This is because there was no basis to validate the words: 'believes on Me'.

We believe the apostle though we do not believe in him. This is because there is no apostle who can redeem sinners. However, we do believe in Him who does redeem sinners and this 'faith is accounted for righteousness,' (Romans 4:5).

The apostle may say: 'Any one who accepts me accepts Him who has sent me'; or he may say: 'Any one who hears me, hears Him who sent me'. Indeed, the Lord says: "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me," (Matt 10:40. That is how the Master is honored through the servant, and the Father through the Son. As a result the Father is honored in the Son and the Lord in the servant.

Truly, the only begotten Son has rightly said: "...you believe in God, believe also in Me," (Jn 14:1). Here He also said: "He who believes on Me, believes not on me, but in Him who sent me." The Lord did not intend to divert the faith of those who believe in Him. However, He does not want a believer to be confined to the status of a slave while having faith in Him. Every one who believes in the Father immediately believes in the Son for without Him the Father would not exist as a Father. In this manner a person achieves belief by equating the Son with Father. This would agree with the words: "...he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me."<sup>2</sup> [45]

**St Augustine**

**"I have come as a light into the world,  
That whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness". [46]**

Before the Lord, the Sun of Righteousness, came into the world, everything was covered in darkness. By His coming, the darkness faded away. However, only those who possessed healthy eyes were able to see the Sun of Righteousness. He shone on all mankind so that believers could find in Him light and peace. With His light there would be no place for darkness in them; their fears and despair would end; and heavenly joy and hope in eternity would be granted.

\* In both the Old and New Testament, the Father bears the same name. The Lord Jesus Christ used that same name too. Therefore St Paul called Him 'the Brightness', (Heb

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<sup>1</sup> Hom 69. PG 59:409

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine; On the Gospel of St John, tractate 54:3

3:1). He learned to do so from the same sources. In this passage the Lord also revealed the strong relationship between Him and the Father, and how there does not exist any separation between them. This is evident when He said that believing in Him did not constitute believing in Him since it was passed or got transmitted into belief in the Father. He called Himself ‘the Light’ because He redeems sins and destroys mental darkness<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* How good is He who has lifted the earth up to the heavens?! Even the twinkling planets reflect His heavenly glory as in a mirror. The hosts of apostles, martyrs, and priests also shine as glorious planets and grant light to the world<sup>2</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

\* The Lord did not say to His disciples: ‘You have come as a light to the world so that all who believe in you will not live in darkness’. We believe that such a statement would have been impossible to accept for He is the One who gives them light. Light is an integral part of Him and therefore can never be isolated from His own self. Indeed, He is not vulnerable to change! Consequently, all the saints are lights and they have attained light through faith in Him<sup>3</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**“And if anyone hears My words, and does not believe, I do not judge him: for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.” [47]**

The Lord Jesus Christ came to save the world and not to judge it. The words of the prophets who have prophesied concerning the Lord will condemn unbelievers.

\* Now is the time for mercy. Later, the time of judgment will come for it is written: ‘I will sing of mercy and justice to You, O Lord,’ (Ps 101:1)<sup>4</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words,  
Has that which judges him: the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day”. [48]**

The Lord desires the salvation and not the condemnation of everybody. On the last day, His words will condemn unbelievers as these words will be a witness against their crimes. Every word that He has uttered, every kindness He has shown, and every gift He has granted will act as a witness against those who have disregarded them carelessly.

\* The words: **“the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” [48]**, sufficiently proclaim that the Lord is Himself the Judge who will appear later on. It is He

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<sup>1</sup> Hom 69. PG 59:409

<sup>2</sup> Of the Christian Faith, 2:2:24

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine; On the Gospel of St John, tractate 54:4

<sup>4</sup> St Augustine; On the Gospel of St John, tractate 54:5

Himself who had spoken and proclaimed that. He is the One who has raised Himself to act as a door through which He can enter as a Shepherd to His sheep. Therefore those who have never heard His words will be judged in a manner that is different from those who have heard but disregarded them. In this context, the apostle says: ‘...for as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law,’ (Romans 2:12)<sup>1</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**“For I have not spoken on My own authority;  
But the Father who sent me gave me a commandment, what I should say,  
and what I should speak.” [49].**

Being the Messiah, the Lord fulfilled the mission of salvation that He had received from the Father. He had to preach and fulfill that mission as the agent of the Father. All His deeds were done for God who has so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son on its account.

The first Adam had failed in his mission. He had rebelled against God and was no longer fit to represent the heavenly One. Therefore the second Adam came filled with the spirit of obedience to fulfill the task delegated to Him: a task of God’s ultimate and divine love. In Him we are enabled to practice the obedience which we lacked due to our kinship with our father Adam.

\* The Lord surely spoke these words for their good...Do you not observe how He spoke with great humility in order to attract His hearers and silence those who came after them? That is the reason why He spoke in a manner appropriate to simple men. He knew that His words had no reference to His nature, and that they were fitting for weak hearers<sup>2</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* Only the Son is the Word of God and His wisdom. In Him is found all the commandments of the Father and at no time did the Son not know them. This made it necessary for Him to acquire at a certain time what He had possessed earlier. What He received from the Father was that He was begotten and so He acquired them at His birth (the Immortal One)...the Father did not give the Son a commandment which He did not know. Rather, we believe that all the commandments of the Father are found in the wisdom of the Father, and the Word of the Son<sup>3</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**“And I know that his commandment is everlasting life.  
Therefore, whatsoever I speak,  
Just as the Father has told Me, so I speak”. [50]**

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine; On the Gospel of St John, tractate 54:6

<sup>2</sup> Hom 69:PG: 410

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine; On the Gospel of St John, tractate 54:7

\* Since the Son Himself is everlasting life and He is God's commandments, then what do these words convey other than: 'I am God's commandments'? Indeed, the Lord says: "Therefore, whatsoever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak." [50]

We should not interpret the words "...the Father has told Me" to mean that the Father uses words when He speaks solely to the Word; or to mean that the Word of God needs words to proceed from God.

The Father spoke to the Son in the same manner that He gave birth to the Son. It is not like someone who knew one thing but lacked the other (lacked life). Since He is the Son...He is the Righteous One who gave birth to the Truth, so what can He say to the Truth? Truth that is so perfect has no need for additional truth. Therefore the Father spoke with the Truth for He gave birth to Him<sup>1</sup>.

**St Augustine**

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine; On the Gospel of St John, tractate 54:8

## Chapter 12

### The Council of the Sanhedrin

In this Gospel we often read about the high priests and the Pharisees. However, we rarely read about the scribes. Here we wish to present a quick picture of the members of the Council of the Sanhedrin.

The word ‘Sanhedrin’ is the Aramaic word for the Greek term ‘*sunedrion*’ which means ‘council’ or ‘gathering’ (legal).

This council was considered the top authority in the high court of law in Jerusalem. At the time when the Lord Jesus Christ ministered, and when He was judged, this court was presided over by the high priest of Israel.

#### Historic Setting

The history of this Council dates back to the period of Greek dominion and rule. However, rabbinic scholars attempt to trace its formation back to the Council of the seventy elders which was established in the days of Moses, (Numbers 11:16, 24).

The first time this gathering was referred to as ‘geraousia’ occurred in the days of Eustachius the Great, 223-187 A.D.

The **Greek emperors** granted freedom in matters pertaining to internal affairs to the local government. Therefore Israel governed itself internally through an aristocratic council of the elders, (1Kgs.6:12; 2 Kgs 1:10, 11:27; 18). This council was headed by the chief priest who acquired the position by inheritance.

When the Roman rule took over under Pompey, the chief priest retained his position as ‘ruler of the nation’<sup>1</sup>. This explains the presence of the council of the elders during these days.

**Gabinus** implemented the division of the Jewish region into five districts or five councils<sup>1</sup>. In this manner, the council in Jerusalem was no longer sole arbitrator in the judicial court.

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<sup>1</sup> Josephus: Antiq. 20:10:1

After ten years, Caesar reinstated Hyrcanus II to his former position and the power of the council of Jerusalem became extended to the region of Galilee<sup>2</sup>. That was the first time for the council of Jerusalem to be called 'the Sanhedrin'.

Herod began his reign by ordering the slaughter of all the members in the council of the Sanhedrin<sup>3</sup>. He then appointed members who were loyal to him.

After the death of Herod and his son Archelaus, the authority of the Council became extensive. By the time the Lord began His ministry and during the age of the apostles, this Council became the high legislative court of justice.

Undoubtedly, this role came to an end when Jerusalem was totally destroyed in the year 70 A.D.

### **The Members of the Council**

1-The Chief Priests: These were considered the aristocratic party in Jerusalem. It comprised former priests as well as current ones- such as Hannaniah the father-in- law of Jaffa and Caiaphas, as well as some other family members of their children. The office of the High Priests became diverted from its main role which was to handle only religious issues; for they used religion to veil their political ends.

2- The Sadducees: These were either called priests or elders. They were not priests in the religious sense and as indicated in the Books written by Moses. They were more like a judicial authority or party and they worked closely with the high priests. They harbored enmity towards the Pharisees which they tried to disguise.

3- The Pharisees: These considered themselves to be the guardians of the law and of Jewish traditions. They adhered to literal interpretations in an extreme manner, and they had immense authority in the local committees. They mixed among the crowds to arouse questions and arguments directed to the Lord Jesus Christ as they sought to accuse Him before the Sanhedrin. They would report how they believed the Lord had abused the law.

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<sup>1</sup> Josephus: Antiq. 14:5:4

<sup>2</sup> Josephus: Antiq. 14:8:3-5

<sup>3</sup> Josephus: Antiq. 14:9:4



4- The Priests: They were scholars in the Law of Moses, (Matt 22:35; Lk 7:30). They were called the teachers of the law or *nomodidashalos*, (Lk 5:17, 34). This class began to appear after the days of Ezra the scribe who used to read the law, (Neh. 6-10).

The role of the scribes evolved to being teachers from being interpreters of the law and enforcing it. Therefore people were required to honor them more than parents since the children and the parents were obligated to honor their teachers.

### The Council of Jerusalem and the Local Councils

According to Jewish customs, there were two types of councils or *sunedria*: the high Sanhedrin of Jerusalem which comprised seventy- one members, and the preparatory Sanhedrin found in the other countries. Each local council- preparatory Sanhedrin- consisted of twenty three members who were appointed by the high Sanhedrin.

Based on the Mishna, the high Sanhedrin comprised seventy members including a president, vice president, and court guards as well.

It is believed that membership continued for one's lifetime. New members were appointed by current members or by a high political authority.

### **The Authority of the Council**

In the days of the Lord Jesus Christ, the authority of the Council was confined to the twelve Jewish regions. Consequently, it was not possible to issue a judicial criminal sentence against the Lord as long as he dwelled in Galilee. It would only be possible when ever He would enter the boundaries of Judea.

Legally, the Council had no authority over the Jews. However, local councils and the Jews in general- wherever they were- tended to obey the decisions of the high Council of Jerusalem. These local councils were not obligated to take their cases to that high Council unless they needed an opinion concerning issues specifically related to the law.

### **The Meetings of the Council**

The local councils usually met on Monday and Thursday each week, excluding feast days and Saturdays. The Sanhedrin met in the place called Xystos or Xistus which is found on the east side within the house of the high priest.

## Legal Procedures

According to the Mishna, the members sat in a semi circle so that they could all see each other. Two court scribes sat before them, one on the right and one on the left side, and their task was to count the votes that would specifically indict or clear an accused person. Facing these scribes, educated students sat in three rows. Every accused had to appear in humble clothes to indicate his grief.

In cases involving a death sentence, the process began with hearing those who pleaded innocent so that they could present their arguments. The students were not allowed to say one word against the accused. However, they could speak if they could find any point to his favor. Whereas those who presented accusations could also present issues to their benefit, those who presented arguments for innocence could not also present arguments against the accused.

Voting began by the youngest of the members, though it sometimes began with the most important member. The vote for the innocence of a person was decided by a majority vote. The vote for the guilt of a person was decided by the majority vote plus two additional votes.

It was illegal to issue a sentence on the same day of the trial; for it was necessary to discuss the case and then issue a verdict on the next day. The exception to that was made in a case where the accused had misled or deceived the public. Then it was possible to judge him on the same day or on the same night. Other than such a situation, it was forbidden to discuss a case deserving a death penalty on a Friday or the day before a feast day. These had to be postponed till after a Saturday or after feast days.

The religious, civil, and criminal authority of the Council was restricted by the ruling foreign body in Israel. This differed from one period to the other and according to current ruler.

When a person was led to his death, he would be announced by a forerunner proclaiming the verdict and saying: "This named person, son of such a named person, has been found to deserve death. Therefore if anyone wishes to contest the matter, let him come forward and proclaim that"<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Sanhedrin 6:1

The person sentenced to death was required to confess his crime so that he may have a share in the life to come.

\* \* \*

**Meditations Inspired**  
**by**  
**The Gospel of St John, Chapter Twelve**  
**Your Fragrance is the Mystery of My Life**

\* Grant me to cross over and come to You  
In the company of Your beloved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus,  
For wherever You go, You set up a joyful heavenly feast!  
With Mary, I pour pure spices at Your feet.  
It is not the work of my hands  
And I have not purchased it with my money...  
What I offer is the fruit of Your Holy Spirit!  
I pour out the spices and I smell its fragrance...  
Your fragrance has invaded my inner home and has filled my whole being.  
Your fragrance is the mystery of my life!

\* Truly, Judas the thief smelled it as a fragrance of death to death.  
Hence he lost love, for he did not comprehend anything but betrayal.  
He counted giving to be a loss;  
For the love of money blinded him.  
As for me, I smell and live by your fragrance...  
Allow me to join Mary and rub Your feet with my hair...  
Let me offer all that the world considers to be glorious to serve Your needy children  
The poor and needy stand before You, and I carry them and walk to You.  
By honoring them, I honor them, I give honor to Your hands.

\* With Martha, my hands stretch out to serve Your Body,  
For You receive in Your hands every offering made to Your brothers.  
Grant me to see Your hand working in and through me in all my actions.  
May Your hands embrace my whole being as I work tirelessly!

\* With Lazarus, I sit silently:  
My life, which You have resurrected, is a living testimony of Your love and glory.  
My silence is greater and more powerful than any word can express!

\* Here are the foreign Greeks seeking You:  
They could meet with You yet they could not rise up upon the Cross.  
How could we enjoy the divine Fruit unless we got buried?  
You arose, so resurrect us with You!

\* See how the heavens witness to You!  
You are the subject of all prophecies,  
You are the achiever of the Father's will,  
You are the Savior of the world!  
The fragrance of Your Cross has filled heaven and earth...  
The Father joyfully received it,  
And the heavens hosts smelled it and comprehended its hidden mysteries.  
Mankind recognized Your fragrance and became angels...  
The fragrance of Your Cross is the mystery of my life!

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## THE LORD REVEALS HIMSELF TO HIS CHOSEN ONES

### CHAPTERS 13 to 17

**The Lord's Farewell Speeches      Chapters 13 -16**  
**The Lord's Farewell Prayer      Chapter 17**  
**The Lord's Farewell Speeches**  
**St John Ch 13 -16**

### **The Lord's Farewell Teachings** **John 13-16**

In the previous chapters (1-12), the Evangelist presented the story of Divine Love. In it the Word of God became incarnated and took the form of a human being. This is God's plan in order to save fallen mankind, and to announce the supreme love and care for every needy person. He wishes to direct the eyes of all mankind to Him who loves them. He wishes men to recognize Him as the One who has the power to renew, satisfy, heal, and educate them. Now the time had come to reveal the height of divine love as the Lord walks in the road of suffering, and ascends on the cross for the sake of every human soul. Some scholars have called chapters 13-17, "the Gospel of Love". In these chapters, the Lord meets with His disciples in the upper room, and then takes them with Him to Gethsemane. The Evangelist recounts the service of the washing of the feet, which the Lord undertook all on His own. He did so in order to attract them to participate in His love by washing the feet of their fellow men. The Lord also established, on that day, the mystery of the true Passover which all generations had been anticipating. He had yet to speak about the subject of the praise offered by the heavenly hosts; and finally the Lord gave farewell speeches which have come to be a living legacy for the church.

The Evangelist uses the word "love" as a noun or verb nine times throughout chapters 1 and 2. In contrast, He uses this word 20 times in chapters 13-17. The story of the upper room is essentially marked by its theme of love.

In His farewell speeches, the Lord Jesus Christ revealed many of His mysteries to His disciples. These had to do with the way the Divine Spirit works in their lives. Therefore He reveals the following:

- 1- God's Divine Plan:** In order to prepare a place for them in the great heavens, His plan anticipated the coming of all humanity into the joy and fellowship of eternal glory. The Lord revealed to His disciples that all He had gone through including pain and crucifixion was planned by the Father: through the Son His love for mankind would be fulfilled, and He would carry them unto the Father's embrace
- 2- His Divine Identity:** He is one with the Father, therefore He fulfills the Father's will joyfully. Whatever the Lord says or does are actually the words and deeds of the Father, who is the lover of mankind.

- 3- **He is the New Core:** And disciples and believers are the branches of the Divine Vine. Although man was banished from the Garden of Eden, now he had the Lord as His true vine. Indeed, man had become a branch bearing great fruit into nature. The Lord becomes greatly pleased with the fruit, that is the work of His hands.
- 4- **Their New Potentials:** Sacrificial love for others. The believer considers himself unqualified to sacrifice his life for his fellow men. Yet, he joins the Lord and shares with Him the glory of the cross and of the sacrificial love.
- 5- **The Role of the Disciples in the World:** Disciples need to love mankind even though the world rejects them. They offer what belongs to their kingdom, the kingdom of light and love. In contrast, the evil world offers darkness and hatred, which belong to the kingdom of darkness and of this world.
- 6- **The Divine Support:** God would send the Holy Spirit, who would guide the Lord's children through and above the anxieties and sufferings which they face. They would smell the Divine Love as well as experience love towards mankind, glory, and honor, since they are partakers with the Lord in His sufferings. Indeed, they would smell the fragrance of the crucified Lord. The Holy Spirit would raise them above suffering; therefore nothing could trap or bind them. Such hardship would be seen as the path of Golgotha leading them to the crucified Divine One. With Him, they would rejoice in His heavenly kingdom.

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## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

### **SERVICE OF THE WASHING OF THE FEET**

When the Lord had completed delivering His teachings, He began to hold private conversations with His disciples. This was just before He was arrested and His aim was to comfort them throughout the time of His suffering. Moreover, the Lord desired to reveal His mysteries and offer His final advice to them. He spoke to His disciples as a Father would speak to His children. For His wisdom would be an inheritance that would enrich and support them.

- |                                                       |              |
|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>1. The washing of the disciples feet</b>           | <b>1-17</b>  |
| <b>2. His words about His betrayer</b>                | <b>18-30</b> |
| <b>3. The glory of the Son of Man</b>                 | <b>31-33</b> |
| <b>4. Brotherly love</b>                              | <b>34-35</b> |
| <b>5. Warning to Peter and his denial of the Lord</b> | <b>36-38</b> |

#### **1- The Washing of the Disciples Feet:**

**‘Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end’[1].**

**St. John Chrysostom** comments that the Lord Jesus Christ did great acts from the very beginning of His ministry. Now that the time had come for Him to leave them and ascend to the Father, the Lord embraced them with His ultimate love through the cross. This would support them after His ascension.

We too need to offer sacrificial love to all those around us every second of our lives for we do not know when we will depart from this world. Then we would leave an inheritance of love and memories of unforgettable loving deeds.

Many scholars question the exact day of the Jewish Passover. Was it on Holy Thursday when the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of the true Passover, established the mystery of the Christian Passover? Or was it on Good Friday when the true Passover was fulfilled, and which occurred on the same day of the Jewish Passover, in order to cancel the symbol?

There have been so many writings on this subject, yet there is no doubt that there were some groups that embraced a different calendar than the one the Jewish religious leaders officially used in Jerusalem. This explains why the events reported in the three Gospels reflect a calendar that the Lord Jesus Christ used when He celebrated, with His disciples, the Passover on Holy Thursday. Yet, the Sanhedrin and their followers celebrated the Passover on Friday, so it was not possible to kill the Passover lamb except on Friday. On that day the lamb was presented to the priest on the official Passover day.

The Evangelist is preoccupied with the True Passover: the killing of the **Lamb of God** who carried the sins of the world on the Cross. This is the Passover that encompasses all ages, it is the one that engages the heavens and the heavenly hosts. Therefore St. John is not concerned with the time when the Christian Passover was instituted, although he states that it was **“before the feast of the Passover”**. In the book of Revelations, the Lord Jesus Christ is called the Lamb more than fifteen times. The Evangelist had a vision of the **“Lamb as though it had been slain”**. He also saw the glorified church as the “Bride of the Lamb” and how the heavenly life is “the marriage of the Lamb” who has come, and this wife had made herself ready, (Rev 14:7). St. John saw the Lamb, the heavenly Holy of Holies or the eternal Tabernacle and Light (Rev 21).

In Chapter 13, the Evangelist reports the **‘washing of the feet’** as a ministry of love and sacrifice. This took place while the mystery of the Eucharist was being prepared, not during the meal itself. It was the custom of the Jews to wash the feet before supper.

St. John the Evangelist did not report the events of Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of the last week in the life of the Lord. These were reported in detail by the earlier three Evangelists. He also does not speak about the institution of the Holy Eucharist (Matt 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19).

Because the Lord Jesus Christ is all omniscient, He allowed the enemy of goodness to have power according to God’s set plan and timing. The Lord allowed the enemy to act and to instigate his followers to resist Him. Accordingly the Lord said: “This is your hour, and the power of darkness,” (Luke 22:53).

St. John’s words that **‘His hour had come’** do not indicate that certain things were bound to be fulfilled over which the Lord had no control. In fact, this would be the Lord’s hour when the salvation of the world would be fulfilled through His Divine power. He would convert the evil of the wicked into goodness without forcing the wicked to pursue their evil acts. If there was anything inevitable about the events of this hour, it had to do with God’s sublime love, which demanded the salvation of the world. In proclaiming that His hour had come, the Lord revealed that He had come of His own will and at that very hour.

Two complimentary issues are related to this hour- or it could be considered as one issue with two facets: His departure or ascension to the Father and proclamation of His infinite love for His followers. It appears that His ascension is not planned solely for Himself, rather it is planned so that His loved ones too would enjoy ascending and meeting with the Father.

In this manner, the Lord accepted all the sufferings leading to His crucifixion in a spirit of sublime love. His sufferings were the source of His joy, as St. Paul explains in Heb. 12: 2: “...for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”.



\* St. John the Evangelist says, **“Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come”**. Actually, the Lord knew about this hour, from a very long time ago, not only when it was about to come.

The Evangelist proclaims, loud and clear, that the death of the Lord is merely relocation as He was going to **‘...depart from this world to the Father...’**

The words **‘He loved them to the end’** indicate that the Lord continued to love them in a constant manner.

\* What is intended by: He loved them to the end? It is as though He were saying ‘My love will never cease’<sup>1</sup>.

#### **St John Chrysostom**

\* He has crossed over to the Father in order to feed us: so let us follow Him in order to get nourished.

\* We can enjoy the sufferings of the Lord and His resurrection by passing over from this death- prone life into the other immortal life. In other words, pass from death into life<sup>2</sup>.

\* This prophetic symbol now gets fulfilled in the Truth when Christ is led, as a Lamb, to be sacrificed (Is. 53:7). Consequently the utmost pillars of our heart are sprinkled with His blood. By making the sign of His cross on our foreheads, we are saved from the destruction awaiting this world. This is similar to Israel when it was saved from the slavery of the Egyptians who were ultimately destroyed, (Ex 12:23). This perfectly planned Passover is what we practice as we cross over from Satan into the embrace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and from this unsettled world into His well established kingdom. This is definitely how we cross over or ‘Passover’ and belong to the eternal God.

The apostle glorifies God for this grace that has been granted to us by saying: this word **‘Pascha’** means ‘passing over’ in the Latin language. Therefore this explains how we have a Pascha and a Passover. From where and to where does He cross over? From this world and into the Father’s embrace.

He has granted hope to the members through the Head. In that manner they will trustfully follow Him as He passes over and takes the lead.

What about those unbelievers who stand apart at a distance away from the Head and the members? Clearly, they are crossing over. However, there is a great difference between those who are crossing over from the world and those who are crossing over with the world. It is a difference between someone moving to the Father and another moving to the enemy. The Egyptians too were crossing over; yet they were not crossing

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<sup>1</sup> Hom 70 PG 59:413

<sup>2</sup> Letters 55

from the sea and into the Kingdom. Rather, they were crossing from the sea into destruction<sup>1</sup>.

\* **‘He loved them to the end’ [1].** He is our end and in Him we pass over, this conveys that His own love is what drove Him to death<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**‘And supper having ended, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him,’ [2]**

The Lord Jesus Christ announced that the time of His death was drawing near, and that one of His disciples would betray Him; another would deny Him; while others would abandon Him. To Him, He perceived that all such events were planned by God to enable Him to fulfill salvation.

At the same time, Satan was preoccupied with dominating the heart of Judas. He planned to move him to betray His Lord. In so doing, Satan imagined he could smother the Divine Light and corrupt the eternal infinite love. However, God, the ever-righteous, transforms Satan’s evil into benefits for us.

Some may ask: ‘Had not Satan planted the idea of disloyalty unto Judas’s mind earlier when he met with the Pharisees and made a deal with them?’ Some scholars believe the enemy of goodness had sown from ‘the seed of the idea’ and that he was watering it with the water of greed and betrayal. Then **the enemy of goodness entered in Judas’s heart as the established owner and Lord and not just an instigator or tempter of an idea.** When we open the door to evil, the enemy scatters his seeds just as a guest would do who tries to invade areas which do not belong to him. Then, when we accept his thoughts and ideas, and we begin to act accordingly, he daringly invades us to reign as an owner. He gets hold of the steering wheel and commands the direction while we are hopelessly unable to resist him, That is why, whenever we are careless in resisting him, we are exposing our hearts and minds to the enemy. Then he believes he is entitled to come in and take control.

\* His Lord continued, to the last day, to be generous to him<sup>3</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* Referring to Judas, it is written: **‘...the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him...’.** Consequently, you could apply this to all those who have delivered their hearts to Satan. Satan could put in such a person’s heart to commit adultery, or in another person’s heart to cheat, or sow a lust for fame...this applies to all the sins scattered by Satan into hearts that are not armed by the

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 55:1

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 55:2

<sup>3</sup> Homilies in St John 70:1

shield of faith. Through such a shield it is possible to defeat all the fiery and wicked darts and not just one or two arrows, (Eph. 6:16)<sup>1</sup>.

\* **‘...the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas’**: in other words he had presented the suggestion to his spirit in the form of an idea. Rather than entering through a physical portal like the ears, Satan entered into Judas through his thoughts. Therefore what we consider to be spiritual does not always convey a praiseworthy matter. Notice that the apostle speaks about certain evil spiritual matters- Eph 6:11- that exist in the heavens; and he testifies that we need to struggle against them<sup>2</sup>.

**St Augustine**

Jesus knew that the Father had given all things unto His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God.

According to our belief, the Father had entrusted the redemption of believers into the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore when the Lord says, “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father,” (Matt 11:22), He was speaking about that kind of trust. In another passage, the Lord Himself says, “They were Yours, You gave them to Me,” (Jn 17:6). He also said: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him,” (Jn 6:44), and St. John the Baptist says, “...unless it has been given to him from heaven,” (Jn 3:27). The Evangelist means to convey that in all cases the Lord takes no lesser role than the Father. Since He came from the Father and has ascended to Him, therefore He possesses all things. Consequently, when you hear that He was delivered and handed over; do not give that a human interpretation. Rather, this illustrates the honor of the Father and the Lord’s fellowship with Him. Indeed, just as the Father entrusted Him, so does the Lord entrust His Father. This is apparent in the following words “But each one in his own order: Christ the first fruits, afterwards, those who are Christ’s at His coming, then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father,” (1 Cor. 15:23),

However, St. John reveals this manner in a human way to underline the great care of the Lord Jesus Christ towards mankind. The Lord proclaims His ultimate love by caring for men just as He cares for himself. He teaches us them all the righteous ways, such as humility, which He indicated as being the basis and end of every virtue.

It is not without purpose that the Evangelist states that, **“He had come from God and was going to God”**. Rather, it is intended to teach us that the Lord acted appropriately according to His origin as well as His destination. In this manner, He crushed with His feet all forms of pride<sup>3</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* He was not entrusted with just a few matters while excluding other concerns, but He was entrusted with “all things”. Accordingly, when David was in the spirit, he had this

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:24

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 55:4

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St John 70:1

vision and said: ‘The Lord said to my Lord. “Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your foot stool”, ‘(Ps. 110:1). Even the enemies of the Lord are a part of “all things” and the Lord with His fore knowledge, knew that they had been sent to Him by the Father. However, in order to enable us to understand more clearly the implications, let us study carefully the statement, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ, all shall be made alive,” ( 1 Cor. 15:22).<sup>1</sup>

**Origen the Scholar**

\* Since the Lord knew what He would do for the sake of His friends, he patiently used His enemies. In this manner, the Father put all things into His hands: every wicked one as well as the righteous were to be used to fulfill the ultimate goal<sup>2</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**“He rose from supper and laid aside this garments,  
Took a towel and girded Himself”. [4]**

He did not leave His supper, but left His seat at the table after everyone was seated and waited for the supper. The Lord took off His outer garments or coat, and put a towel around His waist to appear as a servant and to get ready to wash and dry the feet of those present.

The washing of feet took place before starting to eat dinner. As the streets and alleys were mostly sandy and the shoes were “open sandals” while socks were not yet known, we can understand why feet got dirty and smelly. This would be especially true of those that had walked long distances in the heart of the land. Therefore the washing of feet was part of the job of the slaves or of one of the least status present at a social gathering.

When David the prophet sent a message to Abigail to marry her, she rose up and said: “Here is your maidservant, a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my Lord” (1 Sam 25:41). Some scholars believe that the Lord started with washing the feet of Judas in the hope that his conscience would reprimand him and make him repent on what he had begun to plan.

Our Lord had humbly told St. John the Baptist: “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness”, (Matt 3:15). At that time the Lord revealed the righteousness of humility which He possessed even before the mystery of the Eucharist was established. So who of us would dare draw near to the Eucharist without first bowing down his soul before the Lord and receiving His blessing and then approach and receive His body and blood that have been sacrificed for each one? It would be a sad day for anyone to approach this mystery with a vain or haughty heart and to come without bowing down to wash even the feet of opponents and oppressors.

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:26-27

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 55:5

\* The words **“rose from supper”** indicate that the supper had been prepared and set on the table before the guests<sup>1</sup>.

**St Augustine**

“Come, O Lord Jesus Christ, remove Your clothes-those that You have worn for my sake. May You be naked in order to cover me up with Your mercy. May you carry a towel around Your waist in order to grant us the grace of eternity. May you pour water in a tub in order to wash our heads as well as our feet-that it may be a cleaning of our souls and inclinations and not just of our bodies. We desire You to take away all the uncleanliness resulting from our weaknesses.”

**St Augustine**

How great is Your sublimity! As a servant, You washed the feet of Your disciples, and as a God You send dew from the heavens. You wash not only the feet; but You call us to sit with You. Moreover, in accordance with Your generosity, You encourage us and say **“You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, you Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet”** [13, 14]

Consequently, I desire to wash the feet of my fellow men myself. I wish to fulfill my Lord’s command. I do not want to feel ashamed nor do I take lightly what the Holy One did in the first place.

A great good mystery that no one understands!”<sup>2</sup>

**St. Ambrose**

**‘After that, He poured water into a basin  
And began to wash the disciples’ feet  
And to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded’. [5]**

The Master waited until all the disciples were reclining on the floor around the table. In those days, it was the custom that people did not sit on chairs around the table. A slave would probably sit on a chair to eat; but free people would recline on the floor during meals. They would be leaning on the elbow of the left arm, their head in the direction of the table, and their feet to the other side.

Usually, one of the slaves would do the washing of feet. If there was no slave, then it was expected that the youngest or lesser in rank would perform the task. However, the Lord Himself undertook this role. In this manner, He elevated the status of slaves. Although slaves are forced to do this task due to their social status, yet the Lord did so wholly and gladly by His own free will and through His humility and love. Consequently, a slave should not resent doing any task as long as he works for the Lord and not out of the fear of men. St. Paul accordingly encourages slaves, saying “Servants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh , with fear and

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 55:3

<sup>2</sup> Of the Holy Spirit 1:1:13-15

trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ, not with eye service, as mean pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with good will doing service, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that whatsoever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free” (Eph. 6:5-8)

**Origen the Scholar** believes that the Lord did not wash the feet of Judas as he could have no fellowship with Him due to his determination to do evil. In contrast, St. John Chrysostom comments that the Lord first began by washing the feet of Judas in order to offer him all the loving acts up to the very last moments before his treacherous deed. The Lord did so to grant him the opportunity to examine himself and withdraw from his evil intentions.

\* It appears to us that the Lord first began by first washing the traitor’s feet for the verse says **“began to wash the disciples’ feet”** [5]

\* Notice how the Lord demonstrated the way to be humble. He did so not by simply washing their feet but through other clear actions: He got up after they were all reclining and He washed their feet after He had taken off His outer clothes and not while He was fully dressed. Moreover, He girded Himself and filled the basin rather than ordering someone else to do so. He undertook the whole task all by Himself, all the procedures of washing the feet, in order to show us how to apply ourselves diligently in all tasks and not just go through them carelessly.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Abraham did not carry water by himself. Neither did he wash the feet of those who had come to him as strangers. Father, he said “please, let a little water be brought, and wash your feet,” (Gen 18:4). Joseph too, did not carry water to wash the feet of his eleven brothers. Rather, it was the man who managed his house who made Simeon bring water to them to wash their feet. In contrast, the Lord Jesus Christ says “I am among You as One who serves,” (Lk 22:27). He truthfully states **“...learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart”** (Matt. 11:29). He Himself poured the water into the basin for He knew that no one could wash the feet of His disciples in the way He could. He would wash them in such a manner that would allow them to have fellowship with Him, [8]<sup>1</sup>.

\* We believe that the water is the Word that washes the feet of the disciples when they come to be washed and the Lord came before them<sup>2</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

The Bible does not say: “He washed the disciples’ feet”, but rather states that He “began to wash the disciples’ feet”. **Origen the Scholar** comments, therefore, that the Lord began and has not stopped the washing since they are in need of being constantly washed. Indeed, they became unclean that very night after they had been washed; “all of

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John 70:2

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on John, Book32:47-49

you will be made to stumble because of Me this night,” (Matt 26:31). The Lord told Peter “...the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times,” (Jn 13:38)<sup>1</sup>.

\*Why is it astonishing that the Lord poured water in a basin in order to wash the disciples’ feet? Is He not the One who has poured His blood on the earth in order to wash away the dirt of their sins?

Why is it surprising that the Lord used the towel with which He was girded to wipe the feet He had washed? Is He not the One who, with His own body which enveloped Him, establishes the sound path that His own Evangelists would follow?

In order to gird Himself with a towel, He removed His outer garments. However, when He gave up the glory of His divinity in order to take the form of a slave, the Lord did not abandon what He possessed. Rather, He accepted what He did not possess before<sup>2</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**Then He came to Simon Peter  
And Peter said to Him,  
“Lord, are You washing my feet?”[6]**

It is clear that the disciples were in a state of shocked amazement due to the Lord’s act. None of them had spoken a word until Peter’s turn came. Peter had often witnessed to the Lord’s humility, yet he never imagined it would get to the extent of appearing as a slave undertaking to wash feet.

\* It is as though Peter was saying: ‘Is it with those same hands, with which you have opened eyes, healed lepers, and raised the dead, that you will wash my feet?’ He could not pray and beg the Lord with words other than these “Lord, are You washing my feet?” These words were enough to indicate clearly what was on his mind.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* It is clear from these words ‘**Then He came to Simon Peter**’ that the Lord did not start by washing Peter’s feet. This confirms that the Lord did not think of anyone as the leader of the disciples.

**St. Augustine**

**Jesus answered and said to him  
“What I am doing you do not understand now  
But you will now after this”. [7]**

It is as though the Lord is telling Peter “Allow Me to do this now, and I will soon tell you the nature and purpose of this act”.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf Commentary on John, Book 32:52-58

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 55:7

\*What do these words imply **“...you will know after this?”** When? When you will order devils to come out in My name, when you will see Me ascending into heavens, when you know through the Spirit that I sit at the right of God. Then you will understand what is going on<sup>1</sup>.

\* This means that you will know the great benefit you gather from this. The benefit of the lesson you learn is how the Lord leads us to all manner of humility<sup>2</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* For Me, washing your feet is a symbol of the essence of your souls. These get purified and prepared to proclaim the message of righteousness (Rom 10:15, Isa 52:7). Besides, you are enabled to touch the human soul by your pure feet. However, you do not know that mystery right now because you have not yet acquired the knowledge pertaining to His person. You will comprehend this mystery later on. You will consequently be enlightened concerning matters that are neither a symbol nor trivial<sup>3</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

**Peter said to Him,**

**“You shall never wash my feet!”**

**Jesus answered him:**

**“If I do not wash your feet, you have no part with Me”. [8]**

It was not possible for Peter, the apostle, to see his awesome Master take the position of a slave and perform the task of washing the feet. Therefore he objected to His Master’s action. He had not comprehended the scope of the Lord’s deed who through His sublime love, had chosen to occupy the status of a slave. Indeed, it even allowed Judas to sell Him as a slave, and permitted the enemy of righteousness to fulfill God’s plan for salvation through the Cross.

It is as though the Lord is telling Peter: ‘You cannot be My disciple unless I wash your feet’. Indeed, if the Lord’s hands do not reach unto the inner soul and wash it, a person would not be able to enjoy salvation or become a disciple of the Lord. A believer needs to be washed in the baptismal font by the action of God’s Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:11, Titus 3:5, 6). Moreover, a believer needs to be washed by the precious blood (1 Jn 1:7). We need to wash the feet based on the premise that our souls get unclean while it walks in this world. This is a task that belongs exclusively to the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone can forgive sins and save the soul from corruption. We are able to enjoy Him through the mystery of repentance and confession. Without Him we are unable to partake of the joy of the Lord’s sacrifice (the mystery of the Eucharist).

What do these words imply: **“If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me”**  
The Lord points out here that the action of washing is His own specialty. On the great day of the Lord, a person will not appear to be pure or receive his share, (of fellowship with

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<sup>1</sup> Hom 70 PG 59:416

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John 70:2

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:87,88



the Lord in glory), through His own personal endeavors. This is granted only through the action of the Lord Jesus Himself who washes the souls of the un-cleanliness of sins.

Often we object to the Lord's acts due to our inner blindness and our inability to comprehend His divine wisdom and plans for us.

\* Peter could not comprehend the mystery and therefore refused the service. He imagined that by allowing the Lord to serve him it would damage the servant's humility<sup>1</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

\* It is clear that Peter spoke to his own harm, even though he spoke to the Master with respect and good intentions. Life is full of such mistakes that are committed by people who imagine they know what is best. Actually they are ignorant, and speak or do things that lead them to adverse paths<sup>2</sup>.

\* Peter, who said to the Lord "You shall never wash my feet!" was reprimanded and warned against persisting in this attitude so that he might have fellowship with the Lord. Similarly, it is far better for all of you to seek wisdom before taking decisions, rather than rush and make hasty decisions and promises to do one thing or another and persisting on taking the wrong course<sup>3</sup>.

\* If we do not do so (present our feet to be washed by the Lord) we will neither have fellowship with Him nor will our feet become beautiful. This is a particularly important matter as we are eager and jealous to receive greater gifts, (1 Cor. 1 2:31). Furthermore, we desire to join those who preach righteousness<sup>4</sup>.

\* We even dare to add, in harmony with the words "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me", that the Lord did not wash the feet of Judas because he had actually determined in his mind to betray his Master and Lord. The devil found that Judas was not dressed in the full armor of God. He did not possess the shield of faith that would enable him to quench the fiery wicked darts, (Eph. 6:13-16)<sup>5</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

**Simon Peter said to Him**

**"Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!"[9]**

Probably Peter felt that he needed a complete spiritual washing. Consequently, he desired to get his whole being washed and not just his feet. Some scholars consider that Peter's request here reveals some sort of humility even though it carried some sort of pride too. He has not accepted the Lord's thought but rather intended to fulfill his own.

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<sup>1</sup> On the Mysteries, 6:31

<sup>2</sup> Cf Commentary on John, Book 32:57-58

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:96

<sup>4</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:101

<sup>5</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:19

We often want to advise God so that He would act according to our wishes, even though we would be asking sincerely for spiritual matters.

**Origen the Scholar** states that Peter did not want to get his hands washed, and that the Lord does not ask for the deadly application of the literal word. An example of that is the washing of hands before meals, (Matt 15:2). Besides, Peter did not need to get his head washed. The Lord did not want that to be covered since the glory of God and His likeness rested on Peter, (1 Cor. 11:7)<sup>1</sup>.

\* The apostle Peter, hastily excused himself from washing his feet. He was even more hasty to request that his hands and head get washed. In both instances he was motivated by his sincere love for the Lord Jesus Christ. Why did the Lord not ask him to follow His example rather than threaten Him? Because Peter was not chosen to do so. Had the Lord said “Allow Me, for in this way I encourage you to imitate My humility”, Peter would have made hundreds of promises in order to stop the Lord from washing his feet. However, the Lord uttered words that would frighten Peter and scare him profoundly. He informed Peter that he would be separated from the Lord. Note that Peter’s constant question was, “Lord where are you going?”[36] He also said, “I will lay down my life for Your sake”, [37].

**St John Chrysostom**

**Jesus said to him**

**“He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet,**

**But is completely clean;**

**And you are clean,**

**But not all of you.”[10]**

It was a Jewish custom to bathe twice, therefore the Lord underlines that the washing with the baptismal water occurs only once. The washing the feet refers to the tears of repentance which represent the second baptism.

Eleven of the disciples were pure even though they abandoned the Lord and took flight in the critical hours, (Mark 14:50) The Lord described them as being pure and did not reproach them for their weakness. Even though He said “...you will all abandon Me”, the Lord did not intend to reproach them. He merely wanted to confirm that He understands how a person suffers from isolation in times of trouble. Accordingly, the Psalmist cries, “My father and mother have forsaken me...”. Nevertheless, one of the disciples was not pure, for he harbored betrayal in his heart. The Lord had washed his feet though He knew of his deceit. In so doing, He reveals His compassion towards sinners and His desire for them to enjoy His gifts.

No one is without sin-no one in the Old or in the New testaments. No one is without blemish except the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who is ‘without spot and without blemish’, (1 Pet 1:19). It is therefore possible to say that anyone who needs to enjoy repentance, needs to carry the features of his holy Lord. In other words, such a person needs to become holy by adhering to the Lord. He alone can state that “you are

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on John, Book32:102

clean”, (Jn 13:10). This is due to His blood that cleanses us from all sins, (1 Jn 1:7). He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, (1 Jn 2:2)

\* The eleven disciples who were washed and had become pure, became more so when the Lord had washed their feet. Judas, however, who had actually become unclean-according to the saying: “He who is filthy, let him be filthy still”, (Rev 22:11) became even more filthy and impure for Satan had entered into him after he had received a piece of the bread, (Jn 13:27)<sup>1</sup>.

### **Origen the Scholar**

\* Since the disciples were pure, then why did the Lord wash their feet? He did that in order that we might learn humility. That is why He came: not just for any member of the body, but especially for all those who are considered to be the most repugnant of the members.<sup>2</sup>

\* He came for the members of the body which are assumed to be the most honorable. Were the disciples pure, even though they had neither been redeemed of their sins nor had received as yet the Holy Spirit? Where sin was still prevalent and no sacrifice had been offered, then how is it that they were described as being pure?! So that no one would assume that the disciples were pure and had been washed from sin, the Lord explained “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you”, (Jn 15:3). In other words, ‘you are pure because you have accepted the Light and have avoided falling into the sin of Judas’... these disciples had driven out all evil out of their hearts and had befriended the Lord with their whole pure mind<sup>3</sup>.

### **St John Chrysostom**

\* “For to everyone who has, more will be given”, (Matt 25:29). Since the disciples were pure, the Lord Jesus Christ added to their purity by washing their feet. He neither wishes to wash those who did not wash themselves, nor those who were not wholly clean. In fact, the Lord was speaking about those who had become pure through Him. Indeed, if there was one person among all mankind who was perfect but had not enjoyed being washed by the Lord, then that person would not be considered to be pure...<sup>4</sup>.

\* The Lord washed their feet because they were pure according to human standards but not according to God. Without our Lord Jesus Christ no one would be pure in the sight of God. This is true even if a person assumes that he had been washed based on his own specific effort<sup>5</sup>.

\* The Holy Spirit and the power of the Almighty could dwell in those who have become truly pure even in the eyes of men. It is as though such persons were themselves clothes:

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:110

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John 70: 2

<sup>3</sup> Hom 70 PG 59:416

<sup>4</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:72-73

<sup>5</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:74

they had been washed through the baptism of the Lord, and He had also washed their feet<sup>1</sup>.

\* Since the Lord has made the disciples' feet beautiful by washing them, then what could we say about the real beauty that appears in those who are baptized by the Holy Spirit and by fire through the Lord Jesus Christ? (Matt 3; 11)<sup>2</sup>

\* Now the feet of those who preach the good news have become beautiful. When they have been washed, purified, and wiped by the hands of the Lord, they become capable of walking in the Holy path and of crossing over to the One who says, "I am the way", (Jn 14:6). He is the only One; and all those who have had their feet washed by the Lord, can travel on that way. The Lord is the living way and through Him we come to God's presence. That way will not be open to defiled or impure feet. On account of that, Moses removed his shoes since the place he was entering and standing upon was holy ground, (Ex 3:5). The same thing applied to Joshua the son of Nun, (Joshua 5:15)<sup>3</sup>.

\* As for the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, they needed to walk in the living way that is filled with activity. Therefore it was not enough to travel without sandals as He had ordered them (Matt 10:10). They actually had to let the Lord wash their feet after he had removed his outer garments and put them aside. On the one hand, He probably made their pure feet even more pure. On the other hand, He probably washed their feet in order to transfer the dirt on them onto His body through the towel which He solely wore around His waist (Jn 13:4). Indeed, He alone does carry our weaknesses (Matt 8:17; Is 53:4)<sup>4</sup>.

\* Notice that when the Lord decided to wash the disciples' feet, He chose no other time than when Satan had entered the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, and had driven him to deliver his Master (Jn 13:2). This was in fulfillment of the Plan (sufferings) for the sake of mankind. Before that moment, the time had not been convenient for the Lord to wash the disciples' feet. Who else would want to wash their feet in that crucial moment leading up to His sufferings? That time was not yet right...it became right after the fulfillment of the plan (sufferings). The right movement came when the Holy Spirit visited the disciples who had become pure by the washing of their feet. At that moment their feet were prepared and became beautiful. Consequently, they could preach righteousness through the Spirit (Rom 10:15, Is. 52:7)<sup>5</sup>.

### Origen the Scholar

\* What do you think dear brothers? Indeed, **in the holy baptismal font a person is wholly cleaned, every single part in him.** In spite of that a person goes on living in this physical world, and does not cease to walk on earth with his feet. Consequently, our own human feelings do not get separated from our deadened life on earth. These feelings resemble our feet with which we walk and which are directly responsible to our human

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:74

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:75

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:80-82

<sup>4</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:83

<sup>5</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32: 84-86

actions. That is why if we said that we were without sin, we would be deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us (1 Jn 1:8)

Each day the One who intercedes for us (Rom 8:34) washes our feet. We are in need to be washed daily. In other words, we need to plan uprightly the way our steps should go. The Lord's Prayer teaches us to say "...forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us". It is also written "If we confess our sins: then truly He who washed the disciples feet is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn 1:9): that is, He washes our feet with which we walk on this earth<sup>1</sup>.

\* The church, as it walks on her way to the Lord Jesus Christ, could be fearful of defiling her feet which she has washed in the baptismal font<sup>2</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**'For He knew who would betray Him,  
Therefore He said "You are not all clean". [11]**

\* If you were to ask "Since the disciples were pure, then why did the Lord wash their feet?" Our answer would be: He did so in order to teach us humility.

**St John Chrysostom**

**'So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again.  
He said to them "Do you know what I have done to you?"[12]**

The Lord had taken off His outer garments in order to wash the disciples' feet. When He had accomplished the task, He put them on again and reclined like them. The clothes are a reference to the body and the Lord's act is a symbol for His will and His resurrection which were achieved by His own personal power.

At this point, the Lord fulfills His promise to Peter the apostle as He explains to Him the implications behind the act of washing the disciples feet. The Lord presents to them a command expressed in the form of a question.

\* The Lord asks them: **"Do you know what I have done to you?"** He directs this question to Peter and to all the others as well.

**St John Chrysostom**

**"You call Me teacher and Lord  
And you say well,  
For so I am" [13]**

This dual title **"teacher and Lord"** corresponds to "Rabbi" and "Lord" and these were commonly used for the official Jewish teachers.

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 56:4

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 57:1

\* The One who sits above the Cherubim washed the disciples' feet. Do you, O earthly person, proudly and vainly overestimate yourself ever so greatly even though you are made of ashes, dust and earth?

**St John Chrysostom**

**“If I then, Your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet,  
You also ought to wash one another’s feet”. [14]**

\* When we bend over at our brother’s feet, the feelings of humility are awakened and strengthened in the heart if these feelings are truly found there<sup>1</sup>.

\* May each person forgive the sins of his brother, and pray for other sinners. In this manner each person would wash the other person’s feet<sup>2</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**“For I have given you an example,  
That you should do as I have done to you”. [15]**

\* However, there is no parallel, for He is the Lord and Master, whereas you are slaves and each other’s companions. Then what does **“as I”** convey? It is intended to express doing this act of humility with the same enthusiasm as Mine. In order to motivate us to perform even lesser tasks with humility, the Lord presented many examples of great actions. This is what teachers at school do when they achieve writing in beautiful letters; they intend the children to imitate them even though with lesser results.....and where do those who distance themselves from their colleagues go? Where are they who demand honors? The Lord washed the feet of the traitor who had defiled all sanctities. The feet of the thief who had reached the moment of betrayal and whose condition was hopeless and incurable. In spite of that, the Lord allowed him to share and sit at His table...do you boast and wink your eyes in the belief that you are better? Someone may say: ‘Let us wash one another’s feet’ Is it a great matter to wash the feet of our servants? For us, ‘slave’, and ‘free’, have two different meanings. However, at this point, practical reality presents itself. According to nature, He is God and we are servants. In spite of that, He did not refuse to do the job. Therefore He has made us indebted to one another as He has first performed this task. He has made us indebted to perform even lesser tasks<sup>3</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**“Most assuredly, I say to you,  
A servant is not greater than his master,  
Nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him” [16]**

**Origen the Scholar** noted that this custom of washing the feet of others was widespread among the simple and naïve, and that the Lord called for believers to perform

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 58:4

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 58:5

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St John 71:1

this service- whether they were bishops, priests, or officials who occupied worldly offices. Just as we are in need to wash each other's feet, we should accept that others wash our feet too.

\* As their teacher, the Lord washed His disciples' feet. At the same time, these were the feet of His servants too since He was their Master. The dust of the earth, which is a product of the world, would be cleaned through His teachings. In this manner, the physical world would not affect the innermost parts of the disciples. Matters which defile the feet may be torn away by the Lordship and control of the Ruler. He possesses authority over those who continue to accept being generally defiled. These still bear the spirit of slavery (Rom 8:15)<sup>1</sup>.

\* You can see how the Lordship of our Lord and Savior transcends that of other Lords who do not wish a slave to have equal status with his master<sup>2</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

\* The same love that the Father has is found in the Son...and what love does the Son have other than that He sacrificed Himself for our sakes and saved us by His blood? (Eph. 5:2). The Father sacrificed His Son, and the Son offered Himself. He sacrificed the One who was willing to do so before all ages and who offered Himself as a sacrifice. The Father did not sacrifice the Son as a punishment but He offered Him as a blessing<sup>3</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

\* The Lord spoke because He had washed the disciples' feet through His words and by setting the example of a humble Lord. By His help we can apply ourselves to the any task at hand. We need to see clearly and work without delay while seeking to perfect matters that confront us<sup>4</sup>.

**St Augustine**

\* 'Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ', (1 Cor 11:1). It is for this purpose that the Lord put on our flesh: to teach us to have virtue through His incarnation. God sent His Son having taken the form of our sinful body, (Romans 18:3). Accordingly, the Lord says "Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Matt 11:29). He has taught us not by words alone, but by deeds as well.

They called Him a "Samaritan", possessed by devils and a blasphemer. They stoned Him and the Pharisees sent servants to catch Him once, and they put Him on trial another time. They insulted Him, and when they could not find any fault in Him He would offer them bread through words and deeds...

Let us watch His actions with His disciples and His attitude towards His traitor. The Lord had chosen Judas to be one of His disciples. He invited him to share His table

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:115-116

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:120

<sup>3</sup> Of the Holy Spirit 1:12:129

<sup>4</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 59:1

and His salt (which prevents corruption). Judas had seen the Lord's miracles which called for respect. In spite of that he committed a most dangerous act. This was more serious than any other for he did not stone or insult Him: he betrayed the Lord. Although Judas deserved to be hated, the Lord treated him as a friend and washed his feet because He desired to prevent him from doing evil.

Had He wanted, the Lord could have made him to wither like the fig tree. He could have split him in two in the manner of the rocks that got split, or torn apart as the veil in the temple. However, the Lord did not want to stop him from his act by force. Rather, He wanted Judas to choose voluntarily how to act. That is why the Lord washed his feet. In spite of all that, this wicked and miserable Judas felt no shame<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**“If you know these things, happy are you if you do them” [17]**

Real blessings are obtained through knowing the Lord in a practical manner and this is revealed in obeying Him. A person does not receive joy on account of his great knowledge but on account of being involved and participating in the divine nature. At this point, knowing the Lord is converted into a practical experience.

**\* Washing the feet is specifically performed by the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One who washes the inner depths and forgives sins. A person who forgives those who hurt him through love and humility applies and shares one of the Lord's greatest features.** Such a person is counted as one who enjoys the new and blessed life in Jesus Christ. When the Lord says “...blessed are you”, He reveals His heavenly glory and life which we experience as we practice such acts.

**Origen the Scholar**

**\* “If you know”** is addressed to everyone. However, **“if you do”** does not refer to everyone. That is why the Lord says: **“happy are you if you do them”**. Therefore I always say (repeatedly) the same thing, though you know it, you need to create the sense of duty in you. Even the Jews “know”, but they are not blessed as they do not practice what they know<sup>2</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

## **2-The Lord's Words about His Traitor**

**“I do not speak concerning all of you,  
I know whom I have chosen,  
But that the Scripture may be fulfilled  
‘He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me’” [18]**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John 70:1

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John 71:2



The Lord unveils the plan of Judas to betray Him. From the start the Lord had known but covered up for him until this moment. But it was getting serious, and the Lord revealed the plan to His disciples who could never have imagined that such a thing could occur by someone from among them. Notice how the Lord did not generalize when He spoke about that sin. Rather, He praised the others for being pure vessels. At the same time He neither gave details about the crime nor revealed the name of the offender. However, the Lord underlines that all these events had been foretold in the Holy Bible (Ps 41:9).

The Lord did not state the motivation that drove Judas Iscariot. It is true that the Evangelists had referred to him when Judas criticized Mary, the sister of Lazarus, for pouring the fragrant oil on the Lord's feet: 'This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and had the money box....' (Jn 12:6). Actually, the other Evangelists are the ones who have recorded the details concerning the betrayal of the Lord, the amount Judas had agreed to receive, how he returned the money after delivering the Lord, and his fall into despair. Still there is no commentary about the inner motives for his act. Scholars have attempted to analyze and elaborate on the reasons and motives for this treacherous deed. However, none of the Evangelists has tried to provide a full presentation of the motives of that traitor

St. John the Evangelist presents this act of betrayal immediately after the Lord had finished the washing of the feet. He reveals the desire of the Incarnate Word to perform the smallest acts in total and sincere humility. Indeed, He offered Himself for the sake of everyone. The Lord served them all even though there was one among them who was plotting a great evil against Him. Judas counteracted the Lord's service in his own manner. He obstinately held on to his own thoughts, and planned for his own profit while he failed to recognize that he was destroying himself.

Our Lord- the true Way, leads us to enter into Him, and work in submission, humility, and sincere love. He is there to raise us, while there is one who seeks to destroy us.

The Lord ultimately stresses that He teaches those He has chosen. It is not that He was uninformed about the personality of Judas when He chose him, but that all events take place by the Lord's consent. The evil in Judas did not indicate he was in control of the situation. Rather, the love of the Lord prevailed. That love transformed that evil into an element used in fulfilling the divine plan of salvation. This grants us total consolation for there is One who loves mankind, who is in control, and who transforms all events so that they work for our well being even when the evil confronts and resists us.

\* Could the Lord know those who belong to Him (1 Tim 2: Num 16:5), and those who do not? He had said about some: "I never knew you", (Matt 7:23). Therefore He told Judas who did not belong to Him: "I never knew you" However, Judas belonged to the Lord but he had failed. It would have been possible to tell him "I do not know you, where are you

from?” (refer to Lk 13:27). That explains why the Lord did not say ‘I know you all’ but rather said **“I know whom I have chosen”**<sup>1</sup>.

\* Judas raised his heel against his Master when Satan entered his heart after he had received the piece of bread, [27]<sup>2</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

\* The Lord did not say “The one who eats bread with Me will deliver Me”. He said **“He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me”**. He wished to indicate the covert and deceptive nature of His assassination.

**St John Chrysostom**

**“Now I tell you before it comes,  
That when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He”. [19]**

The Lord assures His disciples of His presence everywhere. He also underlines His knowledge of everything, to the extent that He informed them in advance about His death and all the events related to that. Consequently, their belief that He is the Messiah was reinforced. That belief became deeper as they realized that He knew all things and that He was the Savior of the world whom their fathers and prophets expected to come.

\* Actually, the disciples had once approached the Lord and asked Him to “Increase their faith” (Lk 17:5). They did not condemn themselves as though they were unbelievers. The word “increase” suggests that they had faith and it could become greater. The word “believe” could be interpreted as “so that you might increase in faith”<sup>3</sup>.

**“Most assuredly, I say to you,  
He who receives whomever I send receives Me;  
And he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me”. [20]**

The Lord assured His disciples that although there are some people who are ungrateful and disloyal to Him; yet there are those who believe and accept Him. These are therefore counted as having accepted the Father as well.

\* What is the relationship between this and what has been said before: **“...happy are you if you do them” [17]**; and why did the Lord add these words **“...receives whomever I send”**? There is a strong link and harmony between both, as the Lord was preparing them to go out into the world. He knew that they would face many difficulties and He was comforting them in two ways. First, He clearly explained, **“If you know these things, happy are you if you do them” [17]**. Second, He says **“...he who receives Me, receives whomever sent Me.”** Indeed the Lord had opened before them all the homes they would visit so that they would be dually comforted<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:154-155

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32: 167

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:174, 176

<sup>4</sup> Homilies on St John, 72:1

\* He who accepts the Lord's messenger actually accepts the Lord Himself. And he who accepts the Lord accepts the Father. Consequently, he who accepts the Lord's messenger accepts the Father who has sent the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

\* Based on these words, it is possible to accept the reverse implications. He who accepts the messengers of the son of destruction accepts the adversary of the Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover, he who accepts the son of destruction accepts Christ's adversary as being the word that appears truthful and that falsely claims to be just. Indeed, this indicates the acceptance of the destroyer himself. Let us beware therefore and act as wise bankers. Let us adhere in our belief in the true messengers and reject the ministry of false ones<sup>2</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

**Origen** noted that the Lord said: **"...receives whomever I send"**, and did not say instead "whomever believes in you, believes in Me", or "whomever sees you, sees Me" (The Lord wishes us to accept His disciples but He does not wish us to have faith in them too).

**When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit**

**And testified and said,**

**"Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." [21]**

The Lord was accustomed to speak about His sufferings and death without feeling troubled. However, when He mentioned the fact of being betrayed by one of His disciples the Evangelist reports that **'He was troubled in spirit'**. Clearly, sins committed by believers sadden the fatherly heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, God says: **"I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me" (Is.1:2)**. He also says: **"In all their affliction he was afflicted...But they rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit" Is.63: 9, 10)**.

The Lord was troubled 'in spirit' [21]: this refers to the human aspect of His spirit since He had truly taken the form of a full human being. Consequently, His spirit would be troubled on account of betrayal committed by one of His disciples. This feeling was not the due to fear of death or of the unknown, but due to anxiety and concern for that disciple who had dared to betray his Master and Lord.

\* The one who is going to betray Me is not an outsider or different from My disciples. Neither is he one of many disciples. Indeed, he is one of the apostles who had been honored as I had chosen them.

There are many who have condemned the Lord and who cried out: "Crucify Him, crucify Him" (Lk 23:21)...however, Judas betrayed the Lord even though he had seen and known the Lord. He had known Him as a Teacher presenting many great lessons. He

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:212

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:213-214

had heard these as he attended the Lord's private meetings with His disciples. He got to know Him as the Lord. Consequently, when he betrayed Him, he betrayed the Lord's greatness which he had come to know...a matter which is inconceivable for someone who has seen the Lord's greatness...

When Judas had learned how great He is; when he had heard the greatness of the Word, the Mind, and the Grace He possessed; then He betrayed the Lord. The weight of his deed was as great as the extent of his acquaintance with the Lord. For this reason it would have been good "... if he had not been born", (Matt 26:24, Mk 14:21). Being "born" could refer to renewal (the second birth) in its deep sense, or to 'birth' in its general meaning<sup>1</sup>.

\* Had the wickedness of Judas been apparent to the Lord's disciples, they would have known who it was who would betray their Teacher. He told them **"...one of you will betray Me"**, but the disciples **"looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke,"** [22].

The disciples, in fact, felt embarrassed and would not suspect wickedness in Judas because he had acted so nobly previously. Probably Judas was not inclined wholly to wickedness. Even after the devil had entered his heart...he still possessed the sense of being able to make a choice.

When Judas saw the Lord being judged, then tied and delivered to Pilate the ruler ( Matt 27:2), he repented and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priest and elders. He told them "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood," (Matt 27:4). Judas, who had loved money, threw the money and went and hung himself (Matt 27:5). He did not even wait to see the end of the Lord's judgment as He stood before Pilate.

**Origen the Scholar**

The Psalmist testifies that Judas did not feel hostile against the Lord Jesus Christ. (Ps 55:13). Indeed, after Judas had delivered the Lord, he praised the Teacher and Lord as he said he had committed a sin by handing over innocent blood. He admitted his fault before the chief priests and elders. Besides, he threw the money on the ground and did not spend or enjoy it. All these beautiful touches indicate that he could have repented and moved closer to the Lord. However, he sadly opened his heart to the devil for a second time by committing suicide. Consequently, he lost hope in God, the savior of the world.

**St. Augustine** wonders why the Lord Jesus Christ got troubled in the spirit and said **"Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me"**? Did the Lord not know before hand, and therefore He was troubled in the spirit? Did not the Lord say a little while earlier: **"He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me,"** [18]? Or did He get troubled because the hour had come when the execution of the betrayal would actually take place? The Holy One, who has the power to lay down His life and to take it up again, was troubled in the spirit. The Almighty was troubled, the Rock and stronghold was troubled. However, it was the weakness of our nature which He had put on willingly that got troubled.

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:235-238

St. Augustine goes on to say: [That is surely the case in point: May the servants never have inappropriate doubts or thoughts about their Lord. May they comprehend that they are members of the One Head who died for our sake. Therefore the Lord was troubled as He stood in our shoes. The One who met death powerfully, was disturbed in the fullness of His power. The One who will transform our humble bodies into the likeness of His glorified body had also transferred into Himself the feelings of our weakness into His own, as well as His sympathy for us. Consequently, when the One who is great, courageous, steadfast, and invincible is troubled, we should not be worried as though He could fail; for He will not perish but will conquer on our behalf!... In His distress, we see ourselves. Therefore when anxiety gets hold of us we should not despair or perish. Through the anxiety of the One who could never be troubled without His will, the Lord grants us comfort when we involuntarily get troubled.<sup>1</sup>]

\* Through His power, He fully took on our human nature. With that same power, He fashioned Himself human feelings which He controlled in an appropriate manner<sup>2</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**St. Augustine** comments on the Lord's words **"...one of you will betray Me"** and says: 'The Lord here refers to the disciples as physical persons and not as a communal spiritual group. Actually, Judas Iscariot was not one of them and St. John explains, in 1 John 2:19, that: "they went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us," (1 Jn 2:19).

**Then the disciples looked at one another,  
Perplexed about whom He spoke. [22]**

It is clear that the behavior of Judas Iscariot did not arouse any kind of suspicion. No one suspected him at all.

When they heard the warning words of their Master, they knew He would not speak lightly or say anything to deceive them. Therefore they turned and looked at each. They were wondering silently: "Who could that be?" Their looks revealed their astonishment and inner turmoil.

When David wept over his rebellious son, all his followers wept with him (2 Sam 15:30). In the same manner, the disciples became troubled when the Lord was troubled and saddened on account of His deliverer. The troubled spirit of the One who grants peace and joy filled the disciples with great fear. The feast was transformed from a time of joy to a time of great trouble and fear.

**Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. [23]**

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 60:2

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 60:5

In these times, the Jews used to sit in a reclined position at the table. They would lean with their left elbow on a pillow as they sat to eat. This was also the habit of the Greeks and Romans. There would be two leaning on the same pillow. Because St. John was so close to the Lord, he used to sit next to him and his head would be in the Lord's embrace.

**Simon Peter therefore motioned to him  
To ask who it was of whom He spoke. [24]**

St. John was the right person who could put the question to the Lord. He occupied a special place and he sat next to Him and leaned on His bosom. Peter, in his usual zeal, wanted to know who would betray the Lord. However, he did not dare to ask and made a sign to John to ask the Lord.

\* In every situation, Peter stands out as he reveals his zealous love for the Lord. However, he appears to be in great fear at that moment. He neither spoke nor kept quiet, but he needed to find out through St. John the disciple.

**Then, leaning back on Jesus' breast, he said to Him,  
"Lord who is it?"[25]**

St. John addressed the Lord respectfully, even though he had a very close relationship with the Lord and leaned against His bosom. He uses the title "Lord": our closeness with the Lord Jesus Christ should not cancel our sense of awe and respect when we address Him.

St. John was leaning on the Lord's bosom [23]; and when he wanted to ask Him about the person who would deliver Him, he had to lift his head up. **Origen the scholar** comments that deeds are far more sublime and greater than leaning on the bosom<sup>1</sup>.

\* Their Master just gave them a hint. If you seek to know the reason for that, you would understand that He did so on account of His love.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* The beloved John, who leaned on the Lord's bosom, loved the two breasts of the Word (Jn 13:25). He placed his heart close to the Source of life and enjoyed suckling from the hidden mysteries that are found within the Lord's heart. He absorbed them as a sponge would do.

St. John offers us the breasts that richly carry the Word. Consequently, we can be filled with the same goodness which filled him as he drew out of the Source of goodness. He proclaimed the eternal Word. On this account we can truly say now: **"...we will remember thy love more than wine: We have become like virgins, our minds are no longer childish or under the yoke of childish trivialities, and we are no longer defiled by sin as we draw closer to death due to old age. Therefore let us fully love the**

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:278

**wealth of divine teachings...” (Song of Sol 1:4).** John was the disciple whom the Lord loved, and the Lord is the Truth. The expressions used in this passage are far more beautiful and appropriate than those David used when he said, “the Lord is known by the judgment He executes,” (Ps 9:16). The Lord here is called the Truth as He makes “the crooked places straight and the rough places smooth” (Is 40:4). This is achieved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to whom is due the glory forever amen<sup>1</sup>.

\* Those who were Jews by birth could not regain the virginity they had lost on that account just through reading the Holy Bible. In spite of that, we are told that St. John, who was the youngest one of the disciples, was a chaste celibate when he accepted the Christian faith. He maintained his chastity and on this account, he was especially dear to the Lord and leaned on His bosom. Peter, who was married, did not have the courage to question the Lord, so he asked John to find out the answer, [25]. After the resurrection, when Mary Magdalene reported to the disciples that the Lord had risen (Jn 20:4), both Peter and John ran to the tomb. However, John arrived before Peter. Also when they went fishing in the lake of Genesareth, the Lord stood on the shore and none of the disciples recognized that it was Jesus. Only the chaste disciple recognized the chaste One and he said to Peter, “It is the Lord,” (Jn 21:7)<sup>2</sup>.

**St Jerome**

**Jesus answered,**

**“It is he whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it”.**

**And having dipped the bread He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. [26].**

When the Lord dipped the bread and gave it to Judas, the disciples thought He had done so in order to have him hurry up and accomplish a certain task rather than wait to have supper with them.

Just as John whispered his question into the Lord’s ear, so did the Lord whisper His response to him so that the other disciples would not hear. Rather than mention the name of His traitor, the Lord was satisfied to give a sign. By so doing, the Lord wants future generations to understand that God desires us to recognize those who rebel against the truth. We are enabled to do so through their wicked fruits and spirit rather than by knowing their names.

It seems that Judas was so embarrassed that he did not dare dip the bread and eat from the same dish out of which the Lord ate. Yet the Lord dipped the bread and gave Judas who had to put out his hand and eat with the disciples. The Lord wanted to remind him of his sublime equal status among the others.

It is clear from the Lord’s interaction with Judas that the latter sat closely to Him. This could have been because Judas was the treasurer. Probably the disciples let him sit close to the Lord so that he would be close by should the Lord need anything for the ministry.

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<sup>1</sup> Song of Solomon: St Gregory, Bishop of Nicea. Translated by Dr George Nawaar, 1993, Sermon 1

<sup>2</sup> Against Jovinianus 1:26

Truly, there are many who get close to the Lord Jesus Christ physically. They elbow their way in the crowds wherever the Lord goes. However, they are far apart spiritually from Him. Besides these, there are others who appear far away, yet they carry the Lord in their hearts and thoughts. Such are embraced by the Lord who carries them within Him as members of His own Holy Body.

**St John Chrysostom** finds that the Lord Jesus Christ used every possible means that would lead Judas to be troubled by his deed. It was common knowledge that even barbarian tribes would not betray those with whom they shared one meal. That is why the Lord used this as the sign that would indicate the traitor. It would be the one who would receive the bread after the Lord Himself had dipped it. He gave Judas to eat of the same food He ate; yet in spite of that, he betrayed the One who offered him food.

\* Even the manner by which the Lord reproached Judas should have embarrassed him. The respect for sharing and eating bread did not embarrass him; yet could he not have become overpowered when he received the bread from the hand of the Lord? Yet even this did not overpower Him<sup>1</sup>!

**St John Chrysostom**

\* What he received was good, but he received it to his disadvantage since he received that which is good while harboring a wicked spirit<sup>2</sup>.

\* The focus is not on what is given but on the person who receives the gift. The nature of that person is greatly important rather than the nature of the object offered. This is because even good things could be harmful; while evil matters could result in good things. It depends on the person who receives and handles an object . . . why was the bread given to the traitor? It could be for no other purpose but to serve as a witness to a blessing received by an ungrateful person<sup>3</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him.  
Then Jesus said to him,  
"What you do, do quickly." (27).**

The devil had entered into Judas because he had surrendered completely to the evil one. Judas became even more servile and a son of the destroyer as he never stopped to think of repenting and refraining from the plan against His Master. St. Paul speaks about the devil and says that 'he works in the sons of disobedience' (Eph 2:2), and that often he works more powerfully and clearly when a person submits totally to his evil authority.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 72:2

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 61:6

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 61:1



After the Lord had given Judas the piece of bread, the devil entered into him. If we consider the bread as a symbol of the Lord's tenderness and blessings, then someone who belittles and abuses His gifts sins against God and opens up the door for Satan. That evil one is therefore able to enter and take control.

The Lord's words; "**what you do, do quickly**" [27] is not intended as advice but as permission from the Lord that Judas accomplish his plan. The Lord disrobes him of all blessings because he was resolved to surrender to treachery and evil. It is as though the Lord was telling him: 'You insist on betraying Me and are not willing to open the door to repentance or to return into my embrace. Therefore go and do what you want. As for Me, I do not fear death and indeed I am prepared for it'.

Judas had already laid a plan with the wicked ones. They had agreed on a precise time and place. The hour for the execution of that plan was drawing near. Judas probably did not know how to excuse himself and leave. Therefore the Lord provided his heart's desire and need to leave. We hear the Psalmist say: "The Lord grants you the desire of your heart". Through the Holy Spirit, we need to search our hearts in order to receive what we desire: Is there the desire to see God and have fellowship with Him; or is there a love to be evil and practice it?

The Lord probably told him to hurry and leave before his case would be revealed to the disciples. They would have consequently humiliated him.

Some may wonder: Judas had already planned and agreed with the chief priests and Pharisees to deliver the Lord, therefore why does this passage report that: "**. . . after the piece of bread, Satan entered him**"? Satan had shot one of his fiery arrows at the heart of Judas and discovered an inner response. This opened the doors of his heart and gave access to Satan to enter and reign as king! In the same way, we give access to Satan every time we submit to any evil thoughts and behavior. We would actually be paving the way to a greater evil.

- \* The Lord perceived the one who had entered as well as the one who had received him. He also knew of the whole plan against Him and so focused on the fight. He intended to overcome the wicked one in order to save mankind. Therefore He said: "**What you do, do quickly**" [27]<sup>1</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

- \* St John the disciple speaks about Judas and says "Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him". He is astonished at the traitor's incredible foolishness. The Lord spoke in order to comfort His disciples. He did not wish them to be terrified or filled with sudden dreadful thoughts as this would have added to their anxiety<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on St John, Book 32:299

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John 72:4

- \* As long as Judas remained in the company of the disciples, Satan could not attack him and just played with his mind. However, when the Lord revealed his act and dismissed him from His company, Satan fearlessly jumped into his heart<sup>1</sup>.
- \* **". . . do quickly"** does not sound like an order or an advice. Indeed, it sounds more like a reprimand coming from One who opens the door for a person's reform. However, when it appeared that there was no way for correction, the Lord permitted him to go his way<sup>2</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

- \* After receiving the piece of bread, Satan entered into the Lord's traitor. Judas had submitted to the devil's authority and allowed him full reign over his heart so that he led him to sin.

We do not assume that Satan was not within him earlier and at the time when Judas met with the Jewish leaders. At that time he made the deal concerning the price for betraying the Lord. St. Luke the Evangelist reports clearly: "Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve. So he went his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him to them" (Lk. 22:3-4) . . . **Satan first came in when he planted the idea of betraying Jesus in his heart. Judas was in that spirit when he arrived for supper. Then, and after Judas had received the bread, Satan entered, not to tempt someone who was another's follower, but to claim and rule the one who had become his own**<sup>3</sup>.

- \* Some readers, other than scholars, think that Jesus received the Body of Christ since the Lord had offered to all the disciples present the mystery of His Body and Blood. Judas was there in the room according to Luke's narration in chapter 22:19-22. However, according to St. John, the moment comes when the Lord reveals His traitor by dipping the Bread and offering it to Judas. Probably this was intended to silence other false claims. Indeed, dipping something does not always indicate washing it for it could be done to prevent altering its color. If taken in a positive sense the act of dipping implies ingratitude for receiving something good and therefore deserved to be condemned<sup>4</sup>.
- \* **". . . do quickly"**[27], not because you personally possess authority, but because the Lords wants you to do so. He is the Almighty One<sup>5</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to Him [28]**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John 72:2

<sup>2</sup> Hom 72 PG 59:424

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 62:2

<sup>4</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 62:3

<sup>5</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 62:4

Truly, the Lord knows our inner depths more than we do ourselves. Just as He knows the most wicked-such as Judas-He also knows the weakness of saints such as St. Peter the apostle.

- \* The Lord did not bring Judas' act out into the light. He knew that, if the disciples would get to know, they would have isolated him. Probably Peter would have killed him. This explains why the Lord did not inform any of those reclining at the table, not even St. John the Baptist . . . the Lord did not want to speak badly of Judas for the rest of the days they would spend together. It is our duty to do the same: we should not reveal the sins of others to those around us; even if they are in the same condition as that one who had gone beyond recovery and when there is no hope in healing him.

**St John Chrysostom**

**For some thought, because Judas had the money box,  
That Jesus had said to him: "Buy those things we need for the feast",  
Or that he should give something to the poor" [29]**

The disciples thought that the Lord had asked Judas to "Buy those things we need for the feast" [29]. It is clear that these events occurred the night before the Passover. The disciples knew there would be no selling or buying on Passover Day. Probably, they thought Judas had to go and buy a lamb to offer it on the day of the Passover which was on the following day.

It is clear that no one heard what the Lord whispered in St. John's ear. That is why no one had any reason to suspect Judas. They believed he was doing charitable deeds during the feast. The Lord actually lived like a poor man, yet he put out of the little He had, into the money box. It was as though He obligated everyone, however poor, to donate to others.

- \* If someone were to ask: why did Judas carry a money box whereas the Lord had said: "Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor tunics, nor sandals, or staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food" (Matt 10:9, 10). Our answer would be: Judas carried a money box which was used to serve the poor.

**St John Chrysostom**

**Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night [30].**

Judas left the house in Bethany and hurried to Jerusalem which was a couple of miles away. He hurried to accomplish his plan at night when his heart was in a state of darkness. In the middle of a cold and dark atmosphere, Judas left so that no one would see him as he did his evil deed which was worse than the dark night.

- \* We would like to ask St. John the Evangelist: ‘Why did you mention the exact time?!’ We know that his answer would be: So that you realize the cruelty of his heart since even the time of day did not prevent him from going ahead with his crime<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

- \* He actually ‘**went out**’, not only from the house where the supper was held, but in simple terms, he went away from the Lord Jesus Christ in a final sense. We believe that Judas could not bear to be in the same place as Jesus after having taken the piece of bread and after Satan had entered into him. Indeed, there can be no harmony between Beelzebub (Belial/Satan) and the Lord (2 Cor 6:15)<sup>2</sup>.
- \* For the other disciples, (the piece of bread) was intended for their salvation. As for Judas, it condemned him (1Cor 11:27-29), for Satan entered him after he had received the bread . . . as we have said, this was symbolic. The bread, which nourishes fully and in a physical manner, increases the pain of the fever. At the same time it supplies health and energy for a person<sup>3</sup>.
- \* It is appropriate that we understand the symbolic significance of the night in these circumstances. It represents the night that settled upon the spirit of Judas when Satan entered into him. It is the darkness that covered the depths of the world (Gen 1:2) and the darkness God called Night (Gen 1:5) St. Paul speaks about the night and says that we are not children of the night or of darkness, "But you, brethren, are not in darkness. . . we are not of the night nor of darkness", (1Thes 5:4-5). Therefore let us not sleep, we who are of the light, (1Thes 5:5)<sup>4</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

- \* The light speaks with the light. In other words, the Lord Jesus Christ spoke with His loyal disciples so that they would obey and love Him as His followers. The night too appeared to recognize the night (Ps 19:2) in the sense that Judas communicated with the unbelieving Jews who plotted to persecute and take the Lord Jesus Christ as a prisoner<sup>5</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

### **3. The Glory of the Son of Man**

**So when he had gone out, Jesus said:  
"Now the Son of Man is glorified,  
And God is glorified in Him" [31]**

Until that point, it was hard for the disciples to comprehend what was taking place around them. They were unable to understand what the Lord's words meant concerning

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John 72:3

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on St John, Book 32:301-302

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on St John, Book 32:309-310

<sup>4</sup> Commentary on St John, Book 32:313

<sup>5</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 62:6

His crucifixion, death, and resurrection. However, they sensed some kind of anxiety as events seemed to take an obscure turn.

In the middle of such anxiety, the evangelist announces the exit of Judas who is on His way to betray the Lord. However, the Son of Man would be glorified and God would be glorified too . . . how?

**First:** When the corrupt element left and went away from the center of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ, who grants righteousness, became glorified. It was impossible for corruption to remain permanently within the Church. Corruption condemned itself by withdrawing from the Lord's real Church.

**Second:** When Judas left, the opportunity came for the pure disciples to listen to the Lord's long farewell talks. He spoke to comfort them not only as they were about to go through the events of the Cross; but also to offer divine comfort to the Holy Church through out the ages and until He would appear on the clouds. As that corrupt one, intent on corruption, went out, the opportunity was there for the disciples to witness the great and heavenly Chief Priest as He spoke to the Father. He spoke about the mystery of the divine glory and about granting support to the Church so that she might enjoy fellowship in His glory

**Third:** The Son of Man was glorified because the Father had chosen Him to be the Savior of mankind. The moment had come when His glory would be all the more greatly fulfilled as the people who were to arrest Him started to move. These would deliver Him to be judged and delivered to die on the Cross. This is the glory of His sublime and divine love.

The Lord assures the disciples that the upcoming events would be extremely joyful. It was impossible to separate the role of the Father from that of the Son in achieving the salvation of the world. It is the Father's love that has offered the Cross for us (3:16; Romans 5:8). It is the Father who, through and with the Lord Jesus Christ, became reconciled with the world (2Cor 5:19). It is the Father who has blessed us through the Lord when He chose us long before He laid the foundation of the world (Eph 1:3-4).

- \* By speaking to them, the Lord lifted up their thoughts after they had plunged into anxiety. He succeeded in making them rejoice, besides helping them come out of their depression.
- \* These matters have been recorded to enable us to forgive and not hate those who beat us. We need to reprimand them as well as pray for them. Weeping over sinners is more appropriate than weeping over those in pain. A greedy person, who accuses others falsely and commits evil, brings upon himself a greater evil. At the same time, he causes us to receive greater benefits if we do not avenge ourselves. For instance, if a person steals something from you, do you thank and glorify God for that? By giving

thanks you would receive hundreds of rewards, whereas the thief would have brought on himself an inexpressible fire<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* That is why the Lord says: "**Now, the Son of Man is glorified**" [31]. That was the moment when the plan (the suffering) began and it ended by the death of the Lord. . . it all began at the moment when Judas left the room. After receiving the piece of bread, he left to accomplish his act against the Lord. It would have been impossible for Christ to be glorified if the Father were not glorified in Him. Therefore the Lord says: "**God is glorified in Him.**"<sup>2</sup>

\* Glory was fulfilled as a result of the death of the 'Son of Man' on behalf of mankind. His death was an intrinsic part of His humanity and this is completely unrelated in any manner to the Word and only Son whose naturally never dies. Neither was the Lord's death related to Wisdom and Truth, nor to any other designation used to indicate the Lord's divine attributes. Indeed, death was a physical characteristic of mankind, and the Lord was the 'Son of Man' who was born from the line of David according to the flesh (Rom 1:3)<sup>3</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

\*What did the Day say when the Night left?

What did Lord say when the seller left?

**"Now the Son of Man is glorified" (31)**

The Lord spoke these words to reveal that the time for His ultimate humiliation was getting close. The bonds, the judgment, the ridicule, the crucifixion, and death were about to occur.

Is that glorification or humiliation?

When the Lord worked miracles, did not St John comment, 'for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified' (Jn 7:39)?

When the Lord raised the dead, He had not yet been glorified. So would the Father be glorified while He drew personally closer to death?

He was not glorified when He did works that only God could do; so would He be glorified as He walked on the path of suffering as a human being?

**"Now the Son of Man is glorified" [31]:** the Lord said these words to indicate the total withdrawal of the chief of sinners (Judas) from his friends. The ones who

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John 71: 3

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:321

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:322

remained with the Lord were His saints. **We are the shadow of His glory which will be fulfilled when the wicked will be separated completely. Then the Lord Jesus Christ will abide with His saints in eternity<sup>1</sup>.**

\* **"Now the Son of Man is glorified"** [31]: the word 'now' probably does not refer to the sufferings that the Lord was about to face. Rather, it could be a reference to the events that would follow immediately after His resurrection, and as though these have taken place already<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**If God is glorified in Him,  
God will also glorify Him in Himself,  
And glorify Him immediately" (32)**

The Lord was glorified promptly and at the moment of His arrest, for all those present drew back at His words. They were unable to arrest Him except when He delivered Himself to them (Jn 18:6). The Father glorified the Lord in His sufferings, and crucifixion when nature herself witnessed that He is the Son of God. As a result, the centurion declared his belief, as well as the thief who was attracted by the love of the crucified.

The greater issue is that the Son of Man was glorified through His death on behalf of mankind. This glory proclaimed the love of the Father who sacrificed His only Son for the sake of the world. Just as the Father was glorified through the death of His Son, so the Father proclaimed the glory of the Son through his resurrection from the dead. Consequently, the Son was glorified in Himself as the One who possesses power and authority. This glory was quickly fulfilled through His resurrection. We will see the fullness of His glory when we meet him face to face. This will also be fulfilled very soon when the great day of the Lord will come.

The glory of the Lord had appeared in the tabernacle, and Moses was unable to enter in due to the cloud which covered it (Ex 40: 34-35). Besides, when the priests came out of the temple they could not go in to continue their service because the glory of God filled the holy house of the Lord (1Kings 8:10-11). Again, when Moses came down the mountain carrying the two tablets of the commandments, he did not know that his face was shining with glory. Therefore Aaron and all the children of Israel were unable to come close to him (Ex 34:29-30). At the Transfiguration the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ was reflected on His clothes which became as white as the light (Lk 9:29-31).

In the Old Testament, the glory of God appeared in the clouds and on the face of Moses. In the New Testament, the glory of God appeared during the ministry of the Lord at His transfiguration. At that event, the brilliance of His face was revealed and He shone as the sun. This glory was reflected on His clothes. On the Cross, the glory of the Father and of the Son was mutually recognized. This has led **Origen the Scholar** to consider

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 63:2

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 63:3

that the glory mentioned in this passage implies 'knowledge' which only the Father and the son know, as well as those to whom the son wishes "to reveal Him" (Matt 11:27). This knowledge is not achieved through 'flesh and blood' but by (the) Father who is in heaven (Matt 16:17).

In these words the Lord Jesus Christ presents four important facts:

1. The Son of Man is glorified through the Cross as He becomes the conqueror over the powers of evil as well as the fulfillment of the divine plan for mankind.
  2. The Father is glorified through the Cross by proclaiming His divine love towards mankind.
  3. The Father glorifies His Son through the Resurrection and Ascension of the Son into the heavens while carrying the Church within Him.
  4. The time had come to fulfill the fullness of His glory promptly and without delay.
- \* What does **"God will glorify Him in Himself"** convey? It indicates that God Himself will glorify the Lord and not by using any other medium. . . . **"And glorify Him immediately"** that is through His crucifixion. This occurred when the veil of the temple got split into two, from top to bottom, and there was an earthquake. The rocks cracked, the graves were opened, and many of the saints who were asleep were awakened (Matt 27:51, 52), this is what is conveyed by these words: **"God will glorify Him in Himself"**. The Lord intended to explain that it would not be long; there was no need to wait for the Resurrection, nor to show His radiance. Rather, His glory would be revealed quickly on the Cross where His glory would appear<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**"Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer,  
You will seek Me: and as I said to the Jews,  
Where I am going, you cannot come,  
So now I say to you" [33].**

**"My children"** or **'My little children'** or 'beloved ones'- 'Teknia' expresses great tenderness and feelings. These are similar to a mother's tenderness towards her infant whom she loves greatly.

Now Judas had left and the Lord spoke with great tenderness towards His disciples who were like beloved sons to Him.

The short period indicated in this passage could have been a couple of hours at the most. After that, the disciples were scattered, leaving the Lord Jesus Christ alone throughout His judgment. They could not go into the place where His trial was held. The Cross signified the isolation of the Lord from His enemies as well as from His loved ones. No one could accompany Him on that path and Isaiah heard Him say: "I have trodden the winepress alone" (Is. 63:3). Judas forsook the Lord, and all the wicked ones who were intent on their wickedness went with him. They would come to see the marks

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<sup>1</sup> Hom 72. PG 59:425



of the Cross when He will meet them again. Then they will ask the mountains to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them up from the face of the One who sits on the throne. On the way to the Cross, His loved ones forsook Him too for no one other than Him could participate in the sacrifice on the Cross. However, they would be crucified after He has risen so they would be glorified with Him too. They would find His suffering to be glorious and honorable; therefore they would consider that their sufferings are a blessing they do not deserve. Moreover, His loved ones know that sufferings are a means of being in the eternal and joyful presence of the Crucified conqueror.

\* The Lord Jesus said these words to the Jews as well as to His disciples. It brought terror in the hearts of the Jews, whereas it awakened the flame of anticipation in the hearts of the disciples.

\* **". . . now I say to you"** [33] . . . when the disciples will run away, and when the Jews suffer beyond description during the siege of their city, and when the wrath of God afflicts them from every side; then the Lord addresses the Jews concerning their lack of faith. As for you, the Lord warns you so that no unexpected trouble would afflict you<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* Do not be disturbed by those who say that the Jesus Christ the Savior is the Father of specific person. Indeed, the Lord told the paralyzed man: "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you" (Matt 9: 2). He told the woman who was bleeding. . . "Daughter your faith has made you well" (Matt 9:22). Now, the Lord calls the disciples: **"little children"** and we believe that the intention was to underline clearly their humility. We need to learn humility from the disciples who possessed this feature up to that time<sup>2</sup>.

\* It is necessary to understand that it is not impossible for someone to change from being a child of the Lord into being his brother. On a human level, the son cannot later become a brother to the person to whom he was previously a son.

\* After the Lord's resurrection, those He has called "little children" became His brothers . . . they were as though they have been transformed by the Lord resurrection. This explains the Lord's words when He said: "go to My brethren and say to them . . . " (Jn. 20:17).

In the same manner, it is probably possible to change from being a servant of God. The disciples were servants before they could become 'little children'. The following words explain this point: 'you call me teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am (Jn. 13:13). The following words explain that idea: "a servant is not greater than his master" (Jn13:16) these sayings were expressed before the words **'little children, I shall be with you'**.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John 72:4

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:368

**Note that a servant first becomes a disciples and then changes into a young child. Next, he changes into being the Lord's brother and finally becomes a son of God<sup>1</sup>.  
Orgen the Scholar**

They were going to seek Him. However, He would spend three days and nights in the heart of the earth (Matt 12:40) when His souls leaves to go to Paradise. The Lord spoke about that when He said: ". . . today you will be with Me in Paradise"(Lk 23:43). There He would carry those who had died with hope and bring them from Hades into Paradise. Nevertheless, the disciples could not accompany Him to His Paradise. At that moment in time they were unable to follow Him.

\* The Lord did not want His disciples to think that, being glorified by the Father, he would be unable to have any earthly relationship with them. Therefore He said: **"little children, I shall be with you a little while longer"** [33]. It is as though He was telling them: it is true that I will be glorified through My resurrection. However, I will not ascend immediately into heaven. Rather, "I will be with you a little while longer". Accordingly, we read in the book of the Acts of the Apostles that the Lord spent forty days with them after His Resurrection. During these days, He came, went away, and returned, and stayed in their company, and He ate and drank with them (Acts 1:3) . . . nevertheless, He would no longer share their human weaknesses<sup>2</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**St. Augustine** perceives that this short while which the Lord indicated actually applied to the period between His last conversation with them to the time of His crucifixion, death, and resurrection. After that the disciples would seek Him but would be unable to go to Him. During this short while, the Lord would be sharing their human weaknesses. After that He would no longer share these features with them. An alternative explanation could be that the Lord was referring to the forty days between His resurrection and ascension. In that period, He would be with them but would not share the feature of human weakness with them as He would no longer be subject to death. He would then and would no longer be physically present with them<sup>3</sup>.

#### **4. Brotherly love:**

**"A new commandment I give to you,  
That you love one another.  
As I have loved you,  
That you also love one another". [34]**

Even though Judas, who was so ungrateful, was one of the disciples, yet not everyone was like him. The others were loyal, and the reciprocal love they shared indicated their discipleship. This was an old commandment (1Jn 2:7), yet it was renewed by the Lord Jesus Christ as He gave it greater depths and potentials to apply it. The commandment

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary on John, Book 32:368-374

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 64:1

<sup>3</sup> cf. St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 64:2-3

was extended to embrace lovingly every person: even enemies and opponents. The ultimate aim is to redeem every soul. There are two Greek words used in the Holy Bible for the word 'new': one means recent, the one used here embodies a desire to flourish and refresh. The old commandment occurs in (Lev. 19:18). However, the Cross offers it to us with a deeper meaning. Here it gains a refreshing concept due to the potential of applying it in a new light.

The commandment to love is a wonderful song which fills the Church with joy and gladness. It is a new command which will always remain new. All will practice it even the heavenly ones. It does not get old or obsolete (Heb 8:13). **Tertullian the scholar** informs us that the pagan speak about Christians and say: 'Look, how they love one another!' **Minucius Felix** reports that the pagan Caecilius says about Christians: 'they love each other even before they get to know one another'. This is a testimony from pagans who resist and attack Christians. **Lucian of Samosata** who never said a good word about Christians, attacked them for being foolish. He said that since they loved one another, it is possible for any pagan to exploit this love and gather from them great wealth.

The Evangelist points to two new topics: the new commandment here and the new tomb where the Lord would be buried (Jn.19:21). By accepting this commandment into our depths, our inner being is transformed into the Lord's tomb. It is a new tomb where the Lord will rest in the company of His angels. Our inner depths will bear witness to His glorious resurrection, and in this manner the new commandment transforms our tomb into a new heaven!

\* It is as though the Lord was telling them: you have become anxious because I'm leaving you. However, if you love one another you will be the most powerful<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* This is a new commandment since the Lord has stripped away the old and has dressed us with the new human being.

Actually, there is no love that has the power to renew those who submit or obey it. Here the Lord is speaking about a love that is distinctly different from physical emotions as He goes on to say: "**... as I have loved you**" [24].

Our Lord has given us a new commandment and that is that we love one another as He has loved us. That is the love that will renew us and transform us into new beings and into heirs of the new promise and testament. Hence we will praise Him with a new song of praise<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John 72:4

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 65:1

\* Let us love one another with great concern to win each other and to have the Lord live within us. This love is granted through Him . . . for He has loved us with this goal: that we might love one another. By loving us, He has granted us the power of brotherly love. Consequently we join together in loving fellowship and unite as members joined by the ties of joy. As a result, we become one body to the Almighty Head<sup>1</sup>.

\* The Lord seems to be telling us: ‘There are other blessings that those who do not belong to Me share with you. They share nature, life, sensations, reasoning, and security. I grant these as blessings to men and beasts. Besides, I grant all the gifts of language, mysteries, prophecies, knowledge, shelter, faith, generosity, as well as freedom to deliver their bodies even to fire. However, because they lack love, they become as sounding brass; as nothing, they are become good for nothing, ( 1 Cor 13:1-3)<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“By this shall all men know that you are My disciples,  
If you have love for one another.” [35]**

Sin leads the soul to slip into the path of darkness and death. Conversely the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the word Incarnated leads to resurrection from the grave. He offers divine knowledge and achieves divine wonders. Consequently, through faith the soul adheres to path of righteousness and truth. She shakes away all that is shameful and **expands as it is filled with love to God, to His heavenly hosts, as well as towards all his earthly creatures.**

With such a heart, a person is enabled to walk in the narrow path while carrying a big heart. In contrast, a sinful heart leads its owner into a wide path yet characterized by a restricted heart. The psalmist says: **"I will run in the way of your commandments, for you will enlarge my heart" (Ps. 119:32).**

\* If you wondered: ‘what was the Lord's purpose when He said these words?’ Our answer would be: ‘This love is grater than all other virtues. It transforms people into saints because it is the basis of all virtue’.

If you asked: ‘What do you think: Do miracles help to reveal this love in a more appropriate and devoted manner?’ Our answer would be: ‘It does not reveal it any way’. The Lord Himself said: "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name?' And then I will declare to them, ' I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"(Matt 7:22-23).

Besides, when the disciples were glad that the devils obeyed them, the Lord told them: 'Nevertheless do not rejoice in this. That the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven', (Lk10:20). If the making of the

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 65:2

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 65:3

miracles would lead the world into the faith, then love was present even before that. If love does not exist, then the effect of miracles would be short-lived<sup>1</sup>.

\* How great is love! It is more powerful than fire. It reaches to the highest heavens and nothing can hinder it<sup>2</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* It is good to extend and enlarge our hearts as much as possible. This would be a safeguard against limitations such as cowardice or destructive and angry energy. Such limitations would disable us from receiving what the prophet calls '**the large road**' of God's commandments into our limited hearts. Moreover, we would be unable to join the prophet and say: "**I will run in the way of your commandments, for you will enlarge my heart.**"<sup>3</sup>

**Fr. Youssef**

\* I would be unable to run in the path of your commandments if you do not enlarge my heart. . . can you do that on your own? . . . The answer is "no I cannot". It cannot be done with my own will, and as though I did not need Your help; yet I can because You have enlarged my heart.

An enlarged heart is filled with joy which we have received as we walk uprightly. It is a gift from God which leads us not to resent His commands. We obey not due to fear of penalty. Indeed, the heart opens up through love and joy which we have found in righteousness.

**St Augustine**

\* The road to life is narrow and difficult (Matt 7:14). However, the heart that walks uprightly, that is in the path of the Lord's commands, is opened up and welcomes the divine word. Being sanctified, the heart sees God. In contrast, the wide road leads to destruction. (Matt 7:13). The heart that walks on that road is narrow and refuses to set up a house for the Father and Son within (Jn.14:23). Through ignorance, such a heart disregards God and restricts itself due to its own cruelty.

Let us meditate on Solomon's teachings. He tells us how to record the divine word on the tablets of our hearts (Prov. 3:4; 7:3; 22:20) He proclaims "Wisdom calls aloud outside; she raises her voice. . . (Prov. 1:20) "Outside" refers to the hearts which God intends to enlarge, and not to the streets. .

**Origen the Scholar**

\* The path of the Lord's commandments is narrow. However, the heart of the one walking on that path is opened up and enlarged. This is because the Father, Son and Holy Spirit live within. Therefore that person walks on swiftly and with a big heart . .

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John 72:4

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John 73:1

<sup>3</sup> St Cassian: Conferences, 16:27

. whereas the road taken by evil doers is wide and their hearts are restricted for there is no place for God within them.

**Anthimus, Bishop of Jerusalem**

## **5. Warning to Peter and Denial of the Lord:**

**Peter said to Him,  
"Where are you going?"  
Jesus answered him,  
"Where I am going you cannot follow Me now,  
But you shall follow Me afterward". [36]**

The Lord had told His disciples previously that they could not go where He was going [33]. In spite of that, Peter dared to ask: "Lord where are you going?" His curiosity led him into a discussion that was not needed as it ended by a confirmation that he would deny His Master three times. This was something Peter could not accept logically. It would have been appropriate for him to accept the Lord's words and to meditate on the commandment of love rather than to inquire about matters outside his scope.

In spite of Peter's impulsive question, the Lord candidly responded with enough information to support him on the road of suffering: he would eventually die with Him, drink of the cup with Him. Yet this would happen later on and then would attain the blessing of joining the Lord. The Lord did not give Peter the answer he wanted. Peter wanted to know the place to which the Lord was going. Peter had accompanied the Lord everywhere and he did not imagine he could be separated from Him. Maybe Peter thought that the Lord was getting some temporal glory or earthly status. However, the Lord revealed to him where he could not accompany His Lord to heaven. Peter had not yet accomplished his earthly task, nor was he mature enough to be raised with the Lord into eternal glory.

\* Great love is stronger than fire itself. It lifts us to the heavens. There is no obstacle to hinder its great progression. Peter, the apostle, was so aroused with anticipation when he heard the Lord's words: '**where I am going you cannot come. . .**' (33), and he asks "**Lord, where are you going?**" He said that to reveal his state of mind and emotions, as he was anxious to follow the Lord, and so was not just seeking for just more information. This explains his hasty response 'I will lay down my life for You'.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord announced that the possibility of following Him had to be postponed. Yet He did not lead Peter to lose hope. On the contrary, He granted him that hope by saying: ". . . **but you shall follow Me afterward**" [36] why are you so impulsive, Peter? The Rock had not yet blessed Him with steadfastness that proceeds from His Holy Spirit. Do not lift yourself up to the heights for "**you cannot . . now**": **and do not fall into despair for "you shall follow Me afterward"**<sup>1</sup>.

**St Augustine**

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 66:1

**Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now?  
I will lay down my life for your sake." [37]**

Probably Peter thought the Lord was going on a long difficult journey and He could find no reason that could prevent him from accompanying the Lord. He was ready to accompany Him even it entailed death. Poor Peter did not know his own weakness and his inability to follow the Lord without the divine grace. He did not realize that without the Lord Jesus Christ he could do nothing, (Jn. 15:5).

\* When Peter heard the words of the Lord, ". . . **but you shall follow Me afterward**", he could not restrain his strong desire and impulsively asked, "**Lord why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for your sake!**" We ask Peter the apostle: 'What are you saying Peter? The Lord told you; you cannot follow Me now'. Do you ask: 'Why can I not follow You?' With experience, you will learn that your love means nothing if it is not accompanied by help from above.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* This trial is a lesson that teaches us not to belittle the weakness of the flesh lest we get tried<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* In his mind, he had the desire; however he did not comprehend the measure of his strength.

The weak boasted in his persistence, but the Healer eyed his health. The one promised while the other had foreknowledge. The ignorant was bold, but the all-knowing humbled Himself to be a teacher.

What a great promise Peter made! He only considered his yearning without taking into account his potentials<sup>2</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**Jesus answered him:**

**"Will you lay down your life for My sake?**

**Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow**

**Till you have denied Me three times". [38]**

\* Note the great fall of Peter the apostle! He could have been guilty on or two counts; yet in a short period, he uttered a denial that resulted in three counts of guilt.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* O you who take pride in your ability to die on My behalf, first learn to live and look after yourself. By fearing the death of your body, you open up the possibility of the death

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<sup>1</sup> On the Decease of His Brother Saytrus, Book 2:28

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 66;1

of your soul. Acknowledging the Lord Jesus Christ is life giving, while denying Him is death<sup>1</sup>.

\* He who denies the Lord incarnate cannot be reconciled with God through the mediator; for there is only one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, (1Tim 2:5).

\* Anyone who denies that the Lord Jesus Christ is also Man cannot be redeemed, 'for as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners. So also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous, (Rom 5:19). Any one who denies the Lord incarnate cannot be part of the resurrected life. Just as through one man death has entered, so through one Man has come the resurrection of the dead. "For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead" (1Cor 15:21-22)<sup>2</sup>.

**St Augustine**

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 66:1

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 66:2



## Chapter 13

### **Allow Me to be daring and wash My Brother's Feet!**

\* Greed opened the heart of Judas so Satan could sow his seeds.  
He put his hand out to steal more than once so the enemy entered into him.  
When he became intent on betraying His Master, the enemy held sway over his heart.  
He entered in as one vested with authority and as master of the house!  
He found a dark kingdom ready to receive the head of the realm.

\* You have chosen him to be a disciple and entrusted him with the money box.  
You granted him to work miracles just as the other disciples...  
In your tenderness, you concealed his name and did not humiliate him publicly.  
Hoping he would retreat from his evil,  
Furthermore, you bowed down to wash his feet.  
You dipped the Bread in the plate and offered to feed him out of Your hand,  
And no one suspected him!

\* Humbly, you carried out the task of slaves.  
You removed your outer cloths, and tied your waist with a towel  
You were not embarrassed to fill the basin with water  
And You were not ashamed to wash your disciples' feet.  
You began to wash their soiled feet with water  
In order to wash our hearts and consciences with Your holy blood.  
Who dares to take your place, O You who have washed the feet of mankind!

\* May I be bold and share your love.  
In your tenderness, allow me to receive this honor  
Allow me to gladly wash the feet of my fellowmen who have wronged me!  
My heart lovingly washes each deed that seems evil.  
With your Holy Spirit, my heart expands to embrace everyone in it  
My heart grooms as it yearns to see all feet pure and sanctified.

\* Purify me wholly with water and the fiery Spirit in the baptismal waters  
When will I see the whole world pure and sanctified in You?  
May Your hand wash me from every daily corruption!  
May You wash, O Lord, all the feet of Your believers.

\* Judas went out at night with a darkened heart to accomplish deeds of darkness.  
The disciples remained with you, O True Light  
They had true love, for they followed Your example  
For darkness cannot invade a heart that is occupied by love.

\* Peter yearned to follow You wherever You would go  
The poor man failed to realize his weak potentials!  
He imagined he could lay down his life on Your behalf  
He could not comprehend that he could not make an offering before you had offered  
Yourself first on his behalf ...  
You clearly revealed his weakness to him  
And you filled his heart with amazing hope.  
You announced to him that he would ultimately follow You  
When he too would be crucified with You for the rest of his life  
And when he would die as a martyr for the sake of Your Holy Name!

\* You know me, O my Redeemer, more than I know myself!  
You are my support,  
Fulfilling all the desires of my heart!  
May Your hand wash my heart daily, O Lord,  
So that Satan's traps would fail to catch me  
And the enemy would fail to reign in my heart.  
Your Words spread rays of light over me...  
Therefore the kingdom of darkness will fail to creep within me.

Amen

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### THE OTHER COMFORTER

The Lord delivered three farewell talks. St. John the Evangelist provides a record of these in chapters 14-16.

The heavenly Shepherd talks with the remaining few that represent His weak flock. The storm is about to strike in all its power; and Satan, the savage wolf, believes he will surely destroy the Shepherd with his sheep. As for the Shepherd, while He is fulfilling the Divine plan, reassures His flock. He asks them not to be troubled and tells them that it is more appropriate for them to comprehend the mystery of Divine love:

**Concerning the Father**, the Lord states that the Father has many mansions that are big enough to receive everyone. At the same time, He finds pleasure to come with His Son and abide within the depths of each believer.

**Concerning the Son**, the Lord states that the storm blowing against Him is just the path that has been prepared to carry His flock through the Cross and onto the Throne. There, they would enjoy the fellowship of His glory. In these talks, we hear the Father speaking with His young children. Even though He would be separated from them physically, He will send His Holy Spirit to comfort them. They would not be left as orphans. Indeed, the Holy Spirit will lead them into the heavens where the risen Lord Jesus has ascended!

**Concerning the Holy Spirit**: The Lord indicates that the Holy Spirit is the other Comforter who will lead the flock to the full Truth, who is the Lord Himself. The Holy Spirit will grant them the power to witness before the whole world: He will judge the world for not believing, and consequently attract unbelievers to believe through the preaching of the disciples. The world will be judged for righteousness as men will come to know that no one can be righteous except through the righteousness of the Crucified Lord. It will also be condemned when Satan will be destroyed and condemned.

These farewell talks continue to constitute the mysterious power of the Church. She finds in them the mystery of salvation which preoccupies the Holy Trinity. This will be the main concern until the salvation of mankind is wholly fulfilled and all come to enjoy what God has prepared.

Chapter 14 is an extension to the conversation which the Lord Jesus shared with His disciples after establishing the mystery of the Eucharist. He had just condemned the act of Judas and predicted Peter's act of denying the Lord three times. The Lord wanted to comfort and support the rest of the disciples since they were troubled and saddened to know that one of them would betray Him, and another would deny Him. In the previous chapters, we saw how the gathering of the disciples with the Lord was more like a conference characterized by open debate

Anxiety is often the result of fear of the unknown, or due to the expectation of a great loss that would affect the soul, body, or possessions. The cure for anxiety is to have faith. This lends insight to the soul that enables her to recognize her eternal resting place. She realizes that through God she is enabled to destroy obstacles. No power could stand in her way as she enjoys steadfastness in the Trinity of God who governs heaven and earth and all visible and invisible creatures.

|                                       |                    |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>1- Eternal Rest</b>                | <b>verses: 1-3</b> |
| <b>2- Christ is the way of Rest</b>   | <b>4-11</b>        |
| <b>3- Prayer and Rest</b>             | <b>12-14</b>       |
| <b>4- The Other Comforter</b>         | <b>15-17</b>       |
| <b>5- The Lord's Appearance</b>       | <b>18-24</b>       |
| <b>6- The Comforter and Teacher</b>   | <b>25-26</b>       |
| <b>7- The Lord's Joy on Departing</b> | <b>27-31</b>       |

## **1- Eternal Rest**

**St. John Chrysostom** comments that the disciples were greatly disturbed especially after the Lord Jesus Christ had revealed to them what Peter would do. If that disciple, who was known for his fiery zeal, had always accompanied the Lord, and had proclaimed his desire to sacrifice his life for the Lord's sake, would deny his Master three times, then what hope could they have? That is why the Lord spoke to them these words: He sought to remove their anxiety and open before them the gates of hope and heavenly joy!

**“Let not your heart be troubled;  
You believe in God, believe also in Me” [1]**

The Lord warns us against anxiety and confusion. He offers us faith as a practical cure against the pain of anxiety. Anxiety was evident in the look on the disciples' faces. ‘Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke,’ (John 13:22). The Lord not only saw this, but He also saw their hearts that were inwardly bleeding. Therefore He did not ignore their state as He was concerned about our inner peace. He is also concerned about our inner peace. Now, He opened the door of security and peace before them. This door opens up through believing in Him. They had to believe in Him as the Savior who would suffer and die for them. Consequently, He would grant them the power and joy of the resurrection, open the way to heaven, and grant them the right to pass over into the place of eternal rest.

The disciples had begun to lose the hope of establishing a kingdom on earth. Their dreams concerning the Lord began to disappear. As for the Lord, He raised their minds and sights to the eternal spiritual inheritance. He lifted their hearts to heaven so that they would yearn for the things prepared for them over there.

\* Notice how the Lord Jesus Christ comforted them by saying: **“let not your heart be**

**troubled**". In these opening words He clarifies His divine power as He knew the thoughts that were going on in their minds. Consequently, He incorporated the answer into His words.

By saying: **"... you believe in God, believe also in Me"**, the Lord intends to say that 'all these difficulties will surely pass away since by having faith in Me and in My Father you become far more powerful than all the hardships that you will encounter. That faith will shield you from being conquered by any evil.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord constantly confirms this definition of the faith of the Church. It embraces the teaching that there is one God the Father. However, He is never separate from the mystery of the One God. The Father is neither another God nor is He different from the sole Almighty God.

Since the nature of the One God is found in the Lord Jesus Christ, then it is impossible to have a God that is different from Him...for God can neither be separate from the Lord Jesus Christ nor can He be merged in Him. This explains why the Lord spoke carefully and used well chosen words. What He proclaims to be a feature of the Father, indicates in humble terms that these apply to Him too. To illustrate this point, the Lord says: **"... hold steadfastly to faith in God, and believe in Me"**. He and God are equal in honor. We therefore ask: 'How can He be separated from His nature?' The Lord says: **"...believe also in Me"**. He also says: **"...believe in God"**. Do not the words **"in Me"** refer to His nature?<sup>1</sup>

**St. Hilary, Bishop of Boitier**

\* You fear death that is about to engulf the likeness of that slave; but **"...let not your heart be troubled"** [1]. Indeed, the likeness of God will raise Him up again<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**"In My Father's house are many mansions;  
If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."**[2]

The Lord Jesus Christ calls the heavens His 'Father's house' for He will return to His Father's house which is His own as well. There, He will prepare places and mansions for His followers. Therefore everyone will feel that he is returning to the house of his heavenly Father or to the home awaiting him/her. By saying **'many mansions'**, the Lord assures us that God has many children; and that the heavens are big enough to hold them all. In the Greek language, 'mansions' denotes permanent dwelling places or permanent residences.

Rather than a temporary kingdom, the Lord directs their sight to the kingdom of eternal glory. This is a huge kingdom that can embrace all mankind if they want; for **'... in My Father's house are many mansions (places)'** [2].

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<sup>1</sup> On the Trinity 9:18

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 67:1

Even though the Lord was leaving them physically, He was doing that to bring them to glory: to **‘prepare a place’ [2]** for them. He was not leaving them to seek His personal comfort and glory. Indeed, His intention was to prepare for each one a specific place in His kingdom.

The Jews boasted that the temple was the house of God and it contained many rooms- (1 Kings 6:5; Ezra 8:29; Jeremiah 35:24; 36:10). However, the heavenly temple consists of many varied houses, so that every believer will find a place there that is ready for him.

**‘If it were not so, I would have told you’:** I am not offering you an invalid hope. I have promised you an eternal inheritance so that you would be in the same place where I am going. If there was no place for you, I would not have spoken these words to you.

\* The Lord supported Peter who he was saddened by His words ‘... you shall follow Me afterward,’ (13:36). In the same manner, the Lord offered to His disciples this glimmer of hope. So that they would not think He had made that promise to Peter only. He told them: **“In My Father’s house are many mansions”**. He also said: **“I go to prepare a place for you”**. This reveals that the place which will receive Peter will receive them as well; for there is plenty of room in these mansions<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

Jovinianus comments that these many places in our Father’s house refer to the churches that are spread throughout the world. St. Jerome responds to that by saying that the Lord, in this passage, was referring not to the number of churches but rather to the heavenly houses and eternal residences.

\* In spite of the variety of heavenly glory, yet everyone will enjoy being in one and the same place. The Lord has ascended there to prepare many mansions. Indeed, He will prepare one kingdom and all will have fellowship in it. Consequently all will feel content and satisfied, even though the glory of each star will differ from that of the others<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

\* Is it possible for anyone not to be fearful? Peter who was the most confident and bold disciple was told: “...the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times,” (John 13:38).

Beginning with Peter, they all felt doomed to destruction, therefore they became fearful. Then they heard the Lord’s words: **“In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you”**. This refreshed and pulled them out of their anxiety. Now they could walk confidently and be assured in the knowledge that, after overcoming the horrors of temptation, they would live with the Lord Jesus Christ and in the presence and embrace of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 73:1

<sup>2</sup> Against Jovinianus, 2:28

Even though one person could be stronger than the other, or one more righteous than the other, yet **“...in My Father’s house are many mansions”. None of them would remain outside that house for everyone will receive a place according to his merits.**

All workers are similar with respect to the talents which the master of the house commanded to give out to all those who worked in the vineyard. There was no distinction between those who worked more and those who worked fewer hours, (Matt 20:9). This payment definitely refers to everlasting life where no one lives for a longer period than the rest. Indeed, there are no variant measurements or discrepancies in eternal life. Besides, the numerous dwelling places indicate the levels of entitlement in the one eternal life. We consider that the sun has a certain glory, the moon another, the stars have yet another. One star could possess a more distinct glory than the other. The same will apply at the time of the resurrection of the dead.

The saints are like the heavenly stars. They are granted various places and various degrees of brilliance. However, according to the talents we have referred to, no one is deprived of the kingdom. God will be the All in all, (1 Cor 15:41, 42); and in His own very special way, which is expressed by love: for God is love ( 1 John 4:8). Love will achieve this general condition- in a kingdom that will embrace everyone. This is how everyone can truly possess that (kingdom): **each one will desire to see in others what he does not possess... due to this wide variety of brilliance, all jealousy will disappear while the unity of love reigns over all**<sup>1</sup>.

\* May the Lord Jesus Christ go and prepare for us a place. May He leave and not be visible; and may He remain invisible so that we may practice faith. In this manner, He will prepare a place for us. Having faith in Him, we shall live. May we have the desire to believe in that place in order to attain the spot prepared for us. Yearning for love is the means of getting ready to attain that mansion. May you have ready, O Lord, what you are preparing. You are preparing us to receive You; while You are also getting Yourself ready for us. As much as You are preparing a place in us for You; You are also preparing a place in You for us. Accordingly, You have said: “...Abide in Me and I in you” (John 15:4). Just as each one has fellowship in You ...some to a lesser, others to a greater degree- so also will the various rewards be: each according to his different entitlement<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**St. Augustine** wonders ‘how does the Lord Jesus Christ promise to go and prepare a place for us, whereas He simultaneously states that: “...in My Father’s house are many mansions”...which indicates that they have been actually prepared already?’ He comments on that by stating that these had been prepared in hindsight for our sake. Yet He would be literally fulfilling all that in a practical manner. In the Gospels, we read how the Lord chose His disciples and called them. However, the apostle reports that “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world,” (Eph 1:4). In this manner, the

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 67:2

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 68: 3

disciples had been appointed before the foundation of the world, and according to His Divine plan. Moreover, He fulfilled it in a practical manner when He became incarnated and called the disciples and apostles to Him<sup>1</sup>.

**“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also”. [3]**

The departure of the Lord Jesus Christ from our world opened the way. By leaving our world, He prepares the place and grants us the right to pass through Him into the kingdom of eternal glory. He reminds His disciples of the old times when He led the nation to the place where they would find a home, (Numbers 10:33). Similarly, the Lord will go before His followers, and He will enable them to walk for three days, that is the journey of the resurrection and the victory over death. Ultimately, all will find places in heaven!

The Lord saw the religious leaders. They were greatly disturbed and desired to get rid of Him. Therefore they joined the crowds and shouted: “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” Therefore He urged His disciples not to allow this confusion to touch their hearts. Whereas the world around the Lord was in turmoil and sought to get rid of Him, He willingly went out to open the door of glory even to His opponents. Truly, He seeks to redeem all mankind!

The words ‘...receive you to Myself’ in the Greek language denote great love, yearning, and attraction toward the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the work of the Holy Spirit who pours love into the heart. Consequently, it yearns to meet Him face to face and to be received into His embrace. There the heart will enjoy the warmth of the supreme power of the Lord’s love. The attraction to the Lord Jesus Christ, which we enjoy now, and our steadfastness in Him, is a warranty of what we will attain. Yet, it is impossible to make any comparison.

God the Word accepted to become Man and to live among us. He became a citizen of our world in order to carry us into His heavenly kingdom. He sought to grant us fellowship in His Divine nature so that we might be considered ‘members of the household of God’, (Eph 2:19). Therefore, our heart yearns to say with the apostle: ‘...for me, to live is Christ and to die is gain’, (Phil 1:23). We desire to follow Him wherever He goes’, (Rev 14:4). This is the prayer of the heavenly bridegroom for His bride: that she “...may be with Me where I am”, (John 17:24). In other words: that the bride might enjoy the heavenly feast.

\* It is as though the Lord Jesus Christ was telling His disciples: ‘I have taken great pains to fulfill that’. He intended to underline that they had to trust, have faith, and yearn intensely to be with Him<sup>2</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 68:1

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John, 73:1



## 2- Christ is the Way of Rest

**“And where I go you know and the way you know.” [4]**

The Lord had told His disciples about the Cross, and He had offered to them His sacrificial Blood and Body. He considered that by then they knew where He was going; and the road He would take through the Cross. As a result, He would open the door for them to enter into the embrace of the heavenly Father.

The Lord offered them the blessed heavenly life. To comfort them in the midst of their pain, He indicated the path leading to that life. His words to the disciples conveyed the following: ‘...you have come to know the heavenly home, the home of your Father which is your resting place; and you have learned of the path that would lead you there. I have repeatedly spoken clearly to you about these things and you should have understood all these matters’.

\* The Lord spoke these words as He knew they would seek to know this information later on. By telling them: “...**the way you know** ...”, He underlined the yearning in their minds!<sup>1</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord informs us that in our Father’s house there are many mansions, (John 14:2). In that context, the Lord defines the status of righteousness that every person achieves. Through the rejection of evil and its claim to be a healing prescription, we stay on the Lord’s path.

For example, a person who inherits certain talents early on in life, lives according to the truth, and follows the good path, could be equal to another person who has strived and progressed in the pursuit of truth and goodness.

Another person may develop through a desire for goodness. Another may steadfastly persevere in reaching a peak of virtue; while another may have surpassed him in achieving higher levels.

Some may surpass these, while others may struggle hard to progress.

God the Almighty receives every person coming to Him by his own free will. He ranks each according to his merits. Consequently, He grants rewards to persons who are of a nobler status, as well as to those who are less deserving<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Gregory of Nicea**

**Thomas said to Him:**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 73:2

<sup>2</sup> Song of Solomon: Fr Gregory, Bishop of Nicea. Translated into Arabic by Dr George Nawar: Sermon 15

**“Lord, we do not know where You are going  
And how can we know the way?”[5]**

In spite of all the Lord’s teachings about the Cross and the Resurrection, the disciples could not comprehend the Lord’s words. Probably, they thought He would be taken up in a fiery chariot in the manner of Elijah; or that the angels would carry Him up to heaven; or that He would rest in the bosom of Abraham which was the desire of every Jew. Thomas was at a loss. So were the two disciples as they were on their way to Emaus, and after they had heard the women reporting and confirming to all the disciples that the Lord Jesus Christ had risen from the dead.

The Lord opened the way for a debate with His disciples through His gentle words to them. At least two of the disciples spoke with Him: Thomas and Philip. Thomas questioned the Lord about the path, without apologizing for contradicting His words “where I go you know”. Thomas was not embarrassed to admit that he could not understand the Lord’s words. Moreover, he admitted he did not know where the Lord was going and consequently he could not know the way. Peter was different: he supposed he could go with the Lord, even if that would cost him his very own life, (John 13:37)

It is good that Thomas admitted his ignorance. However, he is to be blamed for thinking of an earthly kingdom. This made him suppose that the Master was going to leave for another country, and therefore he could not know the way. Thomas did not know if the Lord was going to Bethlehem, Capernaum, or any of the cities of the Gentiles. David had gone to Hebron where he was anointed, and there proclaimed to regain a kingdom for Israel. Did Thomas think that the Lord was going to the invisible world of the spirits...we do not know!

\*Peter said these words “Where are you going?” (John 13:36). He asked in order to follow the Lord rather than to get information. However, the Lord rebuked Peter and revealed that what is feasible seemed to be impossible at that time (that the disciples follow the Lord). This obstacle led Peter to desire to know more details. That is why the Lord told the other disciples: **“...the way you know” [4]**, but He told Peter ...“you will deny Me”, (13:38). Before anyone could say another word, the Discerner of the hearts said: **“Let not your heart be troubled”**. Then He said **“... you know”** to reveal the desire in their hearts. Therefore, the Lord excused them for wondering, and for being at a loss. Note that Peter’s question **“where are You going?”** was prompted by pure love, whereas Thomas’ question was prompted by cowardice.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Jesus said to him:**

**“I am the way, the truth and the life.**

**No one comes to the Father except through Me”. [6]**

Thomas allowed his mind to roam all over as he tried to search, and to find where the Lord would go. Similarly, Martha was troubled, to the last day, when the Lord informed her that her brother would come to life. In both cases, and in most cases if not in all, the Lord Jesus Christ draws the attention of the hearers to Himself by saying: **“I**

**am”**. In this manner, He underlines that He is the way, the truth, the life, the resurrection, the shepherd, the door, and the bread descended from heaven. In Him we have full satisfaction and contentment. There is no path outside Him and no truth without Him. Life can be found only in Him.

He is the way that leads us to the Father without quitting the Son, for the Son is in the Father. Therefore, by uniting with the Son, we enjoy union with the Father. The Lord presents Himself as the way, the truth and the life. These are inseparable, since the Lord is all of that to us. He is the way: we believe in Him and therefore remain steadfast in Him. He lives in us in order to carry us unto the Father’s embrace. He is the truth, whose light shines in our depths and reveals the ultimate knowledge of divine mysteries. He is the life and as we receive Him, He grants life to us. In this manner, we are enabled to enter into the Father’s presence, get acquainted with Him, and rejoice in Him.

The Lord corrected the thoughts of Thomas by revealing to him that He is the way that leads to the Father and to an understanding of His way. The Lord is the way based on His teachings (John 6:24); His life (1Peter 2:21); His sacrifice (Hebrew 9:8-9); His spirit (John 16:13). He is the way, where all the divine promises will be fulfilled (2 Cor 1:20). No one can go to the Father except through Him; and no one can know the Father unless the Son informs that person about Him.

The Lord Jesus Christ is **the way** and Isaiah spoke about that, saying: “A highway shall be there, a road, and it shall be called the highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it. It shall not be found there. But the redeemed shall walk there” (Is 35:8-9).

He is **the way** on which He has offered His Blood in order to carry us into His Holy Place, (Heb 9:12). There we will rejoice in the Cross which is the tree of life.

He is **the truth** in whom all shades and symbols mentioned in the Old Testament have been fulfilled: He is the real manna descending from heaven, (John 6:23), He is the Holy Tabernacle (Heb 8:3).

He is **the truth** that erases all that is false and all that is incorrect.

He is **the truth** that destroys all deception; for in Him we find true confidence and truth (2 Cor 1:20)

He is **the truth** and the resurrection: “...consider yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:11).

He is **the way, the truth, the life**. He represents the beginning and the end; as well as all that lies in between. Through Him, we start life, travel on the way, and reach the destination.

\* Therefore, the way is itself God's ultimate power. Since the Lord Jesus Christ is our way; and He is the good way, then He is the way that opens up the heavenly kingdom to believers. The Lord is the initiator of our virtue and the beginning of purity<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* **"I am the way"**: these words are evidence that "No one comes to the Father except through Me".

"I am the truth, the way, and the life"...due to that, all these matters will be fulfilled. I am the truth and there is no falsehood in Me.

Since I am also the life, then even death cannot impede you from coming to Me.

Besides, since I am the way, you will not need anyone to take you by the hand and lead you. Since I am the truth then My words are not lies; and since I am the life, then even though you will die, you will receive what I have revealed to you...

The disciples were greatly comforted by knowing that the Lord is the way. The Lord seemed to inform them that 'since I have the sole power to go to the Father, then you will definitely come to Him, for there is no other way to get there'. Previously, the Lord had said: '...no one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him...', (John 6:44); and "...and I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself", (John 12:32). The Lord also said: "No one comes to the Father except through Me", (John 14:6). All these words indicate that He is equal to the One who created Him.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The Savior Himself says: **"I am the way, the truth, the life"**, [6]. The apostle comments: "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory" (Col 3:4). This is also expressed in the Psalms: 'Because your loving kindness is better than life', (Ps 63:3): life is so much richer because the Lord Jesus Christ is the life within each person<sup>2</sup>.

\* This way is the way of righteousness, and it leads a good person to the righteous Father. A person shows righteousness out of his good treasure; and he is the good and faithful servant, (Matt 7:14; Luke 6:45; Matt 25:21). However, this way is narrow and the majority, who have material inclinations, are unable to travel through it. The road is also narrow for those who struggle as they travel through it. In fact, the Lord did not say that it was 'limited' but that it was 'narrow'<sup>3</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

\* Now the way is not susceptible to error. By that we refer to the Lord Jesus Christ who tells us **"I am the way and the life"**. This way leads to the Father, as He says: "No one

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<sup>1</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 3:7:51-52

<sup>2</sup> Commentary on John, Book 6:41

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on John, Book 6:105

comes to the Father except through Me”, (John 14:6)<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Ignatius of Antioch**

\* The Almighty and Honorable Father is the Father of truth Himself. In other words, He is the Father of the only begotten Son. The Holy Spirit possesses the Spirit of truth. Therefore, those who worship the Father in spirit and in truth, and hold steadfastly on to this faith, receive great power. The apostle says: “...for we offer glory and prayer through the one Holy Spirit”, (John 4:23, 24). The only begotten Son says: **“No one comes to the Father except through Me”**; therefore, those who honor the Father through My name, do so in spirit and in truth, and they are real worshippers<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Gregory Palamas**

\* Every person seeks the truth and the life, yet not everyone finds the way<sup>3</sup>.

\* As a human being, He gave joy (for He became the way of our salvation through his incarnation). As a result, we are enabled to come to God: we come with Him and in Him.

Do not look for any way other than Him to get to the Father. Had the Lord not offered Himself to be the way, we would have been lost constantly. He has become the way that leads us to Him.

We are not saying: seek for the way; because the way Himself has come to you. Get up and walk in Him. Walk with Life- not with your feet, for many are able to walk well with their feet- but they take their lives into evil ways.

Often, even those who walk in godliness run outside the way. Therefore you may find people who live in godliness yet they are not Christians. They run well, yet they are not running in the way. The more they run the more they get lost, for they are running outside the way. However, if such people come and walk in the way, and stay steadfastly on course, their faith would become ever so strong. As long as they pursue godliness, they will never get lost! However, if they do not persevere in the way, how terrible will their suffering be! Those who know how to be godly will greatly lament! **It would have been better had they stopped on the way rather than to have walked steadfastly outside it**<sup>4</sup>.

\* The Lord told His disciples that they knew both matters: (where He was going and the way He would take). However, Thomas declared that he did not know- that is, he neither knew where the Lord was going nor the way to get there. Thomas was not aware that he was uttering lies. Although the disciples knew, yet they were unaware of that knowledge. **Therefore, the Lord convinced them that they actually knew what they thought they did not.** When the Lord said: **“I am the way, the truth, the life”- [6]**, they realized that He is the truth and that they knew Him. Since they knew Him who is life, then they knew

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<sup>1</sup> Epistle to the Eph. 9

<sup>2</sup> The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters, Ch 59

<sup>3</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 91:1

<sup>4</sup> Sermon on N T Lessons 91:4

the way. Notice how they became convinced that they had known but they had not realized that they had known Him already<sup>1</sup>.

\* The Lord Himself was going back to Himself. Therefore to whom are we going other than to Him? What way are we taking other than through the Lord Himself? **Through Him we go to Him.** In the same manner, and through the same way, we, together with Him, get to the Father<sup>2</sup>.

\* The apostle Thomas was granted to see you, O Lord Jesus Christ, in order to ask you questions. **In spite of that, he could not comprehend until he accepted You within himself.**

I ask You because I know You are superior to me.

I ask and search as much as I can in order to extend myself into that place which is so high above me. There I would listen to You, O You who does not use an external voice in order to convince me of Your teachings.

I pray You to inform me, how do I come to You?

Since You have not come from Yourself but from the Father who has sent You; have You abandoned Yourself in order to come to us?

Truly, we know that You have disrobed Yourself by taking on the form of a slave. However, You have neither stripped Yourself of the Godhead to which You need to return; nor have You lost Him as though this needed to be retrieved...**You have come in the form of a slave, yet You were and still are residing where You came from. Moreover, You will be returning there without leaving the place to which You have come.**

Since You have come and have returned in this manner, then You are not only the way through which we will travel to You, but You are also the way through which You Yourself will go and will return<sup>3</sup>.

\* It seems that the Lord is asking us: 'Which way will you take?' **"I am the way"**.

Where are you going? **"I am the truth"**.

Where will you live? **"I am the life"**.

Let us therefore walk confidently in the way. However, let us be on guard due to the nets set up on either side.

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 69:1

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 69:2

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 69:3

The enemy would not dare to set up his nets on the way because the Lord Jesus Christ is the way. Nevertheless, the enemy will not stop from putting them up on the side tracks.

That is why the words of the Psalm say: ‘...they have spread a net by the wayside’, (s 140:5). In another holy verse, it says: ‘Be conscious that you are walking among hidden traps’, (Sirach 9:13). These traps are not found in the **way but they are in the wayside and we would walk in them if we went there.**

What do you fear? Walk in the way!

Be fearful if you have abandoned the way.

That is why the enemy has been allowed to set traps on the wayside: for through pride you might forget the way and fall into the trap<sup>1</sup>.

\* The humble Lord Jesus Christ is the way: He is the truth and the life. The Lord is the Almighty Glorious God.

**If you walk humbly you will attain glory.**

If you are weak in the way you now are, do not belittle the humble, for you will remain gloriously steadfast and empowered<sup>2</sup>.

\* He is the way: ‘The Word became flesh’, (1:14)

He holds the way: ‘He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a slave’, (Phil 2:7).

He is the home to which we are going; and He is the way we will take to get there.

May we go to Him and through Him. Therefore we shall not get lost<sup>3</sup>.

**St Augustine**

\* I find that the true way is the One who embraces me. He is the One who obstructs my wicked paths, ( Hosea 2:6). He is the One who says in the Gospel: **“I am the way, the truth and the life”, [6]**<sup>4</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

\* The Lord Jesus Christ is not only God, but actually the true God: true God from true God since He Himself is the truth<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons 92:1

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons 92:2

<sup>3</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons 42: 3

<sup>4</sup> Letter 122:1

<sup>5</sup> Of the Holy Spirit, Book 1:17:108

**St. Ambrose**

\* It is impossible to have any hope in redemption without knowing both (the Father and the Son) at the same time<sup>1</sup>.

**Caprianus, the Martyr**

\* Look within yourself to see yourself: ‘..why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in you own eye?’ (Matt 7:3).

**The soul that exits from herself is invited to enter into it, for by exiting from herself she has exited from her Lord...**

The soul has withdrawn from Him, and does not live any more within herself. She resists herself, has been expelled from herself, and has fallen into matters that do not relate to her...

**The soul has neglected herself due to her love of the world.  
Now, let her forget herself, but let it be due to her love for the Creator of the world!**<sup>2</sup>

**St. Augustine**

\* Many roads, or ways, open up before those who belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. Under His leadership, they need to travel on these roads before they can enter into the Holy Land. After leaving Egypt, and passing through the many stages mentioned in the Holy Book, they then rested: ‘These are the journeys of the children of Israel...at the command of the Lord’, (Numbers 33:1, 2)

Who is the One who planned the roads that the children of Israel had to take throughout these stages of the journey? Who other than God? He planned them by setting a pillar of fire and a cloud of light...

Now, meditate how the same thing is happening to you spiritually as you walk on your journey. If you have come out of Egypt, and are able to follow the Savior Jesus Christ-(Joshua), He will bring you into the land.

Moses (the Law) seems to be the Leader. However, Joshua is there at his side without openly leading.

Wait for Moses to lead until the moment when his time is up. Then when the fullness of time comes (Gal 4:4) the Lord Jesus Christ will lead...He takes over the role of teaching the people, and proclaiming publicly His laws. Therefore let us walk in them and pray: **‘Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes and I shall keep it to the end,** (Ps 119:33).

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 73 to Jubauan: 17

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons 92:3



We seek to follow Him since there is **“the way of Your statutes”**

It is not an easy way, and it does not need two or three or even ten days. Actually, we need all the days of our lives as we seek to find the way of His statutes.

In the same manner, we need to find **‘the way to witness’**: “I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies as much as in all riches”. (Ps 119:14). Besides, there is the **‘way of commandments’**, “I will run in the way of Your commandments, for You will enlarge my heart”, (Ps 119:32)

All these roads are really one way telling us: **“I am the way”**, (John 14:6). Let us, therefore, walk in all these roads until we reach our destination. That destination is ‘the Lord Jesus Christ’

. **Origen the Scholar**

\* A person does not become contaminated again with the earth’s dust after having washed his feet: the bride says: “I have washed my feet; how can I defile them?” (Song of Sol 5:3). Moses removed his sandals (made of dead animal hides) because he was walking on sacred ground, (Ex 3:5)

The Holy Bible tells us that Moses did not put on his sandals again. He obeyed the instructions that God gave him, when he was on top of the mountain, to make the robes of the priests. They had to be sewed with gold, blue, purple, and red threads; and were to be done of fine linen material so that the beauty of the coverings would throw rays around them ( Ex 28:5,8). Moses did not use any ornaments on his feet, for the feet of priests had to be naked and uncovered. This is because a priest walks on holy ground, therefore he should not use shoes or sandals made of animal hides. This explains why the Lord Jesus Christ forbade his disciples to wear shoes for He commanded them to walk in the way of holiness, (Matt 10:5, 6).

You know that road of holiness on which the Lord commanded His disciples to walk when He said: **“I am the way”**, (John 14:6). **We will be unable to walk on that way unless we remove the dead clothes of the old man<sup>1</sup>.**

. **St. Gregory of Nicea**

**“If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also;  
And from now on you know Him  
And have seen Him”. [7]**

These are words of reproach uttered by the Lord Jesus Christ. Many of the fathers and prophets had recognized Him through the many symbols and shadows; and had desired to see and adhere to Him. He was their only hope. Sadly, the disciples who had lived with Him, had accompanied Him during His ministry, His journeys, and His retreats, had not come to know Him as they should have. Now, it was time for Him to depart from the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Song of Songs: St Gregory, Bishop of Nicea: Translated by Dr George Nawar: Sermon11

The Lord Jesus Christ desires that all believers get acquainted with Him and comprehend their fellowship with Him. This is the prayer of the apostles on behalf of all mankind. St. Paul accordingly wrote to the people of Ephesus: “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...that you may know what is the hope of His calling... 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”, ( Eph 1:16-20).

The Lord’s words: “... **from now on you know Him and have seen Him**” [7], indicate that the hour of the Cross had come now. The world hated the Lord and He was crucified because His followers loved the world. Believers see and recognize the all loving Father in the crucified Son who arose from the dead. The hour of the Cross is a divine opportunity offered to believers in order to recognize and see the Father. Through the Cross, they are reconciled to Him and enjoy stability within His embrace.

A person who truly knows the Lord Jesus Christ understands that He is the Son and the divine God whose kingdom is not of the world. He descended from heaven and ascended to it as He lives in the Father’s embrace. Therefore a person who comes to the Lord comes into the divine embrace of the Father, gets acquainted with Him, and His divine mysteries.

**St. John Chrysostom**, as well as other fathers, note that the Lord Jesus Christ sometimes told His disciples that they have seen and known Him; while at other times he told them that they have seen Him but have not known Him. At times, the Lord tells them that they have neither seen nor heard Him. So is there a conflict or contradiction? St. John Chrysostom makes a distinction between seeing the Son as flesh only which the disciples could touch with their hands and see with their eyes; and yet they could not see His essence or comprehend the brilliance of His divine glory. Therefore they looked but did not see. At the same time they did not know Him. **Even the disciples, who had seen and had adhered to Him, were unable to comprehend sufficiently His divinity up to the moment of His ascension and the coming of His Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Similarly, a person could know the Lord and yet not know Him. He would know the Lord without comprehending His true identity.**

A person who sees the reality of the Son, and gets deeply acquainted with Him, sees the Father and gets acquainted with Him.

\* The Lord Jesus Christ was not contradicting Himself. It is true that the disciples knew Him. However, their knowledge was not as deep as it should have been. They knew God yet they still did not know the Father. Later on, when they received the Holy Spirit, He worked in them and offered them full knowledge.

That was the implication of the Lord’s words: ‘When you comprehend my

essence and stature, you will also come to know the Father and His stature. **You will know and see Him through Me**'. To see indicates knowledge acquired through mental understanding. Often, there are people that we see but do not know. That explains the Lord's intention in saying 'have **seen Him**'. As for those unknown to us, we cannot know or recognize them. We are told in another verse that He is "seen by angels", (1Timothy 3:16). However, the core or essence is invisible; and in spite of that we are told that He is visible... to the extent of our ability to see.

**These words were said to inform you that those who see Him recognize Him who gave Him birth. However, they did not see Him in His revealed essence, for they saw Him in the form of the flesh.**

The Lord seeks **to equate seeing with knowing**. He says: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God", (Matt 5:8). By pure in heart, the Lord refers to those who have become free of all sin- and not from adultery alone- for every sin defiles the soul.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**St. Augustine** comments on verses (7-10) and says that the Lord Jesus Christ stresses that a person who knows Him, knows the Father. This is because no one can come to the Father except through the Lord. While the Lord confirms His unity with the Father, yet He distinguishes between the Father and the Son<sup>1</sup>.

**Philip said to Him:**

**"Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us". [8]**

When the Lord spoke about the Father, Philip yearned to see Him. However, he was not able to see Him yet.

**First:** He was unable to see the Father as He yearned to see the Divinity physically. He wanted to see with his physical eyes and in just the same way he was seeing the Lord Jesus Christ at that time.

**Second:** The cause of his disability to see was that he could not recognize the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He saw the Lord according to the flesh and without recognizing His Divinity.

**Finally:** He could not comprehend the unique unity of the Father and the Son as one in essence. Therefore he asked the Lord: **"...show us the father and it is sufficient for us"**.

Philip's request resembles the request of Moses who yearned to see the glory of God, (Ex 33:18). It is true that seeing God would be satisfying and sufficient. It is a request that brings joy to the heart. However, what was wrong with Philip's request was his ignorance concerning the unity of the Son and the Father. This is because he had not enjoyed the transfiguration like Peter, James and John. Besides, he also could not

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<sup>1</sup> cf. St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, Tractate 70:1

understand, up to the end, the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ; and he could not see the essence of His Divinity.

\* Philip reversed the order and said: **“show us the Father”** as though he had come to know the Lord Jesus Christ sufficiently well. However, the Lord set him on the right course and urged him to get acquainted with the Father through Him. Philip wanted to see the Father with his own physical eyes. He had probably heard about prophets who had seen God. Yet these cases had occurred as God condescended to appear to them; and the Holy Word says the following: “No one has seen God” (John 1:18); and “everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me” (6:45); and “you have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form”, (John 5:37). In the Old Testament we are told: “...you cannot see My face, for no man shall see Me and live”, (Ex 33:20).

What does the Lord Jesus Christ say? **“Have I been with you so long and yet you have not known Me, Philip?”**. The Lord did not say: ‘you have not seen Me’ but He said **‘...you have not known Me’**.

Philip could have asked: “Why do I need to learn about you? I am now asking to see Your Father and you are telling me that I did not know You. What is the relationship between this and my question?” Definitely, there is a strong link; for if the Lord is the One who is the Father and He is at the same time the Son, then it will be through Him that we will know the One who gave birth to Him. In order to distinguish between the two hypostasis, the Lord says: **“He who has seen Me, has seen the Father”**. He said these words so that no one would think that the Father Himself is identical with the Son.

Why did the Lord not answer by saying: ‘You are asking for things that are impossible and which are not permitted to any person, yet are possible to Me only?’ Because Philip said: “...it is sufficient for us”. Although he acknowledged that he knew the Lord, he revealed that he had not seen Him. Indeed, had Philip known the Father, he would have been able to see the Son. Therefore, the Lord told him: “...he who has seen Me has seen the Father”. It is as though He was telling Philip: “It is not possible to see Me or see the Father”. This is because Philip had based His knowledge upon his physical vision. Accordingly, he believed he had seen the Son. In the same manner, he wanted to see the Father. However, the Lord revealed to him that he had not seen even the Son Himself.

If anyone wishes to claim that knowledge is vision, then we would not contradict Him if the Lord Jesus Christ had said: “...He who knows Me knows the Father”. However, the Lord wanted to proclaim the fellowship in the essence. He who knows the Essence of the Lord, also knows the Essence of the Father. Is the Lord speaking here about the wisdom of the Father? Or about His goodness? That is not the case. The Lord is speaking about the reality of God, and His intrinsic essence... Indeed, the Lord reprimanded Phillip and said: “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me”? You have enjoyed all these teachings and have seen the miracles that I have done with authority. Besides, you have watched all the divine things that only the Father can do, such as the forgiveness of sins, revealing the hidden secrets, raising the dead, and

creating from the earth (eyes), and yet you have not known Me? The Lord had become incarnate and therefore said: "...yet you have not known Me?" You see the Father, so do not ask for more since you see Me in Him. Once you see Me, you should not become more inquisitive, for you know Him in Me.

\* "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in Me?" In other words: I can be seen in the same essence. **"The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority, but the Father who dwells in Me does the works"**, [10]. How is it that the Lord mentioned the words first and then the works? This resulted naturally as He could have said: 'It is the Father who speaks the words'. However, the Lord placed the two elements together: the teachings and the miracles. Probably the Lord said so because the words represented deeds as well. But how does the Father perform both? On another occasion, He says: "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me", (10:37). But, why does He say in this context that the Father does the works? Again, His intention is to reveal that there is no separation between the Father and the Son. His words convey the following: 'My Father does not work in one direction, while I work in another. In another context, the Lord says: "My Father has been working until now and I have been working" (5:17). In the first instance, the Lord indicates the harmony between the work of the Father and the Son. In the second, He underlines the divinity of the Father and the Son<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Jesus said to him,**

**"Have I been with you so long and yet you have not known Me, Philip?**

**He who has seen Me has seen the Father;**

**So how can you say, show us the Father?" [9]**

While the Lord reprimanded Philip, He actually was reprimanding all the disciples as He tells them all: "I will be with you". He did not say: 'you will be with Me', for He has descended and lived among us. He is the One who came to us and took the initiative of loving us. Our part is to progress towards Him and let our inner vision be enlightened. In doing so, we can progress and move towards Him. Let us walk with Him as He walks with us. He has descended to us, so that through His Spirit we may ascend to Him.

The Lord Jesus Christ came and lived with the disciples. It was not a fleeting vision, or a few minutes or hours as He had done in the past. He had appeared to the fathers and the prophets in visions, appearances, and dreams. However, He had come and lived among the disciples 'for a period and known measure of time'. That is why they should have seen both Him and the Father. They should have been able to comprehend the Father and be united to Him through the Lord Jesus Christ Truly, the person who has seen the Lord Jesus Christ has also seen the Father!

Can any creature in heaven or on earth dare to proclaim such a thing? Impossible! The Lord considered that anyone who has seen Him has seen the Father. This is achieved once a person discovers the reality of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why the Lord

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 74:2

reprimanded Philip: because he did not get to know the Lord after living with Him for about three years. The Lord reprimanded Philip not because he yearned to see the Father but because he did not comprehend who the Lord Jesus Christ was. Therefore, he had not enjoyed seeing the Father throughout all that time. Philip did not comprehend the full divinity of the incarnated Lord Jesus Christ, (1 Cor. 2:9). Indeed, the Father is in the Lord in the fullness of His divinity. Any work done by the Lord is done in unison with the Father and reflects one divine act.

\* Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? Indeed, anyone who looks at the Son sees the image of the Father. Notice what kind of image the Lord was talking about. The Lord Jesus Christ is the truth, the righteousness and the might of God. He is not dumb for He is the Word; He is not without feelings for He is Wisdom; He is neither a delusion nor foolishness for He is power; He is lifeless for He is life; and He is not dead for He is the Resurrection<sup>1</sup>.

\* In church, we know one image and that is the image of the invisible God. In the words of the Almighty we are told: "So God created man in His own image..." (Gen 1:27). This is the image which was spoken about to describe the Lord Jesus Christ: "...the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person...", (Heb 1:3). In the image, we comprehend the Father. The Lord Himself has said: "He who has seen Me, has seen the Father". This is because this image is not a separate one from that of the Father, it truly teaches us the oneness of the Trinity for the Lord says: "I and My Father are one", (10:30). He also says: "...all things that the Father has are Mine", (16:15). Besides, we are told about the Holy Ghost that He is the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. Accordingly, it is written: "...whatever He hears He will speak; He will tell you" (16:14)<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* Anyone who becomes qualified to have a vision of the deity of the Son gets to enjoy the deity of the Father. These are not our own words. They are the words of the only Son who has said: **"Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father."** Briefly, do not separate Them and do not cause confusion.

Never say that the Son is different from the Father; do not accept those who say that at certain times the Father is the Father while at other times He is the Son. Such a statement would be bizarre and unthankful, besides being in opposition to the teachings of the church. In giving birth to the Son, the Father did not change and continued to be the Father. He gave birth to wisdom and did not lose wisdom as a result. He created power without becoming weak; He gave birth to God without losing His deity. He did not lose anything as a result of decline or change. Similarly, the One born was not deficient in anyway.

Perfect is the Father, and perfect is the Son.

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<sup>1</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 1:7:50

<sup>2</sup> Sermon Auxentius, 32

God is the Father; and God is the One born: God from God. However, He calls the Father as His God without feeling embarrassed when the Lord says: “I am ascending to My Father and your Father and to My God and your God” (20:17)<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

**St. Gregory of Nazinzy** speaks about the mystery of his attraction to the Trinity. For a long time, he had been forbidden to preach about that subject to his congregation, but in spite of that he did not abstain of preaching totally<sup>2</sup>.

\* May the divine Word lead me, at the end of a life filled with tears, to the eternal home. There I will find my Trinity and the brilliance of His combined sublimity<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Gregory of Nazinzy**

\* Indeed, the Lord reprimanded the disciple, when He looked into his questioning heart, and perceived that he wondered if the Father was in any way better than the Son. This had led Philip to seek to know the Father. It was also why he did not know the Son for he believed that He was inferior to the Father. In order to correct this concept, the Lord told Philip: **“He who has seen Me has seen the Father, how can you say: show us the Father?”**... Why do you seek to create a gap between Two hypostasis who are alike? Why do you seek to get a distinct and separate knowledge of Two who are inseparable? What the Lord said after that was directed to all the disciples and not only to Philip. We should not limit His words to just that context so that with the Lord’s help we can interpret His words most carefully<sup>4</sup>.

\* Philip’s eyes were not wholesome enough to see the Father. Consequently, he could not see the Son who is equal to the Father. The Lord therefore took care of him and healed him with the medicines and creams of faith to strengthen his mental vision which was still weak. His mental eyes were still weak and unable to see such a great Light. The Lord asks him: **“Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in Me?”** May the person who is disabled get to see what the Lord will reveal to him one day. May he pray not to see but to have faith and to believe. May he believe first, so that his sight, which gives him vision, might be healed<sup>5</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in Me?  
The words that I speak to you, I do not speak on My own authority,  
But the Father who dwells in Me does the works.”[10]**

Our vision of God is achieved in this world through faith and not through sight. That is why the Lord speaks in this passage about ‘faith’. What kind of faith is it? Faith is

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<sup>1</sup> Essay 11:18

<sup>2</sup> De Vita Sua 1102. PG 37:1106A

<sup>3</sup> Poemata de Seipso, 11. PG 37:1165-66

<sup>4</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate, 70:3

<sup>5</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons, 38:4

believing that the essence of the Son is not complimentary to the Father. Each is within the Other as they are One essence. Therefore, anyone who seeks to see the Father and get to know Him, needs to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ "...is the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him", (John 1:18). Therefore, it is no surprise that the Lord says: "...he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me", (John 12:45).

\* There is no difficulty in understanding that the Son is in the Father as though in one source....the Son is in and with the Father. It is not as though He is found outside Him or in another age; but He is within the essence of the Father and shines through Him. This is similar to the shining sun, and the heat of the fire inherent in its essence. In both of these examples we find one element born of the other and yet it constantly shares existence with the other with being separated. One cannot exist without the other yet each maintains His true and natural traits<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Cyril the Great**

\* The Lord of truth says: **"I am in the Father and the Father in Me"**. Clearly the One hypostasis/personality in His totality is actually the Other personality in His totality. The Father does not overshadow the Son, and the Son is not diminished in the Father<sup>2</sup>.

\* The same feature of divinity is visible in both<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Gregory, Bishop of Nicea**

\* The Father has made all things wisely as everything is done through His own wisdom and power. Accordingly, it is written: "In wisdom you have made (your works)", (Ps 104:24). Similarly, God the Word does nothing without fellowship with the Father. He does not work without Him. Without the will of the Father, He who is totally holy would not have offered Himself to suffer and to be slaughtered in order to save the whole world (John 3:16, 17; Heb 10:10-12). Without the will of the Father, God the Word would not arise from the dead and ascend to life<sup>4</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

**"Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me,  
Or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves." [11]**

The Lord witnesses to Himself before His followers; and reveals His divine mysteries to them. He had said earlier: "Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true", (John 8:14). In this passage, the Lord is not speaking to Philip only. He is addressing all the disciples and offering a message to all His followers. The Lord also did many acts as a true testimony to reinforce His words. Indeed, His deeds bear witness that the Lord was doing the works of His Father and was speaking His words. The deeds and the words come from both the Father and the Son together. St. Paul says of the Father: "He has in these last days spoken to us by His Son", (Heb 1:2). Besides, the Lord says

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<sup>1</sup> PG 73:12 a

<sup>2</sup> Against Eunomius, 2:4

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 6:3

<sup>4</sup> Of the Christian Faith, 4:6:69-70



this about Himself: **“The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works”, (John 14:10).**

\* When you hear the words “Father” and “Son” it is right not to think about anything else except that this is a confirmation of the One Essence and the shared relationship within that Essence. However, if that does not sufficiently convince you of the joint honor and essence, then learn about them by contemplating the deeds<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* You can see that the Son is God and in Him you see God the Father. The Lord used the same expression in the Holy Gospel: **“I am in the Father and the Father in Me”**. He did not say: ‘I am the Father’. Rather, He said: “...the Father dwells in Me and I in the Father”. He also did not say: ‘the Father and I are Me’. Rather, He said: “I and the Father are One” so that we would not separate them and become confused concerning the Son of the Father.

They are One as far as honor is due to the One Divinity. God gave birth to God. They are One in their kingdom since neither the Father nor the Son rules separately. The Son does not act vainly towards the Father in the manner of Absalom, because the kingdom of the Father is the kingdom of the Son. They are One. There is no conflict or division between them. The will of the Father is the will of the Son: They are One. The creative deeds of the Lord Jesus Christ are not different than those of the Father for the Creator of all things is One. All have been created by the Father through the Son. The Psalmist says: “For He commanded and they were created”, (Ps 33:9; 148:5).

**The Son is the ‘very God’ who has the Father in Him but without being the Father, since the Father did not become incarnate. Rather, the Son became incarnate . . . . The Father did not suffer for our sake; but He sent Him who would suffer . . .**

We do not call the Son as 'Father' in order to honor Him. Besides, we do not think that the Son is one of the Father's created beings in order to honor the Father. Indeed, there is one Father whom we worship; and we worship Him through one Son without making any separation in worshipping them.

The only Son is proclaimed as He sits on the right hand of the Father, on a throne, before the beginning of all ages. This is not a promotion that the Son has received at a certain time after having suffered. Indeed, He has been sitting there since time infinite<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* While we speak, the Lord Himself will not withdraw His presence from us and He is our teacher<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies of St John, 74:2

<sup>2</sup> Essay 11:16,17

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 71:1

Are His words deeds? Clearly, this is actually true. Certainly, whoever instructs his neighbor through his words does good deeds<sup>1</sup>.

\* The Lord attributes all the deeds He did to the Father who works through Him. The Father is not the God (born) from someone else. Yet the Son is the heavenly God who is truly equal to the Father and yet born of Him. Hence, the Father is God who is not born of God; and He is the Light who is not born of the Light; whereas the Son is God, is born of God, and is Light out of Light<sup>2</sup>.

**St Augustine**

### **3. Prayer and Comfort/Rest**

**"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me,  
The works that I do he will do also  
And greater works than these he will do,  
Because I go the Father." [12]**

Having revealed His unique unity with the Father, and that what He says and does proceed from the Father who lives in Him, the Lord Jesus Christ clarifies that this reality provides redemption and life. Genuine belief in the ones of the Father and the Son grants the ultimate power to do the deeds of the Lord who lives in the believer. Declaring the Father and knowing Him leads the believer to experience the works of the Father within himself. St. Paul accordingly says: "...that Christ may dwell in your hearts...that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, (Eph 3:17-20). For faith grants knowledge and inspires the experience to take, possess, and act according to the power of God: "... for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure..." (Phil 2:13).

This is the key to the comfort granted to the disciples after they had learned that the Lord Jesus Christ was leaving them. They were filled with sadness and felt like an abandoned flock with no shepherd. They felt they had no one to help or support them. This was intensified by their awareness of the extent of hatred the Jewish leaders harbored against them.

That is why the Lord Jesus Christ assured them that He would not leave them in their weakness. He would grant them the power to do great deeds, miracles, and wonders that would support them. In this manner, they could do the same deeds as those the Lord had done, and even greater ones. This would not diminish Him, or create confusion between the Lord's entity as the only Son of God and their stature as being His children by adoption as well as being His very own disciples. Indeed, whatever they would do would be done in His name, through faith in Him, and for His glory. In fact, the Lord is not only the wonder Worker but He is the One who grants His disciples to perform wonders.

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 71:1

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 71:1

## Why did the Lord tell His disciples that they would do deeds greater than what He has done?

- 1- He did miracles during the three years of His ministry on earth; whereas they would do miracles throughout the ages and to the end of time. The Lord did miracles within the boundaries of the land where He lived; whereas the disciples would do miracles and wonders throughout the whole world and wherever they would preach. They would do miracles that the Lord had not done because there was no need for them in His time: such as the miracle of moving the mountain which Simon the Cobbler did in the days of El Moaz Eldin Allah Elfatimy.
- 2- The Lord laid the foundations of preaching and paid the price through the Cross. However, He allowed preaching to become widespread after His ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples. Therefore greater works took place. This was evident as the faith spread all over the world and was no longer limited to Judea.

The mystery of the strength granted to the disciples is revealed in the Lord's words: **"...because I go to my Father..."** [12]. The Lord would intercede for them. He would carry them to the Father as members in His body. Consequently, they would be working through the power of the Father; and the Son would send the divine Comforter to them- who is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would work in and through them on His behalf and for His glory.

\* It is God's will to grant His disciples great powers. It is His will that what the Lord did during His life on earth would also be done by His servants in His name... He gave them the power to raise the dead. Though God could have reinstated the sight of Saul, He sent him to His disciple Ananias. Through his blessing, the eyes of Saul recovered the vision he had lost<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* The Lord wanted to reveal that He could do not only these works, but greater works than these and many more. He did not say: 'I can do greater works than these,' but what is more astonishing is that He said that 'He could give others the power to do greater works . . . in other words, the Lord was saying to the disciples: 'it is now up to you to work and do wonders because I am leaving'<sup>2</sup>.

\* Do you not see that the Lord is the One doing these works? He said: "...that I do..." He did not say: 'I ask the Father', but rather: **"the Father may be glorified in the Son"**...all the miracles which the disciples did have been done by the Lord and the hand of the Lord was with them, (Act 11:21)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Concerning Repentance, 1:8:334

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John, 74:2

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St John, 74:2

\* Do you not see His authority? What others do is actually done by Him . . . So does the Lord possess no authority to carry out the works He does Himself, and if He does not do them through the Father, how can this be true? So why did He say the rest of the words in that same context? He said them to confirm His words, and to reveal that all His earlier teachings demonstrated His voluntary humbleness. In finishing His words by saying: **"...I go to My Father..."**, the Lord was telling the disciples: 'I am not going to perish for I will retain the honor due to Me in My heavenly dwelling'. He intended to comfort His disciples through these words. They seemed unable to grasp His teachings about the resurrection and considered that to be a morbid matter. In other instances, the Lord had promised to grant them such powers. He had tried to alleviate their situation in every possible manner as He promised that He would be with them always; besides investing them with them a greater power<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* We believe that truly the Lord does **'greater'** works when a person conquers-while he is still in the flesh and liable to be trapped due to frailty- in the war with the demons and evil powers. Then the only weapon which that person has is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and his own personal faith in Him. Such a victory is greater than any other which that person may achieve through his own might.

**Origen the Scholar**

\* The Lord has promised that He Himself would do these greater works. May the slave not boast of being greater than the Master. The Lord says that they would do greater works than those He has done already. However, He is the One working in all things, whether within His disciples or through them. It would not be as though they were self empowered. Consequently, the words of praise directed to Him say: "I will love you, O Lord, my strength..." (Ps 18:1).

What are these greater works?

Are they revealed when the shadow of the disciples heal the sick, (Acts 5:15)? For healing by the passing of a shadow is greater than touching the hem of the clothes of the One who possesses healing power, (Matt14:36). In spite of that, what the Lord recommends is the effective power of His words. Listen to His words: **"The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does the works" [10].**

What works is the Lord referring to other than the words that He has uttered?

The disciples heard and believed, and their faith was the fruit of these same words. When the disciples preached the Gospel with these same words, the numbers and nations converted were far greater in contrast to the few who heard and believed at the time of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no doubt that this was a greater accomplishment<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 74:2

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 71:3

\* The Lord immediately added these words: **"...because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in my name, I will do it"**, [12-14]. What He had said earlier that: '...he (the believer) will do...', He now reiterates and says: "...I will do...". It is as though the Lord was saying: 'It should not seem impossible because whoever believes in Me cannot be greater than I. I am the One who will do greater works than those that I am doing now. I will do greater works through those who believe in Me more than those works I did without them. However, I am the One working through a believer . . . see what greater works the Lord has done when believers preached. These were greater than the deeds done by the Lord when He was actually addressing His hearers<sup>1</sup>.

\* He works in us, yet He does not work without us<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**"And whatever you ask in my name,  
That will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" [13].**

The Lord Jesus Christ stresses that the deeds that the disciples would do would be done through His name. Indeed, He is the doer. This does not leave out the role of the Father, for the Lord directs our attention to pray to the Father. When He tells us: **"...whatever you ask..."**, the Lord requires us to ask the Father for sublime matters that are worthwhile and which appear to be of great importance to us. We should ask the Father to make us worthy to be truly His children, bearing the image of His only Son. Consequently, we live in Christ 'who became for us wisdom from God- and righteousness and sanctification and redemption ...,' (1Cor1: 30).

\* The Father works through the Son in order that the Son becomes glorified through the Father. Moreover, the Son works through the Father so that He might be glorified through the Son. This is due to the fact that the Father and the Son are One and the same<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**"If you ask anything in My name, I will do it" [14].**

As we pray and present our needs to the Father, we call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We therefore pray to attain His righteousness and holiness; and Lord Himself undertakes the work in us, for He says: **"I will do it....,"** [14]. By calling on His name, we reveal that we are invoking His divine presence. That is why- in all the divine mysteries, as well as in our personal prayers, the priest or a believer proclaims: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" and so prays for the presence of the Holy Trinity.

The Lord's physical departure strengthened their position since He would work through them for the glory of the Father. The Father sees the disciples through Him and

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 72:1

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 72:2

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 73:4

answers all their prayers. In other words, the Lord's ascension empowered them to work through the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that the Lord would send. His ascension to the heavens would remove all the distances between Him and the Father. Indeed, the presence of the Son in a glorified body reflects their actual presence as members in that body.

They had to pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and through His redeeming deed which gave joy to the Father. Clearly, they would not depend on their worldly power or rights as they brought their requests or prayers before the Father.

#### 4-The Other Comforter

**"If you love Me, keep My commandments." [15].**

The Lord spoke earlier about faith as a basis for divine knowledge. Now He is forming the building over the foundations, and this consisted of keeping His commandments. The Lord Jesus Christ accepted to carry us within Him and brings us to God who would fund pleasure in believers and answer their needs. On their part, believers need to love Him and obey His commandments. In this manner, they would find great comfort. Indeed, their love would be demonstrated in a practical manner through their obedience of His laws. Moreover it would grant them the power to work especially in difficult times.

\* We need to work and practice obedience to His commands at all times. It should never be a mere exhibit of words . . . God requires love that is demonstrated through deeds. That is why the Lord told His disciples: "He who loves Me, loves my commandments". Having told them: "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it"; He did not want them to think that they only had to ask. Therefore He added: **"If you love Me, keep My commandments"**<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The Holy Spirit is the Comforter whom the Lord promised to send to His disciples. However, notice the way in which that promise is given: **"If you love Me, keep My commandments, and I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper..."** (15:16). Yet, how can we love in order to receive the One who will enable us to love God (Rom 3:5), unless we obey His commands? . . . let us understand that a person who loves is actually filled with the Holy Spirit, and through Him that person becomes qualified to possess Him who is more perfect. Indeed, by receiving Him who is greater, our love grows greater too.<sup>2</sup>

\* The promise is not invalid to those who have not yet attained the Holy Spirit or to those who have Him. The Comforter is offered to the person who does not have Him so that He might receive Him. He is also offered to the person who has received Him in order to get filled more abundantly. If it was not true that the Spirit could be received in varying

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<sup>1</sup> Hom 75 PG 59:438

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 74:1-2

measures, than the saintly Elisha would not have told Elijah: "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me", (2kings 2:9)<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**"And I will pray the Father,  
And He will give you another Helper,  
That He may abide with you forever". [16]**

When the Lord fulfilled the act of redemption on the Cross, He ascended into the heavens in order to send the Holy Spirit. In this manner, He has granted His Church the sweet fellowship in the Cross, the experience of the powerful resurrection, and the promise of the heavenly life. That is the other Comforter who draws from the treasures of the Lord Jesus Christ and grants them to us.

The work of the Holy Spirit is ever so constant in the life of the Church, and continues to the end of time. Ultimately, He will present her as the bride who carries the hypostasis of her heavenly bridegroom.

The word '**paraclete**' is translated as 'Comforter'. It also means lawyer or advocate, for He stands in defense of the Lord's Church and against her enemies.

The Lord calls Himself the '**Comforter**' since He calls the Holy Spirit '**another Helper**'. The Targum labeled the days of the Lord's life as 'days of comfort'. Indeed, the Lord comforted His disciples when He physically lived among them. When He departed, He sent to them His Holy Spirit to be another Comforter.

The request or the prayer mentioned here is not mere lip service for the Lord offered Himself as a sacrifice of love on behalf of mankind. This entitles His believers to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit who would dwell in them. Actually, He had not ceased from dwelling in man since his fall into sin. This gift involves actually receiving the Giver of all gifts. It is a constant gift that accompanies a believer until he leaves this life. The Holy Spirit would never abandon a person as long as that person welcomes and responds to Him. Thus the Lord first presented the basis of knowledge and that is faith. Then He built upon the basis (faith) the deeds of love demonstrated in obedience to His commands. Finally, He sent to us the Holy Spirit from the Father who has the sole power to achieve all this.

The Lord Jesus Christ reveals in the passage the integrated role of the Holy Trinity in fulfilling the plan to glorify us eternally. The Father has sent His Son to comfort us, and the Son offers Himself up to redeem the world. Now the Father would receive the Son when He ascends. In this manner, the Father receives the universal Church-from Adam to the end of time-as represented in the Lord who is the head. He received the first Comforter and is greatly pleased with Him as He fulfilled the redemption of mankind. In doing so, the Lord proclaimed in a practical way, the love of the Father. When the Lord is received in heaven, that Comforter remains comforted on

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 74:2

behalf of all mankind who are still in the flesh. However, He is always present in the midst of His Holy Church. Besides, the Lord prays the Father to send another Helper who fills, enlightens, sanctifies, and leads the Church. He does so without departing or separating Himself from the Father.

In this manner, the reciprocal relationship of love among the Holy Trinity who work for the redemption and eternal glorification of mankind is revealed.

\* If you wondered: 'Why did the Lord say: "I will pray the Father" . . . ?' Our answer would be: Because if He had said: "I will send Him, people would not have believed Him. Therefore He said: **"I will pray the Father"**, in order to make His words acceptable to them.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**"... even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive,  
Because it neither sees Him nor knows Him;  
But you know Him,  
For He dwells with you, and will be in you". [17]**

When the first Comforter, the Lord Jesus Christ, ascended, He would pray that another Comforter be sent and that would be His Holy Spirit. When He who said: "I am the truth" (14:16) ascended, He sent the Spirit of truth to them. And just as the world rejected the first Comforter, the Truth Himself, so they would reject the other Comforter who is the 'Spirit of Truth' ". . . through this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us," (1Jn 3:24). The Holy Spirit grants us to confront the sharp conflict between the spirit of the world and the Spirit of the Truth. This is because the world cannot tolerate, accept, or see the truth. Indeed, the world resists it, and is unable to see or know Him. Consequently, '...if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in Him,' (1Jn 2:15).

The spirit of the world is a spirit of lies and deceit. The possessions, joys, and pleasures it offers quickly become transformed into neglect, grieving, and bitterness. In this manner, truth cannot find a place in the world just as the love of the world cannot find a place in the eternal divine truth. What God offers is the unchanging truth. That is why the Lord says: "My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give you," (Jn 14:27). " . . . I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, your joy no one will take from you," (Jn 16:22) "Whoever drinks of this water that I shall give him will never thirst," (Jn 4:13). This is the nature of Truth and His gifts and blessings. These are not in harmony with the nature of the world, or its spirit and its passing gifts.

The Spirit of Truth which the world does not know is the basis of knowledge in believers. He dwells and remains with them. He lives in them and they know Him as long as they remain steadfast in Him.

The **'Spirit of Truth'** who testifies that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Truth, attracts souls to accept His message and get acquainted with His mysteries.



**“... the world cannot receive Him”** does not refer to those who have loved Him and carried His name. It refers to those who find their pleasure in the lust of the flesh and the eyes, and the pride of life, (1Jn 2:16). These are afflicted with spiritual blindness and corrupt minds. They are unable to see or comprehend the Spirit of truth.

**“... but you know Him”**: in the Vulgate and in some transcripts, the words used are **“...you will know Him”**. When they will be armed with belief in the Lord, especially after His resurrection, they would be prepared to know the promised Holy Spirit. Moreover, they would enjoy His dwelling and presence in them. This would occur on the day of Pentecost. The Lord constantly attracts us to that which is higher than ourselves.

\* The Lord said: **“... the world cannot receive Him because it neither sees Him nor knows Him”** in order to prevent them from thinking that there would be another person. These words served to clarify to the disciples that they should not expect to visually see that other **“... Helper”**.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Some Syrian thinkers comment on the words: ‘...The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters...’ and find that they seem to convey the ‘fostering warmth’ of the Shepherd. In other words, God was preparing the nature of the waters so that it would give birth to living creatures. This in itself provides sufficient response and evidence to some people who question the creative power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

**St Basil the Great**

\* The (temporary) love of the world has no other eyes than the visible ones, whereas the Holy Spirit cannot be seen except by the invisible eyes<sup>2</sup>.

\* He is seen in an intangible manner, and it is impossible to possess any knowledge of the Holy Spirit if He does not dwell in us<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

## **5- The Lord's Appearance to the Disciples**

**“I will not leave you orphans  
I will come to you”. [18]**

The disciples had become so attached to the Lord. They were just as children who get attached to their father. That is why when He was about to leave them, to go through the Cross, and ascend to heaven, the Lord wanted to reassure them that He would not leave them as orphans. In other words, they would not be like children deprived of their parent’s tender love, guidance, and support. The Lord did not want to leave them as a prey to misery and deprivation. By leaving them, as He was going to the Cross and then

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<sup>1</sup> Homilia 2 in Hexameron. PG 29:43B

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractae 74:4

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 74:5

ascending to heaven, they would suffer greatly as orphans. The Lord would no longer be with them in the flesh. However, He would transform their orphaned state into one of sublime and new adoption by sending His Holy Spirit who would grant them to become the children of God through baptism.

The Jews used to consider teachers as their fathers, and the students as their children. Thus, in leaving the disciples, the Lord seemed to let his disciples become like those who had no father. As He walked in the valley of death, and then ascended into heaven, the Lord would send them another Teacher. He would be their Comforter, defender and leader on their way to attain the joy of the divine fatherhood. They would not feel any deprivation because His Holy Spirit would dwell in them. Concerning Himself, the Lord would come to them, after arising from death, and He would appear to them. In the same manner, after His ascension, He would come at the end of time to carry them into glory. He also comes to us constantly by His Spirit. He is present in our hearts and in our midst.

\* As the disciples did not understand the words spoken to them, and were not sufficiently comforted, the Lord told them: **“I will not leave you orphans”**. They had prayed for that more than anything else. The Lord’s words **“I will come to you”** clarify that He would come again to them.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**“A little while longer and the world will see Me no more,  
But you will see Me.  
Because I live  
You will live also”. [19]**

The world could see the Lord Jesus Christ due to His incarnation. However, they could not see Him at all due to their inability to comprehend His divinity. Now that He would be crucified and would die, the world could see Him no more- neither according to the flesh nor according to His divinity since He was about to leave and disappear from the world. Nevertheless, the disciples were going to be able to perceive His divine mysteries and experience the power of His resurrection working within them. Therefore although they would be deprived from seeing Him physically, they would enjoy life in its essence and live just as He lives. They would share the words of St. Paul and say: “...God... made us alive together with Christ” (Eph 2:5). Hence “...it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me,” (Gal 2:20).

\* The Lord is telling them: ‘I will come to you in a manner that is different from my coming the first time. His words: “Because I live, you will live also” indicate that the Cross will not separate us until the end of time. ‘It would just make Me disappear for a short while only’. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ was referring not only to His present life, but also to the life to come.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* We were dead when we did not know Him and lived just for ourselves. However, by His death, He now lives in His own right and for our sakes too. Because He is alive, we are alive as well. Left on our own, we would be overcome by death, for we cannot attain life through our own power<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“At that day you will know that I am in My Father,  
And you in Me, and I in you”. [20]**

Just as I will arise from the dead, so will you as well. My resurrection will confirm your resurrection. Being alive, I will intercede for you before the Father. Death will not be able to destroy you. Indeed, you shall live through my grace and you will enjoy the fellowship of my glory.

After the Lord's death, the unbelievers could not see the Lord. Yet He appeared many times to believers. And to this day, believers enjoy beholding Him within the depth of their souls. The Lord Jesus Christ is still alive as He is present in His Church and in the lives of believers. They experience the life of the Lord who lives within them.

By saying: “. . . you in Me”, the Lord proclaims that He has taken the form (put on) of mankind through His incarnation. His words: “...and I in You” indicate His presence in us, and this enables us to enjoy fellowship in His divine nature. By setting up His kingdom within us, He has granted us to become members in His Body.

The Lord granted us the mystery of the holy Eucharist when He said: “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him”, (Jn 6:56) and “. . . so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me,” (Jn 6:57).

\* These words refer to the Essence (the Divine One). To the disciples, the Lord's words indicate the oneness of thought and the divine support.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Today, too, He dwells in us and we in Him. This is what we believe in today and this is what we will know in the fullness of time. What we now know we hold through faith; what we will get to know will come through actual revelation<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

**“He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father,  
And I will love him and manifest Myself to him,” [21]**

The true testimony of our love for the Lord Jesus Christ is our obedience to His law and commandments. It is evident in a love that is consistent, dignified, and obedient.

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 75:3

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 75:4

It results in our will being in harmony with the will of our Beloved, and in our behavior that is in agreement with divine wisdom.

1- The fruits of this practical love is the believer's enjoyment of the Father's love to him, of His tenderness and His embrace; for the Father loves the Son and those whom the Son loves.

2. A believer also enjoys the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for "... **I will love him**", [21] as a brother and Savior. He will grant the believer forgiveness of sins and the joy of everlasting life.

3. The Lord, moreover, will reveal Himself to the believer: "... **manifest Myself to him,**" [21]; for He will shine on his thoughts as well as on his heart. Hence the believer will enjoy spiritual enlightenment.

In this manner, the Lord Jesus Christ associates the joy of divine love with actual living and experience based on obedience to the Divine law. He also ties it with divine revelation or Divine presence that is announced in the Holy Spirit who grants enlightenment. In this manner, a person who wishes to see God needs to love, and to translate this love into living and applying the divine commandments.

\* It is not enough to just possess the commandments. We need to observe and apply them to the full.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* He who memorizes (my commandments) and observes them in his life: he who says them with his lips and applies them to his conduct . . . he who continues to listen to them with his ears and applies them in his acts . . . he who has deeds and perseveres in them according to My commandments: such a one "**loves Me**". Love is proclaimed through deeds, whereas literal applications without fruit are mere words (for love)<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* Each word that the Lord utters reveals the mercy of God, His righteousness, and His wisdom. His words could be powerful to the ears if they listened obediently. That is why a hard- hearted and wicked person, who listens unwillingly, cannot comprehend the Divine Wisdom. Indeed, such a person would be crucifying the Lord who has proclaimed these teachings.

Therefore we need to find out if we are listening obediently to the Lord's commandments. For He has said: "If you love Me keep My commandments . . . he who has My commandments, keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him," (Jn 14:15, 21).

**Do you see how the Lord uses His commandments as an instrument through which He manifests Himself?** The greatest commandment is to love God and our

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 75:5

neighbors. This is achieved once we reject all temporary matters and our minds become steadfast<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Mark the Ascetic**

**Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said to Him: "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" [22]**

When the Lord had given these divine promises, one of the disciples expressed his astonishment that the Lord would reveal Himself to the disciples and not to the whole world. This is what Judas (not Iscariot) expressed; and he was the brother of James (Lk 6:16). He was related to the Lord according to the flesh, (Matt 13:55) and he wrote the Book of Jude.

Judas was astonished as he felt that he and the rest of the disciples had received a sublime gift and a vision of the Messiah and His deeds. The world did not enjoy these matters. Yet, there remained one question: did Judas realize at that moment what the Lord was proclaiming about Himself, or was he still thinking of the Lord as an earthly king? Did he think he would interact with Him physically only? However, the Lord intended to draw all their thoughts towards heaven.

**St. John Chrysostom** finds that the Lord Jesus Christ had promised to reveal Himself to His disciples; and this made them think that He would appear to them in their dreams. They could not image that He would rise from the dead and truly ascend into heaven. They thought He would appear in their dreams and as part of their imagination. When they did not dare to ask Him, He corrected their understanding by telling them that He would come with the Father and live within them: the disciples would be like a house in which the Father and the Son would dwell.

\* Do you not see how their souls were filled with fear? Judas was confused and frustrated as he thought he would see something like an apparition of a dead one in a dream. In order to remove such imagination, hear the Lord's words: **"We will come to him and make Our home with him,"** [23] . . . this is a matter that is unrelated to dreams<sup>2</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Jesus answered and said to him:**

**"If any one loves Me, he will keep My word,  
And My Father will love him, and We will come  
And make our home with him." [23]**

The Lord started to address His disciples as well as all those who believed and loved Him. This divine promise is a general one made to all: the Father and the Son would transform the heart into a divine home or temple.

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<sup>1</sup> Philokalia, Book 1

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John, 75:3

Whereas Judas was astonished by the Lord proclamation, yet the Lord speaks collectively about Himself and the Father combined. It is as though He intends believers to make the mental association of His true status as He ascends to the Father and exists with Him. He seems to be asking them: 'Do you wish me to proclaim Myself? I am inseparable from the Father! I dwell with Him in heaven; and when I dwell within your hearts, the Father and I will dwell together within you.

**\* The gifts that the Holy Spirit, allocated to each one, are granted by the Father through the Word.** Everything that the Father has is also owned by the Son. Therefore the gifts granted by the Son through the Holy Spirit are the Gifts of the Father. When the Holy Spirit dwells in us, the Word also dwells in us who grants the Holy Spirit, and so does the Father in whom the Word dwells. This is consistent with the words: "We will come to him and make our home with him," (Jn 14:23). Indeed, where there is light, there are rays as well; and where there are rays there is energy and hidden grace.

This is what the apostle proclaimed when he wrote his Second Epistle to the Corinthians: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all . . ." (2Cor 13:14). This blessing and gift is granted through the Holy Spirit: proceeding from the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit.

Just as the gifts are granted from the Father through the Son, so we cannot enjoy and have a share in these gifts except through the Holy Spirit. **Indeed, when we have fellowship with Him, we are granted the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit Himself.**

This fact indicates the unity of the work of the Trinity. The apostle does not intend to convey that gifts are given in small parcels or as a talent granted by each of the hypostasis of the Trinity separately. The gifts that are granted are given through the Holy Spirit and come from the one and only God.

**St. Athanasius the Apostolic**

\* The proof of love is proclaimed in deeds. That is why St. John writes in his Epistle: "He who says: 'I know Him' and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him," (1Jn 2:4). Our love is genuine when we keep our will in harmony with His commandments. A person who wanders here and there to satisfy his/her wicked lusts does not love God truly, for he opposes God as revealed by his acts and will<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Gregory (the Great)**

\* In this passage there is a kind of deeper proclamation of God. It is a matter that is unknown to the wicked who do not accept any revelation about God the Father and the Holy Spirit. This is also true about the Son about whom they know nothing other than His physical aspect . . . therefore it will bring them condemnation rather than joy, and punishment rather than reward<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Hom.30. PL 76:1220. Forty Gospel Homilies

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 76:2

\* In order to avoid the assumption that the Father and the Son are together and exclude the Holy Spirit as they built mansions for their beloved ones, let us remember what was said earlier concerning the Holy Spirit: **"...the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him, nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you, and will be in you,"** [17].

Through these words, you can learn that the Holy Spirit is also with the Father and the Son; and He also dwells in the saints. In other words, He reigns as the one God in His temple.

The Holy Trinity comes to us just as we go to Him.

He comes to bring support. We come to offer obedience. He comes to enlighten us. We come to receive vision.

He comes to fill us up and we come to enfold and embrace Him. Consequently, our vision of Him will not be an exterior one but an interior revelation.

The indwelling of the Holy Trinity is permanent and is never a temporary one.

The Son does not proclaim Himself in this manner to the world. He has spoken about the world in a previous statement, and He promptly added: "He who does not love Me does not keep My words," [24]. Those who are disobedient will not see the Father or the Holy Spirit. They will see the Son only for a short while: they will see Him as the One who will judge them rather than as a Source of blessings. They will not see Him as God who is equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit and invisible with them. On the contrary, they will only see His human aspect and as the One who voluntarily accepted to be a subject of derision throughout His sufferings. Yet He will be the subject of terror when He comes to judge the world<sup>1</sup>.

\* The kind of dwelling which the Lord promises in the future has specific attributes or qualities . . . it is a spiritual dwelling that is achieved internally in the mind; whereas the other is physical and is externally proclaimed to the eye and ear (and which refers to seeing the Lord Jesus Christ during His ministry on earth).

One dwelling brings eternal blessings to those who accept it. The other involves time and those who await salvation.

In the first case, the Lord will not withdraw Himself away from those who love Him. In the second case, He would come and then depart; therefore He says: **"These things I have spoken to you while being present with you"** [25]. The Lord spoke to them at that time in a tangible manner as He was physically present with them<sup>2</sup>.

**St Augustine**

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 76:4

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 77:2

\* The Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ dwells in those who carry His image. We are talking here about the form and the features . . . for God offers in His promises to the righteous: "I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people" (2Cor 6:16; Lev 26: 12; Jer 3:23, 32:38; Zech 8:8). The Lord also says: **"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our home with him," (Jn 14:23)...**

In other parts of the Holy Bible, we are told about the mystery of the resurrection. It is addressed to those whose ears have been divinely opened. We are told that the Temple which had been destroyed will be rebuilt by using living and precious stones. This allows us to comprehend how everyone who is led by the word of God to struggle with others on the path of purity would be precious stones in the Temple of the only one almighty God.

Consequently, St. Peter says: "...you also as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ..." (1Peter 2:5). St. Paul also says: "... having being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,"(Eph 2:20). There is also a similar passage to these words in Isaiah that implicitly refer to this subject and where the prophet addresses Jerusalem and says: ". . . I will lay your stones with colorful gems, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of crystal, and all yours walls of precious stones. All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children," (Is 54:11-14).

Therefore among the righteous, some are colorful gems, some are sapphires, while others are crystal or precious stone. In other words, there is a wide range of types...<sup>1</sup> .

**Origen the Scholar**

**"He who does not love Me does not keep My words;  
And the word which you hear is not Mine,  
But the Father's who sent Me". [24]**

Having spoken about His yearning to come with the Father and dwell in their hearts as in holy temples, the Lord warns believers about love for the world. Its futile pleasures would prevent them from keeping His words and which are also the words of the Father. In loving the world they would be proclaiming their love for the darkness and not for the light. As a result, there would be no place for Him and the Father to dwell in them.

\* It is as though the Lord Jesus Christ is stating the following: 'A person who does not observe His words neither loves the Son nor the Father. If observing the commandments

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<sup>1</sup> Fr Tadros Y Malaty: The Church According to Origen the Scholar. Translation by Dr George Botros



are proof of love, and these commandments are My Father's, then a person who observes them loves not only the Son but loves the Father as well.

**St John Chrysostom**

## **5-The Comforter and Teacher**

**"These things I have spoken to you while being present with you". [26]**

The Lord Jesus Christ encourages the disciples to receive the other Comforter as He is the Teacher who does not compete with the Lord. Indeed, the Comforter will remind the disciples of the Lord's words, and will reveal to them other mysteries: **"He will teach you all things"** [26] as He is the Spirit of Wisdom. He will not bring a new gospel but rather will work in them to remind them of the Lord's gospel, and to reveal to them matters they were unable to accept before.

**"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My Name,  
He will teach you all things,  
And bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" [26].**

\* The Lord speaks of the Holy Spirit as the Comforter due to the anxiety the disciples felt at that time.

The Lord spoke these words as He charged them to endure patiently their separation from Him. This difficult experience would bring great blessings to them.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* The Holy Spirit does not dwell in a person without the presence of the Father and the Son too. Neither does the Son come without the Father or the Holy Spirit, nor does the Father come without them. Their indwelling is inseparable. Yet they could reveal themselves separately in symbols borrowed from the creation. Even though they are never separate in their one essence<sup>1</sup>.

**St Augustine**

\* The Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit. The Father sends the Holy Spirit as we are told: **"I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper"** [16]. The Son, too, sends the Holy Spirit as He says: "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth. . ." (15:26). Therefore if the Son and the Holy Spirit send one another just as the Father also does, then none submits to the other or is lower in rank for they all are integrated in one authority<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* The Greek word **'Paraclete'** means in Latin 'a lawyer' or 'comforter'. He is called 'lawyer' for He intercedes before the Father's judgment seat on behalf of sinners.

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on NT Lessons:21:33

<sup>2</sup> On the Holy spirit, Book 3:1:8

The One who is of the same essence as the Father and the Son, is said to jealously intercede for sinners. He encourages those He teaches to do so; and that explains St. Paul's words: "...the Spirit Himself makes intercessions for us with groaning which cannot be uttered," (Rom 8:26)...

This Spirit is the same One who is considered as the Comforter for He revives the hope of forgiveness in those who grieve over their sins. He lifts their hearts out of sorrow and despair. He promises to teach them everything. If the Spirit is not present in the heart of the hearer, then the words of the teacher would not be beneficial.

It is not appropriate for a person to attribute to his teacher the things he has come to understand from him: Indeed the apparent and external teacher may vainly exert himself if there is no internal teacher. In that context, St. John says: ". . . the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things . . . just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him," (1Jn 2:27).

No one learns through mere hearing if his heart has not been anointed by the Spirit: "**He will . . . bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you**" as He grants you knowledge. This is possible as He knows things that are hidden, but are not of lesser importance<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Gregory the Great**

The Church embodies the great fellowship in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. She is a blessing of love and life granted by the Father of light. The Lord Jesus Christ is present within her as she calls Him in prayer, remembers His testimony and His powerful ministry with the Holy Spirit. Consequently He leads the Church and her children to perfection through the inner voice of the Spirit.

**St. Isaac of Nicibean** says: [...when the Spirit establishes His dwelling within a person, that person never stops praying because the Spirit never ceases to pray within Him].

\* When we begin to meditate on the One Unity, we are overwhelmed by the brilliance of the Holy Trinity. At the same time that Oneness engages us. When any of the hypostasis of the Trinity appears to us, we perceive that He is the whole Being. He completely fills our eyes and we are unable to look for more. Our very limited mind is unable to retain more! It is because we comprehend one flame as we associate the Trinity as one concept. It becomes impossible to split the one light or to analyze it<sup>2</sup>.

**St Gregory Nazianzen**

\* The Holy Trinity as one whole speaks and teaches, (Jn 6:45; Matt 23:10; Acts 10:20)...for they are inseparable<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 30. Forty Gospel Homilies.PL 76:1220

<sup>2</sup> Gregory Nazianzen: Oral XL, IN Sanctum Baptisma 41. PG 36:417 c.

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 77:2

## The Church and the Holy Trinity

The Church is the divine environment where grace works and salvation is offered. According to **St Augustine**, we alone believe that the human being is ‘an extension of the Triune family’. In other words, when God considers man to be in His likeness, then the Lord Jesus Christ occupies the first place in that respect. Consequently, man is governed by the same dynamics as those of the holy Trinity Himself. These are the dynamics of freedom, love, and unity. We alone know that this image and likeness of God, which gets formed within the divine embrace, makes superhuman demands upon us. We have to surmount the struggle in order to attain life, and we need to bypass our egocentricity. In doing so, we will be able to look forward to a fellowship and essential fulfillment for all humanity<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Gregory of Nazianzen**<sup>2</sup> finds in the Old Testament a clear declaration about the Father, while the statement about the Son is a more mysterious one. In the New Testament, the Son is declared and the divinity of the Holy Spirit is revealed. Therefore the revelation concerning the Trinity occurs gradually. This is intended for the benefit of the people who would otherwise be like those who get heavy with overfeeding; or who get exposed to the sun while their eyes are still too weak. In such a case, there is the danger of losing even the little strength they had. Therefore, according to David the King, they are intended to progress gradually and go ahead and grow from glory to glory. Then the light of the Trinity will shine on those who become enlightened.

\* We observe with all due attention the faith we receive from the Church. It is through the work of the Holy Spirit that we are granted this deposit of great value. Our faith is placed in a good vessel and is renewed constantly, and this in turn renews the vessel constantly. **The grace of God (the Holy Spirit) is granted to the Church just as the breath of life was granted to man when he was created.** Consequently, all members are granted fellowship and life through the Holy Spirit. The Church enjoys fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ- that is with the Holy Spirit - and that constitutes a warranty against corruption, a steadfastness in faith, and a ladder to ascend to God...indeed, wherever a church is found, there we will find the Holy Spirit. Moreover, wherever the Spirit of God is found, a church and every good blessing will be found there as well<sup>3</sup>.

\* Through the prophets, God promised to pour His Spirit into His servants at the end of the ages. For that reason, He descended on the Son of God who became the Son of Man. Then it became a common matter for God to dwell in mankind, remain in their midst, live within God's creatures. In this manner, He transforms men from the old into the newness of the Lord and of the Messiah . . . By promising to send the Paraclete, the Lord intends to prepare us to come to God<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Declaration of Msgr Joseph Phourde, Archbishop of Ottawa, at the Synod of Rome on October 19, 1971

<sup>2</sup> St Gregory Nazianzen, Oratio 31, Theologica 26. PG 36:161

<sup>3</sup> Adv. Haer. 3:24:1

<sup>4</sup> Adv. Haer. 3:17:1-2 PG 7:929-30

\* Just as dry flour cannot become dough or a loaf of bread unless it is mixed with liquid, **we all cannot be united in the Lord Jesus Christ without being sprinkled with the water descending from heaven.** This water was received by the Lord as a gift from God; and He grants it also to those who have fellowship with Him by pouring the Holy Spirit over the whole earth<sup>1</sup>.

\* The priests, who are disciples of the apostles, describe the journey of the redeemed and the stages of their progress: **they ascend by the Spirit to the Son, and by the Son to the Father, and finally the Son delivers his work to the Father.** The apostle speaks of that in 1Cor 15:24<sup>2</sup>.

\* **The Father plans and issues commands; the Son fulfills and creates; the Holy Spirit refreshes and develops; and so man ascends the steps towards the Perfect One**<sup>3</sup>.

\* The disciples are activated by the same feelings and praise God; for the Spirit attracts the tribes and peoples from distant lands to unity. They offer the first the nations to the Father. This too is the reason why the Lord promised to send the Paraclete to us; for He is the One who prepares us to come to God<sup>4</sup>.

\* Just as a barren land cannot produce fruit unless it is watered, so we who were dry wood previously could not have produced living fruit without the heavenly rain overflowing upon us. Now our bodies are enabled to unite with the Incorrupt through the washing of the Baptism, while our souls are washed and unified through the Spirit. That is why both are essential since both contribute to the divine life<sup>5</sup>.

**St. Iraneaus**

\* We still need the other One to reveal to us and proclaim all matters . . . through repentance, which the Lord and Savior preached; through turning away from evil to all righteousness, through the remission of sin that is granted to all believers. All these lead to the fulfillment of goodness. Briefly, all these matters help a **person to be qualified to receive the Holy Spirit.** Nothing can provide righteousness to someone who is void of the Holy Spirit. Only through the Holy Spirit can we comprehend the blessed mystery of the Holy Trinity and attain all goodness<sup>6</sup>.

**Origen the Scholar**

\* **Those who are filled with the Holy Spirit are led to the Word- that is, they are carried to the Son. However, the Son carries them and presents them to the Father**

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<sup>1</sup> Adv. Haer. 3:17:2

<sup>2</sup> Adv. Haer. 5:36:2. PG 7:1223 B.

<sup>3</sup> Adv. Haer. 4:38:3 PG 1108 B

<sup>4</sup> Adv. Haer. 3:17:2. PG 7:930

<sup>5</sup> Adv. Haer. 3:17:2PG 7:903 A

<sup>6</sup> In Librum Jesu Nave, Homilia 3:2 PG 12:838 A

**and the Father grants them a state of incorruption.** Note that without the Holy Spirit, it is impossible to come close to the Father . . . because any acquaintance with the Son is fulfilled through the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the Son grants the gifts of the Holy Spirit in accordance with the pleasure of the Father and His will<sup>1</sup>.

**A Guide to Apostolic Preaching**

**The Gift of the Holy Spirit is revealed to us in as much as we seek and pray for it.**

\* This gift (of the Holy Spirit) that is in the Lord Jesus Christ is one Being, and is offered in full to everyone-no one is deprived of the Holy Spirit. However, each one receives according to the measure of his own will. The Spirit resides within us to the extent to which we qualify and according to our fervor in praying to receive Him. This gift remains with us until the end of the world. He comforts us as we yearn for Him, and grants us peace through the privileges He grants us. We live in the hope that He becomes the guiding light for our minds and the Sun for our souls. This Spirit requires us to seek Him and yearn for Him. As we do so, we need to hold on to Him steadfastly by keeping the faith and obeying God's commands<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Hilary, Bishop of Boitier**

\* **The path of divine wisdom ascends from one Holy Spirit through the one Son to the one Father.** In the same manner, natural righteousness as well as inherent holiness and kingly honor proceed from the Father, through the only Son, and to the Holy Spirit<sup>3</sup>.

\* When we fix our eyes, with the help of the powerful light of the Holy Spirit, on the beauty of the image of God (the invisible) as seen in the Son; then through that image, we are led to the ultimate and genuine beauty of the Father. Consequently, the Spirit of Truth within us appears indivisible for all those who love to see the Truth. Indeed, that Spirit grants us the power to see the image . . . He does not empower externally but rather leads us to knowledge found within Himself<sup>4</sup>.

\* He does not dwell in them (sinners); for they easily reject the grace they receive<sup>5</sup>.

**St. Basil the Great**

## **7- The Lord's Joy Due to His Departure**

**"Peace I leave with you,  
My peace I give to you;  
Not as the world gives do I give to you.  
Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." [27].**

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<sup>1</sup> Proof of the Apostolic Preaching, 7

<sup>2</sup> On the Trinity 2:35

<sup>3</sup> Liber de Spiritu Sancto, 18:47 PG 32:153

<sup>4</sup> Liber de Spiritu Sancto, 18:14:PG 32:153 B

<sup>5</sup> Liber de Spiritu Sancto, 26:61:PG 32:180 D

What has the Lord given to His disciples who had abandoned everything and followed Him? **“My Peace I give to you”** [27]: He does not leave them feeling sad and bitter, Rather, He leaves them feeling peaceful as He grants them a precious inheritance: which is His peace! Indeed, He Himself is our peace (Eph 2:14). He has given us Himself as our inheritance and our peace.

That peace is not like the one which the world gives to us. It is not just a verbal greeting. Rather, it is a true blessing that is expressed as He offers Himself to those who believe in Him. The world, with all its potentials, cannot offer such peace. Moreover, in spite of all the sadness in the world, nothing can withdraw that peace from a believer. This is because whatever the world grants affects the body and is limited by time and place. As for the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ, it embraces the whole human being. Neither time nor place can restrict it: the Lord's peace draws the human soul to experience eternity.

**“Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let it be afraid...”**: Because the peace of the Lord is eternal, no power can tear it away from a person who holds on firmly to it. The peace of the world may tempt a person to sin, either in the form of lusts or vanity. In contrast, the peace of the Lord is evident in the way abundant grace works and enables a person to lead a life of holiness and righteousness. In order to draw the hearts of His disciples towards eternal joy and heavenly peace, the Lord spoke to them as someone who is rejoicing due to His return to heaven. He grants them His peace so that they would find fulfillment in Him, and rejoice as they are lifted up with Him.

\* The disciples were greatly troubled when they heard the Lord's words: **“I go to prepare a place for you”**. They imagined that His departure would arouse enmity and wars against them. Notice how the Lord dispels their anxiety when He tells them: **“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you”**. He almost told them: ‘As long as My peace embraces you, what harm can the world inflict upon you?’

#### **St. John Chrysostom**

\* He grants us His peace while He has departed; and He will offer us His peace when He comes at the end of time. He grants us peace while we are in this world and His peace will embrace us in the world to come. He leaves His peace with us and as we dwell in Him we will defeat the enemy.

He will grant us His peace until there are no more enemies to fight; and consequently we would reign as kings.

He grants us peace so that we may love one another here on earth. Moreover, He will grant us His peace when we reach the heights where no conflicts could occur.

He grants us His peace so that we do not judge one another although we ignore one another's private concerns in this world. He will grant us His peace when ‘He reveals the counsels of the hearts and then each one's praise will come from God’, (1Cor 4:5). In

spite of that, it is in Him and from Him that we are granted peace. Whether that peace is granted by Him as He ascends to the Father, or whether it is the peace He will grant us when He brings us before the Father.

What will He leave to us when He ascends other than His presence which He will not withdraw from us? He is our peace and therefore our status in both conditions remains one and the same. (Eph 2:4). Therefore the Lord constitutes our peace when we believe that He is the Holy One, or when we see Him as He is; (1Jn 3:2).

Although we exist in this corrupt body that overwhelms the soul, yet we proceed with faith and not by any physical power. We are confident that He will not abandon those who have departed but have remained estranged from Him, (2Cor 5:6-7). How much more will that be when we attain that faith, for He will fill us with Himself<sup>1</sup>.

**\* The peace which the Lord grants us in this world could more adequately be considered as our peace rather than His. Since He is utterly without sin, there is no element of conflict in Him. In contrast, the peace we have possesses an aspect that still makes us pray and say: "...and forgive us our debts..." (Matt 6:12) . . . for it is not a perfect peace since we find a different law in our bodies that opposes the law of our minds, (Rom. 22:7-23)<sup>2</sup>.**

St. Augustine

**"You have heard Me say to you,  
I am going away and coming back to you:  
If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said; I am going to the Father;  
For My Father is greater than I". [28]**

The Lord presents another reason that would explain why their hearts should not be troubled: although He would depart, yet He would come back to them again. He was departing in order to receive the kingdom, authority, and power on their behalf. Consequently, it was appropriate that they should rejoice due to what they were going to enjoy.

**"For My Father is greater than I," [28]:** The Lord became incarnate, and humbled Himself in order to redeem us. According to the flesh, He became as some one who had lesser glory than the Father. If the pleasure of the Father and the Son require the Son to be humbled for the sake of mankind in order to glorify them, then it is appropriate that believers rejoice with the Son. They rejoice with the Son who finds it an honor to be humbled since His act fulfills their salvation and glory.

\* It is clear that He became Man while He continued to be God; for God put on the guise of Man. Yet God was not absorbed or dissolved into a Man. Logically, the following

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 77:3

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 77:4

would also be true: that the Lord Jesus Christ as a Man had a lower rank than the Father. Yet since He is God then he is equal to the Father, and hence equal to God, (John 10:30)<sup>1</sup>.

\* Many matters are reported in the Holy Bible that speak about the Lord Jesus Christ being in the image of God. Other instances reveal Him as a servant or slave. We will use two of these instances for examples; one to illustrate each aspect. As an image of God, the Lord says: "I and the Father are one," (Jn 10:30). As an image of a slave, he says: "My Father is greater than I"<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* It does seem odd that He who is the Logos had become incarnated, (Jn 1:14); and that He admits that the Father is greater than Him. Moreover, He appeared of lesser glory than the angels, and took the form of man. "For you have made him a little lower than the angels"(Ps 8:5) . . . and "He has no form or comeliness, and when we see Him, there is no beauty," (Is 53:2-3). That is why He is lower than the Father. Indeed He who has loved you has tolerated death and has granted you fellowship in the heavenly life<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Basil the Great**

\* Due to His humility, the Lord spoke these words, and they have been exploited cunningly by opponents who attack Him<sup>4</sup>.

\* They claim that it is written: **"My Father is greater than I"**; and also that "We did not consider it robbery to be equal with God," (Phil 2:6). Moreover, it is written that the Jews wanted to kill Him because He said that He was the Son of God and equaled Himself to God, (Jn 5:18). In John 10:30, the Lord says, "I and the Father are one," (Jn 10:30). They quote one passage and not many passages; therefore could He be lower and equal at the same time to the One and same entity? No, since one expression refers to His divinity while the other refers to His humanity<sup>5</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

**"And Now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe" [29].**

The Lord Jesus Christ informed the disciples in advance about His death so that they would not be confused when this would happen. He revealed to them that His death was a necessary requirement for their salvation. In this manner, the Lord tried to relieve their deep sorrow by granting them hope.

**"I will no longer talk much with you,  
For the ruler of this world is coming, and He has nothing in Me". [30]**

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<sup>1</sup> Letters, 170

<sup>2</sup> Letters, 238

<sup>3</sup> Letter 8 to the Caesareans, 5

<sup>4</sup> On the Holy Spirit, Book 2:8:59

<sup>5</sup> On the Holy Spirit, Book 5:18:224



Some thought that the Lord was speaking about Pontius Pilate who was the Roman ruler. But most thinkers agree that He was referring to Satan as being the ruler of the world, and this according to Ephesians 2: 2 and John 2:31. He is also called the god of this world in 2Corinthians 4:4.

The struggle of the Lord Jesus Christ is not with man but with the armies of spiritual darkness. Man is not an opponent in the struggle. Rather the struggle is between the Lord Jesus Christ and Satan; while man has the choice to hide in one of them. The Lord Jesus Christ speaks confidently as He states that Satan has no place in Him. Consequently, the Lord will surely overpower and conquer Him.

\* The words of the Lord: "**For the ruler of this world**" refer to Satan. Satan is called the ruler of this world not because he presides over heaven and earth-otherwise he would have toppled and reversed all creatures. Rather, Satan rules those people who have submitted themselves to him.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* We are besieged by hostile armies that surround us on every side. The body is frail and will soon turn into dust. It is one entity struggling against many tremendous armies, until the body is finally dissolved; and until the ruler of the world comes and finds it without sin. Until that time comes; let us carefully listen to the words of the prophet: "...you shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day . . ." (Ps 91:5)<sup>1</sup>.

\* If a bishop is short of a virtue or two out of the list of virtues, it does not indicate that he can no longer be considered as being righteous. Moreover, he would not be condemned for his failings. Rather, he would be crowned for what he possesses. Being perfectly virtuous and having no failings whatsoever are attributes of the Lord Jesus Christ only. Only He is without sin, and He never uttered deceit with His mouth. When He was insulted, He never insulted in return, (1Peter 2:22)<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

\* With such words the Lord referred to Satan as a ruler over sinners but not over all God's creations. The Lord refers to such sinners as presently being 'this world'. When He uses the words 'the world' with connotations of wickedness, the Lord is referring only to those people who love the world; to those who are referred to in another passage where it says: "Love of the world is enmity to God," (James 4:4). God forbid that we understand that Satan is the ruler of the world, who possesses the authority to control all the affairs of the world, as well as the heavens and the earth, and all things in them. We have spoken about the world when we spoke about the Lord Jesus Christ as the Word: "...and the world was made by Him," (Jn 1:1). The whole world- from the highest heavens to lowest point in the earth- submits to the Creator and not to the fugitive; to the Savior and not to the destroyer; to the Rescuer and not to the enslaved; to the Teacher and not to the deceiver<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Letters 22:3

<sup>2</sup> Against the Pelagians, 1:22

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 79:2

**St. Augustine**

**“But that the world may know that I love the father,  
And as the Father gave Me commandments, so I do.  
Arise, let us g from here.” [31]**

Satan cannot find a dwelling in the Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover, he is incapable of fighting Him. Yet the Lord allowed him to engage with Him in a decisive war in order to fulfill the Father's plan of Salvation; as well as to demonstrate the Son's love for the Father.

That was the Father's commandment: for the Son to save the world by His sufferings. This was the reason why the Lord asked His disciples to arise and leave the place: so that He would deliver Himself to death.

\* The Lord spoke these words to lift up the spirit of His disciples. He wanted to let them know that He was going to that death willingly and not due to any coercion.

**St. John Chrysostom**

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## Chapter 14

\* May your Holy Spirit carry me to your expansive Heavens!

\* When my spirit gets troubled within me  
Due to the multitude of my sins,  
You have revealed to me the extent of your heavens that await each believer!  
You grant us all the same everlasting life,  
Where Your believers will shine like brilliant planets.  
Each one elated and rejoicing on account of the great brilliance of his brother!

\* May I soar, through You who is the Way, to the place where You are found.  
For You are my divine Path, and You are my Heaven.  
Through You I can soar and come to stay with You in the Father's embrace!

\* I wonder: how can I, a human being, remain with You?  
You have granted me Your Holy Spirit to sanctify my depths.  
You have abandoned me physically when you ascended,  
You sent your fiery Spirit to shape me in Your image!  
He grants me the knowledge of Truth.  
Therefore I get to know You, O Truth.  
I see You and so see the Father, for You are One!  
I perceive You in your humility declaring: 'My Father is greater than I'.  
These words do not make me stumble  
For I find in them the spirit of humility.  
O You who became a slave for my sake!

\* I hear Your words and they make me cling to Your love!  
Your love made You descend to me  
So that You would raise me to the Father's embrace.  
Although You are inseparable from the Father,  
You became as one lower than Him,  
So that You would carry me from my degradation  
To the heights of sharing fellowship in Your glory!

\* How I would have desired to accompany You  
When You lived physically on this earth.  
However, Your ascension has lifted my heart to You.  
The gift of Your Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth,  
The giver of all blessings, comforts my soul.  
Your grace has comforted my heart,  
And I will not ask the Father for anything else!  
Your blessings have erased my orphan condition  
For I have become the child of the King of Kings who lives forever!  
Your gift is the able Teacher who can penetrate my depths,

And lead me- not to theoretical philosophy-but to the whole Truth!

\* You shine upon me, O only Son, by the light of the Spirit  
Therefore my life is filled with the brilliance of the Holy Trinity.  
The world is dead to me with all its darkness,  
So that I live in the light of Truth.  
Glory be to You, O Father, the Lover of mankind and the Planner of Salvation!

\* To You we offer praise, O Holy Spirit,  
Who grants holiness and righteousness!  
My Spirit plunges into the depths of the love of the Holy Trinity.  
As it yearns to enjoy a full vision on the great day of the Lord!

Glory be to God forever

Amen

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## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### A FAREWELL SPEECH

The two chapters (15 and 16) are a farewell speech that the Lord addresses to His disciples on the night He was arrested to be delivered to die. In this speech He makes them ready to face hardship.

In this chapter (15), the Lord speaks to them about:

- |                                             |       |
|---------------------------------------------|-------|
| 1- The Necessity of Abiding in Him          | 1-8   |
| 2- That They Must Love One Another          | 9-17  |
| 3- Confrontation of the Hatred of the world | 18-25 |
| 4- Sending the Helper                       | 26-27 |

#### 1- The Necessity of Abiding in Him

**“I am the true vine,  
And My Father is the vinedresser.” [1]**

Having condescended for our sake, He uses temporal metaphors to disclose His identity and His work in us. So He is called the Sun of righteousness that gives light to those who sit in darkness; He is the shining star, and the vine.

No Jewish person could expect the Messiah to liken Himself to a vine. They awaited His coming as their king and savior, having authority to restore dignity to His people in the world and to grant them royal power. On the other hand, the comparison to a vine belonged to the people, or to the church of God.

God planted the Garden of Eden so that Adam and his sons may enjoy its fruits. Nobody was deprived of anything except the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Then man drove himself out of that Garden to live on the earth that brings forth thorns and thistles. But God offered, throughout the ages, divine possibilities to His people to make them a fruitful vine that produces grapes from which is extracted a spiritual joyful wine. Nevertheless, the Old Testament is filled with lamentations over that vine that produced nothing but bitterness.

Thus, in the lamentation of Asaph, he says, “You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it. You prepared room for it, and caused it to take deep root; and it filled the land. The hills were covered with its shadow and the mighty cedars with its boughs. She sent out her boughs to the Sea, and her branches to the River. Why have You broken down her hedges, so that all who pass by the way pluck her fruit? The boar out of the woods uproots it, and the wild beast of the field devours it.” (Psalm 80:8-13) In this manner this psalmist moans because the vine that God’s right hand planted was destroyed as well as the fences that God built around it. Its fruit was not given to God but was plucked by all those who passed by the way, by the boar out of the woods, and by the wild beast.

God Himself declared His lamentation over His vine when He said in Isaiah, “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt Me and My vineyard. What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?” (Isaiah 5:3-4).

Once more in a lamentation over the same vine, God says, “Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto Me?” (Jeremiah 2:21)

This is God’s pleasure that all His people become a vineyard that devotes its life to those around it, gladdens God’s heart with its spiritual fruit, and gives joy to the heavenly beings by revealing God’s work in it. However, what happened? The prophet Hosea says, “Israel is an empty vine, he brings forth fruit unto himself: according to the multitude of his fruit he has increased the altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made godly images. Their heart is divided.” (Hosea 10:1-2) God’s people became not a holy vine for the kingdom of God, but an empty vine that brings forth bitterness, the worship of idols, and the kingdom of darkness. There was no other solution but that the Messiah Himself becomes the true vine feeding the believers so that they bring forth truly spiritual and heavenly fruit.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the vine planted in the soil, for He is the Word that became flesh. With the spirit of prophecy, Isaiah the prophet saw Him without form or beauty (Is 53:2). The fruit of the vine cheers God and man (Judges 9:13). The fruit of wisdom (the Lord Jesus Christ) is better than gold and fine gold (Prov 8:19). He is the vine of Judah that makes Judah rich with the blood of grapes (Gen 49:11). He is also the vine of Joseph whose branches run over the wall (Gen 49:22). And He is the vine of Israel and under Him Israel dwells safely (1 Kings 4:25).

\* He did not mention the vine here for any other purpose but to teach His disciples that without the power of the Lord Jesus Christ they can do nothing. In accordance to this metaphor they need to abide in Him as the branch abides in the vine.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* We are the Lord’s relatives according to the flesh. Therefore, He says, “I will declare Your name to My brethren” (Heb 2:12; Ps 22:22). As branches are one with the vine (the origin) and the vine is of the branches (John 15:1) so are we also one body homogeneous with the Lord’s body and of His fullness we have all received (John 1:16). Christ’s body is the origin of our resurrection and redemption.

**Saint Athanasious the Apostolic**

Saint Augustine observes that the Lord Jesus Christ calls Himself the vine and calls us the branches and the vine and its branches have one nature. Similarly, when He became

man He carried our human nature; He thus became the vine and we became the branches abiding in Him since He carried us.<sup>1</sup>

\* He says, “I am”. We observe that here the Lord Jesus Christ speaks on a personal level because He came among us as a true vine, truth itself. We are planted in Him as the church of the New Testament that enjoys eternal life and so overflows with spiritual wine that gladdens heaven.

The Father is not only the owner of the vine, but is also the vinedresser who works and cares for the vine. He cares for every branch of the vine. He is the protector of divine steadfastness, meaning our steadfastness as living branches in the vine. When we abide in the vine, the only begotten Son, we abide in the Father and are united in Him and so dwell in His bosom forever. We shall never be taken away from Him.

The Father who brought His people out of Egypt in ancient times to plant them as a vine in the Promised Land, is Himself He who sent His Son from heaven to plant us in Him, as members of His body, as branches of the living heavenly vine. He made His Word Incarnate a vine or head so that we may become branches or members of His body. It is as the Apostle says, “He...gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” (Eph 1:22-23). “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” (Eph 1:19-20)

**“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away;  
And every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” [2]**

God expects that the vine should bring forth grapes (Is 5:2). He expects that the Christian lives a proper Christian life: observing Christian thinking and behavior and having a Christian heart that loves all human beings. What good is the vine if it produces no grapes? And what benefits the Christian without love?

With the continuous growth in Christian life, and with the bountiful fruit, there is yet always something in us that God does not desire and so He takes it away. God, therefore, does the work of the vinedresser. He prunes the branches of the vine that they may bear more fruit. The Lord said to His disciples when He washed their feet that they are pure. However, they need that He washes their feet with His own hands that they may be clean and purified of what they caught as they walked in the world.

Some commentators think that He hints here at Judas who did not bear fruit and therefore deserved to be cut off from apostleship and deprived of the Kingdom. Judas is like the fig tree which the Lord saw on His way and in which He found no fruit. He therefore cursed it and it immediately withered away.

The promise for those who bear fruit is that they will be cleaned that they may bear more fruit. Or they will be pruned, that is to say every superfluous thing that can stop their growth and fruitfulness, will be trimmed off. In pruning the vinedresser is not

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 80:1.

violent or cruel; he rather cares and tends the vine that its fruit may increase. Saint John Chrysostom observes that pruning here indicates the persecutions that the believers face, for oppression does not destroy them but rather gives them more strength and productivity.

The believers are the numerous apparent branches that stretch in different directions but are united in Christ. He is the unseen root that grants life and fruit. He is the center of their unity. The believers are like the weak branches of the vine; they cannot exist independently without the root. The Lord says in Ezekiel, “Son of man, what is the vine tree more than any tree, or than a branch which is among the trees of the forest?” (Ez 15:2)

\* Do not wonder then that in this vine that grows and fills all the nations (Ps 79:10) there are branches that are cut off. Those are the branches that refused to bring forth fruits of love.<sup>1</sup>

\* Why did He not say, “you are clean through baptism in which you are washed” but says, you are clean **“because of the word which I have spoken to you.”** [3] That is because in the water, it is the word that purifies. If you take away the word, the water will be neither more nor less than mere water. But when you add the word to the element, the result is the “sacrament” as though it has become a kind of visible word.<sup>2</sup>

\* This word of faith embodies virtue in the church of God. So, by means of him who is present in the faith, blesses and sprinkles it, he purifies even the small baby who is unable to believe with his heart in righteousness and confess with his lips for redemption. All that is achieved through the word about which the Lord said, “You are already clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.” [3].<sup>3</sup>

\* They are not in Him in the same way that He is in them. Nevertheless, both ways are for their good, not for His benefit. For, in the relation between the branches and the vine, the branches do not partake of anything concerning the vine, but they rather obtain all the means of their life from the vine. On the other hand, the relation of the vine to the branches is that the vine gives the branches their vital strength, but takes nothing from the branches. If a branch is cut off, another branch will grow and have life but the branch that was cut off cannot live separately from its origin.<sup>4</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

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<sup>1</sup> Letters, 52.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 80:3.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 80:3.

<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 81:1.



\*The Lord, in saying to His disciples, “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away” He implies that if their lives appear without deeds they do not deserve to be in Him. When He says, “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away” He means that the Lord Jesus Christ cares very much for that branch.

\* He does not say that the origin (the root) needs the care of the vinedresser. He says rather that the branches need that care. He mentions the origin only so that they learn that **they can do nothing without His power and that they must abide in Him in faith as the branches abide in the vine: “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away.”**

Here, He indicates the path of life and reveals that without deeds we cannot be in Him. “Every branch that bears fruit He prunes”. Although the root requires much more care than the branches, since the soil is dug and cleaned for the root, yet He says nothing about that. All He says concerns the branches. He shows that the origin has self-sufficiency. But even though the disciples are eminent, they need great help on the part of the vinedresser. He, therefore, says, “every branch that bears fruit He prunes.” One can assert, here, that this was said concerning the persecution of believers. He cleans, that is to say, He prunes the branch that it may bear more fruit. He, thus, shows that persecutions give people more strength.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* In His zeal to do the Father’s will, He hurried to accomplish the mystery of His physical suffering. But in the next moment He revealed the mystery of His incarnation. Because of His taking the flesh, we became in Him as branches are in the vine. For if He had not become the vine, we would not have been able to bear good fruit. He speaks to us about steadfastness in Him through our faith in the incarnation. Because the Word became flesh, we assumed the nature of His flesh, just as the branches are in the vine. He surrendered the magnificent form of the Father by being humble and taking flesh. He calls Himself a vine, the source of unity of all the branches, and He calls the Father the vinedresser who cuts off the barren, useless branches that they may be burned with fire.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Hilary of Poitiers**

**“You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.”[3]**

He may be referring here to His discourse on the institution of the Eucharist and to His words about Judas who betrayed Him (John 13:21-30). After that Judas went out, completed his conspiracy with the high priest, and so removed himself from Christ’s body. The pruning of the branches (the Lord’s disciples) thus took place and it was

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 67:1.

<sup>2</sup> On the Trinity, 9 (55).

fitting to say about them “you are already clean” [3]. Christ’s words separate truth from falsehood, that which is precious from the counterfeit. Each of the disciples became clean because of Christ’s word of truth (John 17:17), because of faith that purified their hearts and cleaned them from all blemish (Acts 15:9). They were cleansed from the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

His allusion may also be to what is written in the Book of Leviticus (19:23-24) about the trees in Canaan. The trees will remain unclean for three years, then in the fourth year they will be pure to glorify God. Likewise the disciples remained with the Lord Jesus Christ for three years. Now as He carries them over to His cross and His resurrection as the Firstborn from the dead, and for their sake and in their name He presents Himself to the Father, they become pure in the eyes of God. He has carried the vine across for three years; now is the year of bliss during which her fruit will be sanctified to the Lord. The first year presents the human race in the Garden of Eden. The second year is governed by the natural law until the coming of Moses the prophet. The Law of Moses rules the third year. The fourth is the year of divine blessing when the Savior of the world came and in Him the fruit was consecrated to the Lord.

\* Have you seen how the Lord Jesus Christ shows that He cares for the branches. He indicates that He did not do that act because He needed their service, but that they may succeed.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**“Abide in Me, and I in you;**

**As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine,**

**Neither can you, unless you abide in Me.” [4]**

We often say that the life of faith is a life of clinging to our Lord Jesus. However, this is not enough in the eyes of the Lord. He asks us and promises us a greater aim: that He lives in us and we live in Him. Our living faith is an experience in Christ. This is the expression that the apostles repeat continuously in their epistles.

“Abide” is a word that Saint John loves very much. It recurs 112 times in the New Testament, 66 times of which are in the Gospel according to our teacher John and in his epistles: 33 times in the Gospel, and 3 times in his first, second, and third epistles. For, the Lord Jesus Christ came so that believers may enjoy steadfastness in Him and consequently their relationship with Him may not be temporary but eternal. In the Old Testament we read about the work of the Spirit in the lives of the prophets and kings and others in temporary periods. But in the New Testament, the Lord did not come, nor did He send His Holy Spirit to offer temporary enlightenment as some philosophers claim. He came so that we may abide eternally in Him. He makes of His believers branches to emphasize their place in Him. They abide in Him (1 John 2:6), in the truth (2 Jn 2), and in eternal life (1 Jn 3:15). This is a divine commandment, or rather a divine promise that we must adhere to Him.

A branch shares the nature of the tree, is animated by its juice, and lives by its life. Likewise, it is proper for us to share the divine nature, to be guided by His wisdom, to have His power and possibilities, and to be purified by His righteousness and sanctity.

\* He strengthened their spirits when they weakened with fear, so that they may not be separated from Him because of their cowardice. He attached them to Himself and revealed to them good hopes in the future. For, the origin exists and remains, but the severance or continuance is for the branches. Thus, as He urges them both with the joyful and the painful matters, He indicates first for what we, on our part, need to do.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**“I am the vine, you are the branches.**

**He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit:**

**For without Me you can do nothing.” [5]**

The Lord offers Himself as the secret of the believer’s life and fruitfulness. For Christ is the Savior and Friend, the Way and Door, the Life and Resurrection. He is the Comforter and the good Shepherd.

He asks us to abide in Him in faith so that He may abide in us through His Holy Spirit and through offering His body and blood a sacrifice, a food and drink for us. We are to rely on Him and trust Him. Through this alliance with Him, we live. We cling to Him and He abides in us through His Holy Spirit. We depend on Him, not like a branch leaning on a wall that supports it, but as a branch that has no value without the root. Thus, our Christ reveals the aim of His divine incarnation, rather from the point of view of man. This aim is that the believer enjoys true life continuously through the divine source.

Abidance in Him is optional but is necessary for the believer. Without this adherence the believer will not enjoy spiritual fruits. This is a final condition: either steadfastness and consequent fruitfulness, or else no fruit at all. There is no middle solution.

\* The saints refer everything to the Lord. Let us then learn that we can do nothing without the Lord. For He says, “unless you abide in Me...you can do nothing.” (See John 15:4, 5)

Someone may object saying, “If I refer everything to the Lord, what concerns me?” Let us examine at every point what concerns us so that it may not mingle with what comes from the Lord.

The Psalmist says, “Teach me, O Lord, the way of Your statutes” (Ps 119:33): what concerns us “and I shall keep it to the end.” (Ps 119:33)

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<sup>1</sup> Homiliwies on St. John, 67:1.

Once more, I ask God, “Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law” (Ps 119:34). Then again, “Make me walk in the path of Your commandments” (Ps 119:35). What concerns me? He indicates what concerns me with these words, “For I delight in it” (Ps 119:35).

Let us ask for what comes from God so that we may obtain it. Let us also promise Him what depends on us and let us not relinquish our promise so that we may not break our covenant with the Lord.

This is what the Psalmist says, “Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness” (Ps 119:36). For he knows that covetousness is a depravity that has a strong influence and gives credit to the profits of the wicked. The Apostle called it, “idolatry” (Col 3:5). We therefore learn that covetousness does not agree with the testimonies of the Lord.

### **Origen the Scholar**

**“If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch  
And is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire,  
And they are burned.” [6]**

Here, He warns us against hypocrisy. For there are those who have the name of Christ, but lack partnership with Him. They do not abide in Him, but are like those branches that are a profitless unnecessary burden to the tree. As they practically despise Him, they become despised; and as they refuse partnership with Him, they do not enjoy that secret life in Him. They only deserve to be cast out into the fire. They are dry and fire is the most appropriate place in which they are cleared off.

A branch is not estimated for its wood, for once it is separated from its origin, it is used for nothing but fire. However, by abiding in its origin, the secret link gives it life and makes it flourish and it becomes fruitful. Thus the vinedresser honors it and is preoccupied with it so that it may bear more fruit.

In this discourse our Christ, the true vine, does not terrify us. He rather draws our attention to His true promise that He is responsible for this in accordance to His grace and excessive divine generosity. For, “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made”, (Jn 1:3).

“Is cast out”: When a person separates himself from the Vine, he goes out of that circle and, therefore, does not have Christ’s life. The light of Christ does not shine in him; he does not enjoy the grace and power of Christ; the Holy Spirit does not work in him. This is the case of the Christian who after being a branch in the Vine, he becomes conceited, relying on his abilities, talents, and opinion. He consequently casts himself out and becomes a dry, broken branch that is good for nothing but fire.

The Lord Himself describes the dry branch when in **Ezekiel** He says, “For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourns in Israel, which separates himself from Me (the vine) and sets up his idols (self-conceit) in his heart, and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and comes to a prophet to inquire of him concerning

Me; I the Lord will answer him by Myself: And I will set My face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of My people,” (Ez 14:7-8).

\* The Lord Jesus Christ says to His disciples, **“without Me you can do nothing”**. It is a great loss when the branch can do nothing. However, the Lord does not end the punishment at this point but goes further to say, “is cast out as a branch and is withered”. By saying, **“they throw them into the fire, and they are burned”** Christ makes it clear that those who oppose Him will burn.

\* He says, “is cast out” and therefore does not enjoy the care of the vinedresser anymore; “is withered” because he has no root he is in danger. He had comforting grace but is now deprived of all help and life.

And what would be the end? He is thrown into the fire. But this is not what happens to those who abide in Him. He indicates those who abide in Him by saying, if **“My words abide in you”**. To them He says, **“If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.”** Then He says, “If you love Me, keep My commandments”. (Jn 14:14-15) Here, He says, **“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.”** He says this to show that, on the one hand, those who conspire against Him will burn, and on the other hand, He explains to the others that they will not be defeated. He says, **“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”**<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* You do not accept a corrupt shield, but rather a spiritual shield!

Even now you are planted in a hidden Paradise!

You receive a new name that you did not have in the past, for you were called a catechumen, but now you are a believer!

From now on you are grafted into the spiritual olive tree (Rom 11:24). You have been cut out of the wild olive tree and grafted into a good olive tree. You have been taken away from sins and defilement to be guided to righteousness and purity.

You are now partaking of the sacred Vine (Jn 15:1, 4, 5)! Good, for if you abide in the Vine you will grow as a fruitful branch, but if you do not abide in the Vine you will perish with fire.

Therefore, would you bear fruit worthily, so that God may not permit what happened to the barren fig tree (Matt 21:19) to happen to you! Christ has not yet come (for judgment) and has not yet cursed us because of our sterility. Would we were able to say, “But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the mercy of God forever

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 76. PG 59:448.

and ever.””(See Ps 52:8) And here we do not interpret the olive tree in its material meaning, but rather mentally in perfect light.

Since God plants and waters,<sup>1</sup> it would befit you to bring forth fruit. God grants His blessing and you, on your part accept and keep it. Do not despise grace because it is free. Rather accept and treasure it piously.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* The branch is good only for either way: to be in the vine, or in fire. If it is not in the vine, then its place is the fire. For it to escape the fire it must be in the vine.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you,  
you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.” [7]**

The Lord Christ connects steadfastness in Him with steadfastness in His words because through His gospel we enjoy true union. This gospel is interpreted practically by keeping the divine commandments, by practicing them and rejoicing in them [10-11].

Steadfastness in Christ’s words is a continuous meeting with the Word and an acquaintance with the person of the Lord Jesus Christ through His words. We, then, abide in Him with all our hearts, thoughts, feelings, senses and will. There is nothing that can separate us ever!

He presents to us a firm promise that all that we desire according to His good pleasure shall be done for us through our abiding in Him. And, what shall we ask for but that we may be His icons carrying in us His will, meeting Him and enjoying partnership in His glory.

Our steadfastness in Christ and in His words, and consequently, His steadfastness in us will cause us to be truly men of prayer, knowing what to ask for and having delight in the certainty of what we desire, because it is according to the good pleasure of God our Father. It is as though the secret of the effectiveness of prayer is in our steadfastness in Christ and His dwelling in us.

\* Do you not see that the Son does not participate less than the Father in caring for the disciples? The Father prunes on the one hand and keeps them in Him on the other hand. Abidance in the origin (the root) is why the branches bear fruit.

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<sup>1</sup> The Apostle says, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.” (1 Cor 3:6) Saint Cyril ascribes the planting and watering to God who works and gives the increase.

<sup>2</sup> Article 1:4.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 81:3.

If it is not pruned but abides in the origin, the branch bears fruit but not the proper amount. Yet, if it does not abide in the origin it does not bear fruit at all. However, the pruning belongs to the Son, steadfastness in the origin belongs to the Father who gave birth to the Son. Do you not see that everything, whether the pruning or the ability to have delight comes from the origin?<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* It is true that we desire certain things when we are in Christ, and we have different desires when we are still in this world. Therefore, if we abide in Him, if His words abide in us, we ask what we desire and it is done for us. But, if we ask and do not receive, it is because the things we desire have no relation to our steadfastness in Him, but are rather the persistent desires of the body and its weaknesses, that are not in Christ and in which the words of Christ do not abide. So, concerning His words, in all conditions, they are those of the prayer He taught us when we say, “Our Father who art in heaven” (Matt 6:9). May we not skip any word of this prayer but meditate on every word in our prayer. Then, everything we ask for we shall be given. However, if His words dwell only in our memory and have no place in our life, we, as branches, will not be considered abiding in the vine, for we do not obtain our life from the origin.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“By this My Father is glorified,**

**That you bear much fruit, so you will be My disciples.” [8]**

Here, the Lord Jesus Christ reveals **the wonderful fruit of steadfastness in Him:**

1-The glorification of the Father as the perfect love of the Father is seen in our life. His splendor is revealed in our inner selves. We truly exercise our sonship to Him “that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

2-Increasing fruit as everything we ask for in prayer is done for us.

3-We enjoy being His disciples; we become men of God witnessing for Him to bring back all people to Him so that all may be “members of the household of God”. (Eph 2:19)

\* Do you see how he who bears fruit is a disciple? “By this My Father is glorified” means that He is pleased when you abide in Him, when you bear fruit.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 76. PG 59:447-448.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 81:4.

<sup>3</sup> Hom. 76. PG 59:448.

\* Some scholars think that the Greek word ‘doxazein’ means literally ‘more splendor’ or ‘clearer’ to people. It also means, ‘glorified’.

\* From Him (from Christ) is such grace. Therefore, the glory is not ours but His. Here, the Father is glorified that we bear much fruit and that we have become Christ’s disciples. By whom have we become so but by Him whose mercy precedes and works in us? We are His work “created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph 2:10).<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

## **2- That They Must Love One Another**

**“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you;  
Abide in My love.” [9]**

The Lord Jesus Christ who is love personified speaks to us about love in four forms:

Love of the Father for Him [9]

His love for the Father [10]

The love of Christ for us [9]

Our love for Him and abiding in Him [9].

Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ shows that the foundation of every divine work is the mutual love of the Father and the Son. This indicates that the love of God for us is not based on temporary emotion but is the fruit of the eternal divine mutual love of the Father and the Son. Then, the believers must on their part abide always in love. So, just as there is nothing at all that can stop the love of God for us, we must have the same characteristic in our love for Him. This is what the Lord Jesus Christ asks for us: “that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them”, (Jn 17:26)

He declares His love for them to affirm to them that, though He will leave them physically, by death then later by His ascension, He loves them without limit. He loves them as the Father loves Him, although they are not properly worthy of love.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son whom the Father loves. In the Father’s love for Him, He gave Him everything, because He is One consubstantial with the Father. The Father gave Him the work of the redemption of the human race and Christ’s work of salvation is the object of the love and good pleasure of the Father. Through the mutual love of the Father and the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ advises us to love Him and abide in His love.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 82:1.



Steadfastness in His love implies our disappearance in Him to rejoice constantly for His love and to share with Him the trait of love. We practically get acquainted with the depth of His sacraments by practicing life in Him.

\* So, here you observe the source of good works. Where can we have these works? Are they not works of faith working through love (Gal 5:6)? And how may we be able to love? Is it not because He first loved us?

The Evangelist himself declares quite clearly in his epistle, that “We love Him because He first loved us,” (1 Jn 4:19). However, when He says, “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you”, [9] He does not connote that His nature and ours are equal as His and that of the Father. He rather refers to the grace of the Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus (1 Tim 2:5). For the Father truly loves us also, but in Christ. Here, the Father is glorified that we bear fruit in the Vine, that is, in the Son and thus become His disciples.<sup>1</sup>

Saint Augustine

**“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love,  
Just as I have kept My Father’s commandments  
And abide in His love.” [10]**

As the Lord Jesus Christ carried the message of salvation, He as the Son of Man through His perseverance in work abode in the Father’s love. **“He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till He has set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for His law.”** (Is 42:4) He kept the Father’s commandments, not only by recording them through the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament prophecies, but also by recording them practically when He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and coming in the likeness of men. He humbled Himself to the point of death, even the death of the cross, (Phil 2: 7-8). He kept the commandments in perfect obedience and accepted suffering with joy, (Heb 5:8; 12:2). He accomplished the commandment fully when on the cross He announced **“It is finished”**, (Jn 19:30). Through our steadfastness in Him and through sharing His characteristics, we keep the commandments, not only in our hearts, nor by meditating on them and studying them, but also by practicing them, being always alert, correct and truly eager that we may enjoy them. For the commandments are not oppressive but bear within them the power of fulfillment with praise and joy because within them is the Word Himself, as **Saint Marcus the Ascetic** says. Keeping the divine commandments is the key to heaven, with it we rejoice in our Christ, the Heavenly Treasure.

The sign of steadfastness in His love is our observance of His commandments, as He has kept the Father’s commandments and achieved His will. Without obedience and surrender we shall not enjoy love.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 82:2.

\* Look how the Lord Jesus Christ strengthens His disciples when He says, “abide in My love”. If you ask how that may be, His answer is **“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.”** Consider how the Lord Jesus Christ speaks to them with authority. For He does not say “abide in the love of the Father” but says, “abide in My love”.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* “Abide in My love” [9]. How do we abide? Listen to what follows: “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love” [10]

Love brings about the observance of His commandments. But does keeping His commandments bring about love?

Who can doubt that love comes first? He who lacks love has no good foundation to keep the commandments. Therefore, He says, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love” showing, not the source of love but the means by which love is declared. As though He says, “Do not think that you abide in My love if you do not keep My commandments. For only if you keep My commandments you abide.”

Then, let no one deceive himself by saying that he loves Him if he does not keep His commandments. For we love Him in the same measure as we keep His commandments and if keeping His commandments is weak, our love for Him is weak.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

Saint Augustine asserts that Christ’s love for us exists and He desires our redemption. This love is the expectation that urges us to keep His commandments. But not keeping His commandments reveals our lack of love for Him and our lack of steadfastness in His anticipating love.<sup>2</sup>

**“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you,  
and that your joy may be full.” [11]**

In His farewell discourse He repeats these words “these things I have spoken to you” seven times. These are words that **Ezekiel** declares repeatedly, “I the Lord have spoken” (Ez 5:13). It is as though He who speaks to them here is He who spoke to them through the prophets ages ago.

Let us rejoice in the divine promise like branches in the vine. Let us abide in Christ the true vine and abide in His words, His love, and also His joy. The joy of Saint John the Baptist was fulfilled when he saw the Bridegroom coming and heard His voice as He met His bride through the cross (Jn 3:29). Christ rejoiced to give His life for His bride

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 82:3.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 82:3.

and obtain her a pure virgin bought with the precious blood. And here He calls us to share His joy when we see in our salvation and the salvation of our brethren the fulfillment of heavenly joy.

In the Old Testament redemption was linked with joy. So, **David the Psalmist** repeated “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation” (Ps 51). And the prophet **Isaiah** watched the redeemed of the Lord returning and said, they “shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” (Is 35:10) He saw nature itself: the mountains, the hills, and all the trees of the field singing and clapping their hands, (Is 55:12). Also in the New Testament whenever the Church assembled in the Eucharist sacrament, “they ate their food with gladness” (Acts 2:46).

As He was on His way to the cross with gladness, He urged His disciples to abide in His joy as they shared with Him the cross. Thus their joy may be full.

\* The Lord spoke those words to His disciples making it clear to them that the present calamities are not for sadness, but for joy.

#### **Saint John Chrysostom**

\* What is Christ’s joy in us other than that He is pleased that He rejoices for us? And what is that joy that is ours, about which He says, “may be full” but that we have communion with Him? For this reason He said to the blessed Peter, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me,” (Jn 13:8). So, His joy in us is the grace that He grants us, which is also our joy.

Moreover, He rejoiced since eternity when He chose us before the foundation of the world, (Eph 1:4). We cannot say that His joy was not full, because God’s joy was never at any time incomplete.

However, that joy was not in us because it could not be for us who did not exist. And even when our existence began, that joy did not begin in us. But that joy was always in Him who is truly infallible, who in foreknowledge rejoiced that we shall be His and so had full joy in us as He rejoiced in His foreknowledge and in foreordaining us.<sup>1</sup>

\* His joy for our redemption that was always in Him through His foreknowledge and His foreordaining us began in us when He called us. Then, it was befitting that this joy is called our joy because in it we also are blessed. However, through perseverance this joy increases, grows and advances to perfection. Thus its beginning is in the belief in rebirth and its perfection is in the reward when we advance.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 83:1.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 83:1.

\* My joy has always been full even before I called you when you were in My foreknowledge that I will call you. But it found a place in you also when you were reshaped in accordance to My foreknowledge concerning you. “Your joy may be full” when you are blessed; this has not yet occurred as you are now created but you did not exist before.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“This is My commandment  
that you love one another as I have loved you.” [12]**

The last and basic commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ in His farewell discourse is “love”. And in this speech He connects the commandment and love. If we understand the meaning of love in our Christian life, we do not need another commandment. Therefore, **Saint Augustine** says, “love God and do whatever you like.” Indeed, some people have misunderstood this saying and have used it as a license to a loose life. But, whoever comprehends “love” cannot but act in Christ Jesus according to His divine judgment. Let us love as Christ loves the sinners so that they may become living icons, a new creation in Christ Jesus.

The Apostle Paul says, “he who loves another has fulfilled the law,” (Rom 13:8). He also says, “love is the bond of perfection,” (Col 3:14). The Lord Christ Himself, as He speaks about the commandments to love God and to love our neighbor says, “On “these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets,” (”Matt 22:40).

Saint John the beloved recognized love as the sinew of the Law. And, as **Saint Jerome** says, Saint John in his very old age was carried to the public gatherings of the believers and he always said “my children, love one another”. When he was asked why he continued in this manner, he answered, “because this is the Lord’s commandment and keeping it only is enough.”<sup>2</sup>

\* Abidance is realized through love, and love is achieved through observance of the Law. The commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ is that we love one another. Thus steadfastness in our God consists of the love by which we love one another.

He does not mention love simply, but reveals its nature as He says, “as I have loved you”.

Since love is a powerful irresistible matter and not a mere word, let us declare it through our deeds.

He made peace with us while we were His enemies. Now that we have become His friends let us abide so in His love.

He led the way, let us then at least follow Him.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 83:1.

<sup>2</sup> St. Jerome: Common Gal, Lib 3.c.6.

He loved us not for any personal benefit (for He needs nothing), let us then at least love Him for our benefit.

He loved us while we were His enemies, let us then love Him as He is our friend.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* Why does He speak about love as though that were a special commandment? That is because every commandment has relevance to love and all commandments are in one commandment because any commandment is founded on love alone. Just as the many branches of a tree stem from one root, so do many virtues proceed from love alone. The branch that is our good deeds has no sap unless it remains sticking to the root of love.<sup>1</sup>

**Pope Gregory (the Great)**

\* “This is My commandment” [12] as though there is no other commandment but this. So what do you think my brethren?

Let us meditate on the Apostle’s words, “love is the fulfillment of the law,” (Rom 13:10). Thus, where there is love, what may be lacking? And where there is no love what can be useful?

Satan believes (James 2:19), but trembles and does not love. No one loves but does not believe.

Those who have mutual love have God Himself as an aim of love. They, indeed, love one another and the goal of their love for one another is their love of God. There is no such love among men, for few have the motive to love one another, that God may be all in all, (1 Cor 15:28).<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“Greater love has no one than this,  
Than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” [13]**

These words were said not as a sermon to be examined, but as they were expressed on the eve of His crucifixion, these words declared His gospel in practice. Here, He draws the attention of His hearers toward the cross as a practical declaration of divine love for the entire human race, His dearly beloved are not the righteous but the sinners. The Apostle says, “when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Rom 5:10). Our Christ died for the sake of even those who persecuted Him on the cross, and those who persecute His body, the Church.

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 27. Forty Gospel Homilies, PL 76:1205.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 83:3.

No one can love his friend a greater love than to lay down his own life, everything he has, for him. The great friendship uniting David and Jonathan caused Jonathan to give up his kingdom to David, but Jonathan could not lay down his life for the sake of David. On the other hand, the Lord Jesus Christ lay down His life not only for His friends, but also for His enemies and asked for forgiveness for those who crucified Him. The greatest proof of His love for them is that He sacrificed Himself for their sake as no human being may do on the same level. For He, the Creator sacrificed Himself for His creatures that He loved exceedingly. He died for men when they were His enemies, (Rom 5:8, 10).

\* “Love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith” is truly a virtue for it is “the purpose of the commandment”, (1 Tim 1:5). It has been truly said, “love is strong as death”, (Song of Solomon 8:6). This is either because nothing can conquer it just as nothing can defeat death, or because in this life the evaluation of love is that it is to the point of death. The Lord says, “what love is greater than that a man sacrifices his life for his friends?” (See Jn 15:13). Or rather, as death separates the spirit from the physical senses, so does love take away the spirit from physical lusts. Knowledge, when useful, serves love, for without love “knowledge puffs up”, (1 Cor 8:1). Knowledge is not in the same measure as love, for love fills the heart with refinement and leaves no room for knowledge to be arrogant.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* No one persecutes us now to the point of death. How then shall we prove our love for our friends?

There needs be something for us to do at times of peace in the Church so that we may demonstrate whether we are strong enough to die for the sake of our love at times of persecution. Saint John says, “whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?” (1 Jn 3:17). John the Baptist also says, “he who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none”, (Luke 3:11). But does he who gives his tunic give up his life?

Maintain the virtue of love during peaceful times by showing mercy. You will then not be defeated during the times of persecution.

Learn first to give your possessions to the Almighty God, then you will give Him yourself.<sup>2</sup>

**Pope Gregory (the Great)**

\* Would we follow His example in this spirit of reverent obedience, not that we dare to compare Him to us.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

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<sup>1</sup> Letters, 167:11.

<sup>2</sup> Hom. 27. Forty Gospel Homilies. PL 76:1205.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 84:2.

**“You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” [14]**

Abraham was called the friend of God, (Is 41:8; James 2:23) because he believed God and obeyed Him “and it was accounted to him for righteousness”. Moses also was called the friend of God, (Ex 33:11). This is what every believer wishes to enjoy through the living faith.

\* What is more precious than the friendship that the angels share exactly like human beings? Therefore, the Lord Jesus says, “make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home,” (Luke 16:9)

God Himself makes of us friends instead of servants as He says, “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” He thus gives us the example of friendship so that we may follow Him.

We need to achieve the desire of our Friend (the Lord Jesus) and reveal to Him the secrets of our hearts. We must not ignore His trust. Let us show Him our hearts so that He may open His heart for us. He therefore says, “I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.” [15]. So a friend, if he is truly a friend, does not hide anything, but rather pours out himself as our Lord Jesus pours out His Father’s secrets.

Thus, he who does God’s will is God’s friend and is honored by this name. He who has the same mind is a friend because there is oneness of thought between friends. Nobody is more despised than the offender against friendship is.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

**“No longer do I call you servants,  
For a servant does not know what his master is doing;  
But I have called you friends,  
For all things that I heard from My Father  
I have made known to you.” [15]**

He did not stop at sacrificing Himself for them, but He also made a covenant with them that they become His friends who enjoy knowing His secrets, for they are not servants.

His tongue preaches gentle mercy. Here He calls them friends and after His resurrection He says, “go to My brethren”, (Jn 20:17) and He also says to them,

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<sup>1</sup> Duties of the Clergy, 3:22:135-136.

“children, have you any food?” (Jn 21:5) For they are His beloved children. But on their part, they call themselves His bondservants, (2 Pet 1:1). As He honors us, we on our part, must honor Him more. As we rise in His eyes, we feel even more contrite before Him.

There is no comparison between a servant and a friend. The master may love his servant and may treat him gently, but he does not allow his servant to share his personal secrets. A servant receives orders from his master and has no right to discuss those orders. He must only do what he is told; he knows nothing beyond the order. He does not know the aim of the order, nor does he know his master’s mind.. He must obey blindly.

As they are His friends, Christ does not give them commandments from His throne. He comes down to them to speak with them so that they may realize they are in His heart and that they have their special value in His inner self. By descending to them He ends the age of servitude by ending the letter that kills the Law. He brought us to the era of transcendent love as we enjoy being God’s children through the blood of the Only Begotten Son, through the work of the Holy Spirit in the water of baptism. Thus, He raised us and renewed our nature so that we may become His icons and have the right to enjoy knowing the Father and understand His divine sacraments.

\* When our Lord Jesus Christ saw that His disciples were about to accept adoption, to know Him, and learn through the Holy Spirit, He said to them, “No longer do I call you servants, but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.” (Jn 15:15)

For, those who realized what they became in Christ Jesus cried out saying, “we did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but we received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father,’” (See Rom 8:15)

If a man fails to show complete readiness and zeal to rise (from sin), let him know that the coming of our Lord and Savior is judgment to him. Therefore, Simeon (the Elder) from the beginning said, “Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against,” (Luke 2:34) The Apostle later said, “To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life,” (2 Cor 2:16)<sup>1</sup>.

### **The Great Saint Anthony**

\* He introduces the name ‘friends’ in a way that eliminates away the name ‘servants’. He does not combine the two names in one expression, but rather makes one name take the place of the other.

What does this mean? There are two kinds of fear bringing about two kinds of the frightened. Likewise there are two kinds of service bringing about two kinds of servants. There is fear that perfect love casts out (1 Jn 4:18). There is another fear that is clean and endures forever (Ps 19:9). The Apostle refers to the fear that is devoid of love saying,

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<sup>1</sup> Philokalia, Book 1.



“you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear” (Rom 8:15), but he refers to the pure fear when he says, “Do not be haughty, but fear.” (Rom 11:20)

In the case of fear that perfect love casts out there is also the service related to it for the Apostle links service and fear together. He says, “you did not receive the spirit of bondage (service) to fear”. Such a servant is connected to that kind of service. He is that person who was not before the Lord’s eyes when He said, “No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing”. He certainly is not that servant who is characterized by clean fear to whom is said, “Enter into the joy of your Lord”. He is rather that servant whose fear perfect love casts out. About him it is said, “a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever.” (Jn 8:35)

Accordingly, as He gave us the right to become children of God (John 1:12) may we be not slaves but children. In a true and wonderful manner that cannot be described, we the slaves have the right not to be slaves.

Indeed, we are servants through clean fear that characterizes him who enters into the joy of his Lord. But we are not slaves through the kind of fear of someone who is cast out and that belongs to him who does not abide in the house forever.

Let us bear in mind that it is the Lord who made us able to serve, not as slaves who do not know what their master is doing, but as children. Let not the servant who does some good work be haughty as though he worked independently and not through his Lord. In that case he, and not the Lord, is glorified and in self-deception he boasts as if he had not received from the Lord anything, (1 Cor 4:7).

Dear beloved, may we know what our Master is doing so that we may become friends of the Lord. For it is He who made us, not only human beings, but also righteous. We did not make ourselves what we are.<sup>1</sup>

\* Do not say, ‘Before I believed I did good deeds and for this reason He chose me’. For, what good deeds can precede faith? The Apostle says, “Whatever is not from faith is sin”, (Rom 14:23).<sup>2</sup>

\* Therefore, beloved friends, He did not choose the righteous, but rather caused the chosen to become righteous. “I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain,” (John 15:16) Is not this the fruit about which He said earlier, “without Me you can do nothing,” (Jn 15:5)? He chose us and appointed us that we should go and bear fruit. So, we had no fruit that made Him choose us. We rather go to bear fruit. He is the Way we take to bring fruit. He appointed us to take that way. This is His mercy for all.<sup>3</sup>

\* Let this love endure, for it is itself our fruit.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 85:2.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 86:2

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 86:3.

This love in the present is concealed in our yearning, not in our full rejoicing in it. Everything we ask for in our yearning, in the name of the Only Begotten Son, the Father grants us. But if we ask for what is not connected to our redemption, we must not think that we ask for it in the name of the Savior. What we ask for in the name of the Savior is truly connected to the Way of our salvation.<sup>1</sup>

Saint Augustine

**“You did not choose Me, but I chose you  
and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit,  
and that your fruit should remain,  
that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.” [16]**

He chose them not for their efficiency, wisdom, or goodness, but by way of His love and free grace. God took the initiative. He chose them before they chose Him and before they took that decision. As it is written in Deuteronomy: **“the Lord thy God has chosen you to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people; for you were the fewest of all people: But because the Lord loves you.”** (Deut 7:6-8).

He chose them and “appointed” them (hetheka hymas) meaning He put them into the ministry (1 Tim 1:12). He crowned them with this honor and granted them His confidence as His ambassadors who will assume the management of His kingdom in this world. They, consequently, must work “that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain”. He asked them to bear the yoke everywhere. They must travel from place to place over the whole world. They must not yield or rest, but they must always act, strive and sacrifice themselves so that they may have fruit as among all Gentiles, (Rom 1:13). **Father Theodore, the bishop of Messissa**, interprets the Greek work as meaning “I planted you”, for He is the vine and they are branches in Him.

The secret of success in service lies in the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself chose the disciples and apostles and helped them. He worked in and through them. Therefore, it is appropriate that **whoever serves in the Lord’s vineyard should have the following traits:**

1. That the Lord Himself plants him with His right hand and chooses him for service.
2. That he abides in the true Vine in order that he may bear fruit and may not be arid.
3. That he realizes that he is called to work and not to laziness. For, as the Lord Jesus Christ begins lovingly to choose His disciples, the chosen, on their part, must go and declare the perfect love of God to the entire human race. While He asks them to unite, He commands them not to cling to one another, but to depart and preach the gospel sharing in the journey of the Church into the entire world so that all may rejoice in the Savior, (Mark 16:15).

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 86:3.

4. That he must wait for the fruit patiently and must not despair. For, He who has chosen him guarantees the lasting fruit.
5. That he ascribes all fruit and success to the Lord.

“And that your fruit should remain”: unlike philosophers in general whose philosophy flourishes for sometime then becomes something of the past. The fruit of the disciples is in the Church of God, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. The loving believer is characterized by persistence in all things: perseverance in rejoicing in the Word of God [7], in love of Christ [9-10], in the joy of Christ and in bearing fruit [16].

The indication of His love is not only in that He chose them, appointed them to work, and caused their fruit to remain, but He also granted them the Father’s blessing that all they ask the Father in Christ’s name the Father gives them.

\* Let us believe that whatever we ask the Father in Christ’s name we obtain. For, the Father’s desire is that we ask through the Son and the Son’s desire is that we ask the Father. This does not mean that the Father is unable to act. It means rather that the One Authority is revealed.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* As though the Lord Jesus Christ says to His disciples: ‘I loved you first’.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* ‘I have formed you for grace. I have planted you so that you may willingly go and bring forth the fruit of your work. I say you need to go willingly. For to say you will do something means that you will go with all your heart’. He then added, “and that your fruit should remain”. What we do for eternal life remains even after death. Let us work for the fruit that will remain.<sup>2</sup>

\* Why did Paul plead with the Lord three times but did not receive, (2 Cor 12:8)? Christ asks the great preacher to demand in the name of the Son!

Why did he not obtain what he asked for?

The name of the Son is Jesus, and Jesus means ‘salvation’. Whoever asks in the name of the Savior asks for what concerns his actual salvation. So, if what he asks for is not for his good, he does not ask the Father in the name of Jesus. Therefore, the Lord said to His apostles when they were still weak, “Until now you have asked nothing in My name”, (John 16:24). This is the reason why God did not give heed to Paul. If he had been made free of that affliction, there would have been nothing to help him in his redemption.

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<sup>1</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 1:2:12.

<sup>2</sup> Hom. 27. Forty Gospel Homilies

Examine your requests. Do you ask for the joys of salvation? “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you,” (Matt 6:33)<sup>1</sup>.

**Pope Gregory (the Great)**

**“These things I command you, that you love one another.” [17]**

The Lord Christ combines love of God and love of brethren [12, 17], and He presents Himself as an example, for He loved us and sacrificed Himself for us [13]. He called us ‘friends’ [14], and revealed to us His secrets [15]. He chose and appointed us [16], and gave us grace so that our appeals in His name to the Father may be answered. All this we may acknowledge by loving our brethren.

\* This means that I tell you that I lay down My life for you, not to rebuke you, nor to say I hasten to meet you, but rather to lead you to friendship.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* This is the fruit that we cannot acquire far from Him, just as the branches can do nothing without the vine. Our fruit is love as the Apostle explains, “from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith”, (1 Tim 1:5). This is how we must love one another and love God. For, there will be no true love for one another if we do not love God. Everyone will love his brother as himself if he loves God. On the other hand, whoever does not love God does not love himself.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

### **3- Confrontation of the Hatred of the World**

**“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.” [18]**

Hatred is the characteristic of Satan and the pillar of his kingdom, just as love is the characteristic of Christ’s kingdom. No wonder, therefore, that those who love the world hate the kingdom of Christ without cause, for this is their nature. There would be no comfort for the disciples if the world hated them because they did something evil. But if the world hated them because it could not tolerate their Christ, this hatred is a glory which the believer does not deserve since he shares the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 27. Forty Gospel Homilies

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 87:1.

The evil people are called ‘the world’ because they love the world and carry its name and because they are the majority of the world population. We are not amazed that the world cannot tolerate those whom God loves and blesses. For, there has been enmity between the evil world and God’s children since the time the serpent crept towards Eve to seduce her. Since then, Cain murdered Abel because Abel’s deeds were righteous. Esau also hated Jacob because Jacob obtained the blessing. Likewise, Joseph’s brothers envied Joseph because his father loved him, and Saul hated David because the Lord was with David and gave him success. In all these examples, the saints had no hatred for anybody, nor did they do any evil to deserve such hate.

When **Saint Jerome** faced trouble and was about to leave Rome and travel East, he wrote to Asella saying, “I write to you in a hurry, dear Lady Asella, as I am going to the ship swallowed by grief and tears. Nevertheless, I thank my God that I was counted worthy of the hatred of the world.”<sup>1</sup>

\* Do not be terrified, dear beloved brethren, of the coming persecution, or of the coming of the Antichrist who threatens. There is no weapon against all circumstances other than the evangelical advice and the heavenly commandments and warnings.

The Antichrist is coming, but Christ triumphs.

The enemy approaches and rages, but the Lord who heals our suffering and wounds accompanies us.

The rebel threatens in anger, but there is He who liberates us from the enemy’s hands.<sup>2</sup>

**The Martyr Cyprianus**

\* Along with this love we need also to patiently endure the world’s hatred. Why does the member exalt himself above the Head? You refuse to be in the Body if you do not want to bear the world’s hatred of you, the same as its hatred of the Head.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“If you were of the world,**

**the world would love its own.**

**Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world,**

**therefore the world hates you.” [19]**

The believers are counted as not of the world not because of their wisdom or virtues, nor because their nature is different from that of other people, but because they accepted God’s call. He then chose them and set them apart for action in His kingdom. For this

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<sup>1</sup> Letters 45:6.

<sup>2</sup> Letter 58 to the people abiding in Thibaris, 7.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 87:2.

reason the world hates them. The life of the true Christian silently condemns the evil world. Therefore, the world has no other way but to take revenge of those who do not take part in its evil and calm its conscience.

Here, He refers to Psalm 69: “Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head.” (Ps 69:4). This Psalm is entirely a prophecy about the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

\* As though the Lord Jesus Christ says to His disciples, “If you wish to love, you must suffer.” This is implied in His saying, “If you were of the world, the world would love its own.” If the world loved you, it would be evident that you wanted in yourself the world’s malice.

### **Saint John Chrysostom**

\* The world loves itself falsely and hates itself truly. For, whoever loves evil hates himself, (Ps. 11:5). Yet it is said the world loves itself as much as it loves the wickedness that causes it to be evil. But it is also said the world hates itself as much as it loves what harms it. Therefore, the world hates its true nature and loves vice.

The world hates what it is as the goodness of God created it. And it loves what it willingly brought upon itself. We are forbidden to love whatever the world loves in itself and we are ordered to love whatever the world hates in itself, that is to say, God’s creation and His various blessings.

We are forbidden to love vice in the world and we are admonished to love nature. But the world loves vice in itself and hates nature.

Thus, we love and hate correctly, but the world loves and hates in a wicked manner.<sup>1</sup>

**“Remember the word that I said to you,**

**‘A servant is not greater than his master.’**

**If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.**

**If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.” [20]**

The Lord did, indeed, call them friends. But it is suitable for them to consider themselves God’s servants. He did not wish to begin His discourse by mentioning how much they will be persecuted. He began, rather, by speaking about the hardship He will endure. He put Himself at the forefront of the battle between light and darkness. The suffering of His disciples is only their share in the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord set a distinctive parting line between the believers who are sanctified in His truth and the evil people who live in the darkness of foolishness.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 87:4.

\* The Lord has shown, here, that His disciples are like Him. It is as though He says to them, ‘If they persecute you, this is your share in My suffering. Therefore, you should not be perturbed, for you are not greater than Me.’

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* If “a servant is not greater than his master”, may those who follow the Lord remain close to His footsteps in humility, silence and tranquility. For those who are humble are more glorified<sup>1</sup>

**The Martyr Cyprianus**

**“But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake,  
because they do not know Him who sent Me.” [21]**

One of the main reasons of the world’s hatred for believers is ignorance and lack of knowledge. They do not know the Father who sent the Lord Jesus Christ. In that foolishness they ‘eat up’ God’s people. The Psalmist says, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘there is no God’ ... Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call on the Lord” (Ps 14:1, 4).

They do not know the Father and they do not know the Son sent by the Father “for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory,” (1 Cor 2:8).

We do not marvel that the Lord says, “No longer do I call you servants” and then says, “A servant is not greater than his master”. For He does not want to call us servants and at the same time He calls us ‘servants’ and says we are not greater than Him who is our Master. Saint Augustine explains that it is clear that in the first statement He means the servant who does not dwell in the house forever, and who is characterized by that fear that love casts out.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine** comments on the expression “for My name’s sake” saying this means ‘for righteousness sake’, for our Christ is our righteousness. The wicked persecute the righteous in Christ Jesus not for some crime they committed, but for their righteousness. Sometimes the righteous practice harsh punishment of the evil people, just as a judge punishes a criminal or as a policeman arrests rebels. If the judge or policeman is sanctified in the Lord, he is not judged for punishing the vicious because the pervert does not suffer for righteousness sake but for his own vice. Saint Augustine also says that sometimes the vicious persecute the vicious, as for example, the wicked rulers or judges who persecute the righteous, certainly also punish murderers, adulterers and all those who do evil and violate the general law. How then may we interpret the Lord’s words, “If you were of the world, the world would love its own,” [19] The world punishes those

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 13 to Rogation, the priest and to the other confessors, 4.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 88:1.

criminals, mentioned above, because they harm the world. However, the same wickedness is in those who punish the criminals and in those who love those crimes. Therefore the world that exists in the vicious and unrighteous hates its own who are criminals but loves the vicious who are serviceable.<sup>1</sup>

\* He says this, ‘they hate Me in you; they persecute Me in you. As your word is Mine, they do not obey it.’

All they do to you is done to Me, not to you. Therefore, those who do those things have greater misery. He also blesses those who suffer those things for His sake. For He says, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,” (Matt 5:10). They endure the persecution for My name’s sake. As the Apostle teaches us, “He became for us wisdom from God-and righteousness and sanctification and redemption-that, as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the Lord,’ (1 Cor 1:30-31). The people of the world do those things for evil, not for righteousness. Therefore, both have similar misery, the persecutors and the vicious who are persecuted. Also the righteous who chastise the vicious do that for righteousness, but the vicious who are punished do not suffer for the sake of righteousness.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin,  
but now they have no excuse for their sin.” [22]**

The divine promises have been realized, and He whose day Abraham rejoiced to see and for whose coming all the patriarchs and prophets yearned, has come. Because of this, they had no excuse for rejecting Him. Their hatred, however, was foretold in the Holy Bible, (Ps. 35:19; 69:4; 109:3).

\* Here, the word ‘sin’, does not mean every sin, but means a great sin that includes all sins. Whoever is absolved of this sin obtains forgiveness of all his sins. This terrible sin is their disbelief in Christ who came specially to renew their belief. If He had not come they would not have this sin, but by His coming the life of those who did not believe was in danger of destruction, while those who believed were saved. As He is the head of the Apostles He became, as they declared, “to the one...the aroma of life leading to life, and to the other the aroma of death leading to death,” (2 Cor 2:16)<sup>3</sup>.

\* He adds saying, “but now they have no excuse for their sin” [22]. Someone may be moved to say, ‘those people to whom Christ did not come and with whom He did not

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 88:3.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 88:2.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 89:1.



speak may have excuse for their sin.’ My answer to this is that they may have excuse for this sin concerning their lack of belief in Christ, but they have no excuse for all their other sins. Moreover, He came with His Church to the nations and spoke to them. The reference here is to the words He said, “he who hears you hears Me,” (Luke 10:16). Paul the Apostle also says, “since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me,” (2 Cor 13:3)<sup>1</sup>.

\* However, it is clear that they do not escape from judgment: “For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law”, (Rom 2:12). The Apostle’s word ‘will perish’ has a horrible ring, more so than the word ‘judged’. This shows that such an excuse (that Christ did not come to them and did not speak with them) will not benefit them, but rather adds to their aggravation. For those who find excuse in that they did not hear, will perish without law.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“He who hates Me hates My Father also.” [23]**

**Saint Augustine** asks how can it be possible for the Jews who did not know the Father who sent His Only Begotten Son [21] would hate Him [23]? Saint Augustine then answers at some length, that a man may often love or hate another without seeing or knowing him, but only by imagining him or hearing about him. So, the Jews hated the Father without knowing Him, but as they imagined Him. Saint Augustine writes, “How could they love the Father of Truth when they were full of hatred for truth itself? They did not wish to be judged for their conduct, while the act of truth judged such conduct. Thus, they hated Truth as much as they hated the punishment Truth might submit them to. And as they did not know that He was the Truth who judged such as they were, they hated Him whom they did not know. And as they hated Him, they surely could not but hate Him who was born the Truth. So, as they did not know the Truth by whose wisdom they were judged and who is born of God the Father, they certainly also did not know the Father and they hated Him. Those people were really miserable. For, as they desired to be evil, they rejected Truth that judged them.”<sup>3</sup>

**“If I had not done among them the works which no one else did,**

**They would have no sin;**

**But now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father.” [24]**

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 89:2.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 89:3.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 90:3.

The Lord Jesus Christ did among them great unique works revealing not only His power, but also His kindness, love, and mercy. But, in spite of that, they hated both Him and the Father who sent Him. No wonder they hated those who believed in Him and became His disciples.

\* They were sinners before He spoke to them and did such works among them, but they did not have the sin of disbelief in Him. This is the sin that is referred to in particular because it includes all other sins. If they were freed of that sin and believed in Him, they would have been forgiven all the other sins.<sup>1</sup>

### **Saint Augustine**

They saw with their eyes full of envy and hate and consequently they hated Him. On the other hand, Saint John saw Him and enjoyed fellowship with Him. For he says, “which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life ...that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:1, 3)

**Saint Augustine** says that many prophets did works no one did, but there is no comparison between their works and the works of the Lord Jesus Christ. The countless wonders He did, their variety, and also that He did them with His personal power show that without Him nobody could do anything. Besides, His birth of a virgin and His resurrection the third day are further proof.<sup>2</sup>

\* They themselves were witnesses of this. For they said, “It was never seen like this in Israel,” (Matt 9:33). They also said, “Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind,” (John 9:32). The same was in the case of Lazarus being raised from the dead and all the other works and wonders that were new and beyond thought. Someone may ask, “Why then do they persecute You and us?” The answer is, “Yet because you are not of the world. If you were of the world, the world would love its own”, [19]. As this matter was baffling to us He told us the reason: their viciousness. He did not stop at that but also referred to the prophecy (Ps 35:19; 69:4) to show that this had been foretold a long time before, saying, “they hated Me without a cause,” [25].

### **Saint John Chrysostom**

**“But this happened that the word might be fulfilled  
Which is written in their law,  
‘They hated Me without a cause.’” [25]**

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 91:1.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 91:2-4.

They hated the Lord Jesus Christ without a cause. His words and teaching were open, presenting truth blended with love. His works were superior and unique based on His rich grace and infinite love. In the Psalms it is written, “Those who hate Me without a cause,” (Ps 35:19; 69:4). ‘Without a cause’ in Greek means ‘for nothing’ since they hated Him and did not think of receiving anything in return for their hatred.

**Saint Augustine** observes that the Lord Jesus Christ declared that the Jews hated Him and His Father without a cause and that they would kill Him. However, when the Paraclete arrived at Pentecost after the Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, He, through the word of the apostle Peter, attracted those who were present. So, about three thousand of those who took part in the uprising and asked for Christ’s crucifixion believed in Him. Thus, the Holy Spirit testifies effectively to the change of those who hated truth to become believers in the Truth.

\* As though He says, ‘They hated and killed Me when I was visible to their eyes; but the testimony will be carried for Me by the Helper who will attract them to faith in Me when I am not seen by them’<sup>1</sup>.

**Saint Augustine**

#### **4- Sending the Helper to Them**

He gave them a path that seemed extremely difficult as He asked them to abide in Him like branches in the vine. That seemed impossible to a human being, for how can a weak man abide in the heavenly Son of God? How can the earthy unite with the heavenly?

After giving them this difficult path, He asked them to love, not just a temporary human affection, but by giving themselves even unto death as He gave Himself for the world. This commandment also seemed impossible, for who can fulfill it?

Finally, He told them the world would hate and persecute them. All of that seemed to be a narrow way a man cannot pursue. He, therefore, comforted them by His promise to send His Holy Spirit, the Paraclete. He is the heavenly teacher, the true guide who will lead them to Christ’s perfect truth. He will make them firm in the vine as He pours the heavenly love in their hearts. He will grant them the power of testimony for Christ to attract to truth even those who oppose them.

**“But when the Helper comes,  
whom I shall send to you from the Father,  
the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father,  
He will testify of Me.” [26]**

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 92:1.

He speaks here about the Helper who is a hypostasis called “Spirit of truth”. He proceeds from the Father and testifies of the Son through His gifts and blessings to the believers.

He is the Spirit of the Father, for the Son Himself says, “who proceeds from the Father,” (John 15:26) and in another place says, “...for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you, (Matt 10:20). He is also the Spirit of the Son, for the Apostle says, “God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father’, (Gal 4:6). This means He will make you cry out, because this is what we say crying out to and in Him. This means He will fill our hearts with love without which our crying out will be in vain, for the Apostle says, “...if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His,” (Rom 8:9).

Christ had said that He would pray the Father to send the Helper, (John 14:16). Here, He says, “I shall send Him to you from the Father”. So, He is sent from the Father as the administrator of redemption and sanctification, and He is sent from the Son who paid the price on the cross so that the Spirit may dwell in man and find in him the righteousness of Christ.

The Holy Spirit testifies of the Son, and as He dwells in the disciples they testify of the Lord Jesus Christ with the power of the Spirit.

\* The same Helper is also sent by the Father, as Christ had already said, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name,” (John 14:26). Consider their unity, for the Father sends Him whom the Son also sends.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* The disciples may say, what can we do? If they did not obey Your words, for the same reason they will not keep our words. If they drove You out, they will expel us. They saw miracles no one saw done by anyone but You, and heard words no one heard anything similar said by other than You, and yet they did not benefit from what they saw and heard. If they hated Your Father and Yourself together, why did You cast us to face their opposition? How may we be qualified later so that they may believe us? Who of our tribes will listen to us? The disciples may ask the Lord Jesus Christ these questions. However, so that they do not have these disturbing thoughts, Christ comforts them by saying, **“when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.”** The Lord says that the Holy Spirit whom He calls the Spirit of truth will qualify them to be believed.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> Of the Christian Faith, 2:9:76.

\* We affirm that the Holy Spirit Himself also who works in the prophets is an emanation of God. He proceeds from Him and returns like the rays of the sun.<sup>1</sup>

**Ethnagoros the Scholar**

\* The Holy Spirit is in reality a Spirit proceeding actually from the Father but not in the same way as the Son, for the Spirit is not born, but proceeds from the Father.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Gregory of Nazianzus**

\* Thus it is impossible for the special attribute of the Father hypostasis to move to the Son or to the Holy Spirit. The attribute of the Father exists without cause, but this does not apply to the Son or the Spirit, for the Son “came forth from the Father”, (John 16:28) and the Scripture affirms that the Spirit “proceeds from the Father”, (John 15:26).<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Gregory the Bishop of Nyssa**

**Saint Epiphanius** uses the expression that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and takes from the Son and that He is of the same essence as the Father and the Son.<sup>4</sup> **Saint Gregory the Bishop of Nyssa** maintains that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and takes from the Son.<sup>5</sup>

**Saint Cyril** asserts his teaching concerning emanation by saying, “...the Holy Spirit proceeds from God the Father as from a fountain; on the other hand, the Son is sent by God to His creation”<sup>6</sup>.

**The International Theological Joint Committee of East Orthodox and Catholic Churches** reports that, ‘... the Father is distinct from the two other hypostases in that He is of His essence since eternity, gives birth to the Son and sends the Holy Spirit. The Son is distinct from the two other hypostases in that He is born of His Father. The Holy Spirit is distinct in that He proceeds from the Father. Thus the Father is not born and has no anaitios or origin before Him. He is at the same time the only origin, the only root and the only source of the Son and the Holy Spirit<sup>7</sup>. He alone is aitos who from eternity gives birth to the Son and sends the Holy Spirit...Therefore, the Father has no previous cause anaitios. He is Himself the cause autoaitos; whereas the Son and the Holy Spirit have a source in the Father<sup>8</sup>’.

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<sup>1</sup> Legat. 10:24.

<sup>2</sup> Oratione 39:12.

<sup>3</sup> De Oratione Dominica 3.

<sup>4</sup> Anor.7.

<sup>5</sup> Adv. Maced.10.

<sup>6</sup> PG 77:318 b.

<sup>7</sup> Saint Basil the Great, sermon 24:4, volume of the Greek Fathers 31:9.6.

<sup>8</sup> Photius: De S. Spiritus Mystaggia 16; Mark of Ephesus: Capita Syllogistica 24.

\* It befits us to make sure how many things must be said about that ‘love’ and also how many great things we need to know about God, for He Himself is Love. Just as “...no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him” (Matt 11:27); likewise no one knows Love except the Son, and in the same manner no one knows the Son who is Love Himself except the Father. Moreover, as He is called Love, the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father, alone knows what is in God, just as the spirit of a man knows the things that are within his person, (1 Cor 2:11). Here, then, the Paraclete who is “the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father” (John 15:26), walks about searching for the spirit that deserves and can accept His great love, the love of God that He desires to reveal to men.<sup>1</sup>

### **Origen the Scholar**

\* Christ told His apostles to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is a confession of belief in the Creator, the only begotten Son, and the Gift. For, God the Father, is One and everything is of Him; our Lord Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son through whom are all things (1 Cor 8:6) He is One, and the Spirit, God’s Gift to us who is all things, He is also One (Eph 4:4). Thus the greatness of the Trinity is in accordance to the benefits the Trinity grants: the One Power from whom is everything, the only begotten Son through whom are all things, and the One Gift that grants us perfect hope. There can be no deficiency in this exalted unity that embraces the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the infinite and eternal like the image that expresses Him and that we enjoy through the Gift.<sup>2</sup>

\* For, our fallen minds are incapable to comprehend the Father or the Son. Our faith that found difficulty in believing in God’s incarnation is enlightened by the gift of the Holy Spirit, the bond of the Unity and the source of Light.<sup>3</sup>

### **Saint Hilary of Poitiers**

\* He fills all with His power. But only those who conform partake in Him. Those who partake of the Spirit enjoy Him as much as their nature allows, not as much as the Spirit can give Himself in that communion.<sup>4</sup>

\* As the sun is seen by a clear eye, similarly the Paraclete appears in the same image (the Son) that belongs to (the Father) the Invisible. Through the blessed meditation on the image we shall see the inexpressible beauty of the origin. He is the one who shines in those who are purified from uncleanness and makes them spiritual through communion

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<sup>1</sup> Heg Tadros Yacoub Malaty: the Holy Spirit according to the Learned Origen; transl. Into Arabic by Dr. George Boutros.

<sup>2</sup> On the Trinity 2:1.

<sup>3</sup> On the Trinity 2:33.

<sup>4</sup> Liber de Spiritu Sancto. 9:22 PG 32:108-9.

with Him. And, just as when the sun's rays descend on the bright, transparent bodies they reflect brightness on others, likewise the spirits carrying the Spirit are enlightened and become spiritual imparting grace on the others.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Saint Basil the Great**

\* Christ was born and the Spirit preceded Him. Christ was baptized and the Spirit testified of Him. Christ was tempted and the Spirit carried Him (to the mountain). Christ performed wonders and the Spirit accompanied Him. Christ ascended and the Spirit followed behind Him.<sup>2</sup>

\* The physical works of Christ ended and the works of the Spirit began.<sup>3</sup>

\* If the Spirit is not adored, how may He be able to deify me in baptism? We obtain from the Spirit what renews. You thus see the Spirit working as being God who grants us the gifts and you see what we may be deprived of if we deny that the Spirit is God. Through the Spirit I know God. He is Himself God and in the hereafter. He deifies me.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Saint Gregory of Nazianzus**

\* Our reform is the work of the entire Holy Trinity equal in every respect. Through the Divine nature as a whole, the will and power traverse everything done through Him. Therefore, our salvation is in reality the work of the One God. And, though what was realized for our sake and took place in all creation seems to refer to each hypostasis, we yet believe that all things are from God through the Son in the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Saint Cyril the Great**

\* The work that befits the Holy Spirit is the accomplishment of our unity with Christ.

\* The Spirit unites us. We say He relates us to God; when we admit Him we partake of the Divine nature, we receive Him from the Son, and through the Son from the Father.<sup>6</sup>

\* The Son Himself forms us according to His glory and brands us with the stamp of His form.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Liber de Spiritu Sancto. 9:23 PG 32:109.

<sup>2</sup> Oratio 31, Theologica 5:31. 29 PG 36:159B.

<sup>3</sup> Oratio 41 In Pentecosten, 5. PG 36:436B.

<sup>4</sup> Oratio 31. Theologica 5:28 PG 36:105A.

<sup>5</sup> In Joannis Evangelium, Liber 10, 15:1 PG 74:333-6.

<sup>6</sup> In Joannis Evangelium 11:10. PG 74:544.

<sup>7</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 3. PG 75 :837A.

\* He grants us the perfect scent of Him who gave birth to Him.<sup>1</sup>

\* He who grants the divine Spirit the life giver is the Son born of God.<sup>2</sup>

\* The fulfillment given to us by the Father and the Son is accomplished by the Holy Spirit who fills us with divine gifts through Him and makes us partakers of the unutterable Nature.<sup>3</sup>

\* As the Son lives in us through His Spirit in a manner that cannot be described (Gal 4:6), we say that we are called to the spirit of adopted children<sup>4</sup>.

\* We are grateful to the union with the Son that is achieved through the Spirit in those who accept Him so we take the form of adopted children<sup>5</sup>.

\* If the true image that expresses perfectly the imitation of the Son Himself is without fault, the natural likeness of the Son is the Spirit. We conform to Him in turn through sanctification that gives us the form of the Father Himself.<sup>6</sup>

\* We take the form according to Christ and through Him we accept the image (Gal 4:9); the form of the Spirit is altogether good, and there is no one similar by nature to Him.<sup>7</sup>

\* Because of His strength and nature, the Spirit can surely reform us so that we have the superior image.<sup>8</sup>

**Saint Cyril the Great**

In the writings of **Saint Basil the Great** and also of **Saint Cyril the Great** we read that the Holy Spirit works in us to make us the image of the Father. He is the living environment and through Himself He creates in us the similarity of the Father and the Son.

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<sup>1</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 5 PG 75:837A.

<sup>2</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 3. PG 75: 964A.

<sup>3</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 3. PG 75: 800G

<sup>4</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 3. PG 75: 833.

<sup>5</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 3. PG 75: 837A.

<sup>6</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 7. PG 75:1089A.

<sup>7</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 7. PG 75:1089B.

<sup>8</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 7. PG 75: 1113A.



\* The Son born of God grants the divine life giving Spirit. The Son partakes of life and receives the perfect divine essence from the Father in whom is the Son and the Holy Spirit who gives life to those who obtain Him.<sup>1</sup>

\* In the One divine essence the three distinct hypostases unite in one exalted beauty. We also take a new form by accepting the mark of adopted children through the Son in the Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

\* Thanks are to the Spirit, for when we are molded according to the Son's exalted divine beauty, we partake of the divine essence.<sup>3</sup>

\* The Son grants us the perfect aroma of His Father. Through Him and in Him we accept the fragrance of knowing God and we become rich through it.<sup>4</sup>

**Saint Cyril the Great**

Saint Cyril the Great says that the Holy Spirit gives energy as He is the power of God.<sup>5</sup>

\* The Son proclaimed Himself and the Father alike. The Word Himself became visible and tangible.<sup>6</sup>

\* Concerning His greatness we cannot know God. However, concerning His love, He is perpetually known through His Word and through the Spirit who embraces the human being and grants him authority to the glory of the Father.<sup>7</sup>

**Saint Irenaeus**

\* The Father declares; the Spirit truly works; and the Son serves.<sup>8</sup>

**Saint Irenaeus**

The feast of the Pentecost is the coming of the Holy Spirit that Christ had promised. The Spirit in the continual Pentecost is an assertion of the presence of Christ in the Church. Thus, the feast of the Pentecost is a messianic feast no less than a feast of

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<sup>1</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 5. PG 75:964B.

<sup>2</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 5. PG 75:964B.

<sup>3</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 3. PG 75:837C.

<sup>4</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 3. PG 75:856C.

<sup>5</sup> De SS. Trinitate Dialogus, 7. PG 75:1112B.

<sup>6</sup> Adv. Haereses 4:6:6.

<sup>7</sup> Adv. Haereses 4:20:4. PG 7:1034B.

<sup>8</sup> Adv. Haereses 4:20:6. PG 7:10367.

the Holy Spirit. It is pneumatological because it secretly consecrates the presence of Christ in Church. The feast of the Pentecost eliminates the confusion arising from Christ's ascension to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father, and Christ's promise "I am with you always, even to the end of the age," (Matt 28:20)<sup>1</sup>.

**Saint Macarius** says that when Christ and the Spirit stay in us we experience this fact in various ways: in joy or tears, in silence or rapture. There are many forms of the presence of God; as for the fruit of the Spirit, this always takes the form of the presence of Christ who grants the union that lives in the Church that is in the heart of the believer.<sup>2</sup>

**"And you also will bear witness,**

**Because you have been with Me from the beginning." [27]**

Saint Augustine observes that when the Holy Spirit descends upon the Church, the disciples who accompanied the Lord Jesus Christ from the beginning of His service bear the possibility of witnessing for Him. The disciples were unable to be witnesses when the Lord Jesus Christ talked to them, because the fullness of the Spirit had not yet descended upon them. When the Holy Spirit descends He will grant them faith working through love, and perfect love casts out fear. Thus, Peter the Apostle will not deny Christ again as he did when Christ was to be crucified. He will testify of Christ and joyfully endure suffering and persecution for the sake of Christ's name. "When the Holy Spirit testifies of Christ and inspires such courageous testimony that cannot be defeated. He will free Christ's beloved from fear and will make them love the hatred of their enemies."<sup>3</sup>

\* In the previous words the Lord strengthens His disciples so that they may endure the hostility of their enemies. He prepares them also by presenting Himself as an example so that they may have more courage in following Him. He gives them the promise of the Holy Spirit who will come and testify of Him so that they may become themselves witnesses through the work of the Holy Spirit in His listeners. This is the meaning of: "And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning", [27]. He means that when He testifies you also will bear witness. He is in your hearts, and you will proclaim Him with your voices: He will inspire you and you will speak so that the words... "Their sound has gone out through all the earth" (Ps 19:4)... may be realized. For, unless He fills them with His Spirit, He will not achieve much by giving Himself as an example of the goal.<sup>4</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

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<sup>1</sup> Boris Bobrinskoy: The Mystery of the Trinity, St. Vladimir 1999, p.72.

<sup>2</sup> Boris Bobrinskoy: The Mystery of the Trinity, St. Vladimir 1999, p.73.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 92:2.

<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 94:1.

**Meditations**  
**Inspired by the Gospel of St John –Chapter 15**

\* Engraft Me into You

O True Vine

\* My wonderful love, reveal to me Your eminent love,

You have planted me as in a divine paradise

You enclosed it with Your love

You expected me to give You fruit to delight Your heart

Yet when I gave You bad grapes You did not neglect me.

\* You pulled me from my corruption

And You engrafted me in You who are the true vine!

I bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit, the grapes of love and joy.

I have Your sweet taste and fragrance

Without You I am not good but be thrown for garbage and fire!

\* Would Your love run in my veins

As I am a living branch in and through You.

That Your joy in me may be perfect and my joy through You becomes perfect.

I love You and get to know Your mysteries and will.

I love You and sacrifice myself for Your small brethren!

\* I love you even if the world hates me.

I am a branch in You, O divine Vine!

The world cannot endure you and so despises me!

The world does not tolerate your voice;

It cannot accept your words which I pronounce!

\* Who will consolidate me in You so that I may not be plucked out of You?

Who will care for me but Your Father the wonderful Vinedresser?

Who will encompass me and work in me

Only Your Holy Spirit, the Comforter  
Glory be to You O Trinity who is all love!

AMEN

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## CHAPTER 16

### SENDING THE HELPER

Pain entered the world as one of the fruits of disobedience. However, God in His love allowed His only begotten Son to become man and to suffer as a sacrifice of love offered on behalf of all humanity. Consequently, pain changed from being the fruit of sin to becoming a sign of love. We then obtained the right to suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. Through this unique sacrifice we perceive the meaning of the divine promise that He wounds and heals (Deut 32:39). The Lord Jesus Christ spoke to the disciples openly about how much they would suffer and He promised to them His Holy Spirit the Helper who will descend on them, work in them, and grant them His divine comfort.

\* The spirit needs the divine lamp that is the Holy Spirit who lights the dark house. The spirit needs the bright Sun of Righteousness who shines in the heart. The spirit also needs the armor with which it may fight the battle and win.

**Saint Macarius the Great**

|                                                                     |               |              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| <b>1 – The Painful Arrows of Love</b>                               | <b>verses</b> | <b>1- 6</b>  |
| <b>2 – Sending the Helper</b>                                       |               | <b>7-15</b>  |
| <b>3 – The Promise That He Will See Them after His Resurrection</b> |               | <b>16-22</b> |
| <b>4 – Answering Their Prayers</b>                                  |               | <b>23-27</b> |
| <b>5 – His Ascension to Heaven</b>                                  |               | <b>28</b>    |
| <b>6 – His Abandonment during His Suffering</b>                     |               | <b>29-32</b> |
| <b>7 – His Victory for Them</b>                                     |               | <b>33</b>    |

#### **1 – The Painful Arrows of Love**

In perfect faithfulness the Lord Jesus Christ reveals to the disciples the trouble they will face during the missions to which He will send them. However, these are the burdens of love. They are the arrows of love for His sake, for the world hates them as it hates Him.

**“These things I have spoken to you,  
That you should not be made to stumble.” [1]**

The expression **“these things I have spoken to you”** is repeated seven times in this chapter. In Greek this expression implies continuity and dignity. It is as though the things He speaks about in His farewell speech are not confined to a particular time. They are vital matters related to the Church throughout all the ages.

The word **“to stumble”** here is interpreted by some scholars as “you will fall into a trap” similar to a bird or an animal that falls in a net.

The Lord informs the disciples beforehand about the sufferings they will endure so that they do not stumble. That is to say, lest they lose their faith and their spirits are harmed, just as a man’s body is hurt when he stumbles in the street or falls in a trap or over a stone.

\* “These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble,” [1]. As the Holy Spirit pours in our hearts, the Holy Spirit who was given to us provides (Rom 5:5), to those who love God’s law, great peace so that they do not stumble in anything.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“They will put you out of the synagogues;  
Yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you  
Will think that he offers God service.” [2]**

The Lord refers to the time of suffering as **“the hour of temptation”**.

To cling to Christ and testify of Him was considered a religious crime or blasphemy. Therefore, Christians were put out of the synagogues. They were deprived of the right to pray. They were as considered cursed and unworthy to worship God or participate in prayers with the believers. The pain that the Jew who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ suffered because he was put out of the temple and was deprived of the joy of belonging to the Jewish nation was not less than murder. He then lost the feeling of relationship to the people of God. He lost his peculiar privileges and was considered as one who had broken the law. He was looked upon as a Samaritan, a pagan, a tax collector, and as a traitor of his religion, his people, and country.

They did not stop at putting those who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ out of the synagogues. They pursued them to offer them as human sacrifice and considered doing that for the glory of God. As Isaiah says, “Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for My name’s sake, said, let the Lord be glorified”, (Is 66:5). This is what happened to the Apostle Paul when forty men swore that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed him, (Acts 23:12-13). In the Talmud it is written, “...whoever kills an infidel is equal to a person who brings an offering to God”<sup>2</sup> Thus wolves disguised in the clothes of

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 93:1.

<sup>2</sup> Bammidar, R.21 ad Num.25:13.

lambs, and the enemies of God appeared as zealous servants. They practiced hostility as a religious obligation toward heaven.

\* In truth it was said to those "...they will put you out of the synagogues". That is to say, they have passion for God but have no knowledge, for they ignore God's righteousness. Those punished should have no shame in being cast out by people, as long as God is the glory of their strength.<sup>1</sup>

\* Those who think that they serve God by killing you do not know the Father or the Son. The Lord added these words to comfort His people who are expelled from the Jewish communities. He says, "The time is coming that" in a manner of one who informs them beforehand of good news that will be followed by major evil. They will truly disperse you and I will gather you, or they will truly scatter you, but the time of your joy is coming.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**"And these things they will do to you**

**Because they have not known the Father nor Me." [3]**

There is a big difference between a person who speaks or writes about God and a person who knows God and God knows him. Here, when the Lord speaks about knowledge He does not mean mere mental knowledge, but knowledge through life and experience. Therefore, when on the Day of Judgment He says to the wicked "I know you not..." it does not mean that God is lacking information, for He knows everything, He means He does not know them in the context of friendship and communion.

The cause of their wickedness is lack of true knowledge. As is written in **Hosea**: "...because they have transgressed My covenant, and trespassed against My law, Israel shall cry unto Me, my God, we know thee", (Hos 8:1-2). They may know God's will, but they do not know God practically in their conduct. They study the Bible but they twist the interpretation as they like.

\* As though the Lord Jesus Christ says to His disciples: 'it is sufficient for you so that you may be comforted, to know that all your suffering is for My sake and the Father's sake.' Here He also reminds them of His beatitudes when He taught them "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you," (Matt 5:11-12)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 93:2.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 93:3.

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St. John, 77:3.

**“But these things I have told you,  
That when the time comes,  
You may remember that I told you of them.  
And these things I did not say to you at the beginning,  
Because I was with you.” [4]**

He did not tell them those things at the beginning when they followed Him so that they may not be confused or worried. Now that they have become His disciples, He declares this to them as an essential matter in their life and their communion with Him. Before He had spoken to them about the time of tribulation so that they would realize that what will happen to them will not be a coincidence as some believe but will be allowed by God and to the extent that God will permit. Moreover, in this statement, Christ paves the way for them so that they may be ready to face that time with their spiritual weapons and in particular with the sword of the divine Word.

Why did He inform them about that at that particular time? Because the hour of tribulation was approaching. The hour of His suffering was near and the time of their suffering will be soon and He, in the flesh, will leave them. When He was with them in the flesh He comforted and supported them. Now He leaves to them His word and His promise that He will send to them the Holy Spirit the Helper.

\* No one should be surprised that we are consumed by continuous persecution and are under unusual oppression, since the Lord has told us beforehand that these things will happen at the end. He also gave instructions to our army and His words teach and encourage us.<sup>1</sup>

**Cyprian the Martyr**

\* These words I say enable you to judge and trust in my other speeches. You cannot say that I flatter you by mentioning only what pleases you. I do not cheat you, for whoever wishes to cheat you will not tell you beforehand things that would cause you to leave him. Therefore, I inform you in advance that these things will occur to you, so that you may not be troubled by not expecting these events.

There is also another reason: that you may not say we did not know before that these things will happen. Remember, therefore, that I told you.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 58 to the people abiding in Thibaris, 2.



May we also consider these things at the time of trial? And when we suffer at the hands of evil people: “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith”, (Heb 12:2). These things are caused by the wicked and are for the sake of virtue and for His sake.

For, if we contemplate these matters, everything will be easy and bearable. If one suffers for the sake of his beloved, he glories in doing so; how much more would be his feelings when he endures suffering for the sake of God?

He, for our sake considered this shame, the cross, glory; how much more, then, we need to take this same attitude?

If we can make light of pain, how much more can we disdain wealth and greed?<sup>1</sup>

\* “And these things I did not say to you at the beginning because I was with you,” [4]. He said that in a human way as though saying: ‘when you were safe and had the authorization to ask Me when you wished, while the entire storm was blowing on Me, it was not necessary that I speak to you about these things at the beginning.’<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Saint John Chrysostom** asks, ‘why did Christ say to them that He had not spoken to them about those things before; although when He called the twelve disciples He said to them ‘You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake’ and they will scourge you in their synagogues, (Matt 10:17-18)?’ Then Saint John Chrysostom answers his question by saying that what Christ had said to His disciples was about what would happen in the future when they would preach to the Gentiles. But what He speaks about in this verse are things that they will suffer at the hands of the Jews, things that will soon happen. He had not told them anything about those things before.<sup>3</sup>

**“But now I go away to Him who sent Me,  
And none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’” [5]**

Peter had asked Him this question, (John 13:36). Thomas also asked the same question (John 14:5), and He answered both. But now He tells them not to ask Him that question because sorrow filled their hearts, [6].

It befits them, instead of asking where He was going, to understand and trust that all things work together for good to them whom God loves, (Rom 8:28).

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 77:3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78:1.

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78:1.

\* Now He promises them that He will go away in a manner through which no one asks Him where He is going. For, a cloud received Him as He ascended from among them. When He went up to heaven, no one asked Him orally; this was rather eye witnessing, (Acts 1:9-11).<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“But because I have said these things to you,  
Sorrow has filled your heart.” [6]**

The Lord Christ had filled their heart with joy before now, (John 15:11). However, when their thoughts were troubled, sorrow filled their hearts and they did not allow Christ’s joy to possess them. Their thoughts were preoccupied with Christ’s exterior kingdom and temporal glory and that they would rule with Him. As worldly thoughts entered their minds, worldly sorrow filled them.

\* Their human feelings were distressed because seeing Him in the flesh would end permanently. But He knew what was beneficial for them. For that inner vision through which He will grant them the Holy Spirit for solace is undoubtedly more glorious...since He pours Himself in the hearts of believers. He then adds, “It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you,” [7]. He seems to say to them: ‘it is better for you that the form of a bondservant be taken away from you, for the Word came in real flesh and dwelt among you. But I do not want you to continue in loving Me in the flesh and be satisfied with this milk wishing to remain little children forever. If you adhere to the flesh in a physical way, the Spirit will have no room for you.

What does He mean by “if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you” other than that you cannot accept the Lord as long as you continue in knowing Christ according to the flesh? Therefore, one who obtained the Spirit says, “Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer”, (2 Cor 5:16). For, now even the body of Christ he does not know in a physical way since he achieved the spiritual knowledge of the Word who became flesh<sup>2</sup>.

\* Through Christ’s departure according to the flesh, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit became present with them. Thus, Christ left them in a manner so that He may remain in His abode and not with them, and so that the Holy Spirit may be present in them. What then does His promise mean when He says, “I am with you always, even to the end of the

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 94:3.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 94:4.

age,” (Matt 28:20). My Father and I “will come to him and make Our home with him,” (John 14:23)<sup>1</sup>.

**Saint Augustine**

\* Extreme sorrow is terrible and brings death. Therefore, Paul says, “...lest such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow,” (2 Cor 2:7)<sup>2</sup>.

\* It is no little comfort for them to know that He understands their great sorrow. For, besides their sadness because He will leave them and terrible things will happen to them, they did not know if they could bear all that with a strong will.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

## **2 – Sending the Helper**

**“Nevertheless I tell you the truth.**

**It is for your advantage that I go away;**

**For if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you;**

**But if I depart, I will send Him to you.” [7]**

In the Old Testament the prophets comforted the people during trouble by foretelling the coming of the Messiah the Savior as their helper (Is 9:6; Micah 5:6; Zech 3:8). Now the Messiah has come and will depart according to the flesh. Therefore, there is urgent need for another Helper- that is the Holy Spirit- whose coming necessitates Christ’s departure [7]. It was not possible for the disciples to accept that. Consequently, the Lord Jesus Christ affirms “I tell you the truth” that it is for their advantage that He goes away. This teaching was unexpected and strange to them. His ascension is not for His rest, but for their advantage. For, if what He did through the flesh was for the sake of His believers, His ascension is the ascension of the Head that the members of the body do not relinquish.

He had previously declared to them the necessity of His death for man’s salvation (Matt 20:19; 26:2; Mark 9:31; 10:33; Luke 9:44; 18:32). Now, He does not repeat His previous declaration, but rather reveals God’s plan concerning sending the Holy Spirit to the world. This will not be achieved unless our salvation is realized through the cross, resurrection, and ascension to heaven.

Why will the Holy Spirit not come except Christ goes away first? Because He comes to dwell in the human soul that the Lord bought with His blood. He gave men His

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate 94:5.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78:1.

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78:1.

righteousness and the right to enter heaven. Thus, the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, His resurrection, and ascension are the path to the enjoyment of the coming of the Holy Spirit into the Church and His dwelling in it so that the believer may enjoy that abode.

On the other hand, Christ's ascension to heaven as the glorified Savior does not take away from Him His preoccupation with His Bride-the Church- whom He has saved with His blood. He sends to her the Holy Spirit who sanctifies her for Him. He beautifies her and makes an icon of her for Him. She gets prepared for the heavenly eternal wedding. Thus, the coming of the Holy Spirit who is Christ's Spirit is better for the Church than the Lord Jesus Christ's staying physically on earth. If the Lord Jesus Christ continues to remain physically on earth, the human eye will turn toward Him. But the coming of the Holy Spirit will draw the human heart to the glorified Christ in heaven. Consequently, the human heart will yearn not for continuing to exist on earth, but for departing to the bridegroom.

The Lord Jesus Christ ascended to heaven at a critical moment and in strange circumstances, for He left His disciples powerless and having nothing to do but wait.

(1) From the point of view of their private life and faith, until the moment of ascension they were afraid, weak, hard-hearted and of little faith, (Mark 16:14). He left them physically and He gave them difficult commandments, a narrow path, and His severe cross. Who could endure all that?

(2) From the point of view of their work He gave them a difficult mission. He asked them to preach and make disciples in the entire world. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19). He asked them to preach in the name of the Holy Trinity. This was a difficult mission at a time when they did not perform miracles, cure lepers and cast out evil spirits as they had done when He served on earth before His crucifixion.

They were, therefore, in need of support and help. For this reason, He promised to send them the Spirit of Fire, the Spirit of the Holy God Himself. He will work in them to sanctify them and others. **"Behold, I send you the Promise of My Father upon you, but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high,"** (Luke 24:49) The ascension of the Lord, therefore, became a matter of joy and their spirits rejoiced. For, as He blessed them, He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. They worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. They were continually in the temple praising and blessing God, (Luke 24:51-53). For the Lord said to them, "...if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you," (John 16:7)<sup>1</sup>.

About the day of the Pentecost Feast, **Saint John Chrysostom** writes about 'The gifts of the Holy Spirit' and says: [Before these days He ascended to heaven and took His heavenly throne. He took back His seat at the right hand of the Father. Today He grants us the coming on of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit He distributes among us other heavenly gifts. For, what gift among all gifts do we enjoy in our redeemed spirits, that we did not receive through the service of the Holy Spirit?!

Through the Spirit we are free of bondage and called to freedom!

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<sup>1</sup> The author: God Sanctifies Me, 1967, p.3.

Through Him we become the children of God by adoption!

Moreover, if I may say, we were renewed taking off the loathsome burden of sins!

Through Him we see before us the orders of clergy!

Through Him our teachers help us! From Him we obtain the gifts of signs, of healing and all the other gifts with which the Holy Spirit adorns the Church of God.

This is what the Apostle Paul declares saying, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills," (1 Cor 12:11). He says, 'as He wills' not 'as He orders', and he says, 'distributing' not 'distributed'. He thus shows that the Spirit possesses the gifts and does not bow to the authority of another.

For, the authority that the Apostle testifies of that belongs to the Father is the same that is referred to the Holy Spirit. Just as he says about the Father "it is the same God who works all in all", he also says about the Holy Spirit, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things distributing to each one individually as He wills."

Observe this perfect authority for the divine nature is one. Therefore, there is not the least doubt concerning the authority; since there is equality in honor, power and authority must be one.]

\* In the Gospels of the three other evangelicals it is clearly shown that He made such a prophecy before the Last Supper, (Matt 10:16-30; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-17): that the Helper or Intercessor became necessary when Christ would depart. He, therefore, speaks about Him since the beginning as He was with them and His presence was helping them. However, on the night of His departure it was appropriate for the Lord to speak about the coming of the Spirit who will pour love in the hearts of those who will courageously preach the word of God. With the Spirit, they will carry within themselves Christ's testimony. There will be no cause to stumble when the hostile Jews put them out of the synagogues and kill them thinking that in doing so they offered God service. For, love endures all things, (1 Cor 13:7); and that love of God had been poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to them, (Rom 5:5)<sup>1</sup>.

**Saint Augustine**

\* As though He says openly: 'If I do not withdraw My flesh from your corporeal understanding, I cannot through My Spirit the Helper guide you to spiritual perception'<sup>2</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 94:2.

<sup>2</sup> Moral 8:13.

\* We cannot by any means have this blessing, which we who have not seen- yet believe, except by accepting it through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, He specifically said “It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you,” [7]. He is with us always in His divinity. But if He does not leave us in the flesh, we shall always see His body as body and we shall not believe spiritually.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* Observe how He comforts them again. He is clearly saying, ‘I speak to you not to cheer you, even though you grieved many times, but you need to listen to what is for your good. You truly grieve because you yearn that I stay with you though what is for your good is different’. For, part of the concern for others enforces a person not to be too gentle to them in matters that are for their benefit, or for matters that lead them to what is not to their advantage.”<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

### **The Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit**

The temporal birth of the Lord Jesus Christ opened the way to the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell in us. For the life of the Lord Jesus Christ everywhere and in every action testifies to the work of the Holy Spirit that is Christ’s Spirit. John the Forerunner came as an angel to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus Christ. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb, (Luke 1:15). The same Spirit came upon the Saint Virgin Mary and overshadowed her, like the smoke or thick cloud that covered Sinai, to make her ready so that the Holy One, who is to be born of her would be called the Son of God, (Luke 1:35). Then, when Saint Mary visited Elizabeth, the Holy Spirit filled Elizabeth and the babe in her womb leaped for joy, (Luke 1: 41, 44). Mary and Zacharias, being inspired by the Holy Spirit, glorified God, (Luke 1: 46, 68) and Simeon the Elder came by the Spirit into the temple to receive the child Jesus, (Luke 2: 25-32). The Holy Spirit also drove our Lord Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted (Mark 1: 12).

The Lord Christ gives us the Holy Spirit to dwell in us so that we carry Christ in us, and He Himself becomes our prayer and worship "in Spirit" as we cry out to the Father, "Abba, Father", (Rom 8: 15; Gal 4: 6).

**“And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin,  
And of righteousness,  
And of judgment.” [8]**

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 93:4.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78:1.

The mission of the Holy Spirit to the Church fulfills the Lord Jesus Christ's care for the Church. When the Holy Spirit comes He will grant people the life of repentance and a return to Him through the Cross. He alone can enter the heart, reveal sin and unveil it to a person so that he may return to the delightful communion with God. The Holy Spirit can convince the heart, mind, and the entire depth of a man that his happiness, safety, joy, eternal life and incorruption are in his steadfastness with the Savior, not with sin. He will persuade him that the pleasure of life with God is far greater than the pleasures of sin.

The Holy Spirit is called 'the Paraclete'. This is an old Greek word. 'Para' means 'dwell, beside', 'clete' means 'call', 'to help'. Thus, the Paraclete is the dwelling Helper or the Guide and Comforter, the Intercessor and Defender. In Latin Paraclete is 'advocatus' and in French 'avocat' which means 'lawyer' or 'defending intercessor'.

This is the basis of our communion with the Holy Trinity. He intercedes for us before the Father. He presents the case to end our judgment with a verdict of innocence. We thus have the right of communion and of enjoyment of the divine bosom. The plea of the Holy Spirit is powerful, able, and glorious. Nevertheless, it is an argument in truth for He does not advocate for us falsely or with contrivance. He is the Spirit of Truth whose testimony is for Truth. He is Truth Himself. He is just in His defense; He does not hide our sins and mistakes: in His intercession for sinners (Phil 1:20), He does not conceal our sins or cover up their stains with fig leaves as Adam did and as Adam's sons do. He does not show preference, nor does He ask for association of light and darkness, or righteousness and corruption. His work and advocacy for us is that He 'cuts to the heart' of the individual before he believes and before the Spirit dwells in him. He changes his nature, so that He may grant him faith and acceptance of the gift of the Holy Spirit as on the day of Pentecost. "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the hearts, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles "...what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit," (Acts 2: 37-38)

**Saint Augustine** observes that the greatest sin is disbelief in Christ as the Savior of the world. For he who does not believe cannot have the blessing of remission of his sins. Therefore, "He will convict the world of sin" implies urging men to abandon disbelief in Christ and so open the way for forgiveness.

While Peter was speaking to Cornelius and those who were with him, 'the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word....Then Peter answered, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord,' (Acts 10: 44-47).

If the Spirit cuts to the heart of a person before baptism, will He not cut to his heart after He dwells in him through Chrismation?! His work is to convict a person of sin so that he may repent and confess. By means of the sacrament of repentance and confession, his sins are forgiven through the Holy Spirit who forgives by reason of the due rewards of Christ's blood. Christ said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them." Thus, the Holy Spirit does not cover up the sins of unbelievers or believers. On the contrary, as He is the Light, He reveals and exposes sin before a man's inner vision. He discloses our iniquities and their bitterness to our hearts. At the same time He reveals the work of the Cross and the captivating power of God's love.

In this way, the Holy Spirit presents our confessions- full of depravity- along with our tears of repentance, and prayers of faith and joins them with the Blood shed for our sake. Then immediately the verdict of innocence is declared. The person's old sins are forgiven both in the sacrament of baptism and in the sacrament of repentance and confession.<sup>1</sup>

\* Observe how He begins first by rebuking sin and by scolding not only the Jews but every one who is obstinate and fights the Paraclete. The Holy Spirit's third conviction is of judgment of the ruler of this world. The Paraclete will testify of Christ's glory. He will show to the world the error in deserting Christ and worshipping Satan who by nature is not God. Now Satan is not the ruler of this world rightfully, like one who has the esteem of the governor who inherits his province. However, he retains the glory of this world by deceit and violence as he falsely rules over those, and that because of their evil will he exercise his authority over them.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Cyril the Great**

\* We yearn to understand why it seems that there is no sin for a person other than his disbelief in Christ. For He spoke about that sin only saying that the Holy Spirit will judge the world for it. It is obvious that in addition to the sin of not believing in Christ there are various human sins. So why does the Holy Spirit convict the world of this sin only? It is because in disbelief all sins are retained, but in belief all sins are forgiven. This is why God attributes to them this sin more than all other sins. For by having no faith, a man's sins are not forgiven- since he is proud and does not believe in our humble God. It is written, 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble,' (Prov 3:34; James 4:6). This grace from God is God's gift, but the greatest gift is the Holy Spirit who has been called "Grace". For, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God [because] through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned," (Rom 3:23; 5:12).

**Saint Augustine**

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<sup>1</sup> The author: God Sanctifies Me, 1967, pages 12-13.

<sup>2</sup> The Mission of the Holy Spirit, in Toal 2:369-371. PG 74, 922 B2.



**Saint John Chrysostom** affirms that the Holy Spirit and also the Father testify of the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world that lies under the sway of the wicked one. Indeed, the Lord Jesus Christ delivered teachings and wonders but the wicked resisted them. But when He ascended to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit who worked in Christ's disciples and apostles to reveal truth. The Holy Spirit achieves great wonderful deeds in Christ's name. He convicts the world so that people may comprehend their wickedness and accept to come back to the Savior.

\* **“And when He has come, He will convict the world”** [8]. This means that they will be punished for their deeds when He comes. For, truly the things that were actually done were enough to convict them. However, when those matters are also accomplished through Him (after His ascension), when the teachings become more complete (through the coming of the Holy Spirit), and when the miracles are greater (by the apostles) they will be even more condemned. When they see all that done in My name, My resurrection will be more certain.

Now they can say, ‘this is the son of the carpenter and we know his father and mother.’ But when they see the bonds of death have become loose, evil eliminated, nature's troubles repaired, demons cast out and when they see the abundant help of the Spirit all realized through My mission, what will they say? The Father testifies of Me and the Spirit will also be a testimony though He has testified from the beginning. Yes He will testify and convict.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Saint Augustine** says that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself convicts the world of sin when He says, “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin...”, (John 15:22). He will convict them of righteousness, for He says, “O righteous Father! The world has not known You”, (John 17:25). And He will convict the world of judgment, for He declares that He will say to those on the left hand, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels,” (Matt 25:41). Many statements occur in the Gospels to assert that the Lord Jesus Christ convicts of those matters. Why, then, does He ascribe this to the Holy Spirit as though this was a special attribute to Him? Saint Augustine answers that the Holy Spirit pours out in the hearts of the disciples (Rom 5:5) and grants them love that casts out fear (1 John 4: 18) so that they have the right to reprimand and convict. Saint Augustine continues, ‘I often say that the work of the Holy Trinity is not divided, but each Person of the Trinity has His role, not only without separation, but also without mingling. We rightly understand Their oneness and trinity (distinction)’<sup>2</sup>.

**“Of sin,**

**Because they do not believe in Me.”** [9]

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78:1.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 95:1.

The Lord Christ elucidates the role of the Holy Spirit in convicting the world of sin by saying, "...because they do not believe in Me", [9]. If sin rules over the heart, there is no way for casting it out but by the coming of another ruler who is able to annihilate it. This power is the belief in Christ that controls the heart. Sin ruled and became the source of corruption and atrocity. Therefore, there was an urgent necessity for belief in the Savior who will remove corruption and atrocity and replace them with integrity and sanctity. Man broke the law when he sinned and he was cursed. In believing in Christ who fulfilled the law and suffered the curse for us, we become free of the deadly letter and the curse and we enjoy the life-giving Spirit and a blessed life.

The sin of the Jews became extreme when they did not accept Him as the Messiah and Savior, even though He performed the signs foretold by the prophets, (Is 35: 3-6). When the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost, some Jews confessed that sin and returned to God, (Acts 2: 37).

\* As this sin seems to be the only sin, He mentions it before other sins. For, by persisting in it all other sins remain, and by removing it the other sins are removed.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* He convicts "of sin": this means He will silence all their excuses and show that they disobeyed and their disobedience was exorbitant.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**"Of righteousness,  
Because I go to My Father  
And you see Me no more." [10]**

Concerning convicting of righteousness, the Lord Jesus Christ says, "...because I go to My Father, and you see Me no more", [10]. This means that He convicts them of not understanding the righteousness and holiness of Christ. His resurrection and ascension to heaven are a proof of His righteousness. Therefore, as the Lord ascends to heaven, He sends His Spirit to carry the human hearts to where Christ sits. They will then get in touch and experience His righteousness in them, or rather Christ will become righteousness for them.

Convicting the world of sin refers to the work of the Holy Spirit in disclosing the reality of the world: that the world sins. But convicting the world of righteousness is

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 95:2.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78:1.

exposing the reality of what the world did to Christ; that is His crucifixion. For, Christ's redemptive suffering and crucifixion are for our righteousness. The Spirit that gives light to the eyes to see one's sins gives them light also to comprehend the power of Christ's death that grants righteousness.

The Jews did not properly perceive the value of Moses the prophet until after he departed from our world. Many people also did not know Christ's righteousness until His ascension to heaven. The coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in accordance to the divine promise is a proof of Christ's exaltation to the right hand of God (Acts 2: 33). This is an evidence of His divine righteousness.

**Saint Augustine** asks why the Lord Jesus Christ said that the Holy Spirit convicts the world of righteousness because He (Christ) goes to His Father? He answers that when the Word became flesh and came from His Father He revealed His mercy to us. As He ascends to heaven and goes to the Father we rise with Him and seek things that are above where Christ sits. He sits at the right hand of the Father; He sits as the Head and Body, as though the Church that became a body obtains the right to sit in heaven at the right hand of God and enjoys Christ's righteousness.<sup>1</sup>

\* Therefore, it is proper for us not to consider ourselves separate from that righteousness that the Lord Himself refers to, saying, "...of righteousness because I go to My Father". For we, also, will ascend with Christ and be with Christ our Head. Now by faith and hope for sometime but our hope will be complete in the Last Resurrection. When our hope becomes complete our vindication also will be complete. The Lord who has completed this revealed to us why we need to hope in His body (that is in our Head), this body that rose and ascended to the Father. For it is written: "He was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification," (Rom 4: 25). Thus, the world is convicted of sin in those who did not believe in Christ; and of righteousness in those who rose as members of Christ. For it is written: "...that we might become the righteousness of God in Him," (2 Cor 5: 21). If we are not in Him we have no path to righteousness. But if we are in Him He takes us entirely to the Father and His complete righteousness is realized in us.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* The Apostle states the command clearly: we must believe that the work of the Father and the work of the Son is one work.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* When He convicts a righteous man (proud of his righteousness) He convicts him of sin, not of righteousness. Therefore, consider the divine words: 'Be not righteous over much,' (Eccl 7: 16, 20). These words are not addressed to the wise righteous person, but

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 94: 3-5.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 94: 6.

<sup>3</sup> Of the Christian Faith, 3: 11: 90.

to the proud and arrogant. For the individual who becomes ‘righteous over much’, with that very excess becomes unrighteous. He makes himself too righteous by saying he is without sin and by imagining that he did not become righteous through God’s grace but through his self sufficiency and will. He is not righteous and living a righteous life, but rather he is satisfied with imagining what in fact he is not.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* “Of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more” [10]. This means: ‘I have shown a life without blame and this is a proof that I shall go to the Father’. As they always denounced Him saying He is not of God, and therefore, called Him a sinner and rebel, He says that the Spirit will take away also this excuse. For if I seem to them not to come from God and they call me lawless, when the Spirit declares that I go to God, not for a while but to dwell there... ‘and you see Me no more’ implies this.... what will they say? Notice how with these two points He removes their wicked doubt. For, neither the miracles nor dwelling with God may refer to someone wicked. You cannot say about such a man that he is wicked or is not of God.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**“Of judgment,**

**Because the ruler of this world is judged.” [11]**

Briefly, the Holy Spirit convicts of sin [9] granting faith to human beings and introducing to them the righteousness of the crucified Christ. He also judges the wicked world and grants the believers what belongs to the Son so that they may enjoy sharing the heavenly glory. Thus, the Holy Spirit presents three important facts relevant to our life:

- (1) the corruption of our nature because of sin
- (2) correction of our nature so that we enjoy Christ’s righteousness
- (3) the eternal condemnation of evil.

The Holy Spirit convicts of judgment “...because the ruler of this world is judged”, [11]. While the world thought that they had judged Christ and condemned Him, the Holy Spirit revealed to the believers that through the Cross, the enemy of good was judged and exposed, (Col 2: 15). Satan has been exposed as an impostor and a destroyer of mankind. The nations began to reject and abandon worshipping him when they heard the gospel of Christ’s Cross. The work of the Holy Spirit is an affirmation that Christ is greater and stronger than Satan. Christ grants His disciples authority to trample on the powers of darkness. The believer experiences in his daily life the pledge of authority that he received so that he may enjoy it completely the Day of Judgment, when Satan is judged and the believer obtains remarkable honor. Man will occupy the excellent heavenly

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 95: 3.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78:1.

degree from which Satan and all his soldiers fell. For this reason the verb “is judged” carries the sense of continuity, for the victory over the powers of darkness is a daily continuous work.

\* Again, the world is convicted “...of judgment, because the ruler of the world is judged”: that is Satan the ruler of the wicked. Satan dwells in the heart of this ‘world’ alone. He dwells in the hearts of those who love ‘the world’ just as our dwelling is in heaven if we are raised with Christ. Thus, just as Christ and we, His body, are one, likewise Satan with all the sinful whom he rules are one body. Therefore, just as we are not separate from righteousness about whom the Lord said, ‘I go to My Father’, similarly the sinful are not separate from that judgment that Christ said, “...because the ruler of this world is judged”.<sup>1</sup>

\* The ruler of this world is the ruler of darkness or of those who do not believe in Christ. Whoever liberates himself from this world is told, “you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord”, (Eph 5: 8). The ruler of this world about whom Christ says in a different speech, “...now the ruler of this world will be cast out”, (John 12: 31) is, indeed, judged as determined, and condemned to eternal fire.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* As he is judged through Me, they will know who will trample on him later. They will know My resurrection clearly, that is the sign of who judges the ruler of this world. For he is incapable of holding Me. While they said that I have a demon and that I am a deceiver, all these events will reveal they are false. For, I could not have won if I was under sin. But now he is judged and cast out.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**“I still have many things to say to you,  
But you cannot bear them now.” [12]**

The Lord Jesus Christ declared to them that He had many things that He did not desire to tell them because they would not be able to accept such things at that time. For, in Him, are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

\* Therefore, it is better for you that I depart if you would bear those things through My departure. What will happen? Is the Spirit greater than You and therefore we cannot

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 94:6.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 95:4.

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78: 1.

endure now but later we can? Will the Spirit work better and more perfectly? No. It is not so. For the Spirit also speaks My work.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* At that time when Christ said to them, “You cannot follow Me now...”, (John 13: 36), the disciples were not ready to die for Christ’s sake. However, later, innumerable men, women, children, boys and girls, young men and young women, old and young obtained the crown of martyrdom. The flock was ready for the sacrifice that the shepherds could not bear when the Lord said those words.<sup>2</sup>

\* Well, would we accept this matter as willingly? Many can bear those things since the Holy Spirit has come; though the disciples could not bear them before the coming of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

\* Although I yearn, ask, and pray with all zeal that the Lord uses you to remove my ignorance in this matter, yet though I am unworthy, God forbid! I ask the Lord our God patiently and I believe that I shall not complain if He refuses to open when I knock. I shall remember His words: “I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now,” (Jn 16: 12).<sup>4</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come,  
He will guide you into all truth;  
For He will not speak on His own authority,  
But whatever He hears He will speak;  
And He will tell you things to come.” [13]**

The Lord Jesus Christ promised they would enjoy the coming of the “Spirit of truth” who will guide them into all truth. The Lord had introduced Himself to them saying, “I am the truth”. Whoever obtains Him has the truth. But how may they obtain Him? Through the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of truth. The Spirit works in them, and makes them firm in Christ who is the divine Truth.

Did the Lord Jesus Christ conceal the truth from His disciples? He came to the world to offer the truth. He spoke to His disciples as much as they could bear, and He spoke to the multitude according to their capability. But they were unable to accept all the truth. He therefore sent His Holy Spirit to guide them and take them into new depths of the truth. Moreover, the Lord affirmed that the Spirit of truth does not teach anything contrary to what the Lord teaches. The Spirit hears from the Father in harmony with the Son, and utters what He hears for the glory of the Holy Trinity and the salvation of mankind.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78: 2.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 96: 1.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 96: 2.

<sup>4</sup> Letters, 166: 27.

The Spirit of God leads believers to prophecy (Rom 8: 14). He takes them through the road; He guides and accompanies them. He remains their support until they reach the end where they enjoy all the truth. He is like the captain of a ship who knows all the water ways, and navigates taking the passengers to the mainland safely.

He is the Spirit of truth and He guides the believer only to the truth (1 John 3: 27). He speaks what gives us growth and helps us toward future matters. And, as is written in Joel, “It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2: 28). This prophecy was realized as seen in Acts 11: 28; 20: 23; 21: 11. The Spirit also spoke about apostasy in the latter times (1 Timothy 4: 1).

\* He announced that without the Spirit we should live like small children. He said the Spirit will come and will change the small children into strong men through growth spiritually. He pointed that out, not to put the strength of the Spirit first, but to show that the perfect strength is in knowing the Trinity.<sup>1</sup>

\* The Son of God says concerning the Holy Spirit that He does not speak in His own authority. This means that the Spirit speaks in association with the Father and the Son. For, the Spirit is not separate or detached; He speaks what He hears. This means the Spirit does not speak without the Son, for He speaks the truth and breathes wisdom. He does not speak without the Father, for He is the Spirit of God. He does not hear on His own, for all things are from God. Therefore, what the Spirit says is the word of the Son, for the Spirit says nothing on His own authority. For the Trinity speaks of nothing outside Himself.<sup>2</sup>

\* This does not mean hearing whatever real, palpable words, but rather means the unity of will and strength that is in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Whatever the Spirit says, the Son says here (Jn 16: 13). Let us learn that what the Spirit says, the Son also says and what the Son says the Father also says. For, the work of the Trinity is one in thought and one in characteristic.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Saint Ambrose**

\* He said to His disciples concerning the Holy Spirit, “He will tell you”. He thus raised their distinguished understanding because human beings in general are more at ease when they know the future events. They had asked Him about that matter. Peter asked, “Lord, where are You going?” (Jn 13: 36). Thomas also said, “Lord, we do not know where You are going; and how can we know the way?” (Jn 14: 5). Now, He relieves them by making it clear that the Holy Spirit will tell them everything that is hidden. If you remark, ‘Why the Lord Christ did not give the Holy Spirit to His disciples before He left them?’ I answer, ‘Because the curse had not been removed and our sin had not been forgiven. Therefore, it was not fitting that the Holy Spirit comes when all people were

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<sup>1</sup> Of the Holy Spirit, Book 3: 14: 99.

<sup>2</sup> Of the Holy Spirit, 2: 12 (131, 133, 134).

<sup>3</sup> Of the Christian Faith, 5: 11 (133).

convicted. It is as though the Lord Christ says, ‘The hostility must be resolved; we must first make peace with our God, then accept this grant.’

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Saint Augustine** observes that the disciples, even after the crucifixion, the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Christ, were unable to comprehend such facts of belief as that He who created the world was the One crucified. That He was the Son of God who broke the way the Jews kept the Sabbath. Also the disciples could not understand that God was One Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; or that the Son was of one essence with and equal etc. to the Father. The disciples did not grasp all those facts clearly except through the Holy Spirit. When they were granted the Spirit love and zeal in the spirit filled their hearts that were enlightened with the knowledge of the truth.<sup>1</sup>

\*Therefore, dear beloved, you must not expect to hear us saying to you what the Lord refrained from imparting to His disciples because they could not bear such information. You must rather desire to grow in the love that the Holy Spirit granted to you pours in your hearts (Rom 5: 5). Thus, in your love for the spiritual and in the fervor of your spirit you can know the spiritual light. This will happen not through any sign that the corporal eyes see or a sound that rings in the corporal ear, but through the inner vision and hearing. You will then bear the spiritual word that the worldly people cannot endure. For, it is not possible to love the unknown. However, when a thing is known, even to a small degree, that thing is loved and with that same love a person obtains better and more complete knowledge.

If you grow in the love that the Holy Spirit pours in your hearts “He will teach you all the truth”, or as is written in some manuscripts, “He will guide you into all truth”. As it was said, “Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your Truth” (Ps 86:11). The result is that you will learn those things that the LORD refrained to speak of at that time. You will know them not through teachers outside, but “you will be taught by God” (John 6: 45).

Well, yes, now I have told you some things that have the same quality and you have accepted them. You have not only endured them, but you have also listened joyfully. For, this inner teacher who while He spoke externally to His disciples, said, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now,” [12]. He wishes to speak to us inwardly about what concerns God’s nature that is not incarnate. He wants to speak about that as He speaks to the angels who always see God’s face, but we are unable to endure that.

Therefore, when He says, “He will teach you all the truth” or “He will guide you into all truth” [13], I do not think that the fulfillment is possible in any man’s mind in this life. For, what man who lives in this corrupt body that resists the spirit can know all the truth? The Apostle says, “now, I know in part”. But, the knowledge of all the truth can be realized only through the Holy Spirit whose fervor we obtain now (2 Cor 1: 22). After

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 96: 3. Cf.



that we shall obtain perfect knowledge that the same Apostle talks about saying, "...then face to face" (1 Cor 13: 12).<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* This is our renewal; it makes of us an image of God again. This happens through the regenerating washing of the Holy Spirit that restores us so that we become God's children. We become a new creation again through the communion of the Spirit who delivers us from what was old.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Basil the Great**

**Saint Augustine** comments on the Lord Christ's words concerning the Holy Spirit that, "He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come," [13]. Saint Augustine says that as the Spirit proceeds from the Father (John 15: 26) eternally, He is from the Father and not from Himself. He is one with the Father in essence and in equality. He is from the Father and has the same knowledge. He hears from the Father from Whom He proceeds. To Him, hearing is knowledge, and knowledge is His existence that we have previously discussed. As He is not from Himself, but from Whom He proceeds and from Whom He has His existence, and knowledge (hearing is nothing but knowledge), that hearing is eternal because knowledge is eternal. What is eternal has neither beginning nor end. The verbs 'hears, knows' may be used in any tense, past, present, or future.<sup>3</sup>

**"He will glorify Me,  
For He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you." [14]**

The coming of the Holy Spirit and His work glorify the Son. For, the Father glorifies Him in heaven, and the Holy Spirit glorifies Him on earth. The Holy Spirit comes in the name of Christ. He works for the benefit of Christ's kingdom realizing the message of His gospel. He does not come to establish another kingdom; it is the very kingdom of Christ that is also that of the Father. For, everything that belongs to the Son, belongs to the Father. And what is the Father's is also the Son's.

As Christ became Son of Man, the Father gave the Son what is His for our sake. The Son, in turn, entrusted the work to the Holy Spirit. This proves the unity of the Trinity in work.

**"All things that the Father has are Mine.  
Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you." [15]**

The faithful who are baptized in the name of Christ enjoy fellowship with Him in His death and His resurrection in a manner that is not controlled by the outward senses. This is achieved through the work of the Holy Spirit who comes from heaven when the

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 96: 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ad. Eunom. 5

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 99: 4-5.

priest calls Him, just as the Lord Christ decreed in His holy church. This is the Spirit who takes of Christ's and gives us (John 16: 15).

The Spirit gives us this sacrament with Christ's grace because "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3: 5). "Blessed be God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1: 3-4).

**"He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you,"** (John 16: 14). According to Vulcanists<sup>1</sup> the intrinsic relationship of the three hypostases is that no one of the three can accept anything from one of the other two except through 'emanation'<sup>2</sup>.

**Photius** believes that those words do not mean that the Holy Spirit takes from what is the Son's, but rather what is the Father's because the Lord Christ did not say "He will take of Me" but said "He will take of what is Mine." The first statement means that He will take of Me personally, but the second statement speaks of another person who has family relationship with the speaker.<sup>3</sup> The LORD added, "All things that the Father has are Mine". Therefore, what the Spirit takes that is Mine, He takes from the Father.<sup>4</sup> What the Spirit takes, here, is not of the divine essence, but rather of the characteristics of our Lord Jesus Christ so that we may take the image of the Son (Rom 8: 29).

\* "All things that the Father has are Mine." What, then, is more clear than this unity? All things that the Father has are the Son's, and all things that are the Son's the Holy Spirit also accepts.<sup>5</sup>

\* He has accepted everything from the Father by rights of His eternal birth of Him. The Father appears in His full glory (He loses nothing by what He gives to the Son).<sup>6</sup>

\* "All things that the Father has are Mine" does not mean that the Father granted Him all that, but rather means that what He receives from the Father is His right because He is the Son born of the Father.<sup>7</sup>

\* There is no matter improbable since the Son has the same will that the Father has.<sup>8</sup>

### **3 – The Promise That He Will See Them after His Resurrection**

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<sup>1</sup> That the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. See the article about Vulcanus in the dialogue with the Catholic Church.

<sup>2</sup> Cross: Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 1985, p. 423.

<sup>3</sup> Photius: De S. Spiritus Mystaggia 22.

<sup>4</sup> Photius: De S. Spiritus Mystaggia 29.

<sup>5</sup> Of the Holy Spirit, 2: 11 (118).

<sup>6</sup> Of the Holy Spirit Book 3: 18: 223.

<sup>7</sup> Of the Christian Faith, 4: 8: 80.

<sup>8</sup> Of the Christian Faith, 2: 6: 51.

**“A little while, and you will not see Me;  
And again a little while and you will see Me,  
Because I go to the Father.” [16]**

As the Lord Christ goes the way of suffering and death, He departs temporarily in the flesh from them; this He describes as “a little while”. Then He reappears to them after His resurrection and gives them peace and comfort. A little while He dies and disappears; then He is risen and after a little while He ascends to heaven to the Father. Then He returns on the clouds to take His Church to everlasting glory. Thus, sooner or later, time is always a little while because there is no comparison between time and eternity. The apostle saint Peter says, “But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the LORD one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The LORD is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us.” (2 Peter 3: 8-9) As though Christ says, ‘My role necessitates that I leave you, but this is for your good, for your salvation and glory.’

\* “And again a little while and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.” He makes it clear, here, that He will not perish; His death is but a passing away. This is a declaration to them that He will return and that His departure is for a little while because He will come back. Their separation will be for a few moments, but His presence will be continuous.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**“Then some of His disciples said among themselves,  
‘What is this that He says to us,  
A little while, and you will not see Me,  
And again a little while, and you will see Me’  
And because I go to the Father’. [17]**

**They said therefore, ‘What is this that He says, ‘A little while’?  
We do not know what He is saying.” [18]**

The Lord Christ took pity on them when He saw they were confused and did not understand what He said. For, no one dared to ask Him, but they whispered among themselves asking each other what Christ meant. He did not abandon them in their perplexity, but began to explain what He said.

\* The disciples did not understand what the Lord Christ told them. Here, He wonders how in spite of hearing these words several times, they seemed as though they never heard them.

The Lord Christ said those words in His counsel to His disciples clarifying His great love for them and disclosing His Self, who He is.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 79. PG 59 – 465.

**“Now Jesus knew what they desired to ask Him,  
And He said to them,  
Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said,  
‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’? [19]**

**Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament,  
But the world will rejoice;  
And you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.” [20]**

As the disciples did not understand what He meant, He told them frankly that they would be sorrowful because of His Passion, crucifixion and death. He knew that they longed for knowledge and He, therefore, explained to them that matter. He did not give them the details, but He rather spoke about what would happen to them, about their feelings of sorrow and joy. He did not say more lest their bewilderment may increase. However, He affirmed that this would lead to their joy and enjoyment of the second birth.

The evil people find their happiness in the sadness and suffering of the saints, whereas the believer finds his joy in sharing the pain of those who suffer. He considers the misery of any man as being his own personally.

\* He showed them that after sorrow there will be joy and that sorrow will bring about joy. Sorrow will be for a short period.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* We understand that the disciples will be sorrowful because of Christ’s death, but will be soon filled with joy because of His resurrection. As for the ‘world’ by which He means the enemies who kill Christ, they will certainly be ecstatic for killing Him, when at the same time the disciples will be sorrowful.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow  
Because her hour has come,  
But as soon as she has given birth to the child,  
She no longer remembers the anguish,  
For joy that a human being has been born into the world.” [21]**

He did not promise He would abolish anguish, but He promised to introduce a new meaning of pain. Pain will be like labor pains. It is followed by the birth of the child and joy replaces pain.

\* What He says is as follows, ‘You will suffer labor pains but these sudden pains will bring you joy.’ These words affirm His resurrection. This journey is like a passage from the womb to daylight. To become a mother, a woman crosses a passage as in sorrow.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 101: 2.

Here also is inherent that the pangs of death are endured so that a newborn may result from them. He did not only say that the sorrow will go, but also that we shall not remember it. How great is the joy that follows! This is what will happen to the saints. Here He says "... human being", not a child, has been born. This is related to His resurrection, that a man is not born of the pangs of death, but is born of the Kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**“Therefore you now have sorrow;  
But I will see you again and your heart will rejoice,  
And your joy no one will take from you.” [22]**

Although we shall enjoy full joy in eternity, yet we receive the pledge here on earth that we may live in continuous internal joy. (2 Cor 6: 10). The happiness caused by the pleasures and attractions of the world turns quickly to sadness because the world changes continually. On the other hand, spiritual sorrow changes quickly to joy forever because the joy in Christ is constant. He gives us the reason of the joy that no one can take away. This reason is that He will appear to us and see us as members of His body. We shall see Him as our Head. For, this seems as One who has forsaken us for a short moment, but has returned and with great mercy and rich grace has gathered us (Is 54: 7).

His return is a return of joy to the heart. He returns as the true source of perpetual inner joy and satisfaction of the spirit. This joy no man or event can take from us because nothing can usurp the spirit from the Savior or take a man's spirit from the love of Christ.

\* “Your joy no one will take from you” [22] because their joy is Jesus Himself.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* He mentioned that example to make clear the temporary sorrow and the permanent joy and that the benefit gained from the Savior is great.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

#### **4 – Answering Their Prayers**

The second reason for their perpetual joy is that as Christ reveals Himself to them and sees them, they will be linked to the Father and whatever they ask Him in Christ's name they will obtain.

He blames them for not asking for anything in His name until then so that their joy may be complete. And, what will they require but that the Holy Trinity resides in them?!

**“And in that day you will ask Me nothing.  
Most assuredly, I say to you,  
Whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.” [23]**

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 79. PG. 59: 466.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 101: 3.

They do not need to ask for anything now that the Lord Christ has revealed Himself to them, for in Him is all satisfaction. The Lord Christ risen from the dead thus reveals Himself in the heart and so fulfills all needs. They ask for nothing because the Holy Spirit grants them all the truth and guides them into it so that they enjoy Christ's Kingdom.

\* If you ask: "What is the meaning of the words of the Lord Christ, 'whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you'?" We answer, "This means that they do not need a mediator, but if they mention His name alone they will be rewarded by receiving everything they require. This demonstrates the power of His name."

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* At this present time the Church is in the state of labor pains longing for the fruit of her struggle. But then she will give birth to real meditation. Now she moans in labor, but then she will give birth joyfully. Now she gives birth through her prayers, but then she will give birth through Praise.<sup>1</sup>

\* The Lord is not slow concerning His promise. A little while and we shall see Him, then we shall ask nothing because we shall not yearn for anything and there will be nothing concealed that we may ask about. That little while seems to us to be long because it still continues and will end. Then we shall feel how that period was a little while.<sup>2</sup>

\* In the world to come as we reach the Kingdom and become like Him for we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3: 2), what then shall we demand since He will satisfy all our desires with good things (Ps 103: 5)? As is written in another Psalm "I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness" (Ps 17: 15). One asks when one needs something. This has no place where there is abundance.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**"Until now you have asked nothing in My name.  
Ask, and you will receive,  
That your joy may be full." [24]**

They had not asked for anything until that moment. However, when He who will teach them to pray comes, they will ask for union with God the Father through the only begotten Son in the Holy Spirit.

\* The Lord Jesus knows that a man's spirit, that is to say, his rational mind that was created in the Lord's image, cannot be satisfied except by Him alone.

He knows that He is revealed and that He is concealed. He knows that in Him what is hidden has been revealed. He knows all that. The Psalm says, "O how great is

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 101: 5.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 101: 6.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 102: 3.

the multitude of thy sweetness, O Lord, which thou hast hidden for them that fear thee!  
Which thou hast wrought for them that hope in thee,” (Ps 30: 20 LXX Vulgate)

Your kindness is great and varied. You concealed it for those who fear You.  
For whom You will disclose it? For those who hope in You.  
A double question was raised, but one part of it solved the other part.  
Are those who fear You different from those who hope in You?  
Are those who fear God the same as those who hope in Him?

There is fear of the law, and hope in grace. The law warns those who are self-confident; grace helps those who trust in God. You serve the law, but if there is no grace, you are punished so that you cry, “O wretched man that I am” (Rom 7: 24). You know that you are conquered and your strength is degraded so you say, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” This is how the law warns whoever depends on himself.

Observe here is a human being who is self-dependent. He tries to struggle; he is prostrate and enslaved and is soon captured. Whoever learns to depend on God while the law kept warning him not to depend on himself grace supports him. As he relies on God, in trust he says: “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God, by Jesus Christ our Lord,” (Rom 7: 24-25, Vulgate).

Now contemplate His goodness, taste it and enjoy it. Listen to the Psalm, “O taste, and see that the Lord is sweet” (Ps 33: 9 Vulgate). He is good to you because He delivers you.

You lived in your bitterness when you relied on yourself. Now drink of His goodness and accept the enthusiasm of this great overflow.<sup>1</sup>

\* What you ask for is nothing compared to what I desire to give you. For, what will you ask for in My name? That the demons become subject to you. Do not rejoice in that, for that is nothing; if it was worthwhile He would have told them to rejoice.

“That your joy may be full” means ask for what may fill you.  
When you ask for temporary things you ask for nothing. “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again.” (John 4: 13)  
Ask for what gratifies you.

Speak Philip’s language: ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.’ The Lord said to him, “Have I been so long a time with you and have you not known Me? Philip, he that sees Me sees the Father also.” (John 14: 9 Vulgate).

Offer thanksgiving to Christ who became weak for your sake because you are weak. Let your desires be for Christ’s divinity so that you may be filled with it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 95: 1-5.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 95: 6.

\* His words, "...whatever you ask..." do not mean just asking for anything. They mean rather asking for something that is truly pertaining to the blessed life.

The words that follow, "Until now you have asked nothing in My name" [24] may have two meanings: either that you have not asked in My name because until now you have not known My name as you should. Or, you asked for nothing compared to what you should have asked. What you asked for may be considered as nothing.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**"These things I have spoken to you in figurative language;  
But the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language,  
But I will tell you plainly about the Father." [25]**

He offers us great knowledge concerning the Father so that we may feel His fatherhood, enter His mysteries, and contemplate His extreme glory. The Father will not be strange to us and this will give us full joy.

In spite of all that He explained to them, still He did not reveal all the divine mysteries because they could not bear them then. He spoke to them in figurative language, not plainly. But after His resurrection, His ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit, He will speak to them about the mysteries plainly.

\* As though the Lord Christ says to them, 'At My resurrection you will understand all My words perfectly.'

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Saint Augustine** interprets the word 'the hour', or 'the time' here as meaning the future when we see God face to face. It is as St. Paul says, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known," (1 Cor 13: L 12).

**"In that day you will ask in My name,  
and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you" [26]**

As though He says, 'I do not need to tell you that I shall not stop asking the Father for you through My Blood that was shed for you. My love for you will not cease and the love of the Father for you will not end.'

\* How will the Son not ask the Father, for rather the Father and the Son listen to those who ask. No one can comprehend this except with the spiritual mental eye.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 102: 2.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 102: 4.



**“For the Father Himself loves you,  
Because you have loved Me,  
And have believed that I came forth from God.” [27]**

The secret behind the Father’s love for the faithful is their faith working through love, (Gal 5: 6). Through their love for the Son they enjoy the Father’s love for them. The faithful then feel free to ask the Father, not in fear, but in the privilege they have, that is the love of their heavenly Father who loves His children.

\* The reason for our love is that God loves us. Certainly, our love for God is a divine gift. He gave us this grace, that we love Him. He loved us when we did not love Him. Even when we did not please Him, He loved us so that we may become a cause of joy to His eyes. For, we could not love the Son if we did not love the Father also. The Father loves us because we love the Son. We yearn to obtain from the Father and the Son the ability to love the Father and the Son because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Spirit of the Father and Son, (Rom 5: 5). Through the Spirit whom we love, we love both the Father and the Son. Therefore, God promotes that pious love in us and with it we worship Him. He saw that it was good and on that basis He Himself loved what He promoted in us. However, He would not have worked in us if He did not love to work in us.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

## **5 – His Ascension to Heaven**

**“I came forth from the Father  
And have come into the world.  
Again, I leave the world  
And go to the Father.” [28]**

Here, the Lord speaks to them openly about His incarnation that ends in His ascension so that He may carry the believing humanity with Him. This is the secret of His love, that He appeared in the flesh and carried us to glory.

He came forth from the Father who dedicated Him to this world and sealed Him. He descended to our world with amazing humility and great divine love. Then, He left the world in the flesh and returned in His ascension to the Father. This is the mystery of the entire Gospel: the divine incarnation, His death in the flesh, then His resurrection and His ascension to heaven. This is the key of heaven!

\* He says, “I came forth from God” announcing thus that His nature is the same given to Him at His birth.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 102: 5.

<sup>2</sup> On the Trinity, 6 (31).

\* “I came forth from the Father, and have come into the world.” The last clause is a reference to His incarnation. The first refers to His essence.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers**

\* When Christ says that He “came forth” from the Father, do not imagine a change in place as that happening to the people. Do not interpret “I have come” in the language of motion, but rather as referring to His incarnation.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* He was speaking about His physical suffering and His resurrection and through His resurrection, those who doubted became believers. For, He truly is God who is omnipresent and does not cross from one place to another. But as a man, He leaves but by Himself. He, therefore, says in another context, “Arise let us go from here,” (John 14: 31). He thus leaves and comes. This is the common thing He shares with us.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* He came forth from the Father because He is of the Father. He came into the world to reveal to the world the body that He took from the Virgin. He left the world by withdrawing in the flesh and He went to the Father by ascending as a man. However, He did not leave the world by withdrawing His active presence that rules the world.<sup>4</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

## **6 – His Abandonment during His Suffering**

**His disciples said to Him,  
“See, now You are speaking plainly,  
And using no figure of speech!” [29]**

The gentle loving rebuke of the Lord Jesus Christ gave them confidence and the feeling that He was speaking plainly, and answering the questions they thought about, and could not express or find answers for. The disciples felt He was speaking to them quite frankly and plainly, especially that they believed He was the Messiah for the entire world, knew all things and nothing was hidden from Him. He tests the hearts and minds. He does not need anyone to ask Him, for He knows the secrets, thoughts, and hidden requirements of every one.

**Saint Augustine** observes that the disciples thought He was speaking to them openly and using no figure of speech, though the hour had not yet come when this would be realized according to His divine promise. This was achieved when He completed His words saying, “Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own,” [32]<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On the Trinity, 6 (31).

<sup>2</sup> In 1 Cor. Hom. 20.

<sup>3</sup> On the Holy Spirit, Book 2: 8: 80.

<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 102: 6.

<sup>5</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 104: 1.

**“Now we are sure that You know all things,  
And have no need that anyone should question you.  
By this we believe that You came forth from God.” [30]**

As though they declared, ‘You have known the misgivings that caused us to doubt even before we revealed them and You gave us peace as You said, “for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me,”’ [27].

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe?”[31]**

The Lord Christ answers “Do you now believe?” Will your belief remain steadfast? The hour has come, that you will be scattered and leave Me!

\* May men not set aside thinking about the Son when they read about God alone, or stop thinking about the Father when they read about the Son only.

The Son on earth is not without the Father (John 10: 30). How then may you think that the Father is in heaven without the Son?

The Son in the flesh is not alone. It is written, “I am not alone, because the Father is with Me”. So do you think that the Father dwells alone in the light?<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

**“Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has come,  
That you will be scattered, each to his own,  
And will leave Me alone.  
And yet I am not alone,  
Because the Father is with Me.” [32]**

The Lord came to take our place so that we may enjoy sharing His glory. We all often feel isolated. Our parents may be with us, but we cry with David, “My father and my mother forsook me”. Our friends and beloved may surround us, but we groan, “No one shares my feelings or understands my deep thoughts”. These are the screams of the spirit that sin has broken and alienated us from God, the real provider. There is no one who can fill the inner void. But now that the Lord Jesus Christ has come without sin, He does not feel isolated because He is never separate from the Father and His Holy Spirit. Yet, He was alone among men; He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. When the time of His suffering came, His disciples left Him and He was alone. However, He declares, “I am not alone, because the Father is with Me,” [32]. This is the cry of victory of every spirit that unites with the suffering Christ. For, that spirit will not feel secluded or alone since God dwells in that spirit and never goes away.

## **7 – His Victory for Them**

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<sup>1</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 3: 3: 22-33.

**“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace.  
In the world you will have tribulation,  
But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” [33]**

Through faith Christ enters our hearts and we enjoy His victory for us. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5: 4-5).

The peace that the Lord Jesus Christ gives them offers the blessed, glorious life so that they may enjoy the spirit of strength and victory along with the heavenly comfort and divine support.

He does not conceal from them the fact that in the world they will have tribulation. However, He asks them to be of good cheer in the middle of tribulation because He will be revealed in their life as overcoming the sinful world.

It is said that an artist wished to present a painting of peace. He chose to paint a very stormy day and a huge rock that was battered by waves on all sides. In this painting there was a ship that was wrecked by the waves and corpses of sailors and passengers floated on the water in the middle of a vortex. A dove that built a nest in a hole in the middle of the rock lay there quite secure. The artist then wrote the word “Peace” on the rock directly below that hole. Thus is our peace in Jesus Christ the Rock of ages. In Him we dwell and have rest amid the vortex and tribulations of life.

\* The Lord tells His disciples that in the world they will have tribulation. This means that as long as they are in the world they will be oppressed. This will happen not only in the present, but also in the future.

\* He allows us also to overcome by looking up to the Head of our faith. We walk the same path that He passed through for our sake. We are not dead because we struggle with death. We are immortal because of our victory. Does death corrupt our bodies? So what? Our bodies will not remain corrupt, but will rather be in a better state.

Let us then overcome the world. Let us run toward eternity. Let us follow the King. Let us prepare the memorial of victory. Let us despise the worldly pleasures. We do not need much effort to achieve this.

Let us turn to heaven so that we may conquer the world! When you do not desire the world, you overcome it. When you deride it you vanquish it.

We are strangers and passengers. Let us not grieve for any sad thing related to the world.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 78: 3.

\* We trust in Him who says, “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” [33], because with His help and protection we conquer Satan our enemy.<sup>1</sup>

\* Why does He say to us “Be of good cheer”, but that He has overcome for our sake and has fought for our sake?

How did He fight? He fought by taking our nature for Himself.

He overcame for us as He revealed to us His resurrection. Cling, O man, to God who created you a man. Cling fast to Him and put your trust in Him.

Pray that He may be your strength. Say to Him, ‘In You, O Lord, is my strength’. Then, you will sing when people threaten you. And what you will sing are the words the Lord Himself has told you, “In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid, what can man do to me?” (Ps 56: 11)<sup>2</sup>.

\* In the trials they faced after His glorification they accepted the Holy Spirit and they did not leave the Lord Christ.

They fled from city to city but they did not run away from Him.

As trials overtook them in the world, they found peace in Him.

Instead of wandering away from Him, they rather found their refuge in Him. The Holy Spirit worked in them and thus they realized Christ’s words, “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” [33].

Believers in Christ are joyful and victorious, but in whom? In Him since He conquers the world because His members overcome the world. For this reason the Apostle says, “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory” and adds immediately, “through our Lord Jesus Christ,” (1 Cor 15: 57)<sup>3</sup>.

**Saint Augustine**

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<sup>1</sup> Letters, 39.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 67: 4.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 103: 3.

**Meditations**  
**Inspired by the Gospel of John**  
**Chapter 16**

\* Do Not Leave Me Alone!

\* Look, the world aims its arrows at Me!  
They think My death serves God and them!  
My solace is that they wanted to be free of You not knowing You are their Savior  
They wished to be free of Me yet I shall not stop loving them.

\* Do not leave me alone.  
As You have been tried, You can help the suffering ones like me!  
You have ascended to Your heaven  
But You have not abandoned me, for You fill heaven and earth.

\* You have sent Your Holy Spirit, the source of my comfort  
To convict me of sin, so that I trust in Him who forgives my sins.  
To convict me of righteousness, so that I may appear before the Father concealed in Your  
righteousness!  
To convict me of judgment, so that I may see Satan condemned under my feet!

\* May Your Spirit guide me  
May He show me Your entire truth  
So that I may know Your plan for me!  
By filling me You are revealed in me  
I see, hear, and feel Your love!

+ Your sweet Spirit overflows with Your sweetness in me  
Amid the suffering of the world I enjoy Your divine comfort  
He carries me to You in the garden alone.  
All have abandoned You, but no one can separate You from Your Father  
Give me, in my solitude, the joy of feeling Your divine presence!  
Yes, I pray You not to leave me alone.

AMEN

+++

## CHAPTER 17

### THE FAREWELL PRAYER

After the long but joyful and comforting exposition of the Lord's speech to His disciples (that speech extends over four chapters: 13-16) John the Evangelist gives us the overt farewell prayer delivered before them. This is a unique speech given by the Son in the last moments before He is led to be crucified. This prayer is different from the Lord's Prayer that the Lord Himself has taught us. The Lord's Prayer concentrates on asking for the forgiveness of sins. But this other prayer reveals those longings in the heart of the Lord for His Church. Those yearnings are realized through the Cross. Christ did not need to pray for forgiveness of sins because He is without sin; He is Himself the One who forgives sins.

This is considered the longest prayer of the Lord that the Evangelists record for us. However, we cannot say that it is the longest communication between the Lord and the Father, for He spent the entire night praying before He chose the twelve disciples, (Luke 12:6). There are also other occasions when He spent a long period praying.

This prayer has a special sanctity for the believers because it occurs in the shadow of the Cross. It befits that unique Intercessor and Savior who carries His Church in Himself as the members of His holy body to offer her to His Holy Father. This is the request of the Son for salvation [24] breaking the veil that separated the human race from the Father.

This is considered a family prayer presented by the Head of the family, Jesus Christ, on behalf of His family, the disciples or the entire Church. It is a farewell prayer that He offers, and His disciples hear after His farewell speech to them about the mystery of His relationship with the Father. Now, He speaks openly with the Father for their sakes to reveal to them His role toward them while He sits at the Father's right hand.

It is an ecclesiastic prayer and as **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, in this prayer Jesus is the High Priest who acts on behalf of His people. This prayer is called the high ecclesiastic prayer, or the prayer of the High Priest. He offers it to prepare the human race to accept the fruits of the unique sacrifice. This prayer forms the highest announcement of the mystery of the unity of the Father and the Son.<sup>1</sup> It is not a mere act but a presence in the Father to whose bosom He carries us.

He offered it as a prayer of the soul after the offering of the Christian Easter sacrament. That is to say, He prayed after He had given them His body and blood for the remission of sins and for eternal life for them. This prayer is for their preservation in the grace they received. It is as though the Lord Jesus Christ asserts to us our need to pray

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<sup>1</sup> Boris Bobrinskoy: *The Mystery of the Trinity*, St. Vladimir 1999, p. 83.

continuously so that we may keep the divine grace, and so that God may guard us in the rich blessings of His divine sacraments.

This is a Lord's prayer presented by the Lord of glory to teach us how to pray. It is a prayer when in confrontation of death. It is filled with sweetness because He faces death in order that He may sanctify His beloved. Jacob blessed the twelve patriarchs, or fathers, before his death. Moses blessed the twelve tribes also before his death. Now, the Lord Jesus Christ blesses the Church in the entire world before He gives His life a sacrifice of love for their sakes. The clear theme in this prayer is the practical affirmation of what He said to His disciples, **"Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"**, (16:33). Now that the moments of His crucifixion are very close, He looks at His death not as a catastrophe approaching Him, but as victory He realizes for the human race. He repeated this truth several times to His disciples, but they were not yet able to comprehend it. Therefore, He asked the Father to support them during the resurrection so that they may understand it quickly and enjoy its blessings. Now while He walks the road of the Cross He delivers His disciples in the hands of the Father. For, there is no power that can support them except the divine grace.

|                                                           |              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>1- Christ's Prayer for Himself</b>                     | <b>1-5</b>   |
| <b>2- A general Prayer for Others</b>                     | <b>6-10</b>  |
| <b>3- A Prayer for Them That the Father May Keep Them</b> | <b>11-16</b> |
| <b>4- A Prayer for Them to Be Sanctified</b>              | <b>17-19</b> |
| <b>5- A Prayer for Unity</b>                              | <b>20-23</b> |
| <b>6- A Prayer for Them to Be Glorified</b>               | <b>24-26</b> |

#### **1- Christ's Prayer for Himself**

##### **"Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven" [1]**

As the Word of God became a truly perfect man, He prayed to assert His submission even to the law and the system of worship. He prayed also to reveal His relationship to the Father, for He was accused as being Beelzebub, the ruler of the devils and that He was not from God.

The Lord Christ did not need to pray since He is one in essence with the Father. But as our representative, He offers up this prayer for Himself. "Glorify Your Son" [1] so that we do not cease to ask for our glory in Him.

As Christ is God we pray to Him. As He became man He prays so that all righteousness may be complete in Him. It has been said to Him as to us, "Ask of Me, and I will give you," (Ps 2:8). Now, He asks the Father and gives a special honor to prayer so that we may obtain satisfaction in prayer. Paul the Apostle says, "Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered", (Heb 5: 7-8). He bought the human race with His blood. He offered blood to ask the Father to give Him the human race to dwell in Him and be justified. Without Him we



cannot ask God as our Father and we cannot obtain His blessings. He sanctified our prayers with His prayer. He opened for us the way of meeting with the Father through the divine pleasure. He prayed on our behalf, for He knows the depth of our hearts (Ex 23: 9). He understands perfectly our needs and He is the only path that goes up to heaven to the Father's bosom. Therefore, He is the only one who is able to sanctify our prayers.

The Lord Jesus Christ lifted up His eyes to heaven as He had done before (John 11: 41). Why? He dwells in heaven in His divinity and He does not need to lift up His eyes to heaven like someone begging the Father for something. However, as a Son of Man, the Lord sanctified even the movements of the body so that we also may lift up our eyes with His eyes and He lifts up our hearts to heaven during prayer (Ps 25: 1). At that time, the Jews lifted up their heads and opened their eyes toward heaven during prayer. The Lord used this same popular position common at that time so that we may learn to follow the church congregation in the church rites without confusion. This does not mean that prayers must necessarily be offered in no other manner. The Lord praised the tax-collector who did not dare lift up his eyes and stood beating his breast in repentance (Luke 18: 13). The Lord Himself bowed down as He spoke with the Father in Gethsemane (Matt 26: 39).

**“Father, the hour has come.**

**Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You.” [1]**

The Lord Jesus Christ calls the Father, His Father, for He is His Father in essence, so that when we lift up our eyes with Him, we may look at God as our Father by the adoption that we obtained through the Holy Spirit. He guides us to His Father in the spirit of courage, and hope in getting blessings from His divine hands.

**“The hour has come” [1]** He often repeated that His hour had not come, but now that He begins walking the road of the Cross, He says, “the hour has come” and He knows it. Man does not know his time (Ecc 9: 12), but the Son of Man knows the hour and calls it “this hour” (Jn 12: 27), and “the hour” (Jn 17: 1). For, there is no hour in the entire history of humanity, or since the beginning of time like the hour of the Cross. It opened the gates of heaven, reconciled the human race with the Father, and gave them the right to eternal inheritance and heavenly glory.

The hour of Christ's suffering is, in God's plan, the highest aim of the Lord from the beginning and even before His incarnation. The decisive hour came when the battle between heaven and hell for the glory of God and the happiness for man took place eternally. As though He says, ‘the hour has come when the powers of darkness will afflict Your Son. Now, O Father, glorify Your Son.’ It is a unique hour, the hour of war between Light and the ruler of darkness, between heaven and hell. John the beloved saw it and said, “he went out conquering and to conquer”, (Rev 6: 2). He went out riding the Cross that breaks all powers of darkness.

In the midst of the suffering that the Son accepted joyfully, the Father glorified His Son. When the mobs tried to arrest Him they fell on their faces. After Judas betrayed

Him he confessed his crime and ended by committing suicide. Also Pilate's wife sent to warn her husband not to harm Jesus. Nature also glorified Him. The sun was darkened and also the moon was eclipsed, the rocks were split and the graves opened. The veil of the temple testified also, for the veil was torn. Men saw all that when the Lord was brought to judgment and during His suffering and death. These are signs of glory, but that does not preoccupy the Lord. When He says, **"glorify Your Son"** He is absorbed in the glory that is not visible to the human eye, that is in the glory of victory over Satan, the defeat of the powers of darkness, the freedom of the captives in Hades, and the entrance of the thief on the right into Paradise. The Father glorified Him also in His resurrection and by sending the Holy Spirit to the disciples. He glorified Him by establishing His kingdom in the hearts of men. This was His preoccupation for which He prayed.

Satan wanted to give Him the kingdoms of the world when he tempted Him. That was on condition that He gave up His being the Son of God and refused the glory the Father gives Him. However, the Lord representing us did not accept glory except from the hands of His Father because in Him we inherit glory and we are sanctified as children of God.

The Lord offered up prayer before surrendering to death as a sacrifice for our sins. He prayed so that we may offer up a similar prayer as we travel in the world. When we feel that the hour of our departure from the world has come, we call out to God, 'the hour has come, stand close to me and reveal Yourself to me., My earthy house, this tent, is destroyed and I shall have a building that is not made with hands of men. As You have glorified me with Your grace, glorify my body the day I meet You on the clouds.'

**"That Your Son also may glorify You."** I give You my will and I devote all my energy and gifts for the sake of Your kingdom. My victory, salvation and glory are a living testimony to Your great glory and rich grace.

Saint John the Evangelist wrote this Gospel so that every soul may deeply experience the pledge of eternal glory and so that it would be possible for the entire person, spiritually and physically, to enjoy sharing that glory. We, therefore, find the word '**glory**' repeated 18 times in this Gospel more than in any other book in the New Testament, except in 2 Corinthians in which the Apostle speaks about the suffering and trouble of the servant of God whom the Lord glorifies. As for the verb "glorify", it is repeated here 23 times, whereas in any other book in the New Testament, it does not occur more than 9 times. It is as though John the Evangelist wishes us to soar with the Holy Spirit so that we may relish the glory that the Lord Christ prepares for us. This is truly the Book of glory in which the Word made Himself of no reputation so that we may encounter Him and get acquainted with Him and His love, and unite with Him and so we are glorified.

This is the glory of the Son that we enjoy His Cross and so share His glory. This is the glory of the Father also for He so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (Jn 3: 16), that is to say, enjoy everlasting glory. Thus, the glory of the Son and His Father is one.

It is glory based, not on necessity or increase in Their glory, but rather on Their love for us. We enjoy sharing this glory through the divine act of redemption.

**\* Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven....** When the Lord Christ said to His disciples, “In the world you will have tribulation” (Jn 16:33), He asked them to pray so that their spirits may not be troubled. For, they saw Him as a man, and for their sake He prayed when He raised Lazarus from the dead. He mentioned the reason for His prayer: “because of the people who are standing by”. He said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me,” (Jn 11: 41-42).

You may say, ‘Yes, these things should have happened because of the presence of the Jews. But why should they occur in the presence of His disciples?’ My answer is, ‘It was necessary that this should take place in front of His disciples who had said, “Now we are sure that You know all things and have no need that anyone should question You,”’ (Jn 16: 30). They needed that He would verify this for them more than for all the other people. And there is another reason: the Evangelist did not call this act of the Lord Christ, ‘a prayer’, but said, “Jesus lifted up His eyes,” (Jn 11: 41) and spoke to His Father in a more precise expression.

The Lord Jesus Christ says to the Father, “**...the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You.**” This shows us that He did not go to His Cross unwillingly. How can He do so unwillingly when He prays that this may happen, and He calls it glory and honor not only for the crucified, but also for His Father with Him. For, through the Cross the Son is not glorified alone, but His Father is glorified also with Him. Before the Cross, even the Jews did not know the Father. It has been said, “Israel does not know Me” (Is 1: 3). But after the Cross, the entire world ran toward Him.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* If the Son had died in the flesh and did not rise again, He would without doubt have not been glorified by the Father, nor would He have glorified the Father. Now that He is glorified in His resurrection through the Father, He glorifies the Father through the preaching of His resurrection., This is revealed in the very arrangement of the words: “Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You.” This means, ‘Raise Me up so that through Me the entire world may know You’<sup>2</sup>.

**Saint Augustine**

Saint Augustine observes that the Greek word for ‘glory’ (doksa) is translated into Latin as ‘clarifica’, meaning, making the matter sparkle. When the Son reveals the Father, He reveals His true Self. The human race then see His radiance and so praise Him. Concerning this, the Scripture says, “Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; they will still be praising You” (Ps 84: 4). Praise for God is without end when the

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 80: 1.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 105: 1.

knowledge of God is perfect. Because the knowledge is perfect, there is glamour and glory.<sup>1</sup>

**“As You have given Him authority over all flesh,  
That He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.” [2]**

As He is the Only Begotten Son, His authority is related to the Father’s authority since He is born of the Father and He has no authority from an outside source. He is one with the Father in divine nature and essence. As He accepted in obedience to achieve our salvation and reconcile us with the Father, He obtained authority from Him. But this authority is different from the authority of the kings and rulers of this world. His authority to reconcile humanity with the Father and make us adopted children through the Holy Spirit makes us as relatives and grants us everlasting life. He is Himself everlasting life. As Son of Man He accepted eternal life on our behalf so that through Him He may pour His love in every man.

**‘You have given Him’:** it has been said that St. John loved the verb “give”, for it occurs 76 times in this Gospel. It is repeated 17 times in this prayer, 13 times of which is about the Father giving to the Son and four times about the Son giving to His disciples. The repetition of this verb bears many meanings to the Evangelist. For, as he speaks about the divine Word being the only Son of God in nature, he sees the Father giving birth to the Son eternally and giving Him all He has because He is the same in essence. So, the Father does not give the Son a gift or a blessing as offered from outside. But, as They are two distinctive hypostases, and yet They are One in essence, the giving cannot be comprehended or expressed in words. It is not subject to time, nor to change in its measure or degree. All that is the Father’s is also the Son’s and all that the Son has the Father also has in divine attributes. Through this extremely divine mystery, the Evangelist sees the Son Incarnate overflowing in grants through the divine grace. His gifts to His believers are free and are given by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Every divine blessing is given to us by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as Saint Cyril the Great repeats.

The Church says in almost every Holy Liturgy that Christ is the **“Lover of Mankind”** to affirm that it is the pleasure of the Holy Trinity to give continually to mankind, and without ceasing so that men may carry the icon of Christ and enjoy the heavenly wedding with Him eternally.

The word ‘flesh’ here means ‘human beings’ in general (Gen 6: 3). He has authority over mankind, on the body as on the soul. As He offered up Himself a sacrifice once for all to reconcile all with God, He tasted death by His grace for everyone (Heb 2: 9). As He is the Messiah, Savior of the world who became man to achieve redemption, He received from the Father general authority over all flesh, that is to say, over all mankind, so that by sanctifying Himself for that deed, He reconciles all with the Father. By His grace He tasted death for everyone (Heb 2: 9). In this way, the realization of the promise that the Messiah would obtain the nations for His inheritance was fulfilled (Ps 2:

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 105: 3.

8). He will join the nations with the Jews (2 Cor 5: 14-15; Rom 5: 21; 1 Tim 2: 4-6). The authority of the Lord Jesus Christ is over all mankind, but He grants everlasting life to the believers whom the Father gives to the Son as an everlasting inheritance. He has power over mankind to grant life to God's children and make all things for them (2 Cor 4: 15). All the divine promises are for their sakes.

In His prayer for Himself that the Father may glorify Him, He bears love for the Father as for us. For, His glory is the glory of His Father and in Him we enjoy communion with His glory. We experience the power of His resurrection and our hearts go up with Him to enjoy the splendor of His glory!

He does not say, 'will give', but says 'give' because the Son's gift for us, or His offering up Himself as a gift for us, is an ongoing gift up to now. We accept it, live it, enjoy it, and grow in it until we enjoy it in a greater and more magnificent way when we meet Him face to face.

\* If you say, 'What does the Lord mean by "You have given Him authority over all flesh"?' I answer, 'He has shown from the beginning that preaching Him is not limited to the Jews alone, but extends to the entire world. Here, He announces beforehand the first call to the nations (after the Jews reject Him). For He had said previously, "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles" (Matt 10: 5), but the time came when He said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Matt 28: 19). He has shown that the Father desired that.'

This matter was completely opposite to the Jews and also to the disciples' views. Even after that it was not easy for them to accept preaching to the Gentiles until they received the Spirit's teaching, for this to the Jews was a stumbling block.<sup>1</sup>

\* What does 'all flesh' mean? Assuredly not all men believed in Him. However, He offered that all may believe and if some people ignored His words, this is not the fault of the teacher but that of those who did not accept His teachings.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**"And this is eternal life,  
That they may know You, the only true God,  
And Jesus Christ whom You have sent" [3]**

**'Eternal life':** Christ offers up Himself a sacrifice and so abolishes the work of sin, that is death. He abides in believers and they abide in Him and enjoy Him who is Life that cannot be opposed. Through Him, the believer can cross the boundaries of time and his spirit can enjoy eternity in heaven. The believer's body is glorified having a new nature befitting eternity. The redemption offered by the Lord Jesus Christ is called 'eternal life' for the following reasons:

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 80: 1.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, 80: 2.

- (1) The believer has the right to stand before divine justice, for he is protected by Christ's sacrifice that preserves him from eternal death.
- (2) Life, even in this present world acquires a new taste and message, for the believer, through the redemptive work of the Lord Christ, infuses in others the spirit of joy and inner peace.
- (3) It is eternal life because it goes beyond time boundaries and defies death.
- (4) It reveals the perpetual spirit and body of the believer.

**“That they may know You”:** knowledge is the path to eternal life. It is knowledge of the Father, the only true God, and worshipping and obeying Him, and accepting the Lord Jesus Christ the Teacher, Sacrifice, Priest, and Savior, the only true Christ.

**“The true God”:** God is not a mere name or a mental idea. He is the true God who is preoccupied with His creation. He cares for the salvation of mankind. He is active in His infinite love. In His divine love He sent His Only Begotten Son to work salvation for mankind. This is not a mere intellectual knowledge, but is rather an operative knowledge and an appreciation of God's redemptive plan. It is an agreement with that plan, so that the believer accepts Jesus Christ as Lord, Redeemer, Teacher, and He who satisfies the entire needs of the believer. It is a practical acceptance of the Lord's divine message. The believer thus enjoys a continual renewal of his life through the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, knowledge is life and communion with Him Whom we get to know. What is said about the only true God is not contrary to what is said about Jesus Christ, but is rather opposed to paganism and the worship of many gods.

Some writers interpret the verse as follows: ‘that they may know You and Jesus Christ whom You have sent, the only true God.’

**Saint Ambrose** considers the believer an intelligent merchant who approaches the desk of the spiritual cashier to give the talents and, in exchange, insists to receive the divine promises of a free eternal life and knowledge of the true God.

\* This is the Word of the Lord: this is the precious talent through which you are saved. This money must be seen on the spirits' table so that through true continual trade of good currency it would be possible to go everywhere by buying eternal life. ‘This is the eternal life that You, O Almighty Father, grant us freely so that we may know that You are “the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” [3],’<sup>1</sup>.

+ In this way He puts an end to the argument of the followers of Sabelius who say that the Three Hypostases are only three names or forms of one hypostasis and also the Jews who heard Him speak. The former group must not say that the Father is the Son, for that would have been possible for them to say if He had not added “and Christ”. The others must not separate the Son from the Father.

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<sup>1</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 5: Prologue: 15.

\* The holy Scriptures say that eternal life is based on the knowledge of the Transcendent and on good works.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* “The only true God”: He says this in a way that distinguishes Him from others, who are not gods, as He was about to send them to the Gentiles. But if the heretics do not accept this and because of the word “the only” they refuse to believe that the Son is the true God, they, then, refuse definitely that He is God. However, if the Son is God and is the Son of God who is called “the only God”, it is clear that He also is the true God and that the word “only” is for distinction from the others.

If the Son was not the true God, how then could He be “the Truth”? For the Truth is far above “the true”.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* **First:** there is no eternal life in acknowledging God the Father without acknowledging Jesus Christ.

**Secondly:** Christ is glorified in the Father. Eternal life is specifically inherent in knowing the only true God and also in knowing Jesus Christ whom God has sent.<sup>3</sup>

\* Thus, the Father is glorified through the Son through whom we know Him.

Glory is this: that the Son who became flesh accepted authority from Him over all flesh along with taking us back to everlasting life.

But, what is eternal life? His words inform us that life is “that they may know You and Jesus Christ whom You have sent, the only true God.” Is there any doubt or difficulty here, or any contradiction? Life is that you know the only true God.<sup>4</sup>

**Saint Hilary of Poitiers**

**“I have glorified You on the earth.**

**I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.” [4]**

The Lord Jesus Christ announces that He did not come so that He may rest, but so that He may work all day until He finishes the work of salvation. As He carries us in Him we do not know rest except in continual work to achieve our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2: 12). We must not accept a mid-way or solution, but must strive all the time for our redemption.

**“I have glorified You”:** Our Lord Jesus considered His redemptive work completed in fact, for He bowed His head in acceptance of the cup with love so that He

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<sup>1</sup> Duties of the Clergy, 2: 2: 5.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, 80: 2.

<sup>3</sup> On the Trinity: 9: 42.

<sup>4</sup> On the Trinity, 3 (13, 14).

may carry our sins in His flesh and offer up Himself a sacrifice on our behalf. He, thus, achieved His message. He speaks with the Father saying that He has finished the work that He received from the Father. He looks forward to the Gospel being preached everywhere in the world, and to the believers getting to know the love of the true God, and enjoying their union with Him and their worship of Him. He glorified the Father because He pleased the Father and completed His work. In this is also pleasure and glory for the Son.

We did not see the Lord Christ complaining that His life had been full of trouble since His birth to the Cross. He never spoke about how much He suffered insults and accusations, pain and temptation as the Son of Man. For, He came to work for the glory of the Father by declaring divine love practically for mankind. On His way to Golgotha He is involved only in achieving the will of the Father that is one with His own will. We, when we unite with Him, we overstep all incidents and suffering, and care only for the glory of God in us and in our brethren, so that we may complete our message for the sake of God's kingdom. The Lord Jesus Christ did not come to the world to walk a road covered with flowers. He rather came to find His pleasure in fulfilling all righteousness. Likewise, the Father finds His pleasure in Christ because Christ reveals Him practically and realizes His plan concerning man. The Lord finished the work and will of the Father so that we may have salvation. Now, He still fulfills in us that work and will, so that He may be seen in us and so that we may share His glory.

In the same spirit, it befits the servants in the church- who have God's grace- to achieve His divine plan for salvation, to behold mankind with hope for the redemption of many. It befits us as members of Christ's body to glorify the Father by achieving His will and His work as much as possible. We must glorify Him on the earth, which He has given to the human race, in preparation for crossing over to eternity. It befits us to persevere to the last breath in fulfilling the divine work.

+ The Lord Jesus Christ said to the Father, **"I have glorified You on the earth"**. He said that, because the Father is glorified in heaven. He is glorified in His nature, and in His angels who worship Him. Christ does not speak about that glory that the Father has in essence. He rather mentions the glory that is in the worship of people for Him. He said, "I have finished the work which You have given Me to do." If you ask, 'If the work of the Lord Christ had not yet been finished, how could He say, "I have finished" it?' My answer is, 'Either that He meant that He finished the work that concerned Him, or He spoke about what will happen as though it had already happened. Moreover, everything has been achieved because the root of all blessings has been prepared and the fruit will necessarily follow. This will be through His presence and support in all those subjects that will be fulfilled later. He, therefore, says again in humility: "the work which You have given Me"'<sup>1</sup>.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* What thing did the human nature of the Only Begotten Son not accept? That thing was evil, for He did all that was good as human nature united with the Word through whom

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 80: 2.



all things were made. But, how did He finish the work He was given when there still remained the suffering of martyrs for whom He offered up Himself as an example they should follow? For this reason Peter the Apostle says, “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2: 21). He says that He has finished what He surely knows He finished, just as previously in the prophecy the Spirit had used the past tense while speaking about things that would happen after many years. For He says, “They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones” (Ps 22: 16-17). He does not say, ‘They will pierce and will count’. Likewise, He speaks here as having glorified the Father first and asks that He may be glorified. We need, therefore, to understand that He used all the former words about the future and expressed them in the past tense.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself,  
With the glory which I had with You before the world was.” [5]**

For our sake He made Himself of no reputation leaving His glory; and for our sake He was glorified for He received from God the Father honor and glory (2 Pet 1: 17); that glory that He had before the world was (Jn 17: 5).

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings, crowns His believers with His own hands making them kings. There is no degree of honor, not the very highest, that God cannot raise us to if He so wills it. He raises the poor out of the dust that He may seat him with princes or spiritual kings (Ps. 113: 7-8). For, the Lord took David from among his sheep and made him king on the greatest throne on earth at that time. In His worthy precious blood, our Lord Jesus Christ granted us His Holy Spirit that shapes our inner self so that we may share that glory and radiance in the best image.

The glory of the Son bears many forms of honor, authority, and joy to fulfill the will of the Father and finish the work. That glory that He asks for is His glory that He had before the world was created.

**First:** Eternal glory: One with the Father in glory, for He is the brightest of His glory (Heb 1: 3) inseparable from Him. The expression ‘before the world was’ and similar expressions occur in the Bible to mean eternity (Jn 17: 24; Ps 90: 2; Eph 1: 4; Jn 1: 1).

**Secondly:** In His incarnation, the divine Word abandoned His glory; His flesh was like a veil to hide His radiance, but that veil did not change His nature or remove His truly eternal glory. The Father was glorified in the Son’s incarnation and condescension even to the Cross to achieve redemption. Nevertheless that condescension of the Son did not deprive Him of His glory.

**Thirdly:** He again has His glory and is clothed with it to open for us the way to heavenly glory; for through our mingling with the Lord who is glorified we enjoy sharing glory in eternity.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 105: 4-5.

The Son asks that He may be covered with the glory that He has since eternity before the creation of the world. Thus the law in which He wrapped Himself will be glorious in the resurrection and the ascension to heaven. For He has the authority to lay down His life by death and take it by resurrection because He is the Resurrection. The Father declares the glory of the Son in His resurrection and ascension and in His sitting at the right hand of the Father exalted above every name (Phil 2: 6-9). This is the clear declaration of the prophet Isaiah: **“Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he has put him to grief: when you shall make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand... Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he has poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”** (Is 53: 10, 12) This is the pleasure of the Father in the Cross, because through the Cross human believers become spoil that the Crucified carries to the divine throne, justified and glorified in Him. This is the glory of the Father and of the Son who grants righteousness. It is the glory of humanity who shares heavenly glory. However, as He fulfills the will of the Father, He accepts suffering as the will of His Father and He accepts resurrection as the pleasure of His Father.

This is the glory of the Son incarnate. He does not obtain glory from an outside source. He accepts it from what He has eternally and reflects it in His humanity. He does not ask to be glorified with the rulers of this world. Satan had tempted and offered Him all the kingdoms of this world, but He had refused so that we may deride temporary glory and seek what is heavenly. As though He says, ‘Give the glory of this world to those who long for it. As for Me, My glory is with You in heaven eternally. I do not ask to be glorified with men, but with You.’

We cry with our Christ to ask for our glory not on earth but the glory that is “with the Father”, in the divine bosom so that the divine promise may be realized in us: **“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne”** (Rev 3: 21).

\* Think how the Lord did not ask the Father to glorify Him with the glory He has on earth, but prayed that He glorifies Him with the glory He has with Him.

\* Where is that glory? He did not accept glory from the people because of the cover He covered Himself with, how then could He ask the Father to glorify Him? What does He say here? What He says concerns the dispensation. For, His human nature is not yet glorified, nor has He yet obtained incorruption. His body (flesh) had not yet shared the royal throne. Therefore, He does not say, “on earth”, but says, “with You”.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 80: 2.

\* I can, thus, remind you of many things now in different ways. But, in every condition I offer you another testimony so that you may be sure that God is called “Father of mankind” having an unsuitable meaning, for He is not the Father of mankind by nature.

This is how God was addressed in Isaiah, “You are our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us” (Is 63: 16) and Sarah was not in labor to give birth to us.

As the Psalmist says, “Let them be scattered before him; a father of the fatherless and a judge of the widows” (Ps 68: 5 LXX). Is it not clear to all that he calls God a father of those who recently lost their fathers, not because He gave birth to them, but rather because He cares and protects them?

Yet, while we call God, Father of mankind inappropriately, He is the Father of Christ alone in essence and not by adoption.

So, to mankind He is a father in time, but to Christ He is Father before time. Christ, therefore, says, “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”

**Saint Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* We understand that the glory of His humanity that is liable to death becomes immortal with the Father. This was fulfilled in the first determined dispensation before the world was and was fulfilled at the fixed time in the world.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

## **2- A General Prayer for Others**

**“I have manifested Your name to the men  
Whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours,  
You gave them to Me,  
And they have kept Your word.” [6]**

His prayer for Himself is very short compared to His prayer for the others. However, His prayer for Himself precedes His other prayer so that we may comprehend our love for our brethren as for ourselves. For, if we ask for our eternal glory and declare our love for our salvation, we need to ask the same for others as for ourselves. His prayer for the others has a special place so that our prayers for the sake of the Church and the salvation of mankind may not occupy a small corner in our prayers. We must not tighten our hearts concerning the others. We must rather have a big heart through the Holy Spirit to ask in abundance for their sake.

After He prayed for Himself, though He did not need to but He prayed in participation with the Father and the mutual, or rather one glory in Them both, He now prays on behalf of His people whom He knows by name. He prays for all those who

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 105: 7.

believe in Him and who seek Him. He teaches us that in our prayer we connect divine love with brotherly love. Thus in His prayer for Himself He reveals His wonderful unity with the Father along with His great heart for mankind.

He desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. But in this prayer of intercession He presents those who accept what the Father offers to them. He desires to carry the entire world to the throne, but He does not carry anyone by force, and He does not ask for those who do not accept His work in him or her. He offers to those whose names have been written in the book of life through His blood.

**“I have manifested Your name to the men”** [6]: Nature manifests the existence of God in some limited ways. The Law of Moses declares God more, but the incarnation of the Word is a perfect manifestation of God in His love for men and in His characteristics. Christ as a teacher who brought His disciples to the knowledge of God, prays to the Father for those He received from the Father. He is the Son who knows the mysteries of His Father and He gave His disciples the knowledge of the name and person of the Father. He shines on them giving them the light of knowledge and dispersing the darkness of ignorance. So they love, worship and glorify Him. In His teaching He does not ask for what is His although He is one with His Father, for no one knows the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him (Matt 11:27). He alone is able to reveal the truth and take His disciples to enter the truth and the truth enters their hearts.

**‘Your name’**: The Jews used to look upon the name of God with great reverence. They did not dare pronounce the name “Jehovah” lest they should make a mistake in pronunciation. The scribes also who wrote the Holy Scriptures followed special rites such as washing the pen immediately before writing the name of God. To pronounce the name of God implied His very presence. The early Church had the same Biblical thought and considered uttering the name of Jesus carried with it His presence. The Fathers prayed the “Jesus Prayer” repeating His name and so declaring their feeling that He is among them and in them. For, a name is not merely a way of distinguishing between one person from another; the name of a person is his very essence. It is no wonder, therefore, that Nebuchadnezzar changed the name of Mattaniah to Zedekiah (2 Kings 24: 17). In that manner Mattaniah became one of Nebuchadnezzar’s men and everyone using his new name understood his relationship with Nebuchadnezzar. When Rachel gave birth to a boy as she was dying, she called his name “Ben-oni” meaning “the son of sadness”. But his father refused that the name of his son should be connected to the sadness of his mother, and instead he gave him a name full of hope and strength, for he called him “Benjamin” meaning “son of my right hand” (Gen 35: 18).

Moreover, God Himself often changes the names of His believers so that they may have qualities that are suitable to their divine call to do a certain task. He called ‘Abram’, Abraham to make him father of many nations (Gen 17: 5). Likewise, He changed the name of ‘Sarai’ to Sarah so that she may take the role of a princess. He also called Jacob ‘Israel’ so instead of having the trait of anger because he followed his sibling, he now enjoys the secret of God’s power as a soldier or wrestler for God (Gen 32: 28). Again, when Pashur insulted Jeremiah and smote him then put him in the stocks, God changed

the name of Pashur to ‘Magor-missabib’ (Jer 20: 3) for this name implies terror all around and indicates the divine punishment that will befall him as a result of his violence.

The Lord Jesus Christ also commanded us to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt 28: 19; Acts 8: 16) so that the Holy Trinity may be present and dwell in the baptized person. Thus the name of a person is often used in the Bible to signify the nature of the person. In our love of God we announce our love of His person and essence.

**“The men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours”:** By “The men whom You have given Me” He means primarily the disciples who followed Him. But these words extend also to include all those who accept Him throughout the ages, those who listen and respond to Him. He knew them all but did not mention any name because He thought of them all. He says, “You have given Me” referring to those who through faith belong to Christ. He says they also belong to the Father who presents them as a gift to be heirs of Christ. Through the Cross, the Lord Jesus Christ offers them to the Father justified and qualified for reconciliation with the Father. The Father in turn offers them to the Son as members of His body having the right to eternal inheritance.

They are related to God the Father, as they are His creation who obtained life through His Son. They are the last honest remnants who are sanctified by Christ’s blood, and He has chosen them.

**“They have kept Your word”:** This means they were steadfast in Him and continued in Him working through Him. A commandment is kept when it enters the heart. It is sealed in the heart by actual practice. To show our obligation in the accuracy of teaching, He says that He gave them the words that the Father gave Him. It is thus suitable for us to give others the same words that the Lord Christ gave us and with which the Holy Spirit inspired His disciples and holy apostles. He established this living knowledge in the life of His disciples and the apostles He chose. Those kept the Word, for they accepted the Word incarnate in their lives even though the world rejected and opposed them..

\* The Lord Jesus Christ says to the Father, **“I have manifested Your name to the men”** for He manifested the Father’s name by His teachings and works. And He says, “the men whom You have given Me out of the world” just as He had said before, “no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father” (John 6: 65); and ‘unless My Father attracts them.’ Likewise, He says here, “whom You have given Me”. He calls Himself “the way”. He establishes two things in what He says: that He does not contradict the Father, and that the will of the Father is that they are given to the Son. “They were Yours, You gave them to Me”. Here, the Lord desires to make it clear that His Father loves Him greatly, for He did not beg the Father that He gives them to Him. And He says, “and they have kept Your word” meaning ‘they kept Your word by believing Me.’<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 81: 1.

**Saint Augustine** asks, ‘Did those who belonged to the Father not belong to the Son?’ Certainly those who were the Father’s were also the Son’s. Why then does He say, “They were Yours, You gave them to Me” [6]? They were the Father’s as they belonged to the Son the Word; but as the Son came to the world in the flesh they accepted the incarnate Son and became His disciples. He does not say ‘They were Ours’ because the Son born of the Father refers authority to the Father.<sup>1</sup>

**“Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You.” [7]**

\* It is possible for someone to ask the Lord Christ, ‘How did they know that?’ He would have answered, ‘from My teachings because I taught them that.’<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* When He said, “They have known surely” [8] He desired to explain that ‘they believed’ [8]<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“For I have given to them the words which You have given Me;  
And they have received them,  
And have known surely that I came forth from You,  
And they have believed that You sent Me.” [8]**

The Lord Jesus Christ gives His disciples the divine heavenly teaching, but its essence is in discovering His person and that He came forth from the Father.

Believers understand that the Lord Jesus Christ is the divine Word incarnate. His teachings are divine facts. His commandments are heavenly law and His promises are true and honest because they are divine.

I gave them the words and teachings that are Yours and they thus have the pure learning that comes directly from heaven and is not mixed with human teachings that corrupt the word of truth.

They are quite sure that I am the promised Christ and now they do not ask for another for they enjoy My divine work and heavenly teachings.

**“I pray for them.  
I do not pray for the world  
But for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours.” [9]**

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 106: 5.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, 81: 1.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 106: 6.

He offered His life a sacrifice for the entire world. But He prays or intercedes with His blood for those who have accepted and believed in Him. The Lord dies for the sake of the entire world, but He knows perfectly those who will insist on refusing Him because they are not His. Therefore, He concentrates on those who were given to Him out of the world. But those who persist in refusing Him will remain in the world like chaff that the wind drives away or that is thrown into the fire because it is chaff that has no value.

He does not intercede for those who are determined to drink of the cup of evil, to rebel and refuse to believe, not because He does not love them but because they reject His work in them. He does not say, 'I pray against them', for He has no hatred, rather they hate and refuse Him. As for us, since we do not know who are the Lord's and who are not and since we cannot judge anybody, we must pray for all people (1 Tim 2: 1, 4). For as long as there is breath in a man for whose salvation we pray, there is hope and our prayer will find room so that we repeat with Samuel the prophet, "...as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way" (1 Sam 12: 23).

The Lord Jesus Christ devoted His divine possibilities for His chosen ones so that they may be qualified to spread His Gospel in the world. He prays for the people whom He carries in Himself as children of God who have the right of sharing the inheritance. He does not say that He prays for the heavenly beings.

In the mutual love and in obedience of the Father, the Son incarnate gives His precious blood for the salvation of mankind. And, in His love for the Son, the Father gives those men to the Son as a holy bride. The Son accepts the gift from the Father for the sake of mankind, for they are considered honored vessels.

Those who have accepted the word of the Lord Christ and believed in it have entered into the new covenant with the Father. Therefore the Lord Jesus Christ considered them to be the Father's, for He says, "they are Yours". They are the Father's gift to the Son, since the Father has revealed His love for mankind by giving His Only Begotten Son to save the world. The Son received them as a gift from His Father, for He regarded them His Father's. They are first fruits to God (Rev 14: 4) through their true union; and so we are considered belonging to the Son as to the Father. We are the people of God the Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

\* **"I pray for them" [9]** Do You inform the Father of their news as though He ignored them? Do You speak to Him as to someone who lacks knowledge?

Do you not see that the aim of this prayer is that they know His love for them? For He who does not only give what He has but also prays another to do the same to show greater love.

What then? He says, “I pray for them” and “I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me.” He always says, “You have given” so that they may realize that the Father considered this a good thing.

And as He had always said, “They were Yours. You gave them to Me”, He removes evil doubt, lest anyone should think that His authority was new, that He received that authority recently, what does He say? “And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine” [10].<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* He adds, “for they are Yours” [9]. For the Father does not lose those He gives to the Son since the Son continues saying, “all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine” [20]. It is clear enough that all that belongs to the Father belongs also to the Son.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“And all Mine are Yours,  
And Yours are Mine,  
And I am glorified in them.” [10]**

The people who are sanctified by Christ’s blood are among His possessions and also those of the Father. It is true that any of God’s creatures can say to the Father, ‘all mine are Yours’, but only the Lord Jesus Christ, who is One with Him in essence, can say, “And all Mine are Yours, and I am glorified in them.” For the Father and the Son are One and equal in might, authority and glory. There is no conflict between Them. There is no ‘this is mine and that is yours’ as among people. Since eternity the Father gave birth to the Son as light from light. The Father is for the Son and the Son is for the Father. They are one in essence. They have one nature. Those who are the Father’s are necessarily the Son’s. He who has the Son and knows Him has the Father and knows His mysteries. All that the Son offers as blessings of salvation are for the glory of the Father as though the Father offers them.

The Son has nothing that does not belong to the Father. The Father has nothing that is not the work of His Son because the Son is the power, wisdom and Word of might of His Father. As we have become members of the body of Christ, He, the head, presents us to the Father as belonging to Him. For the Father is glorified in us through our blessing in listening to Christ’s words, through our obedience, true testimony for divine love, and through our work toward His kingdom. What we do in Christ’s name we do guided by His Holy Spirit for the glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

**“I am glorified in them”:** The Lord Jesus Christ announces beforehand the success of His disciples in spreading the Gospel. Through that, Christ is glorified in those in the world who believe in Him. Christ is glorified in His believers who listen to Him, obey Him, work in His name, and preach His grace. This glory is offered to the Father also.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 81: 1.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 107: 2.



The Lord prays for those who believe in Him because He will ascend to heaven and go to the Father and the members of His body, His believers, will remain on earth glorifying the Father and testifying of Him by carrying Christ's name. The disciples preached and performed miracles in the name of Christ and the Holy Spirit dwelling in them and so glorified Christ (Jn 16: 14). This is also referred to the Father.

\* Do you not see the equality in glory? Lest when hearing **“You have given to Me”** you may think they were taken from the authority of the Father or had belonged before and taken away from the authority of the Son, He has removed those two difficulties by saying this. Therefore, **“You have given Me”** is said in great humility, for all that belongs to the Father is the Son's and what is the Son's is the Father's. This cannot be said about sons of men, but the Father and the Son are equal in honor.

He then explains the reason and gives evidence by saying, **“And I am glorified in them”**, meaning ‘I have power over them’ or ‘they will glorify Me and believe in You and Me and glorify Us equally.’

How may He and the Father be glorified equally? They will all die for Him as for the Father. They preach His Gospel as that of the Father and as they say all things were made in the name of the Father they say they were made in the name of the Son also.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* **“And I am glorified in them”** [10] He speaks to the Father about His own glorification as though that was completed though this would happen in the future. He recently prayed to the Father to fulfill His glory. By saying His glory has actually been achieved showing that it was in fact arranged to be achieved, He desired to show that what will be realized in the future is an absolute fact.

### **3- A Prayer for Them That the Father May Keep Them**

**“Now I am no longer in the world,  
But these are in the world,  
And I come to You.  
Holy Father, keep through Your name  
Those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.”** [11]

**“Now I am no longer in the world”** as though He says, ‘I am about to leave the world in the flesh and consequently they are in need of special help and support. They need that I present them to You so that You may keep them in the truth.’

As He prays that they may be protected, He calls God, **“Holy Father”**. His precious gift to His children is holiness so that they may be holy as He is Holy. He hates sin and therefore He embraces His children so that sin may not creep into them. They, in

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 81: 2.

turn, as His children cannot endure sin. They are terrified of sin as the most dangerous enemy they face.

**“Keep them through Your name”:** As believers are the children of the holy God, He keeps them for the sake of His name’s honor and not because they are themselves worthy. As Christ is ascending to the Father, He carries the names of His believers as on His chest, as the greatest heavenly high priest. He takes them to the throne and has for them all love and kindness. He never forgets them, for their names are inscribed on His palm, sealed on His breast, dwelling in His heart. He had told Peter the Apostle that He had prayed for him that his faith should not fail (Luke 22: 32) and that he should not stumble unaware into the danger that he would soon face. Christ said, “I have prayed for you”. He, the Savior, prays for His disciples that the Father may keep them all their lives from stumbling. He prays that they remain always guided by the Father so that we may share the same love and never cease to pray for the salvation of many, for their spiritual growth in the Lord.

The Son declares that the Father has given Him the chosen to become His, for the Son has offered His blood for the redemption of the entire world. Now, the Son gives, with love, those believers to the Holy Father praying to Him saying, “Keep them through Your name”. He does not pray that they become rich or have worldly honor. He does not pray for their earthly victory, but prays that the Father may keep them through His name from sin and the wicked world until they travel the days of their sojourning and reach the Father’s bosom. He prays that they may be protected in the divine commandments through the Father’s name and that they may enjoy the spirit of unity.

**“Those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are”:** The Lord Jesus Christ links holiness and true unity. For, where there is holiness there is great love that unites. Where there is sin there is envy, contention, hatred and severance. Whoever has holiness that is from above experiences unity in its highest degree and all holy people become one like the unity of the Holy Trinity.

He prays the Father to keep them through His name, meaning through Him and belief in Him. The aim of this belief or this teaching is that all believers may be one, may become one body and spirit similar to the unity of the Father and the Son. Thus, the Father is glorified in them.

\* **“Now I am no longer in the world”** [11] meaning, ‘though I shall not appear in the flesh again, I still am glorified through them.’ But why does He say always, “I am not in the world” and “as I leave them I commit them to You” and again, “while I was with them in the world I kept them”? If anyone interprets these words simply he will face many absurd notions. For, how can it be reasonable to say that He will not be in the world and that as He leaves He gives them to another? These words mean He will leave them forever. But He spoke those words to give them peace and joy.

\* He says, **“Keep them through Your name”** meaning keep them through Your help.

\* This is what you doubt. He presents Himself to their minds and to their small spirits when they hear Him saying this and giving them up to the care of the Father. After they hear His many counsels and they still do not respond, He speaks to the Father and reveals His love for them.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

After **Saint Gregory of Nazianzus** became a Christian and despised the world, he was suddenly dazzled by the radiance of the Holy Trinity who dwelt in him when he was still in the world. He wrote, “From the day I left the things of the world to devote myself to contemplate the heavenly light, sublime thoughts carried me to take me away from anything that concerned the flesh and hide me in secret places in the heavenly tabernacle. From that day, the light of the Trinity, that exceeds the ability of the mind to comprehend, has blinded my eyes. This light shines on all from the greatly glorified throne. The shared rays of the Trinity cannot be described. This is the source of all that is here below and that is separated by time from the things above. From that day I died to the world and the world died to me.”<sup>2</sup>

\* He declares that He is no longer in the world- that is in the flesh. He prays the Father to care for those He is about to leave (that is, His absence in the flesh) saying, “Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me”. As a man, the Lord prays to God on behalf of His disciples whom He received from Him.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name.  
Those whom You gave Me I have kept,  
And none of them is lost except the son of perdition,  
That the Scripture might be fulfilled.” [12]**

**“I kept in Your name”:** We have seen that in the Scriptures often “the name of God” is an expression used to signify “God Himself”. The aim of the Word incarnate is to keep His believers in the Father by presenting Himself to them as being the Divine Truth. The Lord Jesus Christ prays that His believers may be kept as He kept His disciples when He was on earth, so that none of them may be lost except he who insisted on being a son of perdition. He thus prays for the sake of believers also, that the Holy Father may keep them so that they may fulfill the holy Gospel and testify for the divine truth.

None of them was lost except that one who insisted on becoming a son of Satan the deceitful and, consequently, became a son of perdition. That man obtained the blessing of discipleship but willingly and wickedly corrupted that gift because of his love of money. Christ calls Judas “son of perdition” because he withdrew from the membership of the divine family. He refused to be a child of God and insisted on being a son of Satan who destroys and kills. He is the “son of perdition” because he did not seek

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 81. PG 59: 480.

<sup>2</sup> Poemata de seipsol, PG 37: 984-85.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 107: 4-5.

his own salvation, but instead willfully and wickedly ruined the divine grants offered to him and opened his heart to a series of sins to enter, like greed, betrayal and despair.

“That the Scripture might be fulfilled”: The Holy Scripture prophecies as in (Ps 41: 9; 109: 8) and in him was achieved the symbols of Ahitophel concerning David the king, and Absalom concerning his father, but in Judas betrayal was more horrible.

\* The Lord Jesus Christ prays to the Father, **“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name.”** When He says this He speaks as a man and prophet but does not show that He does anything in God’s name.

He says, **“Those whom You gave Me I have kept, and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”** In another passage He says, “of all He has given Me I should lose nothing” (John 6: 39). Yet the traitor was not lost alone. After him many were lost. So, how can He say, “I should lose nothing”? The answer is ‘on My part I do not lose.’ In still another passage He explains more clearly, “and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6: 37) as though saying, ‘I am not the cause of their loss. I did not neglect them and as they willingly go away I do not force them to come back.’<sup>1</sup>

\* “That the Scripture might be fulfilled” not that the Scripture might be realized, but this is the method of the Scripture: things are correlated as though they happen because they are written.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* He says, ‘as I am about to come to You, keep them in Your name as I have kept them in while I was with them.’ He kept them in the name of the Father. The Son, as a man, kept His disciples while He was with them in the flesh. But the Father also kept those whom He heard in the name of the Son. He answered their prayers offered in the name of the Son. The Son Himself says to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you” (John 16: 23). But we must not interpret this physically, that they take turns in keeping us as though one substitutes the other when one of them goes away. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit who are one true blessed God keep us at the same time.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“But now I come to You,  
And these things I speak in the world,  
That they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.” [13]**

As the Lord Jesus Christ completes His message on the Cross and is risen from the dead, He goes to the Father. The Father finds His pleasure in this and the Son is

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 82: 2.

<sup>2</sup> Hom. 81. PG 59: 480-481.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 107: 6.

happy in His redemptive mission. He prays that His believers may have His joy fulfilled in them. He carries His people with love in His ascension and as the heavenly High Priest He registers their names on His breast to take them into the heavenly Holiest. He carries them in His heart abiding in Him as He abides in them. He engraves them on the palms of His hands with the nails of the Cross. Then, even if they cannot see Him because He is in heaven, He is still not far from them, nor are they far from Him. He is in their hearts as they are in His heart and mind. He is preoccupied with them until He takes them into the bosom of His Father.

Whoever accepts the good will of God and His good Word must expect the opposition of the evil will and word of the world. Therefore, the Lord prays for His disciples and for all the members of His Church that they may have His joy fulfilled in them in this world. This is the will of the Lord Jesus Christ and the desire of His heart: that every believer may enjoy the perfect continual heavenly joy. He leaves them surrounded by tears, suffering and tribulation, but He achieves in them inner joy that exceeds nature.

May our tears raise our eyes to see our Christ praying His Father for us that we may have His perfect joy. This is a divine promise we must hear with the spirit of faith, in quiet silence and we must adhere to it so that we may obtain it. A person who keeps Christ's word patiently obtains divine special protection at the hour of trial (Rev 3: 10). This has been actually realized when the martyrs were full of joy during their suffering. The joy of Christ is a divine gift and a free blessing. At the same time it is a command we must obey. It is given to those who strive in it. Therefore, the Apostle admonishes us saying, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord" (Phil 3: 1) and again, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice" (Phil 4: 4).

The Holy Spirit shapes whoever conducts himself in the world following the thought of the Lord Jesus Christ and so seeks to become an icon of Christ. He follows Christ's footsteps and does not think of the things of the world. He does not devote his life to serve the world. The Father gives such a man His protection for His Holy Son's sake.

**"That they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves":** The aim of His address to believers is to pour His divine joy in them. Our Lord Jesus Christ is our eternal perfect joy. He is the source of joy and the Lord of true happiness. Without Him all joy fades away because that joy is linked to the evanescent world. But Christ's joy is eternal like Him. He is the pleasure of the Father. He, therefore, asks this of Him.

Undoubtedly, companionship with the living gives a kind of happiness and bereavement causes sadness and pain. But, the time has now come to tell them that He will leave them in the flesh and they will not meet Him in the same manner they did during the years of His open service on the earth. This separation must be the source not of sadness but of joy. They enjoy His presence in their midst and in themselves for He dwells in their hearts and evokes in them His perfect joy. His joy is their joy and they thus experience the perfect joy.

+ He says that His joy that He gives them must be fulfilled in them. He declares that this is why He spoke in the world. Peace in the future world and its blessing are granted through the manner we choose to live in the present: exercising moderation, righteousness and piety.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“I have given them Your word;  
And the world has hated them  
Because they are not of the world,  
Just as I am not of the world.” [14]**

He prays the Father to give support to believers: they need to have Him as their own personal friend because they have many enemies. The world hates them for no other reason but that they are not of the world and they urge humanity to leave the evil world and take delight in the holy One. Therefore, the Psalmist says, “Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head.... Because for Your sake I have borne reproach” (Ps 69: 4, 7). Because they obeyed, they accepted the Word, the world cannot endure them because the world rejects salvation. The world despises what is offered for its glory. The world does its best to destroy the faith and causes ruin. Thus, the children of the world deny the Word of glory and redemption. Instead, they devote all their energy to overthrow the living faith. They, thus, destroy themselves unknowingly.

He tells the world that the believers were of the world but now they are not of the world. They are a new creation (2 Cor 5: 17). They are a new rival though they make a world of love, sacrifice and service even of the rebels. The old world wants all to belong to it. The old world may admire the new creation for their potentiality, possibilities, and conduct; but as it is a selfish world, it will not stop wishing that the new creation returns to its arms and it will not cease from opposing them and getting rid of them.

There is a Jewish proverb that says, ‘If the world does not know the value of its righteous, it will erect (in hatred) a fence of pearls to protect them.’ The farewell prayer of the Lord Christ reveals the great work of God in keeping the servants, believers, and the word of the Gospel. Without this divine blessing faith would have vanished a long time ago. For, throughout the centuries, the world has agglomerated its energy to annihilate faith and destroy the Church and all Christians. However, the words of the Lord Christ are the secret in the survival of faith and of believers to this day.

The Holy Father says, “Once I have sworn by My holiness I will not lie to David.” (Ps 89: 35) As He is holy He does not endure sin. He considers the holy peoples His and He keeps them from sin, which they also hate and regard as a dangerous evil. He, as a Holy Father, cares for His children. He teaches them and keeps them in His direct care. They, on their own, cannot abide in the divine blessings they obtained and, therefore, they need God’s help. They are protected for God as they are His children.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel or St. John, tractate, 107: 8.

\* When we adhere to virtue, evil people persecute us. When we desire virtue they deride us. We must not get confused or angry for these are natural reactions. Everywhere virtue arouses hatred in the malevolent because they envy those who wish to live appropriately. The wicked try to find excuse for themselves when they disparage the others.

They hate them and use every means to abuse their way of life because they behave differently.

We must not be sad, for this is the sign of virtue and for this reason the Lord says, “If you were of the world, the world would love its own.” (Jn 15: 19) and in another place He says, “Woe to you when all men speak well of you” (Luke 6: 26). In the same sense He says here, “I have given them Your word and the world has hated them.” He says, ‘for You and Your word they hate them.’ Because of that they are qualified to enjoy all God’s care.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* This hatred of the world had not yet affected their lives but would happen later. He speaks about the future in the past tense, as is His custom. He explains why the world hates them by saying, “because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world” [14]. They were granted this through their new birth because when they were first born they were of the world. He previously said, “I chose you out of the world” (Jn 15: 19). This is a kind of distinction granted to them as they become like Him, for He is “not of the world”. It is given to them through being saved from the world. In any case, He was never of the world, for even when He took the form of a bondservant He was born of the Holy Spirit of whom they were born again. Thus, because of their second birth they were not anymore of the world, for they were born of the Holy Spirit. For the same reason He was never of the world because His birth or incarnation was of the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“I do not pray that You should take them out of the world,  
But that You should keep them from the evil one.” [15]**

He prays that God may keep them from the evil world and explains the two ways to keep God’s children from the world.

The first way is to take them out of the world through sudden, quick death so that they cross over to a better world. This is what some men of God like Job, Elijah, Jonah, and Moses wished when they were in trouble and suffered trials. But the Lord did not ask for this for His disciples, for He came to the world to give His believers a life of triumph through carrying the Cross. He did not wish them to escape from the world. The Lord came to the world to serve humanity; the world, therefore, was not worthy of the believers (Heb 11: 38). The evil world is dark and the Lord Jesus Christ came to illuminate the world and overcome evil and darkness. He made His disciples as bright

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 82: 1.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 108: 1.

stars to enlighten the world. The love of the Lord for His believers did not cause Him to withdraw them immediately from the world of darkness, but to sanctify them so that they may give light to the world and have the spirit of victory. Jeremiah, the prophet, wished to run away to the wilderness (Jer 9: 2). But our Christ works through all and as the Apostle Paul says, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry” (1 Tim 1: 12). Saint Peter wrote, “Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator” (1 Pet 4: 19). Thus, even the ascetic hermit cannot escape the feeling of responsibility to work in one way or another for the sanctification of the world. The Son did not pray to the Father to send a chariot of fire to carry His disciples to heaven and take them away from the evil world.

The second way is to grant them the spirit of strength and triumph over evil in the world. This is what the Lord asked for His disciples, that God should keep them from corruption in the world. He, therefore, entrusts them to the bosom of the Father so that the evil one may not approach. He does not pray that God should keep them by removing trials and tribulation from their path, but that they experience victory in their struggle against evil and that they testify to the power of the rich grace working in them.

\* What does the Lord Jesus Christ say to the Father? “Keep them from the evil one.” This means keep them from evil conduct, from sin, and from feebleness of the heart.<sup>1</sup>

\* He does not pray that they may be saved from trials only, but also that they may persevere in their faith.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* Their existence in the world is important even though they are not of the world.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“They are not of the world,  
Just as I am not of the world.” [16]**

He prays that God should keep them because they have become like Him. As they became similar to their Christ, they are no longer of the world. They are not preoccupied with the pleasures of the world. They are not troubled by its problems because the service of their Christ occupies their thoughts and fills their hearts.

\* If you say, ‘What does the Lord mean by saying that His disciples “are not of the world”?’ I answer, ‘They look at another world and have nothing of the earth. They have become like the citizens of heaven. In these words the Lord revealed His love for them, for He praises them and raises their praise to His Father to whom He entrusts them.’

**Saint John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> Hom 1. On Gal. PG 61: 664.

<sup>2</sup> Hom. 82. PG 59: 483.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 108: 2.



\* It may be asked, ‘If they are not anymore of the world, whether they are or are no longer sanctified indeed in the truth, how then does He pray that God should not take them out of the world?’ That is because those who have been sanctified must remain so that they may grow in sanctity and in holiness. This is not achieved without the grace of God who sanctifies their growth as He sanctified them at the beginning. Concerning this point Paul says, “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1: 6).<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

#### **4 – A Prayer for Them to Be Sanctified**

**“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” [17]**

What does “sanctify” mean? The work of God in them does not stop at keeping them from evil and the evil one. It extends to the positive work such as acting in holiness, goodness, and righteous work. He prays that their hearts may burn with the love of holiness. Their sanctification implies also continual growth in faith and inflammation of the heart with the Spirit of God.

The means of sanctification is “by Your truth”, meaning the word of God. By the Word and by prayer every act of the Church, such as the holy sacraments, is sanctified. The spirits of God’s servants are also sanctified.

The prophets did their work through sanctification. Jeremiah (Jer 1: 5) and the Levite priests also acted by sanctification. The servants in the New Covenant are likewise sanctified and consecrated (Rom 1: 1). The Lord Jesus Christ as High Priest sanctifies the priests.

The word “sanctify” ‘Hagiason’ is derived from two syllables: “A” or “Ha” which in Greek, means a negative, and “gee” means “earth”. So, the word means “no earth”. Consequently, sanctification implies removing what is of the earth from the heart so that the heart may devote itself to the love, worship, and service of God. It also implies “purity” since the heart is purified of all temporary blemish and acquires a heavenly spiritual quality. The priest or servant who is troubled by worldly concerns even in the service of the Church dishonors the Gospel and loses divine truth. He loses the holiness of his heart.

The word “sacred” in Hebrew means offering a sacrifice. The sacrifice is dedicated to God alone and its goal is that the people, as God’s people, enjoy communion with the Holy God.

The quality of “holiness” belongs to the Holy God alone. For this reason, the heavenly hosts praise Him saying, “Holy, Holy, Holy”. Our holiness then has no other meaning but our unification with the Holy and sharing with Him a divine nature. A holy

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 108: 2.

life is not merely good conduct but is a relation to the divine life and experiencing the work of the Holy God.

\* What does He mean by His words, **“Sanctify them in Your truth”** [17] but to say, ‘Sanctify them in Me.’ The Father sanctifies in the truth, that is His Word, His Only Begotten Son. He sanctifies His heirs and the heirs with the Son.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

+ **“Sanctify them in Your truth”** meaning ‘Make them holy by giving them the Spirit and true teachings.’ Just as He said, “You are already clean because of the word, which I have spoken to you (Jn 15: 3); now He says the same thing: ‘Guide them; teach them the truth’. For, uttering the right teachings concerning God sanctifies the soul. He says that they are sanctified by the word, but this does not only indicate the wonderful works, for the word of God also purifies. But “sanctify them” seems to me also to reveal another similar demand; that is ‘Consecrate them (isolate them) for the word and the Gospel.’ This is shown in what is said later.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

+ The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit sanctify together, give life, light and rest. Let no one refer sanctification particularly and especially to the energy of the Spirit alone. After hearing the Savior’s words, ‘Sanctify them in Your name’ (John 17: 11, 17), it is clear that all energy is achieved equally for those qualified by means of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This energy is in every grace, virtue, guidance, life, consolation, change to immortality and crossing to eternal life, and in all other good blessings descending on the human being.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Basil the Great**

\* Just as the Father sanctifies, the Son also sanctifies and the Holy Spirit sanctifies. The Father sanctifies, as it is written, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thes 5: 23). And in a different place, the Father sanctifies, “Father, sanctify them by Your truth” [17].

The same Apostle says concerning the Son, “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor 1: 30).

The Apostle teaches also that the Holy Spirit sanctifies. He says, “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2 Thes 2: 13).

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 108: 3.

<sup>2</sup> Hom. 82. PG 59: 483-484.

<sup>3</sup> Letter 189 to Eustathius, 7.

However, sanctification is one because baptism is one and the blessing of the sacrament is one.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

**“As You sent Me into the world,  
I also have sent them into the world.” [18]**

The Son devoted Himself to the work of salvation and, therefore, the Father sent Him on a mission to fulfill that divine act. He has been called, “Advocate” (1 Jn 2: 1), “Apostle” (Heb 3: 1), “servant” (Rom 15: 8) and “sent forth (Gal 4: 4). However, He was sent forth as Son of God, not like the servants and bondservants.

Why does He link His mission from the Father to His own mission? That is because the mission is difficult and the task is arduous. Therefore, He wanted to affirm to them that He supports them. He works with, through, and in them, for their work is a continuation of His work. The Lord Jesus Christ, as Son of Man, accepted gifts for the sake of men (Ps 68: 18). He then gave those gifts to men (Eph 4: 8).

As He offered Himself as a sacrifice, He opened the way for His apostles to partake of His practical love and, through abiding in Him, become holy offerings (Phil 2: 17; 2 Tim 4: 6). The death of the saints became dear to God because their death was linked to that of Christ.

\* The Father sent His Son, not in the sinful flesh, but in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom 8: 3). His Son then sent those who were born in the sinful flesh, after they were sanctified through Him and were purified from the contamination of sin.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* He was accustomed to speak about the future as though it actually happened.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**“And for their sakes I sanctify Myself,  
That they also may be sanctified by the truth.” [19]**

As He willingly gives Himself up to death so that He may save humanity, He says He thus sanctifies Himself or consecrates all His life to achieve our salvation. And, as the apostle Paul says, “But Christ...with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption (Heb 9: 11-12). He devoted all His life for the redemption of the human race. Nothing else absorbed Him especially that He is the only One who can offer Himself a sacrifice without blemish to save the entire world. Now, being the High Priest and at the same time the sacrifice, He sanctifies Himself not by any outside power. He does not need the blood of animals to sanctify Him, for He is

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<sup>1</sup> Of the Holy Spirit Book 3: 4: 25-28.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 108: 4.

<sup>3</sup> Hom. 82. PG 59: 484.

without sin. But He wills to devote all His power even to death on the Cross to sanctify His servants and people.

Just as the Son devoted His mission to the salvation of humanity since nothing but human beings preoccupied Him, likewise the believer is sanctified and consecrates all his ability and time for Christ who is “the truth”. This is the pleasure that Paul the apostle experienced and, therefore, described himself as “separated to the gospel of God” (Rom 1: 1). This is what the prophets obtained and so heard the divine voice saying, “before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you” (Jer 1: 5). This was the perception of the Levite priests: that they are consecrated for the service of God. The believer also, even though he does not dedicate his time to service, to preaching and worship, his heart is still sanctified as he does everything, even his food, drink and sleep, for the glory of God.

\* Here He says that He sanctifies Himself. He does not say that He helps Himself to be sanctified by purification of the spirit or soul. Nor does He desire to partake of the Holy Spirit since the Holy Spirit is in His essence and He is forever and ever Holy and will remain so. He says here, “I sanctify Myself” because I offer Myself and present Myself as a sacrifice without blemish, for a sweet smelling aroma, because the offering brought to the holy altar is sanctified or is called, according to the Law, holy.<sup>1</sup>

\* As He is with the Father in existence eternally, He accepts being His Son in the Spirit. And as in the flesh He became similar to the adopted children of God; therefore, it is said that He was sanctified. For, sanctification refers to His humanity or the flesh because human nature cannot acquire holiness of itself.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Cyril the Great**

\* What does He mean by, “I sanctify Myself”? He means, ‘I offer Myself a sacrifice because all sacrifice is called holy and those offered to God are in particular sacred. He says this either because their Head was on the way to be so, or because they also offer a sacrifice, for it is said, “present your bodies a living sacrifice” (Rom 12: 1).<sup>3</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord said these words in order that we may know that He is sanctified in the flesh for our sakes and also is sanctified in His divinity.<sup>4</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* The Word was not only sanctified as a man, but He also sanctifies Himself. He is the source of sanctification for His humanity. **Saint Cyril the Great** affirms that the Lord sanctifies His flesh. He receives the Spirit, His Spirit. He accepts the Spirit as a man, but

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<sup>1</sup> Comm. On John 6: 51.

<sup>2</sup> Dialogue 6 PG 75: 1008D.

<sup>3</sup> Hom. 82.

<sup>4</sup> Of the Christian Faith, 2: 9 (78).

He grants the Spirit to Himself as He is God. He did that for our sake, not for His own sake.<sup>1</sup>

\* The Word who dwells in His flesh sanctifies His own form by the Holy Spirit and transforms His shape to the image (power) of His nature.<sup>2</sup>

\* Someone may claim that the Lord Jesus Christ was sanctified by the Holy Spirit and used the Spirit as a power other than His own. That is to say, He obtained the force against the evil spirits and the ability to perform miracles in front of the people through the Spirit. If someone says this but does not confess that the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ and by Him He does the divine work, that individual must be anathema.

**Anathema 9 by Saint Cyril the Great**

\* What did He mean by, **“And for their sakes I sanctify Myself”** [19]? The meaning is, ‘I sanctify them in Me because they are (part) of Me.’ Those He speaks about are His members. The Head with the members is Christ. This is what the Apostle teaches as he speaks about Abraham’s seed. The Apostle writes, “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed.” The Apostle says this after saying, “He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed,’ who is Christ.” (Gal 3: 16-29) What does he declare to them when he says, “you are Abraham’s seed” but that, you are Christ’s? In the same sense the same Apostle writes in a different epistle, “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ” (Col 1: 24). He does not say, ‘my afflictions’, but says, “the afflictions of Christ” because he is a member of Christ and in his oppression he filled up his share of the afflictions, for it was destined for Christ to bear pain in His entire body. And, so that you may be sure of that meaning in the statement before us, read what follows: “that they also may be sanctified by the truth” [19]. This only means “by Me” according to the fact that the Truth was the Word who was in the beginning and was God.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

## **5 – A Prayer for Unity**

**“I do not pray for these alone,  
But also for those who will believe in Me through their word.” [20]**

He prays for those who believe in Him through the word of His disciples and apostles. This prayer extends across the ages and carries all souls so that they may rejoice in the redemptive prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ for their sakes. They will then be protected in His honorable blood, sanctified and united with the other members. His farewell prayer extends to include all those who are ready to accept salvation across the generations and to the end of time. For, He is the Intercessor by His blood for all those

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<sup>1</sup> In Joannis Evangelium 11 PG 74: 548B.

<sup>2</sup> In Joannis Evangelium 11. PG 74: 549.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 108: 5.

who accept His redemptive act so that all may become one. They will then enjoy true unity, pure heavenly wisdom, and glory from the Father.

Why is this prayer only for those who believe in Him equally in the present and the future, while we should pray for all humanity? We have already said that He desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, but He does not force anyone to be saved or to come to the knowledge of the truth. As He knows who will reject Him, He does not pray against them, but He does not intercede for them and their salvation since they insist on refusing salvation, lest it might be thought that He compels them to accept the faith, or that His prayer is ineffective, God forbid! On the other hand, we do not know who are believers and abide in the faith and who definitely refuse or deny later, therefore it befits us to pray for all.

He prays on behalf of the weak in faith so that they may become strong and abide in Him. He also prays for those who in the future will believe.

\* The Lord Jesus Christ says about His disciples, “And for their sakes I sanctify Myself” [19]. But lest someone may think that what He does is for the sake of His apostles only, He says, here, “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word.” He thus comforts the spirits of His apostles by showing them that many will become their disciples. He cheers them also by revealing to them that they will become the agents of salvation for many people.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* Since the apostles who accompanied Him preached the word of faith in this manner at the beginning, their message was therefore called “their word” [20], but in all cases this is no reason to think that their word is not ‘the word of God’ because it was called “their word”. Therefore, the Apostle says to the Thessalonians, “when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” (1 Thes 2: 13). It is the word of God because it was granted freely by God, but it is called “their word” because it was given to them chiefly and at the beginning so that they may preach it.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“...that they may be one,  
As You, Father, are in Me, and I in You;  
That they also may be one in Us,  
That the world may believe that You sent Me.” [21]**

After He prays for their protection from the evil one and for their sanctity, He prays for the unity of the entire Church that will be established only after evil is cast out. For, evil causes rivalry and division, but holy life grants love and unity. Unity is based on the action of God in the life of the servants (the apostles, disciples, and priests) just as His deed is in all believers among the people.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 109: 5.

The Lord Jesus Christ repeats the clause **“that they may be”** seven times (verses 11, 19, 21 twice, 22, 23, 24). Four of the seven times He prays that His followers may be one. Thus was Jesus the Lord of glory concerned in particular with unity.

Unity preoccupied the heart of the Lord Christ, for He had prayed for it [13] and He now prays persistently to the Father for it. He desires that the inner relationship in the Church may be similar to the relationship between the Father and the Son. This is what the Lord repeats in His prayer. The secret of the unity of the Church is in that the Church clings to the Holy Trinity who has a unique unity in essence. It is also in that the believers’ hearts may be filled with love so that everyone may have a place there. Pray that all become one: one body, one heart, one thought, one hope, and one in enjoying the divine promises.

This prayer was fulfilled in the first Church when the ministers and the people had one faith and one heart, although they had different cultures among the Gentiles. Each expressed his faith in the way that befitted him, but believers of Jewish origin united with Christians of Gentile origin in one body. We are quite sure that Christ’s farewell prayer will be fulfilled when the Church in the entire world will unite round one faith with one spirit and one aim, that is meeting the Lord Jesus Christ eternally and carrying the spirit of adopted children to the one Father.

\* **“That they may be one in Us”** means that they may be one in believing in Us.

\* What does “in Us” mean? It means belief in Us. For, as there is no harm done to humanity more than division, it is a prerequisite that they become one. All believers through the apostles are one, though some have seceded.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* We must verify how God the Father is, how the believer will finally be, and how the saints have been promised to be like the Father and the Son, that they become one in themselves and become one in the Father and the Son.<sup>2</sup>

\* The truth must be imprinted in the mind in more details. We are not one in the Father and the Son in essence, but by grace, for the essence of the human spirit and that of God cannot be one as the followers of Mani claim.<sup>3</sup>

\* John the Evangelist who drank the word in Christ’s bosom says, “By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit....Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.” (1 John 4: 13, 15). If you believe in Christ, as the apostles believed, you become one body with them in Christ. But if you are quick in claiming that you have faith and works like them while

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 82. PG 59: 484.

<sup>2</sup> Letter. 124: 10.

<sup>3</sup> Against Jovinianus, 2: 29.

you do not have the same faith and deeds, you will not be able to have the same position they have.<sup>1</sup>

\* “Do you not know that you are the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 3: 16; 6: 19)? He says, “temple”, not ‘temples’, to show that God dwells in all similarly. Call the Church what you like: bride, sister, mother, for the gathering of the Church is one only. The Church does not need a husband, a brother, or a son. The belief of the Church is one, and the Church is not contaminated with various teachings nor divided by heresy. The Church remains a virgin and where the Lamb goes the Church follows. Only the Church knows the song of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Jerome**

\* The Trinity is in us and we are in the Trinity for the Three are One in essence and we are one in nature. The Trinity is in us as God is in His temple. We are in the Trinity as creation in the Creator.<sup>3</sup>

\* “That they also may be one in Us” [21]. He adds, “in Us” so that we may know that our becoming one in that love in the one faith is referred to God’s grace, not to ourselves. But as the Apostle says, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light” and lest one refers this to himself, the Apostle adds, “in the Lord” (Eph 5: 8).<sup>4</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* It is more appropriate here to quote the words of the Gospel, “that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (Jn 17: 21). O, the majesty and glory that holds this unity! The Holy Spirit is that glory and majesty. No one who examines carefully the words of the Lord Jesus Christ who says, “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them” (Jn 17: 22) can deny that. In truth the Lord Jesus Christ gave that glory to His disciples when He said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn 20: 22).

The Word of God received that glory that He had before the creation of the world, when He took human nature for Himself. Therefore, human nature was glorified by the Holy Spirit. From that relation results the distribution of glory of the Holy Spirit to everyone united in Christ, beginning with the disciples. Christ thus says, “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one; I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me” John 17: 22-23).

Whoever grows quickly from youth to a perfect man arrives at the level of this spiritual stature (Eph 4: 13). Even though he was born a slave, or a bondsman, he will obtain the royal merit and the glory of the Holy Spirit in purity.

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<sup>1</sup> Against Jovinianus, 2: 19.

<sup>2</sup> Against Jovinianus, 2: 19.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 110: 1.

<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 110: 2.



This is the undefiled dove that the Bridegroom looks for when He says, “My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her.”<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Gregory of Nyssa**

**“And the glory which You gave Me I have given them,  
That they may be one just as We are one” [22]**

This may refer to the glory that the Word incarnate obtains by performing the miracles and attracting the lost souls to their salvation. For He grants His disciples this ability in His Holy name, for He is not ashamed to call them brethren (Heb 2: 11). They receive adoption by the Father and have this glory, the glory of adopted children. But they do not obtain it in essence like the Lord; for they obtain it by grace. Glory is a divine gift: “The Lord will give grace and glory” (Ps 84: 11).

Through the suffering on the Cross the Lord carries us to His glory: “For 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” (Heb 2: 10). As our hearts soar we see that Glory about which it has been said that the angels cover their faces before Him. This Glory shines on the heavenly sublime Jerusalem, for the Lamb is the light of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21: 23).

The world does not know God the Grantor of knowledge of life and unity with Him. But believers know Him as their Father with whom they are united. They experience His continual love and they offer Him an uninterrupted thanksgiving offering.

The Lord Christ affirms that the source of the unity that believers enjoy is in His acceptance as Son of Man of glory from the Father to give it to His believers. Thus, our abiding in the One Christ and our pleasure in having that glory are our way to this true unity. The unity of the Church is real; it is a divine blessing and a living testimony that Christ is the true Messiah. It is a testimony of the great love of God for mankind.

The Lord Jesus Christ, thus, stresses unity as a basic and essential matter. It is not a superficial unity such as in the meetings of church leaders; it is rather the unity of the action of the Holy Spirit who gathers all in the spirit and in divine power to a perfect and holy aim, not on the level of Church politics. The center of this unity is that all become one in the Father and the Son, just as They are One. Whoever accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as the “Way” walks through Him to the Father’s bosom united with Him and walks through Him to the hearts of the believers to experience the unity of the brethren.

As the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, some people consider Him the Spirit of unity. He grants unity; He unites all to work all in all (1 Cor 12: 4).

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<sup>1</sup> Song of Solomon by Gregory, bishop of Nyssa, translated into Arabic by Dr. George Nawar, sermon 15.

\* “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them” so that by signs and doctrine they must be one spirit. For, this is the glory: that they become one and this is even greater than the signs. Just as we glorify God in whose essence there is no conflict or difference, and this is His great glory, He says ‘may these qualities were also causes of glory to them.’ One may ask, ‘How does He pray to the Father to give them glory and yet He says that He Himself has given them that same glory?’ The answer is, ‘whether His sermon is about the signs or about harmony and peace among them, He grants them those gifts, while He prays that the Father may give them peace (He prays to the Father on their behalf).’<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* He is Jesus who prays, “**as You, Father are in Me, and I in You; that they may be one in Us**” (Jn 17: 21). For, if God who is One is in everyone, He will make all become one and the number will be lost in the unity.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Basil**

\* What was that glory but immortality that human nature accepts in Him? For He did not accept that alone, but in His usual way according to His anticipated fixed dispensation He refers to the future using the past tense. For, now that He is in His glory, that is His resurrection by the Father, He raises us He Himself to the same glory at the end.

What He says here is similar to what He says in a different context, “For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will.”

The Father does not work in one manner, and the Son works in another manner. They work ‘in the same manner’ (See John 5: 21, 19). In that Christ has risen by Himself, the Lord indicated earlier, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn 2: 19). Thus, the glory of immortality that He said He took from the Father, it is understood, He also gave to Himself, though He did not say so.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* Love casts out fear and as the Apostle says, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love” (1 Jn 4: 18). But if fear changes into love, that unity is achieved as a result of redemption. For all are united with that one good through the perfection symbolized by the dove: “My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her” (Song of Solomon 6: 9).

The Lord Jesus Christ explains this idea in the Gospel more clearly. When He gave the disciples all power through His grace, He also gave blessings to His saints through His prayer to the Father. He crowned these blessings when He added, “ And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one” (Jn 17: 22). This means, they must not differ in doing what is good; they must unite in

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 82: 2.

<sup>2</sup> Letter 8 to Caesareans, 7.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 110: 3.

one thought through the unity of the Holy Spirit. As the Apostle Paul writes, “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit” (Eph 4: 3).<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Gregory of Nyssa**

**“I in them, and You in Me;  
That they may be made perfect in one,  
And that the world may know that You have sent Me,  
And have loved them as You have loved Me.” [23]**

\* Is it true that human beings can, with God the Father’s grace, love that same love of the Son in whom the Father is well pleased (Matt 3: 17)? This is the pleasure of the Father in Himself, and we are His pleasure through the Son. We in whom God sees the image of the Son through adopting us and therefore are His children.

Eternal love in God’s essence is one thing; love through grace is another. The Father loves the Son a perfect, eternally secure love. As for us, our growth in grace qualifies us for God’s love.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* How does He give them glory? By being in them, He and with Him the Father, so that they unite. He shows that peace is more powerful than miracles in attracting men. Just as conflict causes separation, peace grants unity.<sup>3</sup>

\* The Lord Jesus Christ makes it clear here that He does not love His disciples alone, but His Father also loves them.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* “I in them, and You in Me” [23] meaning ‘I am with those You have sent Me to and You are in Me, I who reconcile the world with You through Me.’<sup>4</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* The Father loves us in the Son because He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world (Eph 1: 4). For, He who loves His Only Begotten Son, surely loves the Son’s members through His work. He has engrafted us in Him through adoption, but in this we are not equal to the Only Begotten Son through whom we were made and recreated. For He says, “I have loved them as You have loved Me.” A person is not always equal to another when it is said, ‘as this so is the other’.

He loves the Son as divinity, for He begot Him equal to Himself. He loves Him also in the flesh, because the Only Begotten Son became man. He loves Him as the Word for the body of the Word is dear to Him. But as for us, as we are members of Him

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<sup>1</sup> Song of Solomon by Gregory, bishop of Nyssa, translated into Arabic by Dr. George Nawar, sermon 15.

<sup>2</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 5: 7: 89-90.

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St. John, 82: 2.

<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 110: 4.

whom He loves, and so that we may be so, He loved us for that reason before He created us.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

## **6 – A Prayer for Them to Be Glorified**

**“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me  
May be with Me where I am,  
That they may behold My glory which You have given Me;  
For You loved Me before the foundation of the world.” [24]**

\* The aim of the Lord Jesus Christ’s redemptive intercession for those who believe in Him is that they enjoy existing with Him eternally in heaven. After He prays that they may be protected in the Holy Name, in sanctification, and in unity, He prays for their glory. As the Psalmist says, “The Lord will give grace and glory” (Ps 84: 11). This is God’s plan concerning us that we may be blessed with eternal union with Him, in the Kingdom of Heaven, and with a life blessed and glorious.

What is heaven? It is where the Lord Jesus Christ is: “with Me where I am”. His presence is the heaven of heavens, the perfect blessing and the joy. Heaven is to be with Him (Phil 1: 23). It is seeing the glory of the Son before whom the angels cover their faces (Jn 12: 41). The Lamb is the light of the uppermost New Jerusalem (Rev 21: 23). Just as the bride shines with the light of her groom, the radiant glory shines on the Church that carries His icon and rises from glory to glory.

He prays to the Father who has authority to give eternal life. He speaks as King of kings, as the greatest Chief Priest, as Savior of the world, and as the Offering of love for humanity and obedience to the Father. He prays from a superior position of power as the Son of God, the Only Begotten Son who grants life.

\* He says, “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am.” This is what they desired to know, for they often said, “Lord, where are You going?” (Jn 13: 36) The Lord says to the Father, “that they may behold My glory” as He mentions here, in a mysterious way, that perfect peace is in that His disciples look at the Son of God and this will make them glorified. This is what the Apostle Paul means when he says, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2 Cor 3: 18). And just as those who look at the sun and enjoy the gentle wind enjoy themselves by doing that, this will be our case. For that sight of the glory of the Lord gives us much more pleasure than the joy of those who look at the radiant sun..

**Saint John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 110: 5.

\* The glory that the Word has is also the glory of the Father. The Apostle writes, “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2: 10-11). Therefore, concerning His divinity, the Son has His glory, and the glory of the Father and that of the Son is one. The Son is not less than the Father in majesty, for the glory is one. Neither is He less in divinity, for the fullness of divinity is in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* Undoubtedly it is enough that He says, “I desire that those may be with Me where I am” and He says, “with Me” because being with Him is the greatest blessing. We cannot doubt that the true believer is with Christ in faith. For, about this, He says, “he who is not with Me is against Me” (Matt 12: 30). But when He said, “I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am” He spoke particularly about that vision when we see Him as He is (1 Jn 3: 2).<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“O righteous Father! The world has not known You,  
But I have known You,  
And those have known that You sent Me.” [25]**

When He prayed that they may be sanctified He called the Father, “Holy Father”; now that He prays that they may be glorified, He calls the Father, “O righteous Father”. The glory that we may have is the crown of the righteousness that the righteous Judge gives us. The righteousness of God is the source of all good and glory for us; that glory which the righteous Father promised us and which the crucified Son offered as a price that we may be qualified to have it.

\* He has shown us here that no one knows God the Father unless he knows God’s Son. As though the Lord Jesus Christ says to the Father, ‘I wished that the people may have their share, but they did not know You.’ And I think that He says this here finding their stupidity difficult to accept because they refused to know that He is good and righteous.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* Because You are righteous the world does not know You. That is the world destined to judgment that it truly deserves. But the world that has been reconciled through Christ is qualified to know You, not because it is itself worthy, but through grace. For, what does He mean by knowing Him, but having eternal life? That eternal life He bars from the world that will be judged, and gives to the world reconciled with Him. Thus, the world does not know You because You are righteous and in return the world gets what it deserves, that is not knowing You. In the same way, the world reconciled with You knows that You are merciful, not because it is itself worthy but it is given grace because it needs help to know You.

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<sup>1</sup> Of the Christian Faith, 2, 9 (82).

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 111: 2.

He then says, “but I have known You” [25]. He is the spring of grace Who in essence is God and by grace became man, indescribable, by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin, and as God’s grace is through our Lord Jesus Christ, He adds, “and these have known that You sent Me” [25]. This is the case of the world that is reconciled with Him. ‘But because You sent Me they knew’, that is, through grace they knew.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it,  
That the love with which You loved Me may be in them,  
And I in them.” [26]**

He concludes His farewell prayer by praying that they may have divine knowledge. After He prays that God may keep them from evil, He prays that He may sanctify them for the divine work. Then He prays that they may have heavenly unity, and now He prays that they may have that knowledge that is fulfilled only when they lift up their hearts to live in heaven and discover divine glory.

The knowledge that we enjoy is the fruit of our unity with Him; we know the Son who carries us up to the knowledge of the Father. It is a knowledge that grows continually: “I declared to them Your name, and will declare it.” This is the knowledge of God’s mysteries: that the Son who alone perfectly knows the divine mysteries presents, for He is one with His Father. We have known the Son and He has taken us to the knowledge of the name of the Father. He will also give us knowledge through our growth in our holy love, and through our continual discovery of God’s love and the dwelling of the Word in our hearts.

Knowledge is a dynamic process that does not stop. Through grace, the believer continues to grow in the knowledge of the Father who grants gifts. The believer grows in the knowledge also of the Son who is the Messiah fulfilling salvation. And he grows in the knowledge of the Holy Spirit whom the Lord in His prayer calls “the Spirit of truth”.

Among the blessings of unity is that believers experience the love of the Father for them through His love for His Only Begotten Son. They rejoice in the divine love and in that the Son dwells in them. For, the Son is love in them; He is the source of perfect joy (Jn 17: 13).

\* We also will rejoice in accordance to our measure if we are wise. Therefore, Paul says, “if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may be glorified together” (Rom 8: 17). But there are those who act against themselves because of their laziness and sleep. When such glory, rather than being sent into Hades, is shown to them, when they can reign and be glorified with the Son of God yet they still deprive themselves of such great blessings; then they deserve a profusion of tears and they become more miserable than any being.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 101: 5.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, 80: 3.

\* Do you see how the Lord reaches a good aim with His words? The good aim is love that is the source and perfection of all good work. May we, therefore, know God and love Him so that it may not be said, “They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him” (Titus 1: 16). Once more, it is written, “he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim 5: 8) because while the unbeliever cares for his family, relatives and strangers, he who denies the faith neglects even his family. For, what excuse do you have when they blaspheme against God and disrespect Him because of you?”<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* I have declared to them Your name through faith and I will declare it publicly. I have declared Your name to those whose journey on the strange earth has a definite end. I will declare Your name to those whose kingdom will have no end.<sup>2</sup>

\* Christ’s prayer ends and His suffering begins.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 82: 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 101: 6.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 101: 6.

**Meditations Inspired  
By  
The Gospel of St John, Ch 17**

Do You Lack Glory,  
O You wholly glorious?

+ I stood among Your disciples, amazed!  
I heard You pray 'Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You!  
Do You lack glory, O You wholly glorious glory?  
And does the Father need glory,  
He who dwells in unapproachable light?

+ Your glory and Your Father's glory are one,  
That the fallen humanity may be glorified with heavenly glory!  
You desire all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.  
You desire that dust may become heaven!  
That the corrupt may rejoice in incorruption!  
This is the wonderful glory!

+ Carry me to where You speak to Your Father.  
My spirit will then be comforted in this dark world  
As long as You put the souls of Your believers in Your Father's safe  
They will be protected and no thief can come near them!

+ You carry them to Your Holy Father!  
So that just as You have consecrated Your life for our sanctity  
We may be sanctified in You,  
And we may be considered holy and righteous before Your Father.

+ Carry us all to the Father  
As members of Your one body  
So that the spirit of division may not sneak in!  
But that we may enjoy eternal and true unity!

+ You pray for us because You are the heavenly High Priest  
You pray on our behalf because You are the Head of the Church  
You alone can, through Your blood, request  
Because through Your Cross You raised us up to heaven  
You hid us in Your pierced side  
And with Your blood You bought and redeemed us!

+ Your prayer is certainly fulfilled in us!  
When we see You in Your glory  
We rejoice in the radiance of Your glory covering all Your Church



And all are glorified through You and in You forever!

Amen

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## CHAPTER 18

### YOUR SUFFERINGS REVEAL YOUR GLORY

+ The hour of Your suffering has come. It is the hour of Your glory.  
You willingly entered the garden with Your disciples.  
You, O the Sun of Righteousness entered and waited  
For the procession of darkness to come to You.  
They carried swords and sticks to capture You.  
All nature expected a word from You to destroy them.  
They carried torches to look for the Sun of Righteousness!  
They all did not realize You willingly delivered Yourself up to them  
For the sake of Your wonderful love of their salvation.

+ They wanted to arrest You  
But they fell down on their faces  
You delivered Yourself up to them  
So they bound You cruelly, lest You should escape.  
Your hands bled  
Yet with love You healed the wound of the servant Malchus!

+ They took You to the high priest in the dark night  
You who desire to take them with Your Holy Spirit to Your divine glamorous light.  
The evil high priest advised that it is better that You should die for the nation.  
He did not understand that You are the heavenly High Priest  
That You die to end the death of the human race  
And You rise to raise them up with You.

+ The high priest enveloped himself with religious temporary popular authority  
But everybody abandoned you  
One disciple betrayed you, and another denied you  
The power of the high priest is in human evanescent inner possibilities  
But you are the Power, Word and Wisdom of God  
Your divine glory does not need human support!

+ They delivered you up: You the King of kings to a human ruler.  
They demanded that you should be killed as an evildoer  
The governor found no fault in you at all!  
He used every means so that he might not do what was against his conscience!  
But the stubborn people insisted murdering you.  
They accepted Caesar as their only king and rejected your kingdom.  
They released Baraboo so that you should be crucified, you who are all goodness!

+ In weakness Pilate gave you up to be crucified.

For he could not lose Caesar's friendship as a price for justice.  
All the powers of darkness gathered against You

And did not know that by doing so, they revealed the Light of Your glory!

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## **1 – Pilate's Judgment**

### **So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him. [1]**

Pilate tried to release the Lord because he was sure Christ was innocent. He thought he could release Him because he traditionally used to release a prisoner at the Passover; yet he failed because of the people's uprising. However, as he was still convinced that Jesus Christ committed no crime, he used another method, that is he allowed his soldiers to scourge and scorn Him so that he might prove to the people that Christ was helpless and therefore they should forgive Him.

The Evangelist gives us an exposition of the judgment of the Lord. It is full of injustice: the plaintiffs are confused, the judge wavers between his feeling of injustice to Jesus and his fear of the rebellion of the multitude against him, and their claim that Jesus wanted to be king and oppose Caesar. Pilate failed to acquit Jesus, and therefore he was obliged to let the case proceed in accordance to the rules. He had to treat Jesus cruelly because of the danger and nature of the accusation. Pilate first condescended to the wish of the people and ordered his soldiers to scourge Jesus and treat Him as a rebel. Pilate hoped that by doing this he would legally prove that Jesus was innocent.

Pilate was not serious in judging justly. For, though he knew that Jesus was righteous, he condemned Him to be scourged like a criminal [1]. Luke the Evangelist says that Pilate said to the multitude, "I will chastise Him and release Him" (Luke 23: 16). Pilate's aim in scourging Jesus seems to have been his hope that the Jews would change their minds concerning His crucifixion. Clearly, Pilate felt that Jesus did nothing to deserve crucifixion.

It seems that the scourging was executed in accordance to the Roman rules, which were far crueler than the Jewish rules. The Romans usually scourged those condemned to crucifixion. The Lord Jesus Christ accepted this for our sake. As Isaiah writes, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (Is 50: 6). The Psalmist says, "The plowers plowed on my back; they made their furrows long" (Ps 129: 3). The Lord Himself had said, they will "deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify" (Matt 20: 19; see Mark 10: 34; Luke 18: 33). Saint Peter says, "by whose stripes we were healed" (1 Pet 2: 24). The Physician was scourged so that the sick would be cured. He endured

being scourged for our sake so that the believers would find their pleasure in enduring suffering for Him and partaking of His pains and crucifixion (Acts 5: 41; 16: 22, 25).

Scourging was a terrible punishment. The historian **Eusebius** explains that they used a whip made of several strips made of leather with bits of metal or bone at the tips so that the flesh of the person scourged would be torn. Sometimes the veins and inner layers of the scourged were exposed. The Roman writer, **Cicero**, says that sometimes scourging caused death. The Roman soldiers were cruel and had no mercy. It may be that Jesus Christ could not carry the cross to the place of the crucifixion because He was scourged. Some scholars point out Christ's quick death on the cross as the result of the cruel scourging. The Evangelists mention the fact that Christ was scourged but do not describe His pain.

The Lord considered all sorts of suffering and abuse for our sake as easy. He loves us and longs for our redemption so that we should regard our partaking with Him, of His shame and pain, a glory that we do not deserve.

\* John the apostle says, 'Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him'. Pilate probably wished to calm the Jews and evade their anger. Just as he could not rescue the Lord with his first address to the Jews, he failed in stopping their wickedness to that extent.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* We need to believe that Pilate did this for no reason but to let the Jews see this cruel treatment and be satisfied, without madly asking for His death. For the same reason the governor allowed his soldiers to do what followed. He may have commanded them to do that, though the Evangelist said nothing about this<sup>1</sup>.

**Saint Augustine**

**And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns  
And put it on His head,  
And they put on Him a purple robe. [2]**

The soldiers used to scorn those who were convicted, especially that the soldiers represented the occupying authority that abused rebels against Rome. Their sarcasm fitted the accusation that He was "King of the Jews". They did not find a king to put to death often, and they thought that scorning a king of the Jews was a farce hard to repeat. "Purple": this is an expensive color. It is a mixture of violet and red made of some kinds of rare fish shells. Purple clothes were expensive and linked to royal life, and worn by the rich and high ranking men in the nation.

Matthew the Evangelist writes that they "put a scarlet robe on Him" (Matt 27: 28). This color is extracted from some dead insects and a scarlet robe is much cheaper than a purple garment that the military captains wore. The soldiers perhaps brought an old robe that a military commander had thrown away because it was old. The soldiers

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 116: 1.

then used the purple gown to dress a poor Galilean (Jesus) who would be king! The crown of thorns and the purple robe denote royalty but the world uses them for wicked humor.

\* St John reports, ‘And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe.’ This Pilate did to please the angry Jews. For this reason he led the Lord Jesus Christ out, crowned with thorns, so that when the Jews would see Him so abused, they give would vent out their sickness a little and throw out their poison.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Then they said,  
“Hail, King of the Jews!”  
And they struck Him with their hands.” [3]**

Thus Pilate delivered Him up to the soldiers so that they deride Him. They therefore twisted a crown of thorns for Him and put it on His head instead of the crown of a king. They put on Him a purple robe as a king and in scorn they struck Him with their hands as they said, “Hail, King of the Jews!”

**Pilate then went out again,  
And said to them,  
“Behold, I am bringing Him out to you,  
That you may know that I find no fault in Him.” [4]**

Pilate brought Him out to the Jewish leaders and the tumultuous crowds to show them that their accusation against Him, that He wanted to be king, was some kind of illusion. For here He was before them, His flesh torn with scourging and He had become an absurd subject of scorn. Pilate hurt the Lord Jesus Christ even though he knew that He was innocent. Then he brought Him out to the accusers hoping that they might drop their case against Him. Pilate declared that according to the Roman law he “found no fault in Him” [4]. There was no fault at all in Him, he repeated (Jn 18: 38). Thus Pilate pronounced himself guilty because since there was no fault in Christ at all, why then did he scourge Him and give Him to the soldiers to abuse Him? Why did he bring Him out to His prosecutors and did not release Him immediately as justice decrees?

**Then Jesus came out,  
Wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.  
And Pilate said to them,  
“Behold the Man!” [5]**

By saying, “Behold the Man” Pilate may have wished to assert to the Jews that if they thought Christ wanted to be king and oppose Caesar, this was false. For now that they saw Him so weak and helpless, having no followers who might oppose authority, they should not fear Him.

By bringing Him out wearing the crown of thorns and with His head, face, and all His body covered with blood, to those who denounced Him, Pilate gave them the chance to insist on crucifying Him. For Pilate treated Him as a slave. He unjustly tortured Him because a slave had no right to defend himself. On the other hand, it was necessary to prove that a free man was guilty before tormenting him so cruelly.

The Lord came out to become a spectacle, in front of the people, carrying our reproach. This is why the apostle Paul later said, “Let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach” (Heb 13: 13).

His sight was so painful that Pilate said, “Behold the Man” without mentioning His name in some derision. That sight moved the heart of the man of wisdom almost a thousand years before. For he said, “Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousal, and in the day of the gladness of his heart” (Song of Solomon 3: 11).

Some believe that the words of Pilate, “Behold the Man” bear a secret meaning. The word ‘Adam’ in Hebrew means ‘man’ “Behold the Man” may thus mean ‘Here is Adam whom God created to be king and given him power over all creatures, but he has become miserable and has brought a curse upon himself and all creation. Thus the Second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, has taken the place of the first Adam to bring the royal heavenly life to those who have lost even their temporary peace. Instead of death that the first Adam brought, Christ became life giving (1 Cor 15: 22, 45). This is what Pilate said and unaware of the meaning of what he said!

Pilate faced the outburst of rage and hostility to Jesus by declaring His innocence. In so doing he became a witness across history. But Jesus did not utter a word. Pilate said, “Behold the Man”. He did not say, ‘Behold the culprit’. As though he meant that according to him Christ was innocent of any guilt at all.

**Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him,  
They cried out, saying,  
“Crucify Him, crucify Him!”  
Pilate said to them,  
“You take Him and crucify Him,  
For I find no fault in Him.” [6]**

After hearing Pilate repeating that he did not find fault at all in Jesus, and after seeing Jesus’ body torn with scourging, His head and forehead pierced with thorns, and His face swollen with beating, the people could have asked for His release. But the chief priests and officers quickly cried out saying, “Crucify Him, crucify Him.” Their envy and malice were so extreme that they did not accept Pilate’s judgment. They were not sorry for the Lord’s pain. They, instead, considered Him deserving death even if He was innocent. For in their opinion their safety and the peace of the city necessitated His crucifixion and removal.

The chief priests and their followers had come for one purpose, which is to stress the importance of Christ being crucified no matter what the price might be. They did not listen to anything Pilate said. But as they perceived his strong wish to release Him, they for the first time, said the words, “Crucify Him”. This was what the chief priests and officers said, disclosing what was in their hearts.

For the third time Pilate declares the innocence of the Lord and then he says to them, “You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him.” [6]. He knows very well that they cannot crucify Him. He says this only to rebuke them as though he says, ‘If your envy drives you to crucify Him, do not use me as an obedient means of that envy. I would then do evil against justice. My conscience is troubled. Act according to your envy if you can!’

\* Observe how the judge presented his defense in many ways to acquit the Lord of the accusations against Him. But nothing of all this shamed them. They insisted on fulfilling their aim. The statement, “You take Him and crucify Him” is an expression of one who wants to be innocent of committing a crime, and wants to force the Jews to do something illegal. For, they brought the Lord to him to decide on crucifying Him. But what happened was the opposite, for, the judge declared the innocence of the Lord and did not indict Him.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**The Jews answered him,  
‘We have a law,  
And according to our law He ought to die,  
Because He made Himself the Son of God.’” [7]**

The accusation that He opposed Caesar and the Roman authorities and stirred up the people proved false. So they charged Him with an offence which Pilate had no right to discuss. That accusation was that He had blasphemed and opposed the Jewish law. This was the business of the high priest and the Sanhedrin. Pilate and his men could not interfere in religious matters. The leaders accused the Lord of blasphemy and claiming He was divine, “because He made Himself the Son of God”. These religious men leaders understood from the Lord’s many speeches that by saying, “the Son of God”, He meant He was equal to God. They, therefore, accused Him of blasphemy.

The prosecutors presented their indictment, which is that He blasphemed and therefore deserved death (Lev 24: 16). They were proud of the law even when they broke it and sinned against God. He who makes his boast in the law, does he dishonor God through breaking the law? (Rom 2: 23). They broke the law and thought they honored it. They did not listen to the prophecy, “Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed” (Is 10: 1).

\* Contemplate the accusation: “He made Himself the Son of God” [7]. Tell me is this an accusation that He who does the deeds of the Son of God calls Himself the Son of God? What then did Christ do? While they proceeded with one accusation after another, He

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 84: 2.

continued His calm, thus fulfilling the words of the prophet, “He opens not His mouth. In humiliation His judgment was taken away” (Is 53: 7, 8 LXX).<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid,...” [8]**

When he heard that the accused did not only claim to be king, but also that He was divine, Pilate was greatly troubled and afraid. The case became more difficult for him. He could calm the people concerning His claim to royalty, but Pilate could not appease the terror of the people if Jesus said He was divine. At the same time Pilate feared the personality of Jesus because he was unable to identify Him. Pilate was sure that the religious leaders hated Jesus, but how could he be sure that Jesus was truly the Son of God. Pilate was afraid of taking part with them in the crime of opposing the incarnate Son of God.

**‘...and went again into the Praetorium,  
And said to Jesus,  
‘Where are You from?  
But Jesus gave him no answer.” [9]**

Pilate asked the accused a question inside the Praetorium. That question revealed what went on in his mind, which is that the personality of Jesus was a puzzle. As though he asked, ‘What is Your secret origin? Who are You? Tell me.’ This was a question that was often addressed to the Lord. The Jews asked Him, “Who do You make Yourself out to be?” (Jn 8: 53). He answered the Jews that no one knows Him except He who is with Him all the time and is of the same essence. For He said, “If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me” (Jn 8: 54). The Jews were confused because He announced, “It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him” (Jn 8: 54-55).

As Pilate was troubled and afraid he asked the Lord Christ, “Where are You from?” [9] Pilate spoke to Him in the Praetorium, in the court away from the noise of the Jewish leaders and the people. Jesus had answered Pilate’s previous questions, but concerning this question, ‘Jesus gave him no answer’ (Jn 19: 9). Pilate asked for information about Jesus in relation to this world. But the answer to the question needs leaving this world to comprehend the eternal. For, Christ is not a mere prophet among prophets, nor just a teacher, a worker of signs and cures. Therefore, He was silent. Pilate had asked Jesus, “Are You the King of the Jews?” (Jn 18: 33) and again, “Are You a king then?” (18: 37). Jesus answered, “You say rightly that I am a king”. Now Pilate does not ask, ‘Who are You?’ or, “Are You the Son of God?” He asks, “Where are You from?” implying, ‘Are You a human being or celestial? Are You from beneath or from above?’ Pilate knew the town of the Lord- the man, and he was surely asking whether He was greater than man or not. It was not possible for him to ask this question directly, lest he should be accused of intruding in religious beliefs, and which the religious leaders only should decide.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 84: 2.



The Lord said nothing, not because He could not, or because He did not care for Pilate's salvation, but because He wished to give Pilate a chance to think carefully. Earlier, He had answered saying, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn 18: 36). In that discourse He had made it clear to Pilate where He was from.

In the spirit of prophecy, Isaiah wondered at the Lord's silence. Isaiah said in many passages, "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street" (Is 42: 2). "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opens not His mouth" (Is 53: 7).

\* Pilate was afraid when he heard the Jews saying, "He made Himself the Son of God" [7]. He was terrified lest what they said should be true and he should be violating the law. He therefore did not ask Jesus what He did, but trembling with fear, he began examining Jesus as a person. He asked, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer because He had already said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn 18: 36) and "For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth" (Jn 18: 37). Pilate should not have resisted what he heard.<sup>1</sup>

\* The apostle John says, "But Jesus gave him no answer." As the Lord was silent and gave Pilate no answer, He made it clear that He obediently came to His agony.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* He walked to judgment without opening His mouth. He was not like one with an evil mind convinced he had sinned. Rather in meekness He offered Himself a sacrifice for the sins of others.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**Then Pilate said to Him,  
"Are You not speaking to me?  
Do You not know that I have power to crucify You,  
And power to release You?" [10]**

Pilate boasted of having power and was angry because the Lord did not answer his question. Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?" Pilate exaggerated in showing his power because he thought that he was in control of the situation. He did not realize that on the one hand he had no right to crucify an innocent person, and release another person who should be crucified according to the Roman law. On the other hand, Pilate forgot that God Almighty is there and nothing happens without His permission.

We realize that the silence of our Lord Jesus was not because He refused to answer the question, but because Pilate could not understand the truth. Pilate therefore

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 84: 2.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 116: 4.

thought that he had power to crucify or to release Him [10]. Jesus then answered that Pilate had what limited power allowed to him from above.

\* Do you see how Pilate condemned himself first. For, if he was in power, why did he not release Him when he found no fault in Him at all?

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Jesus answered,  
“You could have no power at all against Me,  
Unless it had been given you from above.  
Therefore, the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.” [11]**

Pilate may have expected that his words would give Jesus Christ a chance to speak to him so that he would release Him. But the Lord rebuked him for his pride, and for boasting of having power over justice, ignoring the role of God Almighty. The Lord Jesus Christ answered him so that He would remove his stupidity. As Solomon writes, “Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit” (Prov 26: 5). When Pilate used his power and unjustly scourged Him, the Lord Jesus was silent. However, when he proudly announced that he had power, Jesus scolded him so that he might know his limitations. Pilate forgot that “...he that is higher than the highest regards and there be Higher than they” (Ecc 5: 8). These are the last words that the Lord said to Pilate in this Gospel. Christ asked Pilate to know that every power a man on earth has is divinely given to him by heaven, not by Rome. God is truly Almighty and He, not the emperor or those that the emperor appoints as rulers and governors, has power over all human affairs.

Pilate had not experienced such moments as this- when he had to judge a person whom some considered the Son of God and the King of Israel. He thought he was in control of the destiny of this person. But the Lord made it clear to him that he was only a tool in God’s hands, and that he could have done nothing without permission from God (Acts 4: 27-28). Still the Lord gave him some excuse when He compared his sin to that of those who delivered Him to be judged. However, this does not justify Pilate, nor does it relieve him of his responsibility. The responsibility of those who delivered Him is greater because they had read the Scriptures, and had heard the prophecies that were fulfilled in Him, and had also seen the miracles He had performed and the divine power He had.

Some observe that here the Lord Jesus Christ was referring to Judas, the disciple who betrayed and delivered Him. But it is obvious that He did not mean Judas alone when He mentioned the one who delivered Him. He meant the entire Jewish nation and the chief priests. As Pilate had said before, “Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me” (Jn 18: 35). Indeed, Pilate did not find in Jesus Christ fault for which He should die. Judas, on the other hand, was a disciple and friend of Jesus and was given many blessings and possibilities to work for the heavenly kingdom. Pilate deviated from justice, but did not accept a bribe like Judas. Pilate was wrong in not insisting on releasing the innocent, but he was not envious and full of hatred and hostility like the Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus Christ.

What does the Lord mean by sin here? According to John the Evangelist, He meant “not knowing God” as seen in Jesus Christ.

\* The Lord destroyed Pilate’s pride and arrogance. For He said to him, “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above.” He made it clear that this event is unlike many other incidents, for what was happening was done in a mysterious way.<sup>1</sup>

\* When you hear the words of the Lord Jesus Christ to Pilate, “...unless it had been given you from above”, do not think that Pilate is innocent of transgression. The Lord said, “...the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin”; this shows that Pilate sinned.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* When He did not answer, He was silent like a lamb; and when He answered, He taught us as a Shepherd. Therefore, may we learn the lesson as the Apostle also says, “...there is no authority except from God” (Rom 13: 1). He who delivers an innocent man to the ruler to kill him is more sinful than he who has power to kill for fear of a higher authority.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**From then on Pilate sought to release Him,  
But the Jews cried out, saying,  
‘If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar’s friend.  
Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.’” [12]**

The words of the Lord Jesus Christ did not cause Pilate to defend his power, but on the contrary they made him more earnest in wanting to prove the Lord’s innocence and release Him. This is evident in the uprising of the Jews and their screams as they accuse Pilate himself of not being Caesar’s friend if he neglected punishing the Man who opposes Caesar. Pilate then would lose his position if he did not perform his duty.

Christ’s enemies found the means by which they could put more pressure on Pilate when they accused him of negligence in punishing a rebel. For, the Roman law respected the right and customs of the people they governed within their community. Moreover, the Roman law was extremely cruel and had no pity in crushing rebellion. Therefore, Pilate was in danger if the multitude persisted in complaining that he was lenient towards the accused.

Pilate feared their protest against him before Tiberius Caesar, for he was known as the most passionate emperor. Tiberius listened to remonstrations against many men and he did not trust those who served him. Pilate was willing to free Jesus, but he was not ready to face an accusation that he failed in his duty as a friend of Caesar. He could not get into trouble with Rome at any price.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 84: 2.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 116: 5.

\* When the Jews could not find in their law an accusation against the Lord, they slyly turned to laws outside their own laws. For they said, “Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.” Now I ask the Jews, “How did the Lord Jesus Christ appear to be a rebel and usurper? How can you prove this? Please, explain! Was He wearing a crown? Did He look like a usurper? Did He have soldiers? He walked with twelve disciples. He was simple in the food He ate, the clothes He wore, and the place where He slept!”<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**When Pilate therefore heard that saying,  
He brought Jesus out  
And sat down in the judgment seat  
In a place that is called the Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha.” [13]**

The Pavement here was like a stone pavement usually in the open air. This was where the judgment seat was on which governors and rulers sat to judge. It was paved with blue, white, and black stones and marble. That place was called **Gabbatha** in Hebrew. The name is derived from ‘gaba’, which means ‘high’ because where the judge sat was usually high so that everybody could see the judge, follow the procedure, and hear the verdict. The judge stepped up on marble steps to the seat. The Pavement may be the name given to those steps. Some say that the word, ‘Gabbatha’ means a closed place because there was a wall surrounding it, made to prevent anyone from attacking the accused during the trial surrounded it. Others think that the place was confined to the trial of criminals who were dangerous to the state.

The verdict was about to be announced because the governor sat down in the official judgment seat, or ‘curule’, an ivory seat for Roman judges and their representatives.

**Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover,  
And about the sixth hour.  
And he said to the Jews,  
“Behold your King!” [14]**

The Evangelist first describes the place of judgment then specifies the time. That was about the sixth hour, meaning at noon, on the Preparation Day of the Passover, the days of unleavened bread (Luke 23: 54) and the Jews were preparing for the Passover Sabbath. This timing augments the guilt of those who crucified Him, for they did not wait until after the feast. This shows their bitter hatred and their haste in achieving their aim. They removed the old yeast from every house, but they did not remove their old nature from their hearts, minds and conduct.

That was between the third and the sixth hour, because He was on the Cross at exactly the sixth hour.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 84: 2.

Mark the Evangelist writes that it was the third hour when they crucified the Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 15: 25). He considered the scourging as the beginning, but John the Evangelist said it was the sixth hour when Christ was actually on the Cross.

Some writers believe that the sixth hour here is according to the Roman time that considers midnight as the beginning of a new day. The other Evangelists, however, used the Jewish time that marked the day as beginning and ending at sunset. So, the sixth hour in the morning was when the sentence was pronounced and the actual procedure of the crucifixion began. In some manuscripts and writings of the Fathers, the hour was the third, not the sixth hour.

As the Jews turned their accusation against Pilate, he angrily ridiculed them saying to them, “Behold your King!” [14] He meant, ‘If you strongly seek to crucify Him, you hurt yourselves for He is your King.’ This arrow was his last attempt at saving the Lord Christ from crucifixion.

\* Pilate delivered the Lord Jesus Christ up to the Jews thinking they would pity Him. The proof that this was his aim is that he said to them, “Behold your King!”

**Saint John Chrysostom**

Deriding the Jews, Pilate announced, “Behold your King!” The Lord was at that moment probably crowned with thorns and wearing the purple or scarlet robe. Pilate did not realize that Christ was truly not only the King of the Jews, but was also the King of the entire world. In Him the prophecies were fulfilled that He was the Lord Jesus Christ. In the past, Gideon had refused to be king over Israel and looked forward to the Lord Himself to be the true King (Judges 8: 23). When the people asked Samuel the prophet to name a king for them like all the nations, God said to Samuel that the people did not reject him but rejected the Lord Himself to be their King (1 Samuel 8: 5, 7). Men of the Old Testament expected the fulfillment of the divine promise, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth, for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron’ (Ps 2: 7-9).

It would have been proper for Pilate to announce to the entire world, ‘Behold your King who cares for the souls and raises them in His eternal kingdom of heaven.’

The Lord Jesus Christ came as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1: 29). He is the Lover of mankind, but He cannot bear to see their sins. He takes away their sins so that they may come to the Father carrying His righteousness. But here we see men not tolerating their Savior. They want to stop seeing Him. The wicked cannot endure God's love and cannot even behold Him!

**But they cried out, “Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!”**

**Pilate said to them,**

**“Shall I crucify your King?”**

**The chief priests answered,**

**“We have no king but Caesar!” [15]**

They cried out more that they could not bear His sight, “Away with Him, away with Him!” [15] They refused to be related to Him or have any relationship with Him. They had no king but Caesar. Isaiah the prophet looked at Him and said, “...whom the nation abhors” (Is 49: 7). He also said, “He has no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not” (Is 53: 2-3).

Capital punishment by crucifixion was known in the past in and out of the Roman Empire. The ancient world looked at crucifixion as the most horrible manner of death because it was a shame and a curse. Ancient writers avoided describing crucifixion in details. Cicero wrote that crucifixion was “the most cruel and disgusting punishment” and Josephus said it was the meanest method of execution. The Roman philosopher, Seneca, explained that crucifixion was a slow and extremely painful death and wondered if anyone wanted willingly to die in this manner. He said, “Is it possible that a person would prefer to waste time in enduring the painful death of his organs one after the other and let his life end drop by drop instead of giving up his spirit at once? Does anyone wish to be nailed to the cross, a curse for a long time, disfigured, his body swollen because of his shoulder and chest wounds, and breathe while suffering extended bitter pain? Indeed, he would find many reasons to prefer death before crucifixion.”<sup>1</sup>

The Roman citizen was rarely condemned to be crucified. This punishment was used to deter slaves from rebellion and force them to accept humiliation and distress. As they stood against the Lord, the Jews did not want freedom; they did not want to be saved; they only hoped to get rid of Jesus. Thus, they became Caesar’s slaves. They lost their feeling that they were under Roman rule. The Jews, especially their leaders, hated Caesar and his representatives, but because of their hostility to the Lord they thought that loyalty and subjugation to Caesar was a better choice. They were ready to be under the rule of any tyrant representing Caesar. They would willingly obey him if that resulted in the removal of the Lord Christ.

The answer of the chief priests implied their fear that their priesthood institution would come to an end. They accepted Caesar as their only king and they forgot God’s Kingdom.

\* Observe the Lord carefully in His trial. He allowed soldiers to drive Him. Pilate sat down to judge Him. He who sits at the right hand of the Father stands before the judge! The people He saved from Egypt were now crying out, “Away with Him! Crucify Him!” Why, O Jews? Is it because He healed the blind among you? Or is it because He made the lame walk and gave blessings to many? The prophet is amazed and says, “...against whom make ye a wide mouth, and draw out the tongue?” (Is 57: 4). The Lord Himself says in prophecies, “Mine heritage is unto Me as a lion in the forest; it crieth out against

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Hengel: *Crucifixion*. London 1977, pp. 30-31; Leon Morris, p. 655.

Me: therefore have I hated it” (Jeremiah 12: 8). I did not reject them but they rejected Me, therefore I say, “I have forsaken My house” (Jer 12: 7).<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* They forced him saying, “Crucify Him.” Why did they strive to kill Him by this method? It is a shameful death! They feared lest in the future He would be remembered and therefore they condemned Him with a curse. They did not know that the Truth is glorified in all impediments. To prove that this was their fear, listen to what they said, “...we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise’” (Matt 27: 63). Therefore they stirred up all the people to turn the matter upside down to destroy further threats. The leaders corrupted the confused people who then cried out repeatedly, “Crucify Him!”<sup>2</sup>

\* “We have no king but Caesar”: they willingly submit themselves to punishment. God therefore gave them up, because as children they expelled themselves from His care and great guidance. As with one voice they glorified that foreign power, He permitted them to fall, as they required.<sup>3</sup>

\* Here they came down from Christ’s Kingdom and claimed for themselves Caesar’s kingdom.<sup>4</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

## **2 – The Crucifixion**

**Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified.  
So they took Jesus and led Him away.” [16]**

As he did not fear God but feared men, Pilate signed the condemnation to crucifixion and delivered Jesus to those who should crucify Him. He who testified several times that Christ was innocent, finally dictated His punishment as a criminal. Pilate washed his hands (Matt 27: 24) to announce that he was innocent of that judgment. However, washing his hands will not make him innocent before God. To save time, the Jewish leaders went with the executors of judgment. They were afraid that Pilate would change his edict, for they saw him from time to time proclaiming the Lord’s innocence. Moreover, they feared the multitude might reconsider when they remembered the wonderful works of the Lord Jesus Christ and the testimony of Pontius Pilate that Christ was innocent. The multitude would then turn against the wish of the chief priests. This is how the adversary stirs up his followers to take every chance to hasten the destruction of faith in the Lord in the life of every believer so that he should not enjoy it.

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<sup>1</sup> Article 13: 15.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, 84: 2.

<sup>3</sup> Hom. 84. PG 59: 501.

<sup>4</sup> Hom. 85. PG 59: 503.

In their opinion, the leaders felt that they were successful in their plot and that the victim had fallen into their trap. They took the lamb to be slaughtered and did not comprehend that the prophets foretold what happened as God's redemptive plan.

\* As Pilate heard them he quite foolishly delivered Him up to them. He should have ascertained that Christ aimed at obtaining royal authority. But he, out of fear only, pronounced his judgment. Christ had already said, "My kingdom is not of this world." But Pilate was totally involved in temporary matters and did not rule, as he should. His wife's dream was enough to terrify him, but nothing made him act well because he did not contemplate heaven, but he delivered Christ.

Now they gave Him, as an evildoer, the cross to carry. They hated the cross and refused to touch the wood. That was the condition of the symbol, Isaac, when he carried the wood. But at that time, what should happen depended on the father's decision because it was a symbol. But here the reality was accomplished practically.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, Which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha." [17]**

As part of His suffering, He actually carried the cross. The slender, sensitive body carried the heavy cross. He carried it alone at first. Then He could not because of His weak body, the wounds caused by the scourging, the crown of thorns, and the slapping of His face. Therefore, Simon of Cyrene helped Him carry the cross (Matt 27: 32). As Isaac carried the wood of the burnt offering on his way to become a burnt sacrifice, similarly Christ carried the wood of the cross. As the prophet says, "...the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Is 53: 6). Saint Peter says, "who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness" (1 Pet 2: 24).

They brought Him to the place of execution outside the city, to a place called Golgotha. Origen the Scholar referred to a tradition that said that this was the place where Adam was buried. There, where death defeated the first Adam and changed him into dust, Christ, the Second Adam died to vanquish death and give life back to Adam and his descendants. That place was on Mount Moriah where Abraham was about to offer his son, Isaac, as a burnt offering but God sent him a ram to offer instead of Isaac. Some writers believe that the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified on a hill that looked like a skull.

\* Some say that Adam died and was buried there and that Jesus achieved victory at the same place where death ruled. Christ went carrying the cross and triumphed over death. His cross was a symbol of victory, though the Jews intended something else.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 85: 1.

<sup>2</sup> Hom. 85. PG 59: 504.



\* He bore our pains and accepted suffering on the cross. He took our flesh and if He had not suffered He would not have shared our human life. He first suffered then descended. But what were those sufferings that He endured for our sake? Those were the sufferings of love!<sup>1</sup>

**Origen the Scholar**

**Where they crucified Him,  
And two others with Him, one on either side,  
And Jesus in the center. [18]**

Two others were crucified with Him, one on either side. This was probably not the time for them to be crucified; but the chief priests insisted they should be crucified as an insult for Him to be crucified with criminals. This may be why the two thieves reviled and abused Him because His crucifixion hastened theirs so that they may be crucified with Him. The high priest did not demand that two of His disciples should be crucified with Him. That might have been considered an honor that they were crucified for the sake of the truth and that the disciples shared His suffering. The high priest instead insisted that two criminals must be crucified with Him. Those two might have belonged to the group of Barabbas the thief.

The Jewish leaders wanted to declare that He was the most evil of the three because they crucified Him in the center. Yet, they did not realize that by doing this the prophecy was fulfilled that He was numbered with the transgressors.

\* If you ask, ‘What was the aim of the Jews that they crucified Him, and two others with Him? I would answer, ‘By doing this they unwillingly fulfilled the prophecy. For, Isaiah the prophet mentioned this long ago when he said, “And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death” (Is 53: 9). Satan wanted to conceal what happened but he could not. For, the three were crucified but only Jesus was glorious so that you know that His power is above all.’

There were signs when the three were crucified, but nobody referred the miracles to any of those two, but only to Jesus alone. Satan’s plan failed totally and instead, one of the two thieves was saved. He did not dishonor the cross, but he increased that honor to a great degree. For, the rebirth of a thief on the cross and his admission into Paradise is not less than the trembling of the rocks.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

### **3 – The Title Put on the Cross**

**Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross.  
And the writing was:  
‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews’. [19]**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilia 6 in Ezechielem 6 PG 13: 714 D.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, 85: 1.

St John calls the writing on the cross ‘a title’, ‘titlos’. Matthew calls it ‘the accusation’, ‘citiei’, while Mark and Luke describe it as an inscription ‘apigraphe’. John the Evangelist often points out the importance of the cross in the life of Jesus Christ. Thus, in chapter three, when Jesus met Nicodemus at night He said, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up” (Jn 3: 14). Again, in His speech to the Jews the Lord says, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He” (Jn 8: 28). And to the Greeks He says, “And I if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”

The Evangelist elevates our minds so that we may see the exaltation and glory we received through the Crucified. In Him we see our Christ glorified in and with His Father. We now have the right to go to the Father’s bosom. The essence of the cross is that He is lifted up on it to draw all peoples to Himself so that they may live at a more sublime level on earth.

The Apostle Paul sees God’s love in the form of a Cross, drawn on humanity. For, he speaks of the width and length and depth and height of the love of God (Eph 3: 18). The measures of the cross seem to be the acquaintance with the secret of divine love.

In eastern tradition the Cross is celebrated as a living person. It is seen as Jesus crucified requesting the heights, separating darkness from light, and ignorance from knowledge. As it became a sign of judgment, it distinguishes between those who yearn for the eternal light and those who are pleased with darkness.

The meaning of the Cross is that one is lifted up beyond this world. It means that a person is open to the eternal world and regains partaking of the enlightenment so that he may go to God and let Him enter his life.

The use of the words ‘up’ and ‘down’ is significant in the Gospel according to St. John as he talks about the person and work of the Crucified. Though this Evangelist does not write about the Last Supper, yet he records at great length the speech of the Lord about the Eucharist (Jn 6: 32-40). Christ affirms that He is the bread that comes down from heaven, or from above. Also the Lord’s speech about baptism, which is immersion, draws our hearts to birth from above to see, through the Cross, the depth of the love of God our Father (Jn 3: 3-8).

In short, in the Cross, we are not of the world even though we are in the world (Jn 7: 6, 14, 16, 18). We are from above. We become partners of Christ who is risen from the dead and whom Mary Magdalene did not recognize until He called her by name. She and the disciples whom the Lord Jesus Christ accompanied as they were traveling to Emmaus thought He was a stranger.

\* Christ is the King of the Jews whose circumcision is that of the heart in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God (Rom 2: 29). They are those related to the free Jerusalem, our eternal mother in heaven, the spiritual Sarah who cast

out of the free house the bondwoman and her children (Gal 4: 22-31). Therefore what Pilate wrote was written because the Lord said His word.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* In this way, Pilate combined two aims: his revenge of the Jews and his apology to the Lord Christ. For, when they defamed the Lord Jesus Christ by crucifying two thieves with Him, Pilate silenced them, and all who would blame the Lord, and made it clear that they rebelled against their King. In this way he took revenge of the Jews. As for his apology to the Lord, he expressed it by putting the writing on a board announcing clearly, though not completely, the Lord's victory and the foundation of His kingdom. This board was similar to the sign given to the victorious conqueror.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* he enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ testified that He is the King, King of Israel, for they wrote over His head on the Cross, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews" (Matt 27: 37). We accept this testimony even though it may be understood that His power and divinity are limited to the children of Israel. The title written on the cross testifies of Christ's divinity not only to the Jews but also to all the people. He is King over the entire earth and rules over all its parts.<sup>3</sup>

**Gregory of Nyssa**

**Then many of the Jews read this title,  
For the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city;  
And it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin." [20]**

This title was written in three languages that were prevalent at that time. Hebrew, which is the language of the Law, Greek, the language of philosophers, and Latin, the language of the rulers. For, the Lord was crucified to be King over all.

\* Even in His crucifixion, the chief priests envied the Lord Christ. I say to them, 'this title does not harm you because if the Lord Jesus Christ was dead and weak and His name would be forgotten, why should you be afraid of what is written, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews"?' [19]

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate,  
"Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,'  
but, 'He said, I am the King of the Jews.' [21]**

Crucifixion was not enough to satisfy their thirst for revenge. So they put pressure on Pilate to change the title and write, 'He said, 'I am the King of the Jews' [21] but Pilate refused to do as they wished. They had already pushed him enough, and he could not do more. They wanted to declare that the Lord was a usurper of honor and authority and that

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 117: 5.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, 85: 1.

<sup>3</sup> Song of Solomon by St. Gregory of Nyssa, translated into Arabic by Dr. George Nawar, sermon 7.

they were loyal to Caesar; yet they were in submission to a foreign ruler and secretly wanted a Jewish ruler having full authority. They did not understand that their Ruler will “be cut off” (Daniel 9: 26).

**Pilate answered,  
“What I have written, I have written.” [22]**

The Roman law forbade the change of the wording of the sentence once it is announced. It seems that Pilate unwillingly prophesied that this was the Messiah who will alone rule over the hearts. This prophecy is in Psalm 18: 22 written about a thousand years before the Crucifixion.

#### **4 – Distribution of His Garments**

**Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus,  
Took His garments and made four parts,  
To each soldier a part, and also the tunic.  
Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece.” [23]**

He carried our sins. He also did not refuse to be naked on the Cross, so that we may see our own nakedness and pray that we put on the Lord Jesus Christ, our righteousness.

It was an almost worldwide custom that the belongings of those who were condemned to death went to the executors of the sentence. Saint John the Evangelist presents to us the extremely few belongings of the Lord. These were His garments cast on the ground. The four soldiers who carried out the verdict distributed His garments among themselves. The seamless tunic remained. It was woven from the top in one piece. They cast lots for it so that they may not tear it. He became as though He did not own anything, not even the tunic that was like a second skin. His garments were on the ground belonging to nobody because the condemned to death had no say or right even to His own clothes. A man’s clothes in Israel at that time consisted of an outside robe, an under robe, a head cover, a belt, sandals and underwear. However, there were no sandals among Christ’s belongings.

The Jewish Philon of Alexandria writes that the tunic of the high priest in the temple in Jerusalem was always seamless and woven from the top in one piece. This was a ritual obligation. Some commentators say that this symbolized the priesthood of Christ. Some say that Christ’s tunic was similar to that of the high priest. The Jewish historian Josephus describes it as without seam, one piece on the shoulders and sides. It was long and had an opening for the neck and two for the arms.<sup>1</sup> It has been reported that Christ’s mother made that tunic for Him when He was a child. Like the clothes of the people of Israel in the wilderness, Christ’s tunic was not torn, nor became old.

\* I think that John the Evangelist wrote this to reveal the common simplicity of the garments.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> Antiq. B3c.7.s.4.

**Origen the Scholar** observes that this tunic is symbolic of the perfect doctrine of Christ that must be preserved without a tear or division in parts. Saint Cyril the Great says it symbolizes the birth of Christ of a virgin, for she remained a virgin after His birth. But Saint Cyprian, who groaned because of the schism in the Church in North Africa, considers that the tunic without seam refers to the truly united Church that is never torn or mended.

**Saint Augustine** wrote in a letter to the Donatists, “Why do you want to divide the Lord’s garments. Why do you not keep the tunic of love in the world whole, woven from the top. That tunic that even His oppressors did not tear?”<sup>1</sup>

**Father Theodore of Mopsuestia** believes that this type of clothes was common at the time of the Lord Christ, though by then, soldiers only wore it.

\* The garments were distributed for our sake. Nobody can have everything when the lots are cast. For the distribution of the Holy Spirit is not according to a man’s will. For, “...there are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit...But one and the same Spirit works all those things, distributing to each one individually as He wills,” (1 Cor 12: 4, 11). Thus was the distribution of His garments, His works, and His blessings.

We read that the tunic was “woven from the top in one piece.” The belief in Christ is woven in the same manner: for He came down to humanity since He was born of God before all ages and He accepted the flesh.

The statement, “the tunic was without seam” also refers to faith, for faith must not be torn. It must remain whole.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* The garments of the Lord Jesus Christ that were “made four parts” stand for the cardinal Church that spreads over the entire world. For, the world consists of four equal harmonious parts in four regions. For this reason, He says that He will send His angels and they will gather together His elect from the four winds (Matt 24: 31). Those are the four cardinal points of the world: the east, the west, the north and the south.<sup>3</sup>

\* The tunic, for which they cast lots, refers to the unity of all the parts bound by love. When the Apostle wishes to speak about love he says, “I show you a more excellent way” (1 Cor 12: 31). He says again, “...to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge” and in another Epistle he writes, “But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (Col 3: 14). If love is a more excellent way, if it passes knowledge and is above all things, then the tunic that represents love must be woven from the top and must be without seam.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letters, 76.

<sup>2</sup> Exposition 10: 116, 119, 120.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 118: 4.

<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 118: 4.

**“They said therefore among themselves,  
‘Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be,’  
That the Scripture might be fulfilled which says:  
‘They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots’.  
Therefore the soldiers did these things.” [24]**

\* Contemplate the prophecies that were fulfilled in the discussion of the soldiers. The crucified were three, but the prophecies were fulfilled in the Lord Christ. Why did not the soldiers do the same with the clothes of the other two crucified, and they did this with Christ alone? Observe the accuracy of the prophecy because the prophet David did not only say, “they divided My garments”, but he also mentioned what they did not divide. For they divided some garments, but His tunic they did not tear, but cast lots for it for one person to have it.

Saint John Chrysostom

Saint Jerome writes the Eustoichim about the life of virginity and the proper conduct of virgins. He observes that such virgins imitate the Lord Jesus Christ who had a tunic woven from the top, heavenly. May the married sew for themselves garments because they lost the robe woven from the top.

In the same letter, he asks the virgins not to wear shoes. He writes, “Moses and Joshua had orders to take off their shoes because the land they stood on was holy (Ex 3: 5; Joshua 5: 15). That command had a secret meaning. Likewise when the disciples were appointed to preach, they were asked not take with them sandals or shoes (Matt 10: 10). When the soldiers began to cast lots for the clothes of Jesus, they did not find shoes to take because it was not possible for the Lord to have shoes when He prohibited His servants to have them.”<sup>1</sup>

## 5 – His Care for His Mother

**Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother,  
And His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas,  
And Mary Magdalene.” [25]**

In Matthew 27: 56, and in Mark 15: 40, it is written that Mary the wife of Clopas is the mother of James the Less and of Joses and that her son James is the son of Alphaeus. It seems that Clopas and Alphaeus are two names for the same person. Hegesippus quotes Eusebius<sup>2</sup> saying that Clopas was the brother of Joseph, Saint Mary’s betrothed.

While all the disciples, except John, had run away, the women (His mother, her sister, and Mary Magdalene) remained with Him by the cross. The women were not

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<sup>1</sup> Letters 22: 19.

<sup>2</sup> H.E.1:3:11.

afraid of the cruelty of the wicked or the horror of the spectacle. Indeed, they could do nothing, but they showed their loyalty to the end. They accompanied Him on the way of salvation, which He walked, and in which the prophecy of Simeon the Elder was fulfilled. He said to Mary, “a sword will pierce through your own soul” (Luke 2: 35). Though they were extremely sad, they did not behave inappropriately as was the custom of women at funerals at that time. They accompanied the Lord because they were loyal and loved Him. Truly, that was God’s great blessing that supported those women, especially His mother.

While four soldiers executed violently and cruelly the sentence of crucifixion, in contrast, four women stood with Christ during His suffering.

\* The women stood by the Cross. The weak sex showed more manliness and everything changed definitely.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**When Jesus therefore saw His mother,  
And the disciple whom He loved standing by,  
He said to His mother, “Woman, behold your son!” [26]**

At that moment, Saint Mary’s heart was certainly totally absorbed by her Son’s agony. As for Him, His pain did not distract Him, for it was the fruit of His great love for His mother and for all humanity. He was involved in the redemption, the growth, and glorification of everybody. In a last sign of kindness to His mother, He wanted to secure care and help for her after His departure. He therefore gave her to whom He loved and was closest to Him out of all the disciples. Joseph the carpenter had certainly died years before. There was no one to care for Saint Mary. The Lord therefore, while on the Cross, gave her to Saint John the beloved as his mother, and gave to her Saint John as her son. By this, John obtained a new relation; he became the son of the mother of Jesus, the Lord of Glory.

He left nothing for His mother since He had neither gold nor silver that she might inherit. The money box was for all the disciples and Judas who had it had probably squandered it. The soldiers took His clothes and Jesus had nothing to give His mother but to entrust her to whom He loved, John the apostle!

Through the Cross, His mother enjoyed the motherhood of the others after her only Son, Jesus, was lifted on the cross. He did not say to her, ‘Mother’ but said ‘Woman’. This was no contempt or rejection of her motherhood, but rather not to increase her pain as a mother hearing her Son speaking in His last moments before His death. He may have desired to assert to her that He was not of this world. He therefore spoke to her, not in terms of mere blood relationship, but as she being a representative of the Church that He loved exceedingly.

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 85. PG. 59: 506.

**Nicephoros**<sup>1</sup> says that the Virgin Mary lived eleven years in the house of John in Jerusalem. Some say that she went with him to Ephesus.

\* I would like you to meditate on the fact that the Lord did everything without confusion while He was on the Cross. He spoke to His disciples about His mother. He fulfilled the prophecies: He gave good hope to the thief. Yet, although He willingly accepted crucifixion, He broke into a sweat; He suffered and was troubled. What does this mean? It is not difficult to understand it. Before His crucifixion He showed the weakness of human nature, but here He revealed the greatness of His power.

Besides, He teaches us that before the terrible things happen, we are troubled yet cannot prevent them. But after the battle begins, we find things are possible and easy. Therefore, may we not fear death. Naturally our spirits love life, but it happens that the bonds of nature become loose and our desire for temporary life becomes weak.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* That disciple gained a hundred times more than he gave when he received the mother of Him who grants everything.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**Then He said to the disciple, “Behold your mother!”**

**And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home. [27]**

\* On the cross, Christ saw and divided the acts of piety between His mother and His disciple. The Lord testified not only on the general level, but also on the individual level. John referred to that testimony and gave witness to the greatness of this commandment.<sup>4</sup>

\* His mother stood and disregarded the danger that surrounded her. She did that because of her zeal for piety. He disdained the dangers and gave His mother a pure devout Son.

This passage teaches us to practice actual kindness. It also teaches children to respect their mothers. He declared that she who gave birth to God remained a virgin. Still, she was delivered in a secret manner to John, the youngest of the disciples. Here is the mystery of the Church. For, the Church at first was related in appearance, not practically, to the old nation. But she gave birth to the Word that was planted in the bodies and minds of men, through faith in the cross, and the burial of the Lord’s body according to God’s commandment. She then chose to adhere to the younger group.<sup>5</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* How wonderful that honor was that the Lord Christ gave to His disciple! How abundant that honor was because when He departed at that time He gave her to His

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<sup>1</sup> Eccv. His. Lib 2, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, 85: 1.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 119: 3.

<sup>4</sup> Letter, 63: 109.

<sup>5</sup> Exposition 10: 129, 132, 134.



disciple, That disciple cared for her and as she needed help the Lord entrusted her to His beloved disciple.

\* He teaches us to give unusual respect to our mothers. When our parents oppose us concerning spiritual concerns we must not cling to what is ours. Although they do not know us fully, we must offer them respect and prefer them to others because they are our parents who brought us up and endured terrible things for our sakes.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* The Holy Bible teaches us that not only the biological father is called father, but also others may be called 'father'. Listen to what the Apostle says, "For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel" (1 Cor 4: 15). Paul was father to the Corinthians, not according to the flesh but through teaching. And he begot them again through the Spirit.

Listen also to Job who says, "I am father to the poor". He calls himself father not because he begot them all, but because he cared for them.

The Only Begotten Son of God Himself when He was nailed to the tree at the crucifixion, He looked at His mother in the flesh and at John, the most beloved of His disciples, and said, "Behold your mother!" He said to His mother, "Behold your son". He declared she should pour her 'parental' love in John<sup>2</sup> In this manner He indirectly explained Luke's words, "and His father and mother marveled at Him", these are the words that the heretics quote saying that He was born of a man and a woman.

Just as Mary was called a mother of John because of her 'parental' love, not because she gave birth to him, likewise Joseph was a father of Christ because he cared for Him and brought Him up, not because he begot Him. For, the Gospel says, "...and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son (Matt 1: 25).<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* He is the virgin son who accepted the Virgin Mother an inheritance from the Lord.<sup>4</sup>

**Saint Jerome**

## **6 – They Offer Him Vinegar**

**After this Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished,  
That the Scripture might be fulfilled, said,  
"I thirst." [28]**

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<sup>1</sup> Hom 85. PG 59: 506.

<sup>2</sup> The Greek word is used about the love that the mother or father has for the son, or that the son has for his parents.

<sup>3</sup> Article 7: 9.

<sup>4</sup> Letter 127: 6.

The Evangelist mentioned previously, in his account of the Lord's encounter with the Samaritan woman, that the Lord was thirsty and that also was at the sixth hour. Some say that it was at that hour, noontime, that Adam went out of Paradise. God, thus, shows His great love of mankind and His thirst for humanity to return to His divine bosom.

During His service, the Lord Jesus Christ declared to the Samaritan woman that He was thirsty (Jn 4: 6-7) for He asked for her belief. At the end of His journey and on the Cross, He declared that He was thirsty for mankind to enjoy His redemptive work. We read that the flames of hell caused the rich man to feel thirsty and beg for a drop of water to wet his tongue. Our Christ, having taken our place, declared that He was thirsty so that we may drink of the fountains of His love.

It was natural that the Crucified felt thirsty because his body lost a lot of water because of perspiration and the wounds. Our Christ did not complain of pain of the flesh because of the crown of thorns, the nails, and the spear. The only complaint that He uttered was that He was thirsty. Here He expressed His inward thirst in addition to His physical pain. The Psalmist David foretold this in the Psalm about the Crucifixion. He said, "My tongue clings to My jaws" (Ps 22: 15) and also in Psalm 69: 21. The synoptic Evangelists do not mention the Lord's thirst. John the Evangelist alone records it.

**Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there;  
And they filled a sponge with sour wine,  
Put it on hyssop,  
And put it to His mouth. [29]**

Some writers are inclined to think that this was to intensify His pain, but this was unnecessary because He was dying. It was usual to give the crucified a cup of wine to reduce his pain in his last moments. But in the case of the Lord they frivolously gave Him a sponge filled with sour wine or vinegar. Other commentators say the exact opposite. For, those who investigated the truth found proof that for a long time the Roman soldiers in the hot climate countries were given a special drink called 'Pouska'. That was a mixture of water and vinegar that would quench their thirst.

Some people ask how can a sponge filled with vinegar be put on hyssop, which is a weak plant, and raised to the mouth of the crucified. They thought that the word 'hyssop' meant 'a stalk' because in Greek the word has those two meanings. The word 'stalk' appears in an eleventh century version. However, most researchers reject this meaning because 'hyssop' appears in all the former manuscripts and the manuscripts of the early Church Fathers.

**Raymond E. Brown** says that there are eighteen plants that are called hyssop. There are also several kinds that have a long stalk that can lift a sponge to reach the mouth of a crucified man.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, p. 668.

The Lord Jesus Christ refused to drink wine before He was crucified (Matt 27: 34; Mark 15: 23). That was the wine that would have relieved His pain.

\* Who has such authority to shape what such a “Man” did to arrange everything concerning His suffering? But this Man is the mediator between God and men. The Man about whom we read in the prophecy...Who knows Him? He is He who revealed Himself bearing all those pains. He is Himself hidden, for He is God who prepared all the suffering.

He saw everything that would happen and requested that it should be fulfilled. He therefore accepted to drink vinegar: ‘And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink’, (Ps 69: 21)<sup>1</sup>.

\* He said, “I thirst” [28] as though He said, ‘One thing you have failed to do, that was to give Me what you are.’ For the Jews were themselves, vinegar was extracted from the wine of the Father patriarchs and prophets. They were like a vessel full of the evil of this world. Their hearts were like sponges, for they were deceitful and in their depth were irregular pores. As for the hyssop on which they put the sponge filled with sour wine, that is a weak herb that cleans the heart and fits the humility of Christ whom they encompassed and thought they had absolutely trapped. It is therefore said in the Psalm, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean” (Ps 51: 7). For Christ’s humility purifies us, because if He had not humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Phil 2: 8), His blood would not have been shed for the remission of sins; in other words for our purification.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

## **7 – He Gives up His Spirit**

**So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said,  
“It is finished!”  
And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. [30]**

By saying, “It is finished!” the Lord Jesus Christ declared that the hostility of His persecutors had reached the end, and that the prophecies concerning His crucifixion had been entirely fulfilled. The shadow has been removed completely and the truth has been realized. He was sold for thirty pieces of silver; His hands and feet were pierced; His garments were divided, and they cast lots for His tunic. Moreover, they had just given Him vinegar for His thirst and finally His side was pierced. Now His sufferings are complete so that He may go carrying the spoils to Paradise. In replacement of the sad environment, He opens the gates of Paradise so that the spirits that are reposed in hope may rejoice. Now that He has offered His body a sacrifice, He, as the Great Heavenly High Priest goes to the Father so that the Father may smell the sweet savor.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 119: 4.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 119: 4.

**‘He gave up His spirit’:** His life was not taken from Him by force; He willingly gave it up. He said to the Father, **“Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.”** He thus expressed His acceptance of death as His choice to redeem many spirits.

**‘And bowing His head’:** Those who are crucified usually raise their heads to breathe. They do not bow their heads except at the very last breath. But to indicate His willing choice, the Lord Christ bowed His head, as in sleep or as surrendering to declare, first, that He carries the burden of our sins and evils. Some commentators observe that bowing His head proclaims the extent of the weight of our sins that He willingly carried for us. “For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me” (Ps 38: 4). “For innumerable evils have surrounded me” (Ps 40: 12). Bowing His head declares also His submission and obedience to His Father who is pleased to offer His Only Begotten Son a sacrifice of love for the human race.

On the Cross, Jesus gave up His human spirit into the hands of the Father so that He may give His Holy Spirit to His Church.

\* **‘And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.’** This means that He died. Yet, giving the last breath does not come after bowing the head; but what happens here is the opposite. What happens to us did not happen to Him. We bow the head after the last breath, but He bowed His head and then gave up His spirit. The Evangelist clearly shows that Jesus Christ is Lord of all.<sup>1</sup>

\* Do you see how the Lord did everything He desired with authority and without confusion?

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* He bowed His head and completed the journey of His spirit in comfortable work for it. Now His spirit is in the bosom of the Father who cares and strengthens it in His bosom. The Learned Origen

\* Who can sleep when he wants to, as Jesus died when He desired? Who is he who took off his clothes when he wished, as Christ put off His flesh as He pleased? Who is he who travels in this manner when he wants, like Christ who departed from this life as He pleased? How great is the power of Christ for whom we long and whom we fear, for He is the Judge. That greatness of power and authority He proclaimed while He was a dead man!<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

## **8 – His Side Is Pierced with a Spear**

**Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day,  
That the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath  
(for that Sabbath was a high day),**

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 85. PG 599: 507.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 119: 6.

**The Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken,  
And that they might be taken away. [31]**

Every Sabbath was holy. But this Sabbath was during the Passover week when they ate unleavened bread and offered their first fruits. Therefore some considered it a 'high day' or 'megale hemerra'. It was the greatest of the days of preparation for the Passover. The preparation for every Sabbath started at the ninth hour (3:00 PM) of Friday. **Josephus**<sup>1</sup> writes that the Emperor Augustus decreed, for the sake of the Jews, that no one was obliged to offer greetings on the Sabbath beginning with the ninth hour of the day of preparation in accordance to the Jewish rites. Dead bodies were not allowed to remain on ordinary days (Deut 21: 23). Now they may have felt compunction and could not bear to see His body hung before them to remind them of their horrible crime and spoil the joy of the feast. Moreover, there were many strangers in Jerusalem, because of the feast, and the Jews did not want the body of the crucified Christ to remain hanging.

Some writers observe that the Jews did not ask Pilate that the heads of the crucified might be cut off so that they die quickly without much pain. They rather asked their legs might be broken so that they suffer even more. Thus, even in asking for mercy (to take away the bodies from the cross) they were very cruel. When they pretended to be holy (the bodies did not remain so that the land might not be defiled) they were evil. They cared to keep the Sabbath, but had no regard for justice or righteousness.

\* The Jews swallowed a camel and strained out a gnat. They committed a great sin, but were very careful in keeping the Sabbath.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other  
Who were crucified with Him. [32]  
But when they came to Jesus  
And saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. [33]**

The Lord Christ died quickly before the two thieves. That may be because His body was weak and He was gentle and could not endure all that suffering. Or, He may have permitted Himself to die before them so that everybody might comprehend that He died of His own will. He gave up His spirit into the hands of the Father at the time He chose. He surrendered to death of His own will, not as an obligation, but through His victory in love.

**But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear,  
And immediately blood and water came out. [34]**

The incident of piercing the side of Christ is recorded in this Gospel only. Jesus, who truly died in the flesh when His spirit left His body, declares that He is the beginning

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<sup>1</sup> Josephus: antiq. 6. 16.c.6.s51.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, 85: 1.

of life that conquers death. By His death He vanquished death and gave us back eternal life.

The early **Church Fathers**, such as the saints Augustine, Ambrose and John Chrysostom, consider this (blood and water that came from Christ's side) the first indication of the sacraments. Water is a symbol of baptism and blood is the Eucharist. We thus drink directly from the wound in the side of our Lord Jesus. The Learned Tertulian, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, and Saint Jerome believe that water and blood here are symbols of baptism and martyrdom.<sup>1</sup> Others think that water stands for the Old Testament and blood is for the New Testament because in it the promise was fulfilled and the people of both Covenants enjoyed salvation.

It is said that the name of that soldier is Longinus, and that when blood and water gushed from the Lord's side some drops of blood fell on the soldier's sick eyes and healed them. He then believed in Christ and preached in Cappadocia and received the crown of martyrdom there. Some say that the name Longinus is a phonetic corruption of the Greek word 'longchee' that means lance or spear, a word that occurs in this verse.

The debate continues concerning which side, the left or right, of the Lord Christ was pierced. The Holy Spirit does not inform us through the Gospels but just says that Christ's side was pierced with a spear in fulfillment of the prophecy. Some believe that the spear pierced the Lord Jesus Christ to the heart, and opened a window through which the spirit saw Christ's heart full of divine love, or extremely fiery love for mankind. It is an open window through which the believer can meet God and send to Him affection. It is the window of the heart that is never closed to any repentant.

God allowed the soldier to attack the heart of the Lord with a spear so that we may see in that heart the Rock that was struck for our sake (1 Cor 10: 4). We also see the fountain that flows for us (Zech 13: 1) and the wells of salvation that were dug for our sake (Is 12: 3). We see the river that overflows to give joy to the city of God.

\* The Lord was wounded in His suffering and blood and water came out of the wound. The water is for purification, the blood for drinking, and the spirit for His resurrection. For Christ alone is our hope, faith, and love. Our hope is in His resurrection, our faith is in the font, and our love is in the sacrament.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* The soldiers came and broke the legs of the others but did not break Christ's legs. However, they pierced His side with a spear to please the Jews and as an insult to the dead body. Now, the prophecy is fulfilled, "and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced" (See Zech 12: 10). Moreover, this act became an evidence of faith for those who did not believe later, like Thomas and similar people. This also conveys a great mystery that has been realized. For, blood and water came out and this was neither a coincidence nor did it lack purpose. The two springs flew together and through them

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 69: 6.

<sup>2</sup> Concerning Virgins 3: 5 (22).

the Church was established. Those initiated in the sacraments know this: that through the water they obtain a new birth, and through the Blood and Body they are invigorated. The mysteries were founded, thus from the beginning, so that when you approach the cup full of awe, this is like approaching Christ's side to drink.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* Just as His work and service on the earth began with water, it also ended with water. They pierced His side with a spear, and blood and water gushed as symbols of baptism and martyrdom.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Jerome**

He announced this before, when He ordered Noah to make a door in the side of the ark (Gen 6: 16) through which all the animals, symbolizing the Church, enter so that they would not perish in the flood. He created the first woman from the man's side as he slept (Gen 2: 22-23). She was called life (Eve) the mother of all living (Gen 3: 20). The Second Adam bowed His head and slept on the Cross so that from the side of the sleeping Man, the Bride may be formed. What is more pure than that Blood? What can grant health more than that wound?<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**And he who has seen has testified,  
And his testimony is true;  
And he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. [35]  
For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled,  
'Not one of His bones shall be broken.' [36]**

Saint John testifies that he saw that with his own eyes, and that it happened miraculously. He affirms this because the other Evangelists do not relate this incident and because what happens here asserts Jesus Christ's death.

The Scripture is fulfilled in accordance to the promise given to all the righteous as a reference to what would be realized concerning Jesus the Righteous. Psalm 34: 20 says, "He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken." By the Spirit, David writes, "All my bones shall say, 'Lord, who is like You?'" (Ps 35: 10). Again, the Jews were forbidden to break any bone of the Passover lamb (Ex 12: 46; Numbers 9: 12). Our Christ is our Passover who was sacrificed for us (1 Cor 5: 7). He is the Lamb of God (Jn 1: 29) and therefore His bones were not broken.

Bones, to the Hebrews, denote the strength of the body because they form the skeleton of the human being. Not breaking Christ's bones signifies that even though the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified as in weakness, yet there is strength in His weakness. Sin breaks our bones and destroys our strength. The Psalmist David therefore says in the Psalm of repentance, "That the bones You have broken may rejoice" (Ps 51: 8). But sin

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 85. PG 59: 507.

<sup>2</sup> Letter 69 to Oceanus, 6.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 120: 2.

could not break or crush Christ's bones, for He stood steadfastly carrying the burden of our sins to save us.

This was previously said in describing the lamb to the Jews. However, the symbol is present for the sake of the truth and has become clearer. For this reason the Evangelist quotes the Scripture in the middle of what he says.

\* Saint John declares loudly the required sacraments in advance. As he saw the treasure in the sacraments, he was scrupulous in relating what happened and how the prophecy was fulfilled. "Not one of his bones is broken" (See Ex 12: 46; Ps 34: 20). This was said about the lamb of the Jews for the sake of the truth to which the symbol referred beforehand. In Him the prophecy was perfectly fulfilled. Therefore, the Evangelist quotes the prophet. Saint John introduces himself always as a witness, but if his testimony might be doubted, he introduces Moses as a witness: what happened did not lack purpose, but was rather mentioned earlier in old times.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**And again another Scripture says,  
'They shall look on Him whom they pierced.' [37]**

The Scripture speaks also concerning Him who was pierced with a spear. In the book of Zechariah the prophet, we read, "and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn" (Zech 12: 10; Rev 1: 7). We also read that He was wounded in the house of His friends (Zech 13: 6).

\* Those miserable people who scorned Him when they saw Him hung on the precious Cross, will look upon Him and see Him crowned with divine glory. They will go down the pit of destruction as a just punishment for their transgression concerning Him.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Cyril the Great**

\* Once more St John supports the prophet's words with his own testimony. I have told you those words so that you may know the great relation that exists between the symbol and the truth. Do you not see the effort he took concerning these things, and so that they may believe by comprehending through what seems shameful and disgraceful!?

The soldier's abuse of the dead body was worse than the crucifixion. However, not even through ignominy can anyone harm our cause. For, what seems to be extremely shameful is itself an extremely exalted record of the good concerns.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

## **9 – The Burial of the Lord Jesus Christ**

**After this, Joseph of Arimathea,**

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 85. PG 59: 507-508.

<sup>2</sup> Comm. On St. Luke, Hom. 145, ch. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Hom. 85. PG 59: 508.



**Being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews,  
Asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus;  
And Pilate gave him permission.  
So he came and took the body of Jesus. [38]**

As the Jewish Passover was imminent, the quick burial was necessary. The Evangelist describes the burial in an impressive manner, and as a dignified act of faith and love of two secret disciples. Joseph of Arimathea was a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, but in his weakness he followed the Lord secretly during His service. However, at the critical moments, when the body of the Lord was hung on the cross, Joseph of Arimathea went courageously to ask Pilate to give him permission to take the body of Jesus. In doing this he obtained great honor. Nicodemus accompanied him. He had once come at night to the Lord, but now he was not afraid of being expelled from the Sanhedrim. If those two men had not buried Jesus, the soldiers would have buried Him with the two thieves in an old grave and His resurrection would not have been affirmed. People would have even claimed that another man had risen from the dead.

\* Joseph was not one of the twelve disciples. He was probably one of the seventy apostles.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came,  
Bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. [39]**

Myrrh and aloes are used to preserve the body for a long time. Some researchers say that a hundred pounds of that mixture would be enough to preserve two hundred dead bodies and they think this was a mistake in writing. However, this was a custom in the case of important or loved personalities. It has been said that a huge quantity of the mixture was used in the funeral of Aristobulus. It has also been said that five hundred servants carried the aloes used to preserve the body of Herod<sup>1</sup> and eighty pounds of spices were used at the funeral of the great Gamaliel. A pound is a Greek and Roman measure equal to a hundred dirhams.

\* Here is myrrh for burial. The aloe juice is for crossing over to the underworld where every drop goes down. And cinnamon is provided for the body on the Cross.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Basil the Great**

\* Your original smell is better than all spices (Song of Solomon 4: 10) used in the burial of the Savior [39]. The sweet smell flows out, when the pleasures of the body members are destroyed. But the other smell is like the smell of Lebanon (Song of Solomon 4: 11) that produces the smell of incorruption of the body of our Lord, the pure flower of virginity.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

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<sup>1</sup> Josephus, b15 c.3, s.14, b17, c.8.s.c.

<sup>2</sup> Hom. 17, Ps. 44: 7, Exegetie Homilies in Fathers of the Church vol 46, p. 290.

<sup>3</sup> Concerning Virgins 1: 7: 39.

**Then they took the body of Jesus,  
And bound it in strips of linen with the spices,  
As the custom of the Jews is to bury. [40]**

\* What does that signify, that not His disciples, but Joseph and Nicodemus are the ones who buried the Lord?

One of them is good and just (Luke 23: 50) and the other has no hypocrisy. Thus Christ's burial is done without deceit or evil. There is no room for trickery. If the apostles had buried Him, the Jews would have said, those certainly never buried Him. But a just man wrapped Christ's body in costly linen (Matt 27: 59; Luke 23: 53) and an honest man anointed Him with spices. Therefore, what happened did not lack purpose, for, righteousness envelops the Church, and innocence serves grace.

Cover the body of the Lord, the Church, with garments and anoint Him with myrrh and spices, so that the Church may become to God the fragrance of Christ (2 Cor 2: 15).

Joseph brought expensive linen. That may have been what Peter saw descending from heaven and in it all kinds of animals, a symbol of the Gentiles (Acts 10: 11-12). The Church is thus wrapped, linking a variety of people in partaking of their faith in that pure fragrant mystery.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* I believe there was no lack of purpose in saying, "as the custom of the Jews is to bury" [40]. For, if I am not mistaken, by saying this he urges us to practice such service for the dead in accordance to the custom of our country.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden,  
And in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. [41]**

Christ's body was buried in a new tomb that Joseph of Arimathea had prepared in a garden he owned outside the city near Golgotha where Christ was crucified. Joseph did not expect that in that tomb the Lord Jesus Christ would be buried.

In a garden, the Lord had bowed His head to joyfully deliver His will up into the hands of the Father and be carried to the cross. In that garden He was arrested, and in a garden the Lord rose from the dead to announce that through His suffering and death He has defeated death and has granted the resurrection. In the garden was buried the grain of wheat about which the Lord Jesus Christ had spoken (Jn 12: 24) and it produced thirty, sixty, and a hundred fold. In the garden, the Lord let the streams of life flow (Song of Solomon 4: 15).

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<sup>1</sup> Exposition, 10: 136, 137.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 120: 4.

The tomb was new and the Lord rose from it while the stone was rolled over it as its door. Just as He was born of a virgin He rose from a virgin tomb. Everything concerning Him, even the tomb, was new so that He may grant us a new life.

\* In that garden, I sang to My Bride, in the Song of Solomon, “I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse” (5: 1). For the place where He was crucified was a garden. What did He take from there? “I have gathered my myrrh with my spice” for He drank myrrh with vinegar. After that He said, “It is finished” because the mystery was accomplished, the Scripture was fulfilled, and the sins were forgiven. “But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most High Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ...cleanse your conscience” (Hebrews 9: 11-14).<sup>1</sup>

\* Again He says in the Song of Solomon, “I went down into the garden of nuts” (6: 11) for He was crucified in a garden. For though that place is now decorated with royal gifts, yet it was a garden and the landmarks and traces still exist. He is “a garden enclosed...a fountain sealed” (Song of Solomon 4: 12). The following was written about the Jews who said, “we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Therefore command that the tomb be made secure” and “So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard” (Matt 27: 63-64, 66).<sup>2</sup>

\* He was buried in a garden where a vine was planted for He said, “I am the true vine” (Jn 15: 1). He was planted in the earth so that He may pluck out the curse that happened because of Adam. For the earth then brought forth thorns and thistles. The vine sprang out of the earth so that the words of the Psalm may be fulfilled: “Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven” (Ps 85: 11).

What does He who was buried in the garden say? He says, “I have gathered my myrrh with my spice” (Song of Solomon) and “myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices (4: 14). These are the signs of burial as is recorded in the Gospels, “certain other women with them came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared” (Luke 24: 1); “And Nicodemus...also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes” (Jn 19: 39). It is also written, “I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey” (Song of Solomon 5: 1) for He ate myrrh before crucifixion and honey after the resurrection.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* Just as no one before or after Him was born of the Virgin Mary, likewise no one before or after Him was buried in this tomb.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Article 13: 32.

<sup>2</sup> Article 14: 5.

<sup>3</sup> Article 14: 11.

<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 120: 5.

**Saint Augustine**

**So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day,  
For the tomb was nearby. [42]**

There was no funeral service for the Lord Jesus Christ because He was crucified, rejected by His people, and because there was no time and therefore the burial had to be in a hurry before sunset. The Sun of righteousness was buried at sunset and it was impossible for the tomb to imprison His light. Darkness could not control Him. The soldiers stood guard lest He should rise and proclaim that He paid our debt, His sacrifice for us was accepted, and that He justified us before the Father. However, the soldiers' watch became a testimony of the truth of His resurrection.

This conduct (the quick burial) shows that His resurrection was not in anybody's mind in spite of the continuous references to it before His crucifixion. The burial took place in this manner because there was no time and there was no tomb prepared for Him. No one thought of burying Him in the family cemetery because the sun was about to set and it was difficult for the family to prepare for burial especially in such bitter circumstances. This is from the human point of view. However, concerning the divine dispensation, everything was amazingly arranged. Thus, Isaiah foretold this seven hundred years beforehand when he said, "And he made his grave...with the rich in his death" (Is 53: 9).

\* It was arranged that the body of the Lord was laid in a new tomb in which no one was buried before, so that nobody might think that there was another buried with Him who rose from the dead. Also this enabled His disciples to come to the tomb and see what happened, for the tomb was nearby.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

## CHAPTER 19

### THE CRUCIFIXION OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

We noticed in the previous chapters that St John the Evangelist is not inclined write a chronological narration. His aim is to reveal the person of Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word of God who came to save the world. Now that he speaks about the crucifixion of the Lord, he does not relate the historical events, but rather presents the person of the crucified Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior of mankind. He exults and is proud of the cross.

|                                      |       |
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#### 1 – Pilate’s Judgment

##### **So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him. [1]**

Pilate tried to release the Lord because he was sure Christ was innocent. He thought he could release Him because he traditionally used to release a prisoner at the Passover; yet he failed because of the people’s uprising. However, as he was still convinced that Jesus Christ committed no crime, he used another method, that is he allowed his soldiers to scourge and scorn Him so that he might prove to the people that Christ was helpless and therefore they should forgive Him.

The Evangelist gives us an exposition of the judgment of the Lord. It is full of injustice: the plaintiffs are confused, the judge wavers between his feeling of injustice to Jesus and his fear of the rebellion of the multitude against him, and their claim that Jesus wanted to be king and oppose Caesar. Pilate failed to acquit Jesus, and therefore he was obliged to let the case proceed in accordance to the rules. He had to treat Jesus cruelly because of the danger and nature of the accusation. Pilate first condescended to the wish of the people and ordered his soldiers to scourge Jesus and treat Him as a rebel. Pilate hoped that by doing this he would legally prove that Jesus was innocent.

Pilate was not serious in judging justly. For, though he knew that Jesus was righteous, he condemned Him to be scourged like a criminal [1]. Luke the Evangelist says that Pilate said to the multitude, “I will chastise Him and release Him” (Luke 23: 16). Pilate’s aim in scourging Jesus seems to have been his hope that the Jews would

change their minds concerning His crucifixion. Clearly, Pilate felt that Jesus did nothing to deserve crucifixion.

It seems that the scourging was executed in accordance to the Roman rules, which were far crueler than the Jewish rules. The Romans usually scourged those condemned to crucifixion. The Lord Jesus Christ accepted this for our sake. As Isaiah writes, “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting” (Is 50: 6). The Psalmist says, “The plowers plowed on my back; they made their furrows long” (Ps 129: 3). The Lord Himself had said, they will “deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify” (Matt 20: 19; see Mark 10: 34; Luke 18: 33). Saint Peter says, “by whose stripes we were healed” (1 Pet 2: 24). The Physician was scourged so that the sick would be cured. He endured being scourged for our sake so that the believers would find their pleasure in enduring suffering for Him and partaking of His pains and crucifixion (Acts 5: 41; 16: 22, 25).

Scourging was a terrible punishment. The historian **Eusebius** explains that they used a whip made of several strips made of leather with bits of metal or bone at the tips so that the flesh of the person scourged would be torn. Sometimes the veins and inner layers of the scourged were exposed. The Roman writer, **Cicero**, says that sometimes scourging caused death. The Roman soldiers were cruel and had no mercy. It may be that Jesus Christ could not carry the cross to the place of the crucifixion because He was scourged. Some scholars point out Christ’s quick death on the cross as the result of the cruel scourging. The Evangelists mention the fact that Christ was scourged but do not describe His pain.

The Lord considered all sorts of suffering and abuse for our sake as easy. He loves us and longs for our redemption so that we should regard our partaking with Him, of His shame and pain, a glory that we do not deserve.

\* John the apostle says, ‘Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him’. Pilate probably wished to calm the Jews and evade their anger. Just as he could not rescue the Lord with his first address to the Jews, he failed in stopping their wickedness to that extent.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* We need to believe that Pilate did this for no reason but to let the Jews see this cruel treatment and be satisfied, without madly asking for His death. For the same reason the governor allowed his soldiers to do what followed. He may have commanded them to do that, though the Evangelist said nothing about this<sup>1</sup>.

**Saint Augustine**

**And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns  
And put it on His head,  
And they put on Him a purple robe. [2]**

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 116: 1.

The soldiers used to scorn those who were convicted, especially that the soldiers represented the occupying authority that abused rebels against Rome. Their sarcasm fitted the accusation that He was “King of the Jews”. They did not find a king to put to death often, and they thought that scorning a king of the Jews was a farce hard to repeat. “Purple”: this is an expensive color. It is a mixture of violet and red made of some kinds of rare fish shells. Purple clothes were expensive and linked to royal life, and worn by the rich and high ranking men in the nation.

Matthew the Evangelist writes that they “put a scarlet robe on Him” (Matt 27: 28). This color is extracted from some dead insects and a scarlet robe is much cheaper than a purple garment that the military captains wore. The soldiers perhaps brought an old robe that a military commander had thrown away because it was old. The soldiers then used the purple gown to dress a poor Galilean (Jesus) who would be king! The crown of thorns and the purple robe denote royalty but the world uses them for wicked humor.

\* St John reports, ‘And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe.’ This Pilate did to please the angry Jews. For this reason he led the Lord Jesus Christ out, crowned with thorns, so that when the Jews would see Him so abused, they give would vent out their sickness a little and throw out their poison.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Then they said,  
“Hail, King of the Jews!”  
And they struck Him with their hands.” [3]**

Thus Pilate delivered Him up to the soldiers so that they deride Him. They therefore twisted a crown of thorns for Him and put it on His head instead of the crown of a king. They put on Him a purple robe as a king and in scorn they struck Him with their hands as they said, “Hail, King of the Jews!”

**Pilate then went out again,  
And said to them,  
“Behold, I am bringing Him out to you,  
That you may know that I find no fault in Him.” [4]**

Pilate brought Him out to the Jewish leaders and the tumultuous crowds to show them that their accusation against Him, that He wanted to be king, was some kind of illusion. For here He was before them, His flesh torn with scourging and He had become an absurd subject of scorn. Pilate hurt the Lord Jesus Christ even though he knew that He was innocent. Then he brought Him out to the accusers hoping that they might drop their case against Him. Pilate declared that according to the Roman law he “found no fault in Him” [4]. There was no fault at all in Him, he repeated (Jn 18: 38). Thus Pilate pronounced himself guilty because since there was no fault in Christ at all, why then did

he scourge Him and give Him to the soldiers to abuse Him? Why did he bring Him out to His prosecutors and did not release Him immediately as justice decrees?

**Then Jesus came out,  
Wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.  
And Pilate said to them,  
“Behold the Man!” [5]**

By saying, “Behold the Man” Pilate may have wished to assert to the Jews that if they thought Christ wanted to be king and oppose Caesar, this was false. For now that they saw Him so weak and helpless, having no followers who might oppose authority, they should not fear Him.

By bringing Him out wearing the crown of thorns and with His head, face, and all His body covered with blood, to those who denounced Him, Pilate gave them the chance to insist on crucifying Him. For Pilate treated Him as a slave. He unjustly tortured Him because a slave had no right to defend himself. On the other hand, it was necessary to prove that a free man was guilty before tormenting him so cruelly.

The Lord came out to become a spectacle, in front of the people, carrying our reproach. This is why the apostle Paul later said, “Let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach” (Heb 13: 13).

His sight was so painful that Pilate said, “Behold the Man” without mentioning His name in some derision. That sight moved the heart of the man of wisdom almost a thousand years before. For he said, “Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousal, and in the day of the gladness of his heart” (Song of Solomon 3: 11).

Some believe that the words of Pilate, “Behold the Man” bear a secret meaning. The word ‘Adam’ in Hebrew means ‘man’ “Behold the Man” may thus mean ‘Here is Adam whom God created to be king and given him power over all creatures, but he has become miserable and has brought a curse upon himself and all creation. Thus the Second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, has taken the place of the first Adam to bring the royal heavenly life to those who have lost even their temporary peace. Instead of death that the first Adam brought, Christ became life giving (1 Cor 15: 22, 45). This is what Pilate said and unaware of the meaning of what he said!

Pilate faced the outburst of rage and hostility to Jesus by declaring His innocence. In so doing he became a witness across history. But Jesus did not utter a word. Pilate said, “Behold the Man”. He did not say, ‘Behold the culprit’. As though he meant that according to him Christ was innocent of any guilt at all.

**Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him,  
They cried out, saying,  
“Crucify Him, crucify Him!”**



**Pilate said to them,  
“You take Him and crucify Him,  
For I find no fault in Him.” [6]**

After hearing Pilate repeating that he did not find fault at all in Jesus, and after seeing Jesus’ body torn with scourging, His head and forehead pierced with thorns, and His face swollen with beating, the people could have asked for His release. But the chief priests and officers quickly cried out saying, “Crucify Him, crucify Him.” Their envy and malice were so extreme that they did not accept Pilate’s judgment. They were not sorry for the Lord’s pain. They, instead, considered Him deserving death even if He was innocent. For in their opinion their safety and the peace of the city necessitated His crucifixion and removal.

The chief priests and their followers had come for one purpose, which is to stress the importance of Christ being crucified no matter what the price might be. They did not listen to anything Pilate said. But as they perceived his strong wish to release Him, they for the first time, said the words, “Crucify Him”. This was what the chief priests and officers said, disclosing what was in their hearts.

For the third time Pilate declares the innocence of the Lord and then he says to them, “You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him.” [6]. He knows very well that they cannot crucify Him. He says this only to rebuke them as though he says, ‘If your envy drives you to crucify Him, do not use me as an obedient means of that envy. I would then do evil against justice. My conscience is troubled. Act according to your envy if you can!’

\* Observe how the judge presented his defense in many ways to acquit the Lord of the accusations against Him. But nothing of all this shamed them. They insisted on fulfilling their aim. The statement, “You take Him and crucify Him” is an expression of one who wants to be innocent of committing a crime, and wants to force the Jews to do something illegal. For, they brought the Lord to him to decide on crucifying Him. But what happened was the opposite, for, the judge declared the innocence of the Lord and did not indict Him.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**The Jews answered him,  
‘We have a law,  
And according to our law He ought to die,  
Because He made Himself the Son of God.’” [7]**

The accusation that He opposed Caesar and the Roman authorities and stirred up the people proved false. So they charged Him with an offence which Pilate had no right to discuss. That accusation was that He had blasphemed and opposed the Jewish law. This was the business of the high priest and the Sanhedrin. Pilate and his men could not interfere in religious matters. The leaders accused the Lord of blasphemy and claiming

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 84: 2.

He was divine, “because He made Himself the Son of God”. These religious men leaders understood from the Lord’s many speeches that by saying, “the Son of God”, He meant He was equal to God. They, therefore, accused Him of blasphemy.

The prosecutors presented their indictment, which is that He blasphemed and therefore deserved death (Lev 24: 16). They were proud of the law even when they broke it and sinned against God. He who makes his boast in the law, does he dishonor God through breaking the law? (Rom 2: 23). They broke the law and thought they honored it. They did not listen to the prophecy, “Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed” (Is 10: 1).

\* Contemplate the accusation: “He made Himself the Son of God” [7]. Tell me is this an accusation that He who does the deeds of the Son of God calls Himself the Son of God? What then did Christ do? While they proceeded with one accusation after another, He continued His calm, thus fulfilling the words of the prophet, “He opens not His mouth. In humiliation His judgment was taken away” (Is 53: 7, 8 LXX).<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid,...” [8]**

When he heard that the accused did not only claim to be king, but also that He was divine, Pilate was greatly troubled and afraid. The case became more difficult for him. He could calm the people concerning His claim to royalty, but Pilate could not appease the terror of the people if Jesus said He was divine. At the same time Pilate feared the personality of Jesus because he was unable to identify Him. Pilate was sure that the religious leaders hated Jesus, but how could he be sure that Jesus was truly the Son of God. Pilate was afraid of taking part with them in the crime of opposing the incarnate Son of God.

**‘...and went again into the Praetorium,  
And said to Jesus,  
‘Where are You from?  
But Jesus gave him no answer.” [9]**

Pilate asked the accused a question inside the Praetorium. That question revealed what went on in his mind, which is that the personality of Jesus was a puzzle. As though he asked, ‘What is Your secret origin? Who are You? Tell me.’ This was a question that was often addressed to the Lord. The Jews asked Him, “Who do You make Yourself out to be?” (Jn 8: 53). He answered the Jews that no one knows Him except He who is with Him all the time and is of the same essence. For He said, “If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me” (Jn 8: 54). The Jews were confused because He announced, “It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him” (Jn 8: 54-55).

As Pilate was troubled and afraid he asked the Lord Christ, “Where are You from?” [9] Pilate spoke to Him in the Praetorium, in the court away from the noise of the

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 84: 2.

Jewish leaders and the people. Jesus had answered Pilate's previous questions, but concerning this question, 'Jesus gave him no answer' (Jn 19: 9). Pilate asked for information about Jesus in relation to this world. But the answer to the question needs leaving this world to comprehend the eternal. For, Christ is not a mere prophet among prophets, nor just a teacher, a worker of signs and cures. Therefore, He was silent. Pilate had asked Jesus, "Are You the King of the Jews?" (Jn 18: 33) and again, "Are You a king then?" (18: 37). Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king". Now Pilate does not ask, 'Who are You?' or, "Are You the Son of God?" He asks, "Where are You from?" implying, 'Are You a human being or celestial? Are You from beneath or from above?' Pilate knew the town of the Lord- the man, and he was surely asking whether He was greater than man or not. It was not possible for him to ask this question directly, lest he should be accused of intruding in religious beliefs, and which the religious leaders only should decide.

The Lord said nothing, not because He could not, or because He did not care for Pilate's salvation, but because He wished to give Pilate a chance to think carefully. Earlier, He had answered saying, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn 18: 36). In that discourse He had made it clear to Pilate where He was from.

In the spirit of prophecy, Isaiah wondered at the Lord silence. Isaiah said in many passages, "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street" (Is 42: 2). "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opens not His mouth" (Is 53: 7).

\* Pilate was afraid when he heard the Jews saying, "He made Himself the Son of God" [7]. He was terrified lest what they said should be true and he should be violating the law. He therefore did not ask Jesus what He did, but trembling with fear, he began examining Jesus as a person. He asked, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer because He had already said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn 18: 36) and "For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth" (Jn 18: 37). Pilate should not have resisted what he heard.<sup>1</sup>

\* The apostle John says, "But Jesus gave him no answer." As the Lord was silent and gave Pilate no answer, He made it clear that He obediently came to His agony.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* He walked to judgment without opening His mouth. He was not like one with an evil mind convinced he had sinned. Rather in meekness He offered Himself a sacrifice for the sins of others.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**Then Pilate said to Him,  
"Are You not speaking to me?"**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 84: 2.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 116: 4.

**Do You not know that I have power to crucify You,  
And power to release You?” [10]**

Pilate boasted of having power and was angry because the Lord did not answer his question. Pilate said to Him, “Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?” Pilate exaggerated in showing his power because he thought that he was in control of the situation. He did not realize that on the one hand he had no right to crucify an innocent person, and release another person who should be crucified according to the Roman law. On the other hand, Pilate forgot that God Almighty is there and nothing happens without His permission.

We realize that the silence of our Lord Jesus was not because He refused to answer the question, but because Pilate could not understand the truth. Pilate therefore thought that he had power to crucify or to release Him [10]. Jesus then answered that Pilate had what limited power allowed to him from above.

\* Do you see how Pilate condemned himself first. For, if he was in power, why did he not release Him when he found no fault in Him at all?

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Jesus answered,  
“You could have no power at all against Me,  
Unless it had been given you from above.  
Therefore, the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.” [11]**

Pilate may have expected that his words would give Jesus Christ a chance to speak to him so that he would release Him. But the Lord rebuked him for his pride, and for boasting of having power over justice, ignoring the role of God Almighty. The Lord Jesus Christ answered him so that He would remove his stupidity. As Solomon writes, “Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit” (Prov 26: 5). When Pilate used his power and unjustly scourged Him, the Lord Jesus was silent. However, when he proudly announced that he had power, Jesus scolded him so that he might know his limitations. Pilate forgot that “...he that is higher than the highest regards and there be Higher than they” (Ecc 5: 8). These are the last words that the Lord said to Pilate in this Gospel. Christ asked Pilate to know that every power a man on earth has is divinely given to him by heaven, not by Rome. God is truly Almighty and He, not the emperor or those that the emperor appoints as rulers and governors, has power over all human affairs.

Pilate had not experienced such moments as this- when he had to judge a person whom some considered the Son of God and the King of Israel. He thought he was in control of the destiny of this person. But the Lord made it clear to him that he was only a tool in God’s hands, and that he could have done nothing without permission from God (Acts 4: 27-28). Still the Lord gave him some excuse when He compared his sin to that of those who delivered Him to be judged. However, this does not justify Pilate, nor does it relieve him of his responsibility. The responsibility of those who delivered Him is

greater because they had read the Scriptures, and had heard the prophecies that were fulfilled in Him, and had also seen the miracles He had performed and the divine power He had.

Some observe that here the Lord Jesus Christ was referring to Judas, the disciple who betrayed and delivered Him. But it is obvious that He did not mean Judas alone when He mentioned the one who delivered Him. He meant the entire Jewish nation and the chief priests. As Pilate had said before, “Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me” (Jn 18: 35). Indeed, Pilate did not find in Jesus Christ fault for which He should die. Judas, on the other hand, was a disciple and friend of Jesus and was given many blessings and possibilities to work for the heavenly kingdom. Pilate deviated from justice, but did not accept a bribe like Judas. Pilate was wrong in not insisting on releasing the innocent, but he was not envious and full of hatred and hostility like the Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus Christ.

What does the Lord mean by sin here? According to John the Evangelist, He meant “not knowing God” as seen in Jesus Christ.

\* The Lord destroyed Pilate’s pride and arrogance. For He said to him, “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above.” He made it clear that this event is unlike many other incidents, for what was happening was done in a mysterious way.<sup>1</sup>

\* When you hear the words of the Lord Jesus Christ to Pilate, “...unless it had been given you from above”, do not think that Pilate is innocent of transgression. The Lord said, “...the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin”; this shows that Pilate sinned.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* When He did not answer, He was silent like a lamb; and when He answered, He taught us as a Shepherd. Therefore, may we learn the lesson as the Apostle also says, “...there is no authority except from God” (Rom 13: 1). He who delivers an innocent man to the ruler to kill him is more sinful than he who has power to kill for fear of a higher authority.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**From then on Pilate sought to release Him,  
But the Jews cried out, saying,  
‘If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar’s friend.  
Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.’” [12]**

The words of the Lord Jesus Christ did not cause Pilate to defend his power, but on the contrary they made him more earnest in wanting to prove the Lord’s innocence and release Him. This is evident in the uprising of the Jews and their screams as they accuse Pilate himself of not being Caesar’s friend if he neglected punishing the Man who opposes Caesar. Pilate then would lose his position if he did not perform his duty.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 84: 2.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 116: 5.

Christ's enemies found the means by which they could put more pressure on Pilate when they accused him of negligence in punishing a rebel. For, the Roman law respected the right and customs of the people they governed within their community. Moreover, the Roman law was extremely cruel and had no pity in crushing rebellion. Therefore, Pilate was in danger if the multitude persisted in complaining that he was lenient towards the accused.

Pilate feared their protest against him before Tiberius Caesar, for he was known as the most passionate emperor. Tiberius listened to remonstrations against many men and he did not trust those who served him. Pilate was willing to free Jesus, but he was not ready to face an accusation that he failed in his duty as a friend of Caesar. He could not get into trouble with Rome at any price.

\* When the Jews could not find in their law an accusation against the Lord, they slyly turned to laws outside their own laws. For they said, "Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar." Now I ask the Jews, "How did the Lord Jesus Christ appear to be a rebel and usurper? How can you prove this? Please, explain! Was He wearing a crown? Did He look like a usurper? Did He have soldiers? He walked with twelve disciples. He was simple in the food He ate, the clothes He wore, and the place where He slept!"<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**When Pilate therefore heard that saying,  
He brought Jesus out  
And sat down in the judgment seat  
In a place that is called the Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha." [13]**

The Pavement here was like a stone pavement usually in the open air. This was where the judgment seat was on which governors and rulers sat to judge. It was paved with blue, white, and black stones and marble. That place was called **Gabbatha** in Hebrew. The name is derived from 'gaba', which means 'high' because where the judge sat was usually high so that everybody could see the judge, follow the procedure, and hear the verdict. The judge stepped up on marble steps to the seat. The Pavement may be the name given to those steps. Some say that the word, 'Gabbatha' means a closed place because there was a wall surrounding it, made to prevent anyone from attacking the accused during the trial surrounded it. Others think that the place was confined to the trial of criminals who were dangerous to the state.

The verdict was about to be announced because the governor sat down in the official judgment seat, or 'curule', an ivory seat for Roman judges and their representatives.

**Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover,  
And about the sixth hour.  
And he said to the Jews,**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 84: 2.

### **“Behold your King!” [14]**

The Evangelist first describes the place of judgment then specifies the time. That was about the sixth hour, meaning at noon, on the Preparation Day of the Passover, the days of unleavened bread (Luke 23: 54) and the Jews were preparing for the Passover Sabbath. This timing augments the guilt of those who crucified Him, for they did not wait until after the feast. This shows their bitter hatred and their haste in achieving their aim. They removed the old yeast from every house, but they did not remove their old nature from their hearts, minds and conduct.

That was between the third and the sixth hour, because He was on the Cross at exactly the sixth hour.

Mark the Evangelist writes that it was the third hour when they crucified the Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 15: 25). He considered the scourging as the beginning, but John the Evangelist said it was the sixth hour when Christ was actually on the Cross.

Some writers believe that the sixth hour here is according to the Roman time that considers midnight as the beginning of a new day. The other Evangelists, however, used the Jewish time that marked the day as beginning and ending at sunset. So, the sixth hour in the morning was when the sentence was pronounced and the actual procedure of the crucifixion began. In some manuscripts and writings of the Fathers, the hour was the third, not the sixth hour.

As the Jews turned their accusation against Pilate, he angrily ridiculed them saying to them, “Behold your King!” [14] He meant, ‘If you strongly seek to crucify Him, you hurt yourselves for He is your King.’ This arrow was his last attempt at saving the Lord Christ from crucifixion.

\* Pilate delivered the Lord Jesus Christ up to the Jews thinking they would pity Him. The proof that this was his aim is that he said to them, “Behold your King!”

**Saint John Chrysostom**

Deriding the Jews, Pilate announced, “Behold your King!” The Lord was at that moment probably crowned with thorns and wearing the purple or scarlet robe. Pilate did not realize that Christ was truly not only the King of the Jews, but was also the King of the entire world. In Him the prophecies were fulfilled that He was the Lord Jesus Christ. In the past, Gideon had refused to be king over Israel and looked forward to the Lord Himself to be the true King (Judges 8: 23). When the people asked Samuel the prophet to name a king for them like all the nations, God said to Samuel that the people did not reject him but rejected the Lord Himself to be their King (1 Samuel 8: 5, 7). Men of the Old Testament expected the fulfillment of the divine promise, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth, for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron’ (Ps 2: 7-9).

It would have been proper for Pilate to announce to the entire world, 'Behold your King who cares for the souls and raises them in His eternal kingdom of heaven.'

The Lord Jesus Christ came as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn 1: 29). He is the Lover of mankind, but He cannot bear to see their sins. He takes away their sins so that they may come to the Father carrying His righteousness. But here we see men not tolerating their Savior. They want to stop seeing Him. The wicked cannot endure God's love and cannot even behold Him!

**But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!"**

**Pilate said to them,**

**"Shall I crucify your King?"**

**The chief priests answered,**

**"We have no king but Caesar!" [15]**

They cried out more that they could not bear His sight, "Away with Him, away with Him!" [15] They refused to be related to Him or have any relationship with Him. They had no king but Caesar. Isaiah the prophet looked at Him and said, "...whom the nation abhors" (Is 49: 7). He also said, "He has no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not" (Is 53: 2-3).

Capital punishment by crucifixion was known in the past in and out of the Roman Empire. The ancient world looked at crucifixion as the most horrible manner of death because it was a shame and a curse. Ancient writers avoided describing crucifixion in details. Cicero wrote that crucifixion was "the most cruel and disgusting punishment" and Josephus said it was the meanest method of execution. The Roman philosopher, Seneca, explained that crucifixion was a slow and extremely painful death and wondered if anyone wanted willingly to die in this manner. He said, "Is it possible that a person would prefer to waste time in enduring the painful death of his organs one after the other and let his life end drop by drop instead of giving up his spirit at once? Does anyone wish to be nailed to the cross, a curse for a long time, disfigured, his body swollen because of his shoulder and chest wounds, and breathe while suffering extended bitter pain? Indeed, he would find many reasons to prefer death before crucifixion."<sup>1</sup>

The Roman citizen was rarely condemned to be crucified. This punishment was used to deter slaves from rebellion and force them to accept humiliation and distress. As they stood against the Lord, the Jews did not want freedom; they did not want to be saved; they only hoped to get rid of Jesus. Thus, they became Caesar's slaves. They lost their feeling that they were under Roman rule. The Jews, especially their leaders, hated Caesar and his representatives, but because of their hostility to the Lord they thought that loyalty and subjugation to Caesar was a better choice. They were ready to be under the rule of any tyrant representing Caesar. They would willingly obey him if that resulted in the removal of the Lord Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Hengel: Crucifixion. London 1977, pp. 30-31; Leon Morris, p. 655.



The answer of the chief priests implied their fear that their priesthood institution would come to an end. They accepted Caesar as their only king and they forgot God's Kingdom.

\* Observe the Lord carefully in His trial. He allowed soldiers to drive Him. Pilate sat down to judge Him. He who sits at the right hand of the Father stands before the judge! The people He saved from Egypt were now crying out, "Away with Him! Crucify Him!" Why, O Jews? Is it because He healed the blind among you? Or is it because He made the lame walk and gave blessings to many? The prophet is amazed and says, "...against whom make ye a wide mouth, and draw out the tongue?" (Is 57: 4). The Lord Himself says in prophecies, "Mine heritage is unto Me as a lion in the forest; it crieth out against Me: therefore have I hated it" (Jeremiah 12: 8). I did not reject them but they rejected Me, therefore I say, "I have forsaken My house" (Jer 12: 7).<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* They forced him saying, "Crucify Him." Why did they strive to kill Him by this method? It is a shameful death! They feared lest in the future He would be remembered and therefore they condemned Him with a curse. They did not know that the Truth is glorified in all impediments. To prove that this was their fear, listen to what they said, "...we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise'" (Matt 27: 63). Therefore they stirred up all the people to turn the matter upside down to destroy further threats. The leaders corrupted the confused people who then cried out repeatedly, "Crucify Him!"<sup>2</sup>

\* "We have no king but Caesar": they willingly submit themselves to punishment. God therefore gave them up, because as children they expelled themselves from His care and great guidance. As with one voice they glorified that foreign power, He permitted them to fall, as they required.<sup>3</sup>

\* Here they came down from Christ's Kingdom and claimed for themselves Caesar's kingdom.<sup>4</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

## **2 – The Crucifixion**

**Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified.  
So they took Jesus and led Him away." [16]**

As he did not fear God but feared men, Pilate signed the condemnation to crucifixion and delivered Jesus to those who should crucify Him. He who testified several times that Christ was innocent, finally dictated His punishment as a criminal. Pilate washed his hands (Matt 27: 24) to announce that he was innocent of that judgment.

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<sup>1</sup> Article 13: 15.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, 84: 2.

<sup>3</sup> Hom. 84. PG 59: 501.

<sup>4</sup> Hom. 85. PG 59: 503.

However, washing his hands will not make him innocent before God. To save time, the Jewish leaders went with the executors of judgment. They were afraid that Pilate would change his edict, for they saw him from time to time proclaiming the Lord's innocence. Moreover, they feared the multitude might reconsider when they remembered the wonderful works of the Lord Jesus Christ and the testimony of Pontius Pilate that Christ was innocent. The multitude would then turn against the wish of the chief priests. This is how the adversary stirs up his followers to take every chance to hasten the destruction of faith in the Lord in the life of every believer so that he should not enjoy it.

In their opinion, the leaders felt that they were successful in their plot and that the victim had fallen into their trap. They took the lamb to be slaughtered and did not comprehend that the prophets foretold what happened as God's redemptive plan.

\* As Pilate heard them he quite foolishly delivered Him up to them. He should have ascertained that Christ aimed at obtaining royal authority. But he, out of fear only, pronounced his judgment. Christ had already said, "My kingdom is not of this world." But Pilate was totally involved in temporary matters and did not rule, as he should. His wife's dream was enough to terrify him, but nothing made him act well because he did not contemplate heaven, but he delivered Christ.

Now they gave Him, as an evildoer, the cross to carry. They hated the cross and refused to touch the wood. That was the condition of the symbol, Isaac, when he carried the wood. But at that time, what should happen depended on the father's decision because it was a symbol. But here the reality was accomplished practically.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull,  
Which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha." [17]**

As part of His suffering, He actually carried the cross. The slender, sensitive body carried the heavy cross. He carried it alone at first. Then He could not because of His weak body, the wounds caused by the scourging, the crown of thorns, and the slapping of His face. Therefore, Simon of Cyrene helped Him carry the cross (Matt 27: 32). As Isaac carried the wood of the burnt offering on his way to become a burnt sacrifice, similarly Christ carried the wood of the cross. As the prophet says, "...the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Is 53: 6). Saint Peter says, "who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness" (1 Pet 2: 24).

They brought Him to the place of execution outside the city, to a place called Golgotha. Origen the Scholar referred to a tradition that said that this was the place where Adam was buried. There, where death defeated the first Adam and changed him into dust, Christ, the Second Adam died to vanquish death and give life back to Adam and his descendants. That place was on Mount Moriah where Abraham was about to offer his

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 85: 1.

son, Isaac, as a burnt offering but God sent him a ram to offer instead of Isaac. Some writers believe that the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified on a hill that looked like a skull.

\* Some say that Adam died and was buried there and that Jesus achieved victory at the same place where death ruled. Christ went carrying the cross and triumphed over death. His cross was a symbol of victory, though the Jews intended something else.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* He bore our pains and accepted suffering on the cross. He took our flesh and if He had not suffered He would not have shared our human life. He first suffered then descended. But what were those sufferings that He endured for our sake? Those were the sufferings of love!<sup>2</sup>

**Origen the Scholar**

**Where they crucified Him,  
And two others with Him, one on either side,  
And Jesus in the center. [18]**

Two others were crucified with Him, one on either side. This was probably not the time for them to be crucified; but the chief priests insisted they should be crucified as an insult for Him to be crucified with criminals. This may be why the two thieves reviled and abused Him because His crucifixion hastened theirs so that they may be crucified with Him. The high priest did not demand that two of His disciples should be crucified with Him. That might have been considered an honor that they were crucified for the sake of the truth and that the disciples shared His suffering. The high priest instead insisted that two criminals must be crucified with Him. Those two might have belonged to the group of Barabbas the thief.

The Jewish leaders wanted to declare that He was the most evil of the three because they crucified Him in the center. Yet, they did not realize that by doing this the prophecy was fulfilled that He was numbered with the transgressors.

\* If you ask, ‘What was the aim of the Jews that they crucified Him, and two others with Him? I would answer, ‘By doing this they unwillingly fulfilled the prophecy. For, Isaiah the prophet mentioned this long ago when he said, “And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death” (Is 53: 9). Satan wanted to conceal what happened but he could not. For, the three were crucified but only Jesus was glorious so that you know that His power is above all.’

There were signs when the three were crucified, but nobody referred the miracles to any of those two, but only to Jesus alone. Satan’s plan failed totally and instead, one of the two thieves was saved. He did not dishonor the cross, but he increased that honor

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 85. PG 59: 504.

<sup>2</sup> Homilia 6 in Ezechielem 6 PG 13: 714 D.

to a great degree. For, the rebirth of a thief on the cross and his admission into Paradise is not less than the trembling of the rocks.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

### **3 – The Title Put on the Cross**

**Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross.**

**And the writing was:**

**‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews’. [19]**

St John calls the writing on the cross ‘a title’, ‘titlos’. Matthew calls it ‘the accusation’, ‘citiei’, while Mark and Luke describe it as an inscription ‘apigraphe’. John the Evangelist often points out the importance of the cross in the life of Jesus Christ. Thus, in chapter three, when Jesus met Nicodemus at night He said, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up” (Jn 3: 14). Again, in His speech to the Jews the Lord says, “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He” (Jn 8: 28). And to the Greeks He says, “And I if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”

The Evangelist elevates our minds so that we may see the exaltation and glory we received through the Crucified. In Him we see our Christ glorified in and with His Father. We now have the right to go to the Father’s bosom. The essence of the cross is that He is lifted up on it to draw all peoples to Himself so that they may live at a more sublime level on earth.

The Apostle Paul sees God’s love in the form of a Cross, drawn on humanity. For, he speaks of the width and length and depth and height of the love of God (Eph 3: 18). The measures of the cross seem to be the acquaintance with the secret of divine love.

In eastern tradition the Cross is celebrated as a living person. It is seen as Jesus crucified requesting the heights, separating darkness from light, and ignorance from knowledge. As it became a sign of judgment, it distinguishes between those who yearn for the eternal light and those who are pleased with darkness.

The meaning of the Cross is that one is lifted up beyond this world. It means that a person is open to the eternal world and regains partaking of the enlightenment so that he may go to God and let Him enter his life.

The use of the words ‘up’ and ‘down’ is significant in the Gospel according to St. John as he talks about the person and work of the Crucified. Though this Evangelist does not write about the Last Supper, yet he records at great length the speech of the Lord about the Eucharist (Jn 6: 32-40). Christ affirms that He is the bread that comes down from heaven, or from above. Also the Lord’s speech about baptism, which is immersion,

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St. John, 85: 1.

draws our hearts to birth from above to see, through the Cross, the depth of the love of God our Father (Jn 3: 3-8).

In short, in the Cross, we are not of the world even though we are in the world (Jn 7: 6, 14, 16, 18). We are from above. We become partners of Christ who is risen from the dead and whom Mary Magdalene did not recognize until He called her by name. She and the disciples whom the Lord Jesus Christ accompanied as they were traveling to Emmaus thought He was a stranger.

\* Christ is the King of the Jews whose circumcision is that of the heart in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God (Rom 2: 29). They are those related to the free Jerusalem, our eternal mother in heaven, the spiritual Sarah who cast out of the free house the bondwoman and her children (Gal 4: 22-31). Therefore what Pilate wrote was written because the Lord said His word.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

\* In this way, Pilate combined two aims: his revenge of the Jews and his apology to the Lord Christ. For, when they defamed the Lord Jesus Christ by crucifying two thieves with Him, Pilate silenced them, and all who would blame the Lord, and made it clear that they rebelled against their King. In this way he took revenge of the Jews. As for his apology to the Lord, he expressed it by putting the writing on a board announcing clearly, though not completely, the Lord's victory and the foundation of His kingdom. This board was similar to the sign given to the victorious conqueror.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* The enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ testified that He is the King, King of Israel, for they wrote over His head on the Cross, 'This is Jesus the King of the Jews' (Matt 27: 37). We accept this testimony even though it may be understood that His power and divinity are limited to the children of Israel. The title written on the cross testifies of Christ's divinity not only to the Jews but also to all the people. He is King over the entire earth and rules over all its parts.<sup>3</sup>

**Gregory of Nyssa**

**Then many of the Jews read this title,  
For the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city;  
And it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin." [20]**

This title was written in three languages that were prevalent at that time. Hebrew, which is the language of the Law, Greek, the language of philosophers, and Latin, the language of the rulers. For, the Lord was crucified to be King over all.

\* Even in His crucifixion, the chief priests envied the Lord Christ. I say to them, 'this title does not harm you because if the Lord Jesus Christ was dead and weak and His name

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 117: 5.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, 85: 1.

<sup>3</sup> Song of Solomon by St. Gregory of Nyssa, translated into Arabic by Dr. George Nawar, sermon 7.

would be forgotten, why should you be afraid of what is written, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”?’ [19]

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Therefore the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate,  
“Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’  
but, ‘He said, I am the King of the Jews.’ [21]**

Crucifixion was not enough to satisfy their thirst for revenge. So they put pressure on Pilate to change the title and write, ‘He said, ‘I am the King of the Jews’ [21] but Pilate refused to do as they wished. They had already pushed him enough, and he could not do more. They wanted to declare that the Lord was a usurper of honor and authority and that they were loyal to Caesar; yet they were in submission to a foreign ruler and secretly wanted a Jewish ruler having full authority. They did not understand that their Ruler will “be cut off” (Daniel 9: 26).

**Pilate answered,  
“What I have written, I have written.” [22]**

The Roman law forbade the change of the wording of the sentence once it is announced. It seems that Pilate unwillingly prophesied that this was the Messiah who will alone rule over the hearts. This prophecy is in Psalm 18: 22 written about a thousand years before the Crucifixion.

#### **4 – Distribution of His Garments**

**Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus,  
Took His garments and made four parts,  
To each soldier a part, and also the tunic.  
Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece.” [23]**

He carried our sins. He also did not refuse to be naked on the Cross, so that we may see our own nakedness and pray that we put on the Lord Jesus Christ, our righteousness.

It was an almost worldwide custom that the belongings of those who were condemned to death went to the executors of the sentence. Saint John the Evangelist presents to us the extremely few belongings of the Lord. These were His garments cast on the ground. The four soldiers who carried out the verdict distributed His garments among themselves. The seamless tunic remained. It was woven from the top in one piece. They cast lots for it so that they may not tear it. He became as though He did not own anything, not even the tunic that was like a second skin. His garments were on the ground belonging to nobody because the condemned to death had no say or right even to His own clothes. A man’s clothes in Israel at that time consisted of an outside robe, an under robe, a head cover, a belt, sandals and underwear. However, there were no sandals among Christ’s belongings.

The Jewish Philon of Alexandria writes that the tunic of the high priest in the temple in Jerusalem was always seamless and woven from the top in one piece. This was a ritual obligation. Some commentators say that this symbolized the priesthood of Christ. Some say that Christ's tunic was similar to that of the high priest. The Jewish historian Josephus describes it as without seam, one piece on the shoulders and sides. It was long and had an opening for the neck and two for the arms.<sup>1</sup> It has been reported that Christ's mother made that tunic for Him when He was a child. Like the clothes of the people of Israel in the wilderness, Christ's tunic was not torn, nor became old.

\* I think that John the Evangelist wrote this to reveal the common simplicity of the garments.

### **Saint John Chrysostom**

**Origen the Scholar** observes that this tunic is symbolic of the perfect doctrine of Christ that must be preserved without a tear or division in parts. Saint Cyril the Great says it symbolizes the birth of Christ of a virgin, for she remained a virgin after His birth. But Saint Cyprian, who groaned because of the schism in the Church in North Africa, considers that the tunic without seam refers to the truly united Church that is never torn or mended.

**Saint Augustine** wrote in a letter to the Donatists, "Why do you want to divide the Lord's garments. Why do you not keep the tunic of love in the world whole, woven from the top. That tunic that even His oppressors did not tear?"<sup>2</sup>

**Father Theodore of Mopsuestia** believes that this type of clothes was common at the time of the Lord Christ, though by then, soldiers only wore it.

\* The garments were distributed for our sake. Nobody can have everything when the lots are cast. For the distribution of the Holy Spirit is not according to a man's will. For, "...there are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit...But one and the same Spirit works all those things, distributing to each one individually as He wills," (1 Cor 12: 4, 11). Thus was the distribution of His garments, His works, and His blessings.

We read that the tunic was "woven from the top in one piece." The belief in Christ is woven in the same manner: for He came down to humanity since He was born of God before all ages and He accepted the flesh.

The statement, "the tunic was without seam" also refers to faith, for faith must not be torn. It must remain whole.<sup>3</sup>

### **Saint Ambrose**

\* The garments of the Lord Jesus Christ that were "made four parts" stand for the cardinal Church that spreads over the entire world. For, the world consists of four equal

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<sup>1</sup> Antiq. B3c.7.s.4.

<sup>2</sup> Letters, 76.

<sup>3</sup> Exposition 10: 116, 119, 120.

harmonious parts in four regions. For this reason, He says that He will send His angels and they will gather together His elect from the four winds (Matt 24: 31). Those are the four cardinal points of the world: the east, the west, the north and the south.<sup>1</sup>

\* The tunic, for which they cast lots, refers to the unity of all the parts bound by love. When the Apostle wishes to speak about love he says, “I show you a more excellent way” (1 Cor 12: 31). He says again, “...to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge” and in another Epistle he writes, “But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (Col 3: 14). If love is a more excellent way, if it passes knowledge and is above all things, then the tunic that represents love must be woven from the top and must be without seam.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**“They said therefore among themselves,  
‘Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be,’  
That the Scripture might be fulfilled which says:  
‘They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots’.  
Therefore the soldiers did these things.” [24]**

\* Contemplate the prophecies that were fulfilled in the discussion of the soldiers. The crucified were three, but the prophecies were fulfilled in the Lord Christ. Why did not the soldiers do the same with the clothes of the other two crucified, and they did this with Christ alone? Observe the accuracy of the prophecy because the prophet David did not only say, “they divided My garments”, but he also mentioned what they did not divide. For they divided some garments, but His tunic they did not tear, but cast lots for it for one person to have it.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Saint Jerome** writes the Eustochem about the life of virginity and the proper conduct of virgins. He observes that such virgins imitate the Lord Jesus Christ who had a tunic woven from the top, heavenly. May the married sew for themselves garments because they lost the robe woven from the top.

In the same letter, he asks the virgins not to wear shoes. He writes, “Moses and Joshua had orders to take off their shoes because the land they stood on was holy (Ex 3: 5; Joshua 5: 15). That command had a secret meaning. Likewise when the disciples were appointed to preach, they were asked not take with them sandals or shoes (Matt 10: 10). When the soldiers began to cast lots for the clothes of Jesus, they did not find shoes to take because it was not possible for the Lord to have shoes when He prohibited His servants to have them.”<sup>3</sup>

## **5 – His Care for His Mother**

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 118: 4.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 118: 4.

<sup>3</sup> Letters 22: 19.



**Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother,  
And His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas,  
And Mary Magdalene.” [25]**

In Matthew 27: 56, and in Mark 15: 40, it is written that Mary the wife of Clopas is the mother of James the Less and of Joses and that her son James is the son of Alphaeus. It seems that Clopas and Alphaeus are two names for the same person. Hegesippus quotes Eusebius<sup>1</sup> saying that Clopas was the brother of Joseph, Saint Mary's betrothed.

While all the disciples, except John, had run away, the women (His mother, her sister, and Mary Magdalene) remained with Him by the cross. The women were not afraid of the cruelty of the wicked or the horror of the spectacle. Indeed, they could do nothing, but they showed their loyalty to the end. They accompanied Him on the way of salvation, which He walked, and in which the prophecy of Simeon the Elder was fulfilled. He said to Mary, “a sword will pierce through your own soul” (Luke 2: 35). Though they were extremely sad, they did not behave inappropriately as was the custom of women at funerals at that time. They accompanied the Lord because they were loyal and loved Him. Truly, that was God's great blessing that supported those women, especially His mother.

While four soldiers executed violently and cruelly the sentence of crucifixion, in contrast, four women stood with Christ during His suffering.

\* The women stood by the Cross. The weak sex showed more manliness and everything changed definitely.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**When Jesus therefore saw His mother,  
And the disciple whom He loved standing by,  
He said to His mother, “Woman, behold your son!” [26]**

At that moment, Saint Mary's heart was certainly totally absorbed by her Son's agony. As for Him, His pain did not distract Him, for it was the fruit of His great love for His mother and for all humanity. He was involved in the redemption, the growth, and glorification of everybody. In a last sign of kindness to His mother, He wanted to secure care and help for her after His departure. He therefore gave her to whom He loved and was closest to Him out of all the disciples. Joseph the carpenter had certainly died years before. There was no one to care for Saint Mary. The Lord therefore, while on the Cross, gave her to Saint John the beloved as his mother, and gave to her Saint John as her son. By this, John obtained a new relation; he became the son of the mother of Jesus, the Lord of Glory.

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<sup>1</sup> H.E.1:3:11.

<sup>2</sup> Hom. 85. PG. 59: 506.

He left nothing for His mother since He had neither gold nor silver that she might inherit. The money box was for all the disciples and Judas who had it had probably squandered it. The soldiers took His clothes and Jesus had nothing to give His mother but to entrust her to whom He loved, John the apostle!

Through the Cross, His mother enjoyed the motherhood of the others after her only Son, Jesus, was lifted on the cross. He did not say to her, 'Mother' but said 'Woman'. This was no contempt or rejection of her motherhood, but rather not to increase her pain as a mother hearing her Son speaking in His last moments before His death. He may have desired to assert to her that He was not of this world. He therefore spoke to her, not in terms of mere blood relationship, but as she being a representative of the Church that He loved exceedingly.

**Nicephoros**<sup>1</sup> says that the Virgin Mary lived eleven years in the house of John in Jerusalem. Some say that she went with him to Ephesus.

\* I would like you to meditate on the fact that the Lord did everything without confusion while He was on the Cross. He spoke to His disciples about His mother. He fulfilled the prophecies: He gave good hope to the thief. Yet, although He willingly accepted crucifixion, He broke into a sweat; He suffered and was troubled. What does this mean? It is not difficult to understand it. Before His crucifixion He showed the weakness of human nature, but here He revealed the greatness of His power.

Besides, He teaches us that before the terrible things happen, we are troubled yet cannot prevent them. But after the battle begins, we find things are possible and easy. Therefore, may we not fear death. Naturally our spirits love life, but it happens that the bonds of nature become loose and our desire for temporary life becomes weak.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* That disciple gained a hundred times more than he gave when he received the mother of Him who grants everything.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!"**

**And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home. [27]**

\* On the cross, Christ saw and divided the acts of piety between His mother and His disciple. The Lord testified not only on the general level, but also on the individual level. John referred to that testimony and gave witness to the greatness of this commandment.<sup>4</sup>

\* His mother stood and disregarded the danger that surrounded her. She did that because of her zeal for piety. He disdained the dangers and gave His mother a pure devout Son.

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<sup>1</sup> Eccv. His. Lib 2, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St. John, 85: 1.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 119: 3.

<sup>4</sup> Letter, 63: 109.

This passage teaches us to practice actual kindness. It also teaches children to respect their mothers. He declared that she who gave birth to God remained a virgin. Still, she was delivered in a secret manner to John, the youngest of the disciples. Here is the mystery of the Church. For, the Church at first was related in appearance, not practically, to the old nation. But she gave birth to the Word that was planted in the bodies and minds of men, through faith in the cross, and the burial of the Lord's body according to God's commandment. She then chose to adhere to the younger group.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* How wonderful that honor was that the Lord Christ gave to His disciple! How abundant that honor was because when He departed at that time He gave her to His disciple, That disciple cared for her and as she needed help the Lord entrusted her to His beloved disciple.

\* He teaches us to give unusual respect to our mothers. When our parents oppose us concerning spiritual concerns we must not cling to what is ours. Although they do not know us fully, we must offer them respect and prefer them to others because they are our parents who brought us up and endured terrible things for our sakes.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* The Holy Bible teaches us that not only the biological father is called father, but also others may be called 'father'. Listen to what the Apostle says, "For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel" (1 Cor 4: 15). Paul was father to the Corinthians, not according to the flesh but through teaching. And he begot them again through the Spirit.

Listen also to Job who says, "I am father to the poor". He calls himself father not because he begot them all, but because he cared for them.

The Only Begotten Son of God Himself when He was nailed to the tree at the crucifixion, He looked at His mother in the flesh and at John, the most beloved of His disciples, and said, "Behold your mother!" He said to His mother, "Behold your son". He declared she should pour her 'parental' love in John<sup>3</sup> In this manner He indirectly explained Luke's words, "and His father and mother marveled at Him", these are the words that the heretics quote saying that He was born of a man and a woman.

Just as Mary was called a mother of John because of her 'parental' love, not because she gave birth to him, likewise Joseph was a father of Christ because he cared for Him and brought Him up, not because he begot Him. For, the Gospel says, "...and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son (Matt 1: 25).<sup>4</sup>

**Saint Cyril of Jerusalem**

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<sup>1</sup> Exposition 10: 129, 132, 134.

<sup>2</sup> Hom 85. PG 59: 506.

<sup>3</sup> The Greek word is used about the love that the mother or father has for the son, or that the son has for his parents.

<sup>4</sup> Article 7: 9.

\* He is the virgin son who accepted the Virgin Mother an inheritance from the Lord.<sup>1</sup>  
**Saint Jerome**

## **6 – They Offer Him Vinegar**

**After this Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished,  
That the Scripture might be fulfilled, said,  
“I thirst.” [28]**

The Evangelist mentioned previously, in his account of the Lord’s encounter with the Samaritan woman, that the Lord was thirsty and that also was at the sixth hour. Some say that it was at that hour, noontime, that Adam went out of Paradise. God, thus, shows His great love of mankind and His thirst for humanity to return to His divine bosom.

During His service, the Lord Jesus Christ declared to the Samaritan woman that He was thirsty (Jn 4: 6-7) for He asked for her belief. At the end of His journey and on the Cross, He declared that He was thirsty for mankind to enjoy His redemptive work. We read that the flames of hell caused the rich man to feel thirsty and beg for a drop of water to wet his tongue. Our Christ, having taken our place, declared that He was thirsty so that we may drink of the fountains of His love.

It was natural that the Crucified felt thirsty because his body lost a lot of water because of perspiration and the wounds. Our Christ did not complain of pain of the flesh because of the crown of thorns, the nails, and the spear. The only complaint that He uttered was that He was thirsty. Here He expressed His inward thirst in addition to His physical pain. The Psalmist David foretold this in the Psalm about the Crucifixion. He said, “My tongue clings to My jaws” (Ps 22: 15) and also in Psalm 69: 21. The synoptic Evangelists do not mention the Lord’s thirst. John the Evangelist alone records it.

**Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there;  
And they filled a sponge with sour wine,  
Put it on hyssop,  
And put it to His mouth. [29]**

Some writers are inclined to think that this was to intensify His pain, but this was unnecessary because He was dying. It was usual to give the crucified a cup of wine to reduce his pain in his last moments. But in the case of the Lord they frivolously gave Him a sponge filled with sour wine or vinegar. Other commentators say the exact opposite. For, those who investigated the truth found proof that for a long time the Roman soldiers in the hot climate countries were given a special drink called ‘Pouska’. That was a mixture of water and vinegar that would quench their thirst.

Some people ask how can a sponge filled with vinegar be put on hyssop, which is a weak plant, and raised to the mouth of the crucified. They thought that the word

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 127: 6.

‘hyssop’ meant ‘a stalk’ because in Greek the word has those two meanings. The word ‘stalk’ appears in an eleventh century version. However, most researchers reject this meaning because ‘hyssop’ appears in all the former manuscripts and the manuscripts of the early Church Fathers.

**Raymond E. Brown** says that there are eighteen plants that are called hyssop. There are also several kinds that have a long stalk that can lift a sponge to reach the mouth of a crucified man.<sup>1</sup>

The Lord Jesus Christ refused to drink wine before He was crucified (Matt 27: 34; Mark 15: 23). That was the wine that would have relieved His pain.

\* Who has such authority to shape what such a “Man” did to arrange everything concerning His suffering? But this Man is the mediator between God and men. The Man about whom we read in the prophecy...Who knows Him? He is He who revealed Himself bearing all those pains. He is Himself hidden, for He is God who prepared all the suffering.

He saw everything that would happen and requested that it should be fulfilled. He therefore accepted to drink vinegar: ‘And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink’, (Ps 69: 21)<sup>2</sup>.

\* He said, “I thirst” [28] as though He said, ‘One thing you have failed to do, that was to give Me what you are.’ For the Jews were themselves, vinegar was extracted from the wine of the Father patriarchs and prophets. They were like a vessel full of the evil of this world. Their hearts were like sponges, for they were deceitful and in their depth were irregular pores. As for the hyssop on which they put the sponge filled with sour wine, that is a weak herb that cleans the heart and fits the humility of Christ whom they encompassed and thought they had absolutely trapped. It is therefore said in the Psalm, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean” (Ps 51: 7). For Christ’s humility purifies us, because if He had not humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Phil 2: 8), His blood would not have been shed for the remission of sins; in other words for our purification.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

## **7 – He Gives up His Spirit**

**So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said,  
“It is finished!”  
And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. [30]**

By saying, “It is finished!” the Lord Jesus Christ declared that the hostility of His persecutors had reached the end, and that the prophecies concerning His crucifixion had

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, p. 668.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 119: 4.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 119: 4.

been entirely fulfilled. The shadow has been removed completely and the truth has been realized. He was sold for thirty pieces of silver; His hands and feet were pierced; His garments were divided, and they cast lots for His tunic. Moreover, they had just given Him vinegar for His thirst and finally His side was pierced. Now His sufferings are complete so that He may go carrying the spoils to Paradise. In replacement of the sad environment, He opens the gates of Paradise so that the spirits that are reposed in hope may rejoice. Now that He has offered His body a sacrifice, He, as the Great Heavenly High Priest goes to the Father so that the Father may smell the sweet savor.

**‘He gave up His spirit’:** His life was not taken from Him by force; He willingly gave it up. He said to the Father, **“Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.”** He thus expressed His acceptance of death as His choice to redeem many spirits.

**‘And bowing His head’:** Those who are crucified usually raise their heads to breathe. They do not bow their heads except at the very last breath. But to indicate His willing choice, the Lord Christ bowed His head, as in sleep or as surrendering to declare, first, that He carries the burden of our sins and evils. Some commentators observe that bowing His head proclaims the extent of the weight of our sins that He willingly carried for us. “For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me” (Ps 38: 4). “For innumerable evils have surrounded me” (Ps 40: 12). Bowing His head declares also His submission and obedience to His Father who is pleased to offer His Only Begotten Son a sacrifice of love for the human race.

On the Cross, Jesus gave up His human spirit into the hands of the Father so that He may give His Holy Spirit to His Church.

\* **‘And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.’** This means that He died. Yet, giving the last breath does not come after bowing the head; but what happens here is the opposite. What happens to us did not happen to Him. We bow the head after the last breath, but He bowed His head and then gave up His spirit. The Evangelist clearly shows that Jesus Christ is Lord of all.<sup>1</sup>

\* Do you see how the Lord did everything He desired with authority and without confusion?

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* He bowed His head and completed the journey of His spirit in comfortable work for it. Now His spirit is in the bosom of the Father who cares and strengthens it in His bosom. The Learned Origen

\* Who can sleep when he wants to, as Jesus died when He desired? Who is he who took off his clothes when he wished, as Christ put off His flesh as He pleased? Who is he who travels in this manner when he wants, like Christ who departed from this life as He pleased? How great is the power of Christ for whom we long and whom we fear, for He

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 85. PG 599: 507.

is the Judge. That greatness of power and authority He proclaimed while He was a dead man!<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

## **8 – His Side Is Pierced with a Spear**

**Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day,  
That the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath  
(for that Sabbath was a high day),  
The Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken,  
And that they might be taken away. [31]**

Every Sabbath was holy. But this Sabbath was during the Passover week when they ate unleavened bread and offered their first fruits. Therefore some considered it a 'high day' or 'megale hemerra'. It was the greatest of the days of preparation for the Passover. The preparation for every Sabbath started at the ninth hour (3:00 PM) of Friday. **Josephus**<sup>2</sup> writes that the Emperor Augustus decreed, for the sake of the Jews, that no one was obliged to offer greetings on the Sabbath beginning with the ninth hour of the day of preparation in accordance to the Jewish rites. Dead bodies were not allowed to remain on ordinary days (Deut 21: 23). Now they may have felt compunction and could not bear to see His body hung before them to remind them of their horrible crime and spoil the joy of the feast. Moreover, there were many strangers in Jerusalem, because of the feast, and the Jews did not want the body of the crucified Christ to remain hanging.

Some writers observe that the Jews did not ask Pilate that the heads of the crucified might be cut off so that they die quickly without much pain. They rather asked their legs might be broken so that they suffer even more. Thus, even in asking for mercy (to take away the bodies from the cross) they were very cruel. When they pretended to be holy (the bodies did not remain so that the land might not be defiled) they were evil. They cared to keep the Sabbath, but had no regard for justice or righteousness.

\* The Jews swallowed a camel and strained out a gnat. They committed a great sin, but were very careful in keeping the Sabbath.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other  
Who were crucified with Him. [32]  
But when they came to Jesus  
And saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. [33]**

The Lord Christ died quickly before the two thieves. That may be because His body was weak and He was gentle and could not endure all that suffering. Or, He may have permitted Himself to die before them so that everybody might comprehend that He

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 119: 6.

<sup>2</sup> Josephus: antiq. 6. 16.c.6.s51.

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St. John, 85: 1.

died of His own will. He gave up His spirit into the hands of the Father at the time He chose. He surrendered to death of His own will, not as an obligation, but through His victory in love.

**But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear,  
And immediately blood and water came out. [34]**

The incident of piercing the side of Christ is recorded in this Gospel only. Jesus, who truly died in the flesh when His spirit left His body, declares that He is the beginning of life that conquers death. By His death He vanquished death and gave us back eternal life.

The early **Church Fathers**, such as the saints Augustine, Ambrose and John Chrysostom, consider this (blood and water that came from Christ's side) the first indication of the sacraments. Water is a symbol of baptism and blood is the Eucharist. We thus drink directly from the wound in the side of our Lord Jesus. The Learned Tertulian, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, and Saint Jerome believe that water and blood here are symbols of baptism and martyrdom.<sup>1</sup> Others think that water stands for the Old Testament and blood is for the New Testament because in it the promise was fulfilled and the people of both Covenants enjoyed salvation.

It is said that the name of that soldier is Longinus, and that when blood and water gushed from the Lord's side some drops of blood fell on the soldier's sick eyes and healed them. He then believed in Christ and preached in Cappadocia and received the crown of martyrdom there. Some say that the name Longinus is a phonetic corruption of the Greek word 'longchee' that means lance or spear, a word that occurs in this verse.

The debate continues concerning which side, the left or right, of the Lord Christ was pierced. The Holy Spirit does not inform us through the Gospels but just says that Christ's side was pierced with a spear in fulfillment of the prophecy. Some believe that the spear pierced the Lord Jesus Christ to the heart, and opened a window through which the spirit saw Christ's heart full of divine love, or extremely fiery love for mankind. It is an open window through which the believer can meet God and send to Him affection. It is the window of the heart that is never closed to any repentant.

God allowed the soldier to attack the heart of the Lord with a spear so that we may see in that heart the Rock that was struck for our sake (1 Cor 10: 4). We also see the fountain that flows for us (Zech 13: 1) and the wells of salvation that were dug for our sake (Is 12: 3). We see the river that overflows to give joy to the city of God.

\* The Lord was wounded in His suffering and blood and water came out of the wound. The water is for purification, the blood for drinking, and the spirit for His resurrection.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 69: 6.



For Christ alone is our hope, faith, and love. Our hope is in His resurrection, our faith is in the font, and our love is in the sacrament.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* The soldiers came and broke the legs of the others but did not break Christ's legs. However, they pierced His side with a spear to please the Jews and as an insult to the dead body. Now, the prophecy is fulfilled, "and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced" (See Zech 12: 10). Moreover, this act became an evidence of faith for those who did not believe later, like Thomas and similar people. This also conveys a great mystery that has been realized. For, blood and water came out and this was neither a coincidence nor did it lack purpose. The two springs flew together and through them the Church was established. Those initiated in the sacraments know this: that through the water they obtain a new birth, and through the Blood and Body they are invigorated. The mysteries were founded, thus from the beginning, so that when you approach the cup full of awe, this is like approaching Christ's side to drink.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

\* Just as His work and service on the earth began with water, it also ended with water. They pierced His side with a spear, and blood and water gushed as symbols of baptism and martyrdom.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Jerome**

He announced this before, when He ordered Noah to make a door in the side of the ark (Gen 6: 16) through which all the animals, symbolizing the Church, enter so that they would not perish in the flood. He created the first woman from the man's side as he slept (Gen 2: 22-23). She was called life (Eve) the mother of all living (Gen 3: 20). The Second Adam bowed His head and slept on the Cross so that from the side of the sleeping Man, the Bride may be formed. What is more pure than that Blood? What can grant health more than that wound?<sup>4</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**And he who has seen has testified,  
And his testimony is true;  
And he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. [35]  
For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled,  
'Not one of His bones shall be broken.' [36]**

Saint John testifies that he saw that with his own eyes, and that it happened miraculously. He affirms this because the other Evangelists do not relate this incident and because what happens here asserts Jesus Christ's death.

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<sup>1</sup> Concerning Virgins 3: 5 (22).

<sup>2</sup> Hom. 85. PG 59: 507.

<sup>3</sup> Letter 69 to Oceanus, 6.

<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 120: 2.

The Scripture is fulfilled in accordance to the promise given to all the righteous as a reference to what would be realized concerning Jesus the Righteous. Psalm 34: 20 says, “He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken.” By the Spirit, David writes, “All my bones shall say, ‘Lord, who is like You?’” (Ps 35: 10). Again, the Jews were forbidden to break any bone of the Passover lamb (Ex 12: 46; Numbers 9: 12). Our Christ is our Passover who was sacrificed for us (1 Cor 5: 7). He is the Lamb of God (Jn 1: 29) and therefore His bones were not broken.

Bones, to the Hebrews, denote the strength of the body because they form the skeleton of the human being. Not breaking Christ’s bones signifies that even though the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified as in weakness, yet there is strength in His weakness. Sin breaks our bones and destroys our strength. The Psalmist David therefore says in the Psalm of repentance, “That the bones You have broken may rejoice” (Ps 51: 8). But sin could not break or crush Christ’s bones, for He stood steadfastly carrying the burden of our sins to save us.

This was previously said in describing the lamb to the Jews. However, the symbol is present for the sake of the truth and has become clearer. For this reason the Evangelist quotes the Scripture in the middle of what he says.

\* Saint John declares loudly the required sacraments in advance. As he saw the treasure in the sacraments, he was scrupulous in relating what happened and how the prophecy was fulfilled. “Not one of his bones is broken” (See Ex 12: 46; Ps 34: 20). This was said about the lamb of the Jews for the sake of the truth to which the symbol referred beforehand. In Him the prophecy was perfectly fulfilled. Therefore, the Evangelist quotes the prophet. Saint John introduces himself always as a witness, but if his testimony might be doubted, he introduces Moses as a witness: what happened did not lack purpose, but was rather mentioned earlier in old times.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**And again another Scripture says,  
‘They shall look on Him whom they pierced.’ [37]**

The Scripture speaks also concerning Him who was pierced with a spear. In the book of Zechariah the prophet, we read, “and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn” (Zech 12: 10; Rev 1: 7). We also read that He was wounded in the house of His friends (Zech 13: 6).

\* Those miserable people who scorned Him when they saw Him hung on the precious Cross, will look upon Him and see Him crowned with divine glory. They will go down the pit of destruction as a just punishment for their transgression concerning Him.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Cyril the Great**

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 85. PG 59: 507-508.

<sup>2</sup> Comm. On St. Luke, Hom. 145, ch. 22.

\* Once more St John supports the prophet's words with his own testimony. I have told you those words so that you may know the great relation that exists between the symbol and the truth. Do you not see the effort he took concerning these things, and so that they may believe by comprehending through what seems shameful and disgraceful!?

The soldier's abuse of the dead body was worse than the crucifixion. However, not even through ignominy can anyone harm our cause. For, what seems to be extremely shameful is itself an extremely exalted record of the good concerns.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom**

## **9 – The Burial of the Lord Jesus Christ**

**After this, Joseph of Arimathea,  
Being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews,  
Asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus;  
And Pilate gave him permission.  
So he came and took the body of Jesus. [38]**

As the Jewish Passover was imminent, the quick burial was necessary. The Evangelist describes the burial in an impressive manner, and as a dignified act of faith and love of two secret disciples. Joseph of Arimathea was a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, but in his weakness he followed the Lord secretly during His service. However, at the critical moments, when the body of the Lord was hung on the cross, Joseph of Arimathea went courageously to ask Pilate to give him permission to take the body of Jesus. In doing this he obtained great honor. Nicodemus accompanied him. He had once come at night to the Lord, but now he was not afraid of being expelled from the Sanhedrim. If those two men had not buried Jesus, the soldiers would have buried Him with the two thieves in an old grave and His resurrection would not have been affirmed. People would have even claimed that another man had risen from the dead.

\* Joseph was not one of the twelve disciples. He was probably one of the seventy apostles.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

**And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came,  
Bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. [39]**

Myrrh and aloes are used to preserve the body for a long time. Some researchers say that a hundred pounds of that mixture would be enough to preserve two hundred dead bodies and they think this was a mistake in writing. However, this was a custom in the case of important or loved personalities. It has been said that a huge quantity of the mixture was used in the funeral of Aristobulus. It has also been said that five hundred servants carried the aloes used to preserve the body of Herod<sup>2</sup> and eighty pounds of

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 85. PG 59: 508.

<sup>2</sup> Josephus, b15 c.3, s.14, b17, c.8.s.c.

spices were used at the funeral of the great Gamaliel. A pound is a Greek and Roman measure equal to a hundred dirhams.

\* Here is myrrh for burial. The aloe juice is for crossing over to the underworld where every drop goes down. And cinnamon is provided for the body on the Cross.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Basil the Great**

\* Your original smell is better than all spices (Song of Solomon 4: 10) used in the burial of the Savior [39]. The sweet smell flows out, when the pleasures of the body members are destroyed. But the other smell is like the smell of Lebanon (Song of Solomon 4: 11) that produces the smell of incorruption of the body of our Lord, the pure flower of virginity.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

**Then they took the body of Jesus,  
And bound it in strips of linen with the spices,  
As the custom of the Jews is to bury. [40]**

\* What does that signify, that not His disciples, but Joseph and Nicodemus are the ones who buried the Lord?

One of them is good and just (Luke 23: 50) and the other has no hypocrisy. Thus Christ's burial is done without deceit or evil. There is no room for trickery. If the apostles had buried Him, the Jews would have said, those certainly never buried Him. But a just man wrapped Christ's body in costly linen (Matt 27: 59; Luke 23: 53) and an honest man anointed Him with spices. Therefore, what happened did not lack purpose, for, righteousness envelops the Church, and innocence serves grace.

Cover the body of the Lord, the Church, with garments and anoint Him with myrrh and spices, so that the Church may become to God the fragrance of Christ (2 Cor 2: 15).

Joseph brought expensive linen. That may have been what Peter saw descending from heaven and in it all kinds of animals, a symbol of the Gentiles (Acts 10: 11-12). The Church is thus wrapped, linking a variety of people in partaking of their faith in that pure fragrant mystery.<sup>3</sup>

**Saint Ambrose**

\* I believe there was no lack of purpose in saying, "as the custom of the Jews is to bury" [40]. For, if I am not mistaken, by saying this he urges us to practice such service for the dead in accordance to the custom of our country.<sup>4</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 17, Ps. 44: 7, Exegetie Homilies in Fathers of the Church vol 46, p. 290.

<sup>2</sup> Concerning Virgins 1: 7: 39.

<sup>3</sup> Exposition, 10: 136, 137.

<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 120: 4.

**Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden,  
And in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. [41]**

Christ's body was buried in a new tomb that Joseph of Arimathea had prepared in a garden he owned outside the city near Golgotha where Christ was crucified. Joseph did not expect that in that tomb the Lord Jesus Christ would be buried.

In a garden, the Lord had bowed His head to joyfully deliver His will up into the hands of the Father and be carried to the cross. In that garden He was arrested, and in a garden the Lord rose from the dead to announce that through His suffering and death He has defeated death and has granted the resurrection. In the garden was buried the grain of wheat about which the Lord Jesus Christ had spoken (Jn 12: 24) and it produced thirty, sixty, and a hundred fold. In the garden, the Lord let the streams of life flow (Song of Solomon 4: 15).

The tomb was new and the Lord rose from it while the stone was rolled over it as its door. Just as He was born of a virgin He rose from a virgin tomb. Everything concerning Him, even the tomb, was new so that He may grant us a new life.

\* In that garden, I sang to My Bride, in the Song of Solomon, "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse" (5: 1). For the place where He was crucified was a garden. What did He take from there? "I have gathered my myrrh with my spice" for He drank myrrh with vinegar. After that He said, "It is finished" because the mystery was accomplished, the Scripture was fulfilled, and the sins were forgiven. "But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most High Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ...cleanse your conscience" (Hebrews 9: 11-14).<sup>1</sup>

\* Again He says in the Song of Solomon, "I went down into the garden of nuts" (6: 11) for He was crucified in a garden. For though that place is now decorated with royal gifts, yet it was a garden and the landmarks and traces still exist. He is "a garden enclosed...a fountain sealed" (Song of Solomon 4: 12). The following was written about the Jews who said, "we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore command that the tomb be made secure" and "So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard" (Matt 27: 63-64, 66).<sup>2</sup>

\* He was buried in a garden where a vine was planted for He said, "I am the true vine" (Jn 15: 1). He was planted in the earth so that He may pluck out the curse that happened because of Adam. For the earth then brought forth thorns and thistles. The vine sprang

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<sup>1</sup> Article 13: 32.

<sup>2</sup> Article 14: 5.

out of the earth so that the words of the Psalm may be fulfilled: “Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven” (Ps 85: 11).

What does He who was buried in the garden say? He says, “I have gathered my myrrh with my spice” (Song of Solomon) and “myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices (4: 14). These are the signs of burial as is recorded in the Gospels, “certain other women with them came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared” (Luke 24: 1); “And Nicodemus...also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes” (Jn 19: 39). It is also written, “I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey” (Song of Solomon 5: 1) for He ate myrrh before crucifixion and honey after the resurrection.<sup>1</sup>

**Saint Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* Just as no one before or after Him was born of the Virgin Mary, likewise no one before or after Him was buried in this tomb.<sup>2</sup>

**Saint Augustine**

**So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews’ Preparation Day,  
For the tomb was nearby. [42]**

There was no funeral service for the Lord Jesus Christ because He was crucified, rejected by His people, and because there was no time and therefore the burial had to be in a hurry before sunset. The Sun of righteousness was buried at sunset and it was impossible for the tomb to imprison His light. Darkness could not control Him. The soldiers stood guard lest He should rise and proclaim that He paid our debt, His sacrifice for us was accepted, and that He justified us before the Father. However, the soldiers’ watch became a testimony of the truth of His resurrection.

This conduct (the quick burial) shows that His resurrection was not in anybody’s mind in spite of the continuous references to it before His crucifixion. The burial took place in this manner because there was no time and there was no tomb prepared for Him. No one thought of burying Him in the family cemetery because the sun was about to set and it was difficult for the family to prepare for burial especially in such bitter circumstances. This is from the human point of view. However, concerning the divine dispensation, everything was amazingly arranged. Thus, Isaiah foretold this seven hundred years beforehand when he said, “And he made his grave...with the rich in his death” (Is 53: 9).

\* It was arranged that the body of the Lord was laid in a new tomb in which no one was buried before, so that nobody might think that there was another buried with Him who rose from the dead. Also this enabled His disciples to come to the tomb and see what happened, for the tomb was nearby.

**Saint John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> Article 14: 11.

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine: On the Gospel of St. John, tractate, 120: 5.

## **Meditations Inspired by the Gospel of St John Chapter Nineteen**

### **With You I Am Judged, and with You I Am Crucified**

- + They led You to the court of justice, You O Judge of all!  
Your presence sanctified the tribunal  
Acceptance of injustice  
For Your love and Your children's love became my spirit's pleasure!  
You remained silent before Pilate who was therefore troubled.  
You declared to him that Your kingdom was not of this world  
So Pilate wanted to know who You are.  
They released Barabbas the robber  
And You, O Righteous, were crucified.  
Yes, You opened the gates of captivity  
And released my spirit from prison.
- + I shall go out with You to Golgotha.  
In the act of Your cross I find honor I do not deserve.  
I look at Your crown of thorns  
And I see that You are preparing for me a crown of eternal glory.
- + The road to Golgotha has become a royal road  
Who deserves to cross it  
To enter with You to Your heavenly glory?
- + You carried the wooden cross to carry all mankind who believe in You.  
In Your wonderful love You thirst for all mankind  
They gave You vinegar to drink,  
So that You may give us to drink the river of life in Jerusalem above  
You bowed Your head and gave Your spirit up into the hands of Your Father  
So that You may raise our heads before Your Father  
And glorify our spirits and bodies!
- + They pierced Your side with a spear and blood and water came out!  
Your blood sanctified me entirely  
And through the water You granted me the Spirit of prophecy to the Father
- + In Your crucifixion You were numbered with the transgressors  
So that You may declare that You are the Savior of sinners.  
In Your death You were buried in the grave of a rich man  
You are the lover of sinners for their justification  
You gather the poor and the rich  
You are the lover of mankind.

+ They buried You in a garden  
Because the first Adam died in the garden  
And in the garden You have come to restore life to us once more!.

Amen



## CHAPTER 20

### THE LORD'S RESURRECTION TESTIFIES TO HIS DIVINITY

#### **The Resurrection: The first and eight day combined**

#### **The Lord Risen from the Dead**

St. John opens the first chapter of his Gospel by proclaiming the eternal existence of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a completely different beginning in contrast to the opening chapters in the other three Gospels. St. John elaborates that the Lord, being the word of God, and being one with Him, was born since time eternal. However, in the closing chapters of his Gospel, St. John writes about the same events recorded in the other Gospels as they all speak about the Lord's resurrection. This is because His resurrection represents the focal point of the act of salvation. The Lord spoke repeatedly about that subject; and He presented the story of Jonah the prophet inside the whale as an example of His burial and resurrection (Matt 12:40). None of the evangelists have explained to us how the Lord arose. They were preoccupied with confirming His resurrection. In every possible way, they wanted to convince everyone of that great event. As much as the disciples and apostles confirmed the Lord's resurrection, as much as unbelievers resisted this fact. Indeed, His resurrection entailed a confirmation of the crime committed in killing the Messiah, the Giver of life. The resurrection confirms the redeeming act: since He was slaughtered for our sake, then His resurrection confirms the acceptance of this sacrifice. Since He was crucified on account of our debts, then His resurrection proclaims the payment of the debt. Nothing has preoccupied the minds of preachers more than the need to confirm the Lord's resurrection. This is because the Lord was publicly crucified and the sun became darkened at that moment. The Lord arose in order to appear to His followers and those loyal lovers who seek their salvation.

Each Evangelist has underlined an aspect of the resurrection that differs from that recorded by the other writers. What St. John has underlined is not recorded in the other Gospels. He does not relate the story found in St. Luke's Gospel about the Lord's meeting with the two disciples on the way to Emaus. St. John does not include the story in St. Matthew about the Lord's meeting with some of the women who were going to the tomb. He also does not relate the story in St. Mark about the youth who was dressed in white and who informed the women that they would see the Lord in Galilee.

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|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>1- Dawn: The Empty Tomb</b>                           | <b>verses 1-10</b> |
| <b>2- Morning: Mary Magdalene and the Two Angels</b>     | <b>11-13</b>       |
| <b>3- Morning: Mary Magdalene and the Lord</b>           | <b>14-18</b>       |
| <b>4- The Lord Meets the Disciples on Sunday Evening</b> | <b>19-25</b>       |
| <b>5- Meeting with Them the Next Day</b>                 | <b>26-29</b>       |

**1- Dawn: The Empty Tomb**

**Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early,  
While it was still dark,  
And saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.[1]**

St. John has reported many events where women played great roles: the first miracle he reports reveals the holy virgin Mary, the mother of the Lord, as an intercessor for those present at the wedding in Cana. In chapter four, the Lord meets with the Samaritan woman who attracted the whole city of Sychar. After the Lord had revealed Himself to her, she wanted them all to enjoy meeting with Him. In the incident of the raising of Lazarus from the dead (Ch. 11), the presence of the two sisters, Martha and Mary is of great significance. In this Chapter, Mary Magdalene appears with her amazing inner faithfulness. She came to the tomb while it was still dark. She was driven by her great love to the One who was absent from her at that time. Her personal and immense sorrow seem to be the driving force leading her to go to the tomb. She felt overwhelmed by the finality of absence which the grave always inspires. She was the first person to see the stone rolled away from the grave. The Lord intended her to witness that the One who takes away the sins of the world has risen (John 1:29), and that the final veil has been removed.

The word 'Magdalene' is the feminine for the word 'Magdala'. Here the word 'Magdalene' means 'Mary, from Magdala'. The Talmud mentions that there was a city called Magdala, and it took about twenty minutes to walk from Tiberia (on the Sea of Galilee) on the northern side to that city. The word 'Magdala' means 'tower'. Actually there was a tower in the region which carried that name- probably a watch tower.

St. John mentions St. Mary Magdalene solely, and has not referred to the other women who went to the tomb with her. Probably, this is due to her great eagerness to go there. The Lord had shown her great love and she had adhered to Him and had used her money to provide for His needs (Luke 8:2-3). She had listened to His teachings, and loved Him to the end. She stood by the Lord up to the moment of His death on the Cross. Now, she had come to His tomb without fearing the possible obstacles and dangers. Indeed, her love for the Lord stripped her of the fear of death and of the grave. She came to the tomb to weep bitterly and to pour frankincense and spices on His Body. This was Mary Magdalene who had adhered to the Lord up to the last moment of His burial. Now she would be the first to enjoy the news of His joyful and glorious resurrection: the empty tomb!

Mary Magdalene came to the tomb **at the beginning of the week**. That is, she came as soon as the Sabbath of the Old Testament was over. According to the literal application of the law, it would have been incorrect to visit the tomb until the new Sabbath day - the first Sabbath of the New Testament- when the Lord arose from the

dead. Mary Magdalene, in this context, has become a representative of the Church that fulfills the law of the Lord Jesus Christ. She celebrates the new Sabbath as she hurries to the Lord's tomb in order to enjoy fellowship in His resurrection. The Gospel here begins with the first day in the new week. It opens before us a totally new age. It proclaims, in that new age, a new resurrected life and a new world. Since that time, Christians have designated Sunday as the day of rest: it is celebrated in memory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is called 'the Lord's day' (Rev 1:10).

**She came to the tomb in the early morning.** Indeed, love drives the believer to meet with the One resurrected from the dead at the first possible opportunity and as early as possible, without delay or procrastination. She came while it was still dark, yet the Sun of Righteousness could shine within her and brighten the path to the empty tomb that stood as a witness to the glory of the Lord's resurrection. It was still dark, but love provided the light to her path.

**She 'saw that the stone had been taken away'.** As she was preoccupied with thoughts about the Lord, she did not worry about the problem of rolling the stone in order to offer the spices (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1). At the same time, when she came and found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty, she did not realize immediately that the Lord had risen. She thought the body had been taken away. The Lord intended her to enjoy the news of the resurrection gradually.

The Lord arose while the stone was in its place with the seals on it. However, to ensure that all the others would be completely assured, it was necessary to open the tomb after the resurrection. This is what happened, and this is what drove St. Mary Magdalene to take action. She was so filled with love for her Lord, that she could not rest; and as soon as the Sabbath ended, she went very early to the tomb. She was anxious to find some comfort in that place. When she got there, and saw the stone rolled away, she did not enter inside. She did not even bend down. Rather, she ran eagerly to the disciples. She zealously wanted to get back to them and report promptly what happened to the body. This explains why she ran and the words she said to them<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Then she ran and came to Simon Peter,  
And to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them,  
"They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb,  
And we do not know where they have laid Him." [2]**

As the two disciples ran towards the tomb, it was hard for Mary Magdalene to join them. So she probably returned to the tomb while they were there or maybe after they had already left. She began to weep and it was then that the two angels appeared to her to console her.

She had quickly run to Peter and John because they lived on the outskirts of the city and close to the tomb. Therefore she just ran to them. It never occurred to her that the

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 85:4

Lord had risen according to what He had said to His disciples. Yet, there were clear indications of the resurrection, and the testimony was powerful. She probably suspected that the high priest had ordered that the body be moved to another place as a form of humiliating the Lord. Or could Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus have feared that the Jews would be angered by their act so they had carried the Lord's body to another tomb?

Mary Magdalene ran to the two disciples to beg them to look for the Lord's body. Her grief due to His death did not erase her need to see the Lord's body. She wanted to offer spices as an indication of her love even after His death.

The amazing thing is that Peter and John stuck together. Peter's denial had humbled him, yet he did not despair. Through repentance and tears, he came back to share fellowship and service with John. Lovingly, John did not reject drawing close to that one who had denied the Lord; for Peter showed remorse.

Some believe that Mary Magdalene ran to Peter and John while the other women ran to report the news to the rest of the disciples.

The mother of the Lord went to the tomb where she met the rest of the women.. Being the Theotokos, she alone realized the power of the angels' words- She and the other women listened to the glad news concerning the resurrection- Mary Magdalene told them how she had met with her Son and Lord. Mary Magdalene had seen the One risen from the dead. She had recognized Him before all the other women. She fell down and touched His feet and became an apostle to His disciples<sup>1</sup>.

**Fr. Gregory Palamas**

**Peter, therefore, went out, and the other disciple,  
And were going to the tomb. [3]**

They both went out as quickly as possible to check the news. They wanted to be personally assured, and they wanted to look for the Holy body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**St. John Chrysostom** believes that St. Mary Magdalene imagined that the body had been stolen because she was not thinking clearly about the resurrection. However, the evangelist St. John does not deny praising her for her action. Moreover, he does not consider it shameful that the disciples heard the news first hand from a woman who had spent the whole night vigilant and anxious to see the body of the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>2</sup>.

The Evangelist exposes the stages one takes to progress towards understanding and comprehending the resurrection. The first step is the immediate shock that Mary Magdalene got on discovering the empty tomb. Then St John sees and experiences what the Lord had declared previously that 'He would arise from the dead.

**So they both ran together,**

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<sup>1</sup> Homily on the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women. PG 151:244 CD, 245

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John, 85:4

**And the other disciple outran Peter, and came to the tomb first. [4]**

The two disciples ran together as soon as they heard the news from Mary Magdalene. Her words did not lead them to despair though the matter was out of their control and they could do nothing. However, they wanted to act quickly in order to comfort her and to find out the real situation. They ran together and did not compete as to who would enter into the tomb first. Even though John outran Peter due to his youthful age, yet they cooperated. The incentive one of them had to run to the tomb did not impede the other. Each ran as fast as he could. Peter did not envy John as he ran faster, nor did John despise Peter for his slowness. Peter had repented denying the Lord. His guilt feelings slackened his movement towards the tomb. Yet he was not deprived of the One risen from the dead. This is serious spiritual friendship, which bears the spirit of communal action with no impediments to others. The wise prophet accordingly says: 'two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor' (Eccl 4:9).

Some believe that Mary Magdalene ran to the disciples after she and the women with her had seen the angel who told them that the Lord had risen. However, she was so stunned that she did not report to the disciples what the angel had told her. All what preoccupied her was to find the Lord's body and to meet with Him. Her vision of the angel and his conversation with her could have seemed more like a dream or part of her imagination. Note that the only disciples, who moved at her words, were Peter and John only.<sup>1</sup>

**And he stooping down and looking in,  
Saw the linen clothes lying there, yet he did not go in. [5]**

John did not go in because he trusted that the words of Mary Magdalene were true and that the body was no longer in the tomb. He was assured just by looking inside the empty tomb. However, as soon Peter stepped inside, John followed him. Then they saw and believed that the body was no longer in the tomb.

**Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb;  
And he saw the linen clothes lying there. [6]**

They looked and saw the linen clothes placed in order and folded. This was a sign of the resurrection. Indeed, anyone who intended to steal or remove the Body would not have stripped the linen clothes from it. A thief would not have bothered to fold the clothes; and anyone intending to move the Body would not have taken off the clothes. If some persons had stolen the Body would they have engaged in complicating their job by removing the handkerchief and placing it in another place after folding it? What had happened definitely was not the action of grave diggers or thieves looting corpses.

\* St. John stooped to look inside. However, St. Peter entered in and saw the linen clothes. He stopped and did not speak immediately. The jealous one entered and looked in more deeply to discover and see more detail. Then he called on the other disciple to come in.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Adam Smith; Comm. On St John 21:2

After he had first seen for himself, Peter called John to enter and see the linen clothes and how the handkerchief that had covered His head was put in another place separately<sup>1</sup>.

Out of necessity, they would have removed the Lord as He was (with the linens on Him). That is why St. John the evangelist reports in the earlier chapters that His Body was covered with a lot of spices. These would let the linen clothes stick to the Body just as hard as lead. Consequently, when we hear that the handkerchief was lying in a separate place, we do not accept the words of those who claimed that the Lord's Body was stolen. A thief would not perform a needless act: why would he remove the burial clothes and the handkerchief? Besides, how could he escape if he had spent all this time to dismantle the Body and risk being discovered red handed? He would have been arrested if he had delayed and taken time at the job. Again, why would the clothes be placed away from the handkerchief and folded separately? So that we might learn that the action did not take place hastily or nosily<sup>2</sup>.

\* If you were to say: "what is the purpose of the handkerchief not lying with the linen clothes, but folded together in a place by itself?!" Our answer would be: So that you would know that the act was done by someone who was not hurried nor anxious. Therefore they believed in the Lord's resurrection based on that action.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* If the enemies had stolen the Body, then they would not have left the burial clothes behind in order to ensure some material gain. If the Lord's follower were the ones who did that act, they would not have accepted to strip the Body and humiliate Him. The best explanation is that the incident reveals that the Body had crossed over into eternity and had no need for clothes in the future.<sup>3</sup>

**St. Amonius of Alexandria**

**'...and the handkerchief that had been around His head,  
not lying with the linen clothes, but folded together in a place by itself. [7]**

The Lord left the burial clothes and the handkerchief that covered his head behind in the tomb. He had risen and would not die again or need burial. **His Body was now enveloped in glory and He had abandoned the earthly clothes that would deteriorate inside the tomb.** In Paradise, we do not need clothes as we do on earth; for we are enveloped in the Lord's righteousness and share His glory. When Elijah was taken up in the fiery chariot that soared into the heavens, his cloak fell away as he did not need it.

Let us abandon with the Lord the burial clothes behind. For we carry the promise and warranty of incorruption, which replaces the corruption that has come upon us.

The Lord has left us the burial clothes placed in an orderly manner inside the tomb; as well as the handkerchief that covered His head in a place by itself. **He intended that every believer, whenever he goes to his own burial, to find coverings that the**

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<sup>1</sup> Hom 85. PG 59:510

<sup>2</sup> Hom 85. PG 59:509- 510

<sup>3</sup> Leon Morris, p 692

**Lord has prepared by His precious burial clothes. There, the believer would also find the Lord's handkerchief to wipe away the tears shed during his struggle on earth.**

**St. Chrysostom** comments on the burial clothes and handkerchief that were left in the tomb. He says that the Lord encourages us not to spend too much when we bury our dead. The body of the dead person will arise in brilliant glory and will not need grand clothes!

\* How majestic is the power of the One crucified! He encourages those who physically die as death is not final. Therefore they should not behave as persons who will ultimately die. Conversely, they should behave as persons who are sending the departed one to a distant and better home. He encourages people to know that this corrupt earthly body will wear more glorious clothes than those made of silk and golden threads- a clothing of incorruption. It is therefore appropriate not to worry over burial, since people need to consider that a virtuous life is clothing similar to an amazing breeze...

\* What excuse do we have if we decorated a body that will be eroded with corruption and worms; while we neglect the Lord Jesus Christ who is thirsty and walks naked and estranged? Let us therefore stop this meaningless toil. May we conduct the funerals of the departed in a manner that contributes to our benefit and to theirs for the glory of God. Let us be giving for their sakes, and let us look with them for food on the way... let us send the departed to the tomb while he is wearing these clothes ( of giving) so that the Lord would be his inheritance!

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first,  
Went in also; and he saw and believed. [8]**

John had arrived first as he raced towards the tomb. However, Peter showed more courage as he stepped into the tomb looking for the body. He wanted to check the matter in all its possibilities. Some persons are characterized by their speed, others by their aggressiveness, and all support one another through their talents and their various skills. John's speed encouraged Peter to move more quickly; while Peter's courage led John to step inside the tomb. Peter saw and marveled (Luke 24:12); John saw and believed, (John 20:8).

The physical death of the Lord Jesus Christ has removed our fear of death and of the grave. Death will eventually take hold of us, and we will be laid in a tomb. Therefore, it is appropriate that we repeat with the righteous Job: "...I say to corruption you are my father, and to the worm, you are my mother..." (Job 17:14).

**For as yet they did not know the Scripture,  
That He must rise again from the dead. [9]**

St. John the Evangelical explains why he and Peter were slow to believe. It was due to their lack of deep knowledge of scriptural prophecies. They need God to open up their minds to understand the Holy Book in the same way it happened to the disciples who were going to Emaus, (Luke 24:44-45) All the disciples did not understand the prophecy of the Psalmist who said: 'For you will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will you allow your Holy One to see corruption,' (Ps 16:10). They also did not understand what the Lord had told them about the fulfillment of Jonah's miracle by His own resurrection, (Matt 12:40).

The Evangelist does not say: 'He will arise from the dead', but he stated 'that He must rise again from the dead'. On the one hand, the resurrection was part of God's plan to save and redeem us. Therefore it was an expedient matter. On the other hand, it was not possible for death to imprison the Lord, or for the grave to seize Him who had said: "I am the Resurrection"!

**Then the disciples went away again to their own homes. [10]**

They returned to the place where all the other disciples were gathered. They all had no homes in Jerusalem, so they gathered in a home there and they did not return to their homes after the crucifixion. John and Peter did not go to the other disciples in order to proclaim the resurrection, or to confirm that they could not find the body. They returned probably because they feared future troubles. It was hard for them to know what the Jewish leaders would do upon discovering that the Body was no longer in the tomb. They returned and joined their fellow disciples and waited to hear from God. They definitely spoke about what had happened, and they decided to meet all together in the evening on that same day. It was then that the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to them; but Thomas was not there. It was essential for them to meet together especially that the two angels had appeared to Mary Magdalene, whereas no angel had appeared to Peter and John.

**St. John Chrysostom** believes that the two disciples had gone each to his own home at first as they felt amazed. There the resurrection began to touch their minds. Then they returned and met with the other disciples according to the Lord's command.

**2. In the Morning: Mary Magdalene and the Two Angels.**

**'But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping,  
And as she wept she stooped and looked into the tomb.' [11]**

Whereas the two disciples hurried back to their fellow disciples, Mary Magdalene stayed by the tomb and wept. It was hard for her to leave the tomb without seeing the Body of the Lord.

The soul is bound to the Lord Jesus Christ by love. She desired to get acquainted with His mysteries and longs to see Him. While Mary wept she stooped and looked inside the tomb. She was assured that the Body was no longer there. The two disciples had also entered and were assured. However, her love drove her to keep stooping and looking



inside time and again. She hoped to find something that would console her!

\* The female species is characteristically emotional to a great extent, and is more inclined to tenderness. We say that so that you would not be surprised why Mary wept so bitterly at the tomb, while Peter showed no emotions! The Holy Word reports that ‘... **the disciples went away again to their own homes**’. As for Mary, she stood there weeping; on account of her weak nature and because she had not yet comprehended well enough the matter of the Resurrection. In contrast, the two disciples marveled and believed after having seen the burial linen clothes; and so returned home. Why did they not go back immediately to Galilee according to the command the Lord Jesus Christ had given them before His suffering? Maybe it was because they were waiting for the arrival of the others as well as due to their own state of ultimate astonishment. These two disciples therefore went on their way home, whereas Mary remained by the tomb. As we have said earlier, just looking at the tomb gave her great comfort...

All things considered, she received a blessing on account of her great zeal. This is not to be discounted, for what the disciples had missed, this woman was the first to see: she saw two angels seated, one at the feet and the other at the head, and even their white clothes reflected the brilliance with joy<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**And she saw two angels in white  
Sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet,  
Where the body of Jesus had lain. [12]**

After the two disciples had left, and probably after the sun came up on that same day, Mary returned alone. She was still searching for the One she missed. Her condition had not changed, though when she stooped and wept, the tomb presented another proclamation. She saw two angels sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet. It was as though they were measuring the Body with heavenly standards rather than earthly ones. Therefore they could present the Body risen from the dead throughout all ages, to establish out of Him the one universal church as His Holy Body.

The Lord responded to her love and tears. So he opened her eyes to see the two angels witnessing to His resurrection- for based on two witnesses, a testimony is acceptable. She had not seen them before; nor had the two disciples when they had entered the tomb. St. Matthew and St. Mark report that Mary saw one angel- they were probably satisfied with making reference only to the one who spoke to her.

White clothes indicate purity.

**Why were the angels sitting?** Angels do not need to sit in order to rest for they do not possess a body that is liable to get tired. Their sitting down indicates an invitation to shake off our fear of the grave. Wherever the Lord is present, we may sit and rest. Although the world had positioned guards to secure the tomb and prevent the Lord's

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 86:1

resurrection, yet He arose, and the guards trembled and ran away. As for the guards of the Lord, they are the angels who were sitting in security and assurance in the Lord's conquest and victory over the forces of darkness.

The two angels are a reference to the two cherubim who stood over the Ark of the Covenant where the throne of mercy and God's presence among His people was found (Ex 28:18). They did not carry swords, like those standing at the gate of the Paradise of Eden, in order to prevent men from entering. These angels were sitting at the head and feet where the Body had been laid, and they welcome us. They lead every believer to enjoy fellowship with the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. They invite us to enjoy eternal life through the cross that is the tree of life.

**St. Gregory the Great** comments that the angel seated at the head proclaims the Lord's divinity: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1:1). The other angel, seated at the feet proclaims the Lord's incarnation: 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14). They could also be a reference to the two Testaments, the Old and the New Testaments. Both present the same message: that the Lord became incarnate, died, and arose from the dead. They are like the two cherubim who sat on the Ark of the Covenant where the glory of God shone. The word 'cherubim' means 'perfect knowledge'. What else could that mean other than the two Testaments? What is the mercy seat other than the Lord who became man? The Old Testament proclaims a matter that is imperative and bound to happen. The New Testament announces that this proclamation has been fulfilled and completed. Both Testaments faced each other while they faced the seat of mercy at the same time. They contemplated the Lord who became incarnated; and with one heart, they explained the mystery of His plan<sup>1</sup>.

\* Why was one angel seated at the head, while the other was seated at the feet? Is it not because the Greek word for angels is translated into Latin as 'untie' (bearing/carrying news)? Therefore the angels refer to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that is preached from head to foot- or from the beginning to the end of time<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* The woman's comprehension had not soared sufficiently to accept the Resurrection based on the evidence of the handkerchief and the burial linens. Then something else occurred, for she saw the two angels seated and dressed in shining clothes. They were there to alleviate somewhat her great sorrow and to comfort her. They did not speak about the resurrection, but she was led to that knowledge gently. She saw unusual brilliant features, shining clothes and heard a soothing voice<sup>3</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* The Jews honored the Holy of Holies because it contained the cherubim, the seat of mercy, the bowl of manna, Aaron's rod, and the gold censor. Does the Lord's tomb less honorable than the Holy of Holies? On entering there, we would probably see the Savior

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<sup>1</sup> cf. Hom 25: Forty Gospel Homilies, PL76:1189

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 121:1

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St John, 86:1

in burial clothes; and if we stayed longer, we would see an angel seated at His feet and another at His head. This tomb had been carved by Joseph of Arimathea, and the prophetic words of Isaiah inform us of his glory: ‘...and his rest shall be glorious,’ (Is 11:10). This indicates that the burial place of the Lord would receive universal honor<sup>1</sup>.

**St Jerome**

**Then they said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?”  
She said to them, “Because they have taken my Lord,  
And I do not know where they have laid Him.” [13]**

The two angels behaved tenderly towards Mary Magdalene. They marveled at her weeping because they expected her to rejoice that He had risen. Indeed, the heavenly ones lovingly share our sorrows. They are surprised that we are saddened because they know what glory the resurrected Lord has prepared for His followers.

Even the sight of the angels could not satisfy the heart of Mary Magdalene. She had come to seek the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

The two angels stopped her tears for what else could they be proclaiming other than that, in one way or another, the matter promised future joy... They raised the question: ‘why are you weeping?’ It is as though they were telling her: ‘Do not weep’. But she assumed that they asked this as they did not know the cause of her tears<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* In all these circumstances, it was as though a door was opening up before her so that she could gradually acquire the knowledge of the Resurrection. The manner in which the angels were sitting down was an invitation for her to ask them for they indicated that they knew what had happened. Therefore they did not sit together, but each sat apart... What did she say? She spoke with emotion and excitement: ‘**...they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.**’ What are you saying? Have you not learned anything about His resurrection until now? Do you still imagine that He is still lying somewhere? Do you not see that Mary Magdalene had not yet acquired superior knowledge?<sup>3</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* She was not looking for the Body. She was looking for the Lord who had been taken away<sup>4</sup>.

**St. Gregory the Great.**

\* ‘By night on my bed I sought the one I love’ (Sg of Sol 3:1). It is also written: ‘Mary

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<sup>1</sup> Letter, 46:5

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 121:1

<sup>3</sup> Homilies on St John, 86:1

<sup>4</sup> Hom 25. Forty Gospel Homilies, PL 76:1189

Magdalene came....while it was still dark': 'By night on my bed I sought the one I love, I sought him, but I did not find him' And in the Gospels, Mary says: '**...they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him?!'**'<sup>1</sup>

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

### **1- In the Morning: The Meeting of Mary Magdalene with the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**'Now when she had said this,  
She turned around and saw Jesus standing there,  
And did not know that it was Jesus.'** [14]

The special 'place' where the Lord stayed, and where He went is a vital topic. At the beginning of the Gospel, the first two chosen disciples asked the Lord: '... where are You staying?' (John 1:38). During the last supper, Thomas said to the Lord: "Lord we do not know where You are going..." (John 14:5). At the tomb, Mary Magdalene asked Him: "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away" (John 14:15). When the Lord asked her to proclaim His resurrection, He guided her to the place where He was going for He wanted her and the disciples to reach a higher degree of knowledge concerning His resurrection.

Before the angels could answer her, the answer came in a practical fashion: the Lord Jesus Christ stood behind her, spoke with her and answered her question. The desire of her heart was to see the Body of the Lord who had died. However, the Lord granted her a greater blessing for the 'One risen from the dead' appeared to her. Indeed, the Lord grants us over and above what we pray for and request.

She turned around probably because she saw the angels acting in an unusual manner such as bowing down towards the Lord. Or their eyes looked in great awe as they turned away from her. Mary Magdalene saw an ordinary person and did not recognize the Person of the Lord. Her psychological condition or her mind was not prepared for meeting with the resurrected One. It is true that she was seeking Him with tears and a broken heart; but she did not realize that He 'is near to those who have a broken heart', (Ps 34:18), and closer than they think. Therefore it is appropriate for us to realize that He is very close to us -more than anyone can imagine- when we seek Him. Indeed, He lives within us, and seeks to reveal Himself to us.

St. John the evangelist does not report that one of the angels informed Mary Magdalene about the Lord's resurrection. Probably this is because the other three evangelists have mentioned it, (Matt 28:5-7; Mark 16:6-7; Luke 24:5-7).

\* It seems to us that the Lord appeared to her suddenly, and immediately after she had said: 'they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him'. When the angels saw the Lord, their appearance, looks, and behavior revealed that they seen their Master. They wanted to draw Mary Magdalene's attention to Him.

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<sup>1</sup> Essay 14:12

That was how the angels saw Him- as their Master. However, the Lord did not reveal Himself to her in the same manner, as He did not want to scare her when her eyes would see Him for the first time after His death. Therefore He appeared to her as a simple human being so that she thought He was the gardener.

This was expected of a mind that was not fully ready for heavenly matters. Rather than providing a big portion of knowledge all at once, the Lord quietly asked her: **“Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”**<sup>1</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* Because she loved, she complained, and she saw Him but did not recognize Him. Her love revealed Him to her, yet her doubts prevented her from recognizing Him<sup>2</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

**Jesus said to her,**

**“Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”**

**She supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him,**

**“Sir if you have carried Him away,**

**Tell me where you have laid Him and I will take Him away.” [15]**

It could be that the Lord’s questions were spoken in a stern manner: **“Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”**. It is as though He was telling her: why have you come here so early?!

Her behavior was previously reported symbolically by Joseph in the Old Testament. He had acted as a foreign person towards his brothers before revealing himself to them, (Gen 44, 45). The Lord was reprimanding her: **“Why are you weeping? I am risen! Whom are seeking? I am here before you! My resurrection is the answer to all your questions, and it fulfills all your needs.”**

Her answer implied the following: ‘Why do you blame me for my many tears? Why do you ask about whom I am seeking? You know the reason for my tears and the purpose of my search.’ As she thought Him to be the gardener, she begged Him to tell her where she could find Him if he had carried the Lord away to another place.

She probably believed that as a gardener he did not want the body of a person, who had been rejected and crucified by society, to be placed in the new graves prepared for his employer and masters. Therefore he had carried Him elsewhere. She asked to take the Body and she would find another tomb where to lay Him. Her love led her to forget the weight she would have to carry in order to move the Body and find an appropriate burial place.

\* Again, Mary Magdalene spoke about the Body as though she was speaking about a dead body that was laid down or carried far away. Her words implied: ‘If you have

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 86;1

<sup>2</sup> Hom 25. Forty Gospel Homilies.PL 76:1189

carried Him away because you feared the Jews, inform me, and I will take the Body.’ Her feminine tenderness and spontaneous love were so great! However, she lacked a sublime vision. Therefore He gave her the message through the sound (of His voice) and not through vision<sup>1</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* The Lord asked her about the reason for her sorrow in order to augment her yearning. He asked the woman who was searching to see, in order to inspire in her a stronger charge of feelings and love towards Him<sup>2</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

**Jesus said to her, “Mary!”  
She turned and said to Him  
“Rabboni!” (which is to say, Teacher). [16]**

She searched for Him zealously and lovingly. This qualified her to be the first to hear His joyful voice. The Lord Jesus Christ was pleased to grant her the joy of His resurrection. Consequently, He intended her to testify and preach the Gospel of His resurrection. He spoke to her in the loving tone with which she was familiar, and not in the manner of a gardener watching over the garden. She heard her name uttered through His lips and so she recognized Him. This conforms with what the Lord had said about His sheep who know His voice (John 10:4). One word sufficed and it was the Lord calling her by her name. The church accordingly says: ‘The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping upon the mountains...’ (Song of Solomon 2:8).

She said to Him, ‘ **Rabboni**’. This is a title that carries an honor that is greater than that of ‘Rabbi’. It conveys the meaning of ‘My greatly honored teacher’.

\* Until the moment when the Lord called her by her name, and had appeared to her, she still believed that He had died and asked where He had been laid. He called her by her name and seemed to be telling her: ‘May you know the One who knows you’. As soon as she was called by her name, Mary Magdalene recognized her Creator. He was the One she was seeking beyond herself, whereas He was teaching her to seek Him inside her<sup>3</sup>.

**St. Gregory the Great**

\* The reason for her sorrow was that she did not know where to go to comfort herself. However, the time had come when the two angels would announce to her what would transform, to some extent, her sorrow into joy. They asked her not to weep<sup>4</sup>.

\* When she turned around (to look behind her) she thought Him to be someone else (15). However, when she let her heart guide her, she recognized Him for who He really was<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John,, 86:1

<sup>2</sup> Hom 25. Forty Gospel Homilies, PL 76:1189

<sup>3</sup> Hom 25. Forty Gospel Homilies, 193

<sup>4</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 121:1

<sup>5</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 121:2

**Jesus said to her  
“Do not cling to Me,  
For I have not yet ascended to My Father;  
But go to My brethren  
And say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father,  
And to My God and your God.”[17]**

Mary Magdalene did as she was commanded, and went and informed the disciples that she had seen the Lord. She confirmed her experience of having met the Lord who had risen from the dead.

To confirm His resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ allowed His disciples to touch the places where the nails and wounds had been. He also allowed the women to touch His feet and worship Him (Matt 28:9). As for Mary Magdalene, the Lord asked her not to touch Him with her hands for He wanted her to reach out to Him with her heart. Probably the reason for that was that He knew she would imagine that He had risen and would live with them on earth just as Lazarus had done. The Lord wanted her to preach His resurrection and ascension into heaven. He did not arise in order to establish an earthly kingdom. He arose in order to ascend and establish His kingdom in our hearts. The Lord had prepared the minds of His disciples earlier, and had told them about His crucifixion and ascension into the heavens. Therefore He did not want the joy of His resurrection to be transformed into a yearning for Him to stay with them on earth.

Leon Morris explains that the word ‘touch’ in Greek implies the meaning of ‘do not continue to touch’ and not ‘do not start with touching’. The Lord wanted her to stop touching and it is as though He allowed her to touch Him only for a moment. He wanted to assure her that He had risen with a new life and this shared nothing in common with the old life He had left on earth. Having this new life, He would grant the faithful believers this renewal in the final great day of the Lord, (1 Cor. 15:51-53).

Once again, as Mary Magdalene experienced His resurrection, He confirms to her that He has not ascended yet to heaven. The time had come to preach the resurrection and to prepare the minds for the ascension. There was no time for temporal relationships or for His physical presence among them. There was no time to speak with Him. The Lord had to fulfill His mission, and it was time to preach the joyful news.

Although He had risen and had proclaimed His ascension, yet He was not embarrassed to call His disciples as His **‘brothers’**.

The Lord sent a message to His disciples through Mary Magdalene. They had deserted Him when He was arrested; and they did not accompany Him to the cross. He did not tell them one word of reproach. It was as though the message He sent was telling them, ‘I forgive and forget, and I do not reproach!’

The Lord sent the message with Mary Magdalene from whom He had cast out seven devils. She was the one who would preach the glad news of the resurrection to the disciples.

In His message to them, the Lord proclaimed His yearning for unity. Their union with Him was His desire. Consequently they would be adopted sons of God and God would be their Father. The Lord Himself would be united with them for the Father would be His God, and the Lord would be the Son of Man who is a representative of all mankind. However, the Lord makes a distinction between His status as the true and eternal Son and their status as children by adoption; since He does not say: **‘our Father and our God’**, Although John and Peter left Mary Magdalene alone in the garden, looking for the Lord and weeping, she ran back to the disciples as soon as she met Him. She returned to preach all the things she had seen, heard and found. She had found the Messiah, the Savior of the world who would prepare them to ascend with their hearts into the Father’s embrace.

**Saint Jerome** responds to the question raised by **Marcella** about the harmony between the words in John 20:16 ‘Do not cling to Me..’ and the words in Matt 28:9, ‘...they came and held Him by the feet and worshipped Him’ ( Mat 28:9). St. Jerome says that in the first case Mary Magdalene failed to recognize the divinity of the Lord. In the second case, the women recognized Him, and therefore were granted the privilege which Mary Magdalene was denied at first<sup>1</sup>.

\* In other words: ‘you are not qualified to touch the One risen from the dead and whom you imagine is still in the grave.’<sup>2</sup>

#### St. Jerome

\* The Lord Jesus Christ taught this woman a lesson after which she knew that He was the Master. That was how she had called Him in her response to Him. That gardener was planting in her heart the mustard seed just as He would have planted it in His garden. So what did He intend to convey when He told her: **“Do not cling to Me”**? He also added-as though the reason for that needed an explanation, **‘for I have not yet ascended to My Father’**. What does this mean? If human beings cannot touch Him while He stands on this earth, then how could we touch Him when He is seated in heaven? He surely came before His ascension, to His disciples, so they could touch Him (Luke 24:29).. This woman symbolizes the gentile church who did not believe in Him except after His actual ascension to the Father. In this manner the Lord intends the Gentiles to believe in Him. They need to cling to Him spiritually as He and the Father are One..

\* It was appropriate that Mary Magdalene was forbidden to touch the Lord who said: ‘Do not cling to Me..’ because she still did not believe that He was equal to the Father. It conveyed to her that she could not go on having faith based on her current concept. He seemed to be telling her: ‘Do not let your thoughts wander away from all what I have

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<sup>1</sup> Letter,59, Question 4

<sup>2</sup> Letter 39:6



gone through for your sake and without transcending and comprehending that which goes beyond your present condition...you will cling to Me when you believe that I am God and am in no way unequal to the Father<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* We believe that this woman wanted to resume her friendship with the Lord Jesus Christ and accompany Him as she had done before. She was so overjoyed that she did not comprehend the huge event. Even though He still carried the same Body, yet He was in a far more glorious state. By forbidding her, the Lord lifted her thoughts so that she would see Him in greater awe and reverence. The words ‘do not cling Me’ actually meant: ‘Do not approach Me in the manner you did previously’.

\* Whereas we saw the Lord all alone at His crucifixion, we do not see Him in that state afterwards. Indeed, He appears among His brothers. On the day of His resurrection, He offered the joyful message: ‘..go to My brethren and say to them; I am ascending to My Father and your Father’ (John 20:17). We hear Him talk to His disciples as His brothers on the day of His glorious resurrection after He had gone through His suffering. As we become sanctified through His redeeming act (the pains of the cross), He not only bears no grudge or embarrassment but also feels greatly pleased to call them His ‘brothers’, (Heb 2:11-12).

\* The bridegroom says: ‘If you desire to open the door of your soul so that the king of glory enters in, then you need to have a sense of yearning in your soul. As the Evangelist reports: ‘for whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother’ (Matt 12:50). It is appropriate that you draw near to the Truth, and to become His partner so that you are never separated from Him.

**St. Gregory, Bishop of Nicea**

\* **“Go to My brethren and say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father.”** Although His ascension was not going to occur immediately, and would happen after forty days, why did the Lord say these words? He desired to raise their thoughts and motivate them to comprehend that He was leaving this world and going to heaven<sup>2</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

\* When the Lord would go( to the Father), He would be carrying His victory and conquest in His Body, resurrected from the dead...then some of the hosts would inquire: “who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this One who is glorious in His apparel?” (Is 63:1). And those in His company would answer the guards at the doors of heaven saying: “Lift up your heads, O you gates!...and the king of glory shall come in” (Ps 24:7). As they would need more explanation, and when they will see traces of blood on His side and all the wounds on His Body, they will ask: ‘why is Your apparel red, and Your garments like one who treads in the winepress?’ And His answer is: ‘I have trodden them and trampled them..’ (Is 63:2-3)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 121:3

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John, 86:2

<sup>3</sup> Commentary on John, Book 6:2888-289

## Origen the Scholar

\* The Lord asked Mary Magdalene not to touch Him as He had not yet ascended. **He would prepare glorious things and then she could touch Him after His ascension when she would be able to comprehend matters which hands cannot grasp, and have a vision of things not found here below.** The Lord probably intended to inform her by asking her not to touch Him, that she should not consider Him to be just a human being; but that He is the Holy One. He wanted to lead her to ‘lift up your heart and thoughts to heaven and seek for Me there. I am going to ascend to the Father whom I have never left and have never become separated from Him. I will raise you and carry you up to My throne!’

The reason why He should not be touched is stated: ‘... **for I have not yet ascended to My Father ...**’ The heart that does not believe in the equality of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Father would maintain that the Lord has not yet ascended to the Father. But a person who believes in his heart that the Lord is one with the Father since the beginning of times is uniquely enabled to touch Him... Because I have become incarnated, then He is My God. Because you have been liberated from sin, He is become your God. He is My Father and God in a manner that is distinct and different from yours for He gave birth to Me as a God before the beginning of the creation but became created as a man in the fullness of time<sup>1</sup>.

## Pope Gregory the Great

\* It is vital to avoid thinking naively or rashly and tenaciously, that the Lord’s words, ‘**I am ascending to My Father and your Father**’ indicate a person’s equality in honor with the righteous. Therefore it is important to make a distinction: the name ‘Father’ refers to One- that is- ‘He is the Father to one Son’. Concerning His role, it is a multiple one as He ‘he calls sons through the adoption of many’: Because the Lord Jesus Christ Himself knew that, He who is without sin, has said: ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father’. He did not say: ‘Our Father’ for He distinguished between the two.

He first said what applies to Him: ‘I am ascending to My Father’ which is the natural relation. And then He added ‘... and your Father’ that is the result of adoption. For however great is the privilege we have received when we pray ‘Our Father who is in heaven’; yet this is a gift we have received due to God’s merciful love. We call Him Father because we have been transferred from slavery to adopted children, and not because we have been born naturally from our heavenly Father. By the grace of the Father, through the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we have been allowed to say these words. It is due to God’s love and His unspeakable mercy<sup>2</sup>.

\* To prevent the thought that in some way He is Father of the Son as well as of all creation, the Lord Jesus Christ made the following distinction: He said “ My Father and your Father’, which is to say: ‘He is my Father by nature, and your Father through

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<sup>1</sup> Hom 25. Forty Gospel Homilies, 193-195

<sup>2</sup> Essay 7:7

adoption'. He did not say: 'I am ascending to our Father', otherwise all creation would be a partner with the only Son (based on His earthly status)<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem**

\* If you are seeking Him among the earthly creatures, just as Mary Magdalene was doing, then be careful or He will tell you the words He told Mary: 'Do not cling to Me for I have not yet ascended to My Father'. Your doors are narrow and cannot be lifted up and you are therefore unable to enter in. Go on the way to my brothers, that is to the eternal doors through which you will see the Lord Jesus Christ ascending... The doors of the church are eternal. The prophet yearned for them and proclaimed within its doors the praises of the Lord in these words: "that I may tell of all your praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion", (Ps 9:14)<sup>2</sup>.

\* The Son of God reveals the difference between birth and grace when He says: 'I have not yet ascended to My Father... I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God'. He does not say: "I have not ascended to our Father and our God"; and this distinction marks the difference because the One who is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is at the same time our Creator<sup>3</sup>.

\* The Lord's purpose in being incarnated is to prepare for us the path to heaven<sup>4</sup>.

\* The Lord actually told Mary Magdalene: '**Do not cling to Me**'. However, the wholly pure One did not say: "because I am pure". So do you dare to claim, O Novatian, and say that you are pure? In fact, by claiming this, you will be considered impure even if your deeds were pure<sup>5</sup>.

**St. Ambrose**

\* The Lord Jesus Christ was about to sit on His Father's throne, while everyone else remains standing. Even though He became our brother according to the flesh, yet He possesses honor that is wholly different than ours, and to a degree that is impossible to express<sup>6</sup>.

**St. John Chrysostom**

**Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord,  
And that He had spoken these things to her. [18]**

Observe how the sin of the human race fell away just in the same manner when it was initiated. In paradise, the woman was the cause of man's death (Gen 3:6). Now, a woman leaves the tomb to proclaim life for mankind. Mary recounted the words of the One who restored her life to her; and it was a woman who had recounted the words of the snake

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<sup>1</sup> Essay 11:19

<sup>2</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 4:2:25-26

<sup>3</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 1:14:90

<sup>4</sup> On the Christian Faith, Book 3:7: 50

<sup>5</sup> Concerning Repentance:1:8:38

<sup>6</sup> Homilies on St John, 86:2

and which led to death. It seems that the Lord was telling the human race through deeds and not through words: 'Receive the source of life from the hand that had offered the death potion'<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Gregory the Great**

## **2- The Lord's Meeting with His disciples on Sunday Evening**

**Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week,  
When the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled,  
For fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them,  
"Peace be with you." [19]**

We do not hear that the Jews wanted to attack the disciples at that time. It is the weak faith of the disciples that led them to think that their turn would come after the Jews had crucified and buried the Lord. Indeed, no one had touched them since the Jews had been told: "let these go their way", (John 18:8). The goal of the leaders was to get hold of Jesus Himself. Therefore acting against the disciples was useless once Jesus had died in disgrace on the cross and was no longer present. So they considered the matter of the disciples of little importance.

The Lord's appearance in the midst of the disciples while the doors were closed was not a miraculous event. This is the nature of the body resurrected from the dead. Matter cannot hinder or obstruct it. The Lord wanted to confirm that He had risen with the same body. However, it was a glorified body. His resurrection did not mean that He had returned to a normal life on earth. Conversely, it proclaimed the uplifting of believers and ascending while carrying them into the Father's embrace.

The word 'doors' in the plural form occurs only in the Gospel of St. John. The upper room probably had more than one door, or he could have meant that the front door of the house as well as the door of the upper room was both locked. As the disciples were greatly frightened, they were not content to close the front door only.

In the other Gospels, the evangelists underlined how the disciples lived in fear immediately after the resurrection. It was not an easy thing for them to see the One, who had died and had been buried, still alive and appearing to them. Here, however, St. John the evangelist reveals another reason for their fear, and that is 'the Jews'. The disciples felt that their lives were exposed to real danger even after the Lord's resurrection. They feared they would be accused of having stolen the Body.

The Lord appeared on the first Christian Sabbath in order to bless and sanctify that day. The disciples had probably met in order to pray and worship. They might have wanted to discuss the current events of that day. The women, Peter, and John had confirmed that the tomb was empty. Mary Magdalene recounted her meeting with the Lord and reported the message He had entrusted her to deliver. He had also appeared to

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<sup>1</sup> Hom 25. Forty Gospel Homilies, 195

the women on that day, (Matt 28:9). He had also appeared to the two disciples on the way of Emaus. He had conversed with them, opened their minds, and inflamed their hearts with love, ( Luke 24:13), etc...

They had probably met to pray as they feared they would be arrested, The Jews claimed that the Lord's disciples had gone at night and stolen the Body. Anyhow, the disciples knew how to gather and pray in moments of stress.

The Lord's words: "Peace be with you" were not mere words uttered as a usual form of greeting exchanged among friends. Indeed, these words were a form of unusual blessing that carried power and offered the fruit of the resurrection: inner peace with God, peace for man with himself, peace in the Lord Jesus Christ. A peace unlike the fake peace of the world.

The Lord Himself is chaste. His mother is a virgin as well. Indeed, although a mother, she remained a virgin for the Lord had entered while the doors were closed. In His grave, a new tomb had been cut out of an extremely solid rock. No one had been laid there before or after Him, (John 19:41). St. Mary is a closed paradise... 'A sealed source', (Song of Solomon 4:12). According to Joel (3:18) the waters of the river flow from this source<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

\* Truly, the Lord was able to enter through the doors without opening them. He is the One who was born and yet the virginity of His mother remained untouched<sup>2</sup>.

**St. Augustine**

\* The disciples had gathered behind closed doors due to their fear of the Jews. (John 20:19). When a person remains in the city of revelation, feeling secure, and overcome by holy meditation- while in fear of evil spirits, and enclosing his senses, that person welcomes the word of God. Then it is revealed to him in a mysterious manner rather than through the senses. It proclaims peace to him, while granting calmness and freedom from lusts...as he inhales this breeze, it grants him the many gifts of the Holy Spirit and the power over evil spirits, while revealing to him the marks and concepts of the divine mysteries.

**St. Mark the Ascetic**

**And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side.  
Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. [20]**

By entering while the doors were close, the Lord Jesus Christ confirmed to the disciples that His resurrected Body had a new nature. At the same time, He confirmed that it was the same body since it bore the same wounds of the cross. However, this was a glorified body.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 48:21

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 121:4

The resurrected Lord spoke through His mouth. He granted them a new and sublime peace. He spoke as He carried His wounds in His hands and feet. Therefore He granted them a unique joy by His presence among them. He showed them His hands and side to assure them that He is the same Jesus who was crucified in the same body. The traces of His wounds were a living testimony of His resurrection. These wounds will continue to be a source of joy and glory until the end of time. They will remain to be a sign of the amazing divine love that is endless and that seeks the salvation of mankind. He had placed a cover shield on the brilliant glory of His resurrected Body so that they could look at Him and speak to Him.

The Lord Jesus Christ continues to spread His hands and expose His side. He embraces us with His love and satisfies our thirst from the source of His amazing blood. Consequently, we learn that since He is living then we are alive through His cross. Death will not be able to destroy us. The wounds of His cross are the language of a love that can tear away our fear of this world. A language of love that grants us a sublime inner joy.

He always grants us insight through the wounds of His cross. We eventually realize that we not only enjoy depth of vision but that we also enjoy His presence among us.

\* Certainly the form of the bodies resurrected from the dead will be in the same state as now, however they will attain a sublime glory. After the Lord's descent into Hades, He had the same body which had been crucified. He showed the disciples the marks of the nails in His hands and the wound in His side.

If we deny the condition of His body because of the manner he entered the room though the doors were closed- and this is not a feature of human bodies- then we need to remember, as well, that Peter and the Lord Jesus Christ each possessed two real bodies since they walked on the water. This too contradicts nature, (Matt 22:30)<sup>1</sup>.

**St. Jerome**

### **What are the features of a body resurrected from the dead?**

A resurrected body is comparable to the body of the Lord Jesus Christ after His resurrection. With this body, He came out of the tomb while the sealed stone was still placed there; and He entered the upper room while the doors were closed. (John 20; 19-20). He soars over time and place, as well as over physical boundaries and obstacles. It is an ideal body that collaborates with the soul so that it enables man to progress towards the Lord. Such a glorious fellowship, coupled with vision and meeting face to face is ultimately achieved. This does not mean that it is a different body than the one we now have. It is the same identical body we have now dressed in incorruption. (1 Cor 15:53)

**St. Augustine** deals cautiously with this problem of **'the nature of the resurrected body'** and says: **(At any rate, whatever the nature of the spiritual body is, and however great is its blessing, yet I fear to speak about it. This is because we**

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<sup>1</sup> Against Jovinianus, 1:36

still have no experience related to the reality of this subject)<sup>1</sup>.

The resurrected body possess these characteristics:

1- After the resurrection, the human body becomes spiritual. However, it is recognizable and can be distinguished from other bodies. The saint clarified the expression of **‘the heavenly body’ does not mean the denial of the real bodily nature that the spiritual body possess<sup>2</sup>. (The spiritual body does not imply that it is no longer a body. Rather, just as “the living body” implies “life”... “the spiritual body” implies a body that obeys the spirit)<sup>3</sup>.**

2- It is the same body as ours, yet it will be wholly transformed into incorruption. The resurrected body will not possess the imperfections or defects of our bodies **as (it will be transformed wholly into something far better at the moment of the resurrection<sup>4</sup>).**

3- **The wounds of martyrdom will leave their marks on His body.** They will not appear as defects but as clear marks revealing the mystery of great love the martyrs bore for Jesus Christ. These will convey honor, and glory and will not appear as imperfections or defects in the body<sup>5</sup>.

4- The resurrected body will be a glorified one that resembles the body of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

5- (It is possible and reasonable to believe that we shall see the new heaven and the new earth. In this manner, we shall see God more vividly wherever we turn our eyes. He will be present everywhere as He rules the whole universe<sup>6</sup>.)

6- We are introduced to the concept of the spiritual body as a factor that will no longer preoccupy us from meditating on God. It will no longer be a stumbling block for the soul as it will submit to it. According to **St Augustine**, this will be a vital issue as there will no longer be a conflict between the spirit and the body. Indeed, the resurrected body will interact with the spirit – **[the same body that troubles us and makes us continue to sin, will submit to us in the resurrection. It will no longer trouble us with the obstacles it puts in our way as we seek to study God’s divine laws and commandments<sup>7</sup>].**

In his book ‘The Holy City of God’, St Augustine explains this concept in great depth and says: **[The spiritual body will submit to the spirit, yet it will remain a body and not a spirit. Just as in this life the earthly spirit submits to the body yet it**

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<sup>1</sup> De civitate Dei, 22:21

<sup>2</sup> Retractiones 2:3

<sup>3</sup> Sermon 242:8:11

<sup>4</sup> De doctrina Christiana, 1:19:18

<sup>5</sup> City of God 2:19

<sup>6</sup> De Civitate Dei, 22:229:3 cf. De Genesi ad Litteram 12:35

<sup>7</sup> To Fortunatus 22

**continues to be a spirit and is not a body<sup>1</sup>].** Instead of there being a conflict between the soul and the body, there will be a complete union within one spiritual nature, where the body will not rebel against the spirit. **St Augustine explains: [Why do we speak of a spiritual body, O dearly beloved, except that it does not fail to submit to the spirit? Nothing will remain in you that struggles or rebels against you. There will no longer be reason to lament as the apostle does when he says: “The flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh,” (Gal 5:17)<sup>2</sup>].**

\* The outer features of this world will pass away- that is, all the consequences of the fall will end. This will not involve the destruction of the essence or composition of the creation; but just the outer form of the world that will pass away. Then man will be renewed and flourish in the incorrupt form and origin of life. It will no longer be possible to grow old, for there will be ‘a new heaven and a new earth,’ (Rev 21:1). In this new heaven and earth, man will live in a state of constant renewal and he will be engaged in an eternal dialogue with God<sup>3</sup>.

**St Iraneous**

\* The Lord arose with the same body He had at His burial. As Christians, we have been given the promise of the resurrection, and we look forward to experience a resurrection similar to that of the Lord’s. He has risen before any of us came into the faith so that His resurrection becomes the basis of our belief. But why? Is it so that we are no longer the same, after the resurrection, as we are now? The Lord Jesus Christ arose and ascended into the heavens with His body. When He lived on earth, His body possessed all its human functions. Therefore this proves that the body that was buried is the same that arose. But will there be a need for food in heaven? We have read that angels had appeared on earth in the form of men, (Gen 18). They visited Abraham and ate with him. An angel appeared to Tobias and also ate with him. Do we suppose that they seemed to eat but did not do so actually? Is it not a fact that Abraham indeed killed a calf, baked bread, and laid it on the table? Did he not offer food to the angels and they ate?! (Gen 18:1-9)<sup>4</sup>.

**St Augustine**

\* God, who is loving and merciful, has released the body from its imprisonment, and has liberated it from the slavery of destruction. A slavery that is deadly and bitter. He has granted the body immortality in the eternal life. In this manner, He has granted the human body the gift of holy eternity, making it immortal and alive for ever<sup>5</sup>.

**St Clemet of Alexandria**

**Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you!  
As the Father sent Me, I also send you.” [21]**

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<sup>1</sup> De Civit. Dei, 22:21

<sup>2</sup> Sermon, 242:8

<sup>3</sup> K Ware: the Orthodox Way :SVSP., p182

<sup>4</sup> Sermon 242:8

<sup>5</sup> Pedagogus 3:1



The Lord repeated and confirmed His gift, **“Peace to you” [21]**. Through this gift, the disciples would therefore become qualified for the heavenly mission. They would preach, with authority from above, the news of the joyful resurrection. They would act as ambassadors of inward peace for they would become members in the risen body of Christ. The Head would work in them so that they would witness to the world concerning the risen life which they practice through the Holy Spirit.

\*This is what the Lord had said before His crucifixion, “...I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one can take away from you,” (16:22). These words were now being fulfilled in a practical manner. It led the disciples now to have true faith...these were the Lord’s first words after His resurrection<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them,  
“Receive the Holy Spirit”. [22]**

The Lord granted the disciples the Holy Spirit for the first time on the eve of the first day of His resurrection... It was the culmination of a series of events that had started at dawn. This preceded the Pentecost and it has led many to question the difference between the granting of the Holy Spirit in this passage and the event that took place on the day of the Pentecost.

In the Holy Bible, the verb ‘breathed’ or ‘emphyso’ has been rarely used. However, it is used in the Book of Genesis where it carries much weight. We read at first that ‘the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters’; then we read that God ‘breathed into (man’s) nostrils the breath of life’, and man became a living soul; (Gen 2:7). In the Book of Ezekial, we are told that when the bones of the dead came together, the Spirit breathed into them and granted them life, (Ezk 37:9). From the above, we understand that a new creation is born and inaugurated through the breath of the Holy Spirit which was granted to the disciples. It is possible to describe the work of the Holy Spirit as a mission with the objective of leading the disciples to work by the Holy Spirit in order that the world might enjoy the new creation of the resurrected life. He granted them the breath of the Holy Spirit to empower them to carry out the ministry and service of their mission. Thousands of years earlier, God had breathed into the earth and had created Adam into a living being. Now He breathed into the disciples’ faces in order to raise in them the new being; and so that they would be blessed by the gift of the active Spirit working within and through them.

**Fr Maximus the Confessor** comments as follows: [ Since we have been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit, (in other words, we have participated in His death and resurrection), we have been granted our first liberation from the corrupt flesh in the name of the Lord and through His Spirit. However, we look forward to the final liberation...as spiritual beings].

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 86:2

\* We know that it is possible to be baptized only in the Church and at the hands of priests. The Church is established upon evangelical principles; and her priests are ordained in the Lord Jesus Christ and authorized to baptize and grant absolution for our sins. Without them it would be impossible to absolve or retain sins since there would be no one to determine such issues<sup>1</sup>.

\* The Lord gave the disciples the power to forgive sins. He also gave that power to the Churches where He had sent the disciples to lay down the foundations; and to the bishops whom they had ordained and who had succeeded them<sup>2</sup>.

**Caprianus the Martyr**

\* Notice that sins are absolved through the Holy Spirit. As for human beings, they undertake this function as they fulfill the service of absolving sins. They do not claim that they are entitled to do so due to some kind of authority they personally possess. In fact they forgive sins in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and not in their own name. Man prays the Divine One to grant forgiveness; for man performs the service, but the Almighty grants the blessing<sup>3</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

\* Why were the disciples granted the Holy Spirit on earth at first, and then later as tongues of fire descending from heaven? Because there are two commandments for love: loving God and loving our brothers. The gift of the Holy Spirit on earth promotes love for our brothers, while the gift coming from heaven promotes love for God

Just as there is one love and two commandments, so there is one Spirit and two gifts or blessings.

**The first blessing** is the one the Lord granted when He lived on earth. **The second one** when He went to heaven. By loving our brothers we learn how to develop our love for God. It is true that the one Holy Spirit had lived in the hearts of the disciples from a very early stage in order to grant them faith; however, the gift was not fully or clearly granted except after the resurrection.

This explains why it is written, ‘...for the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified,’ (Jn 7:39). It is important to realize that those who possessed the Holy Spirit acknowledged and proclaimed Him publicly only after the Lord’s resurrection. They did so not only to support the small number of believers but for the sake of many others<sup>4</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

**“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them;  
And if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” [23]**

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<sup>1</sup> Letter 73 to Jubauan: 7

<sup>2</sup> Firmilian to Cyprian: Letter 75:16 (on 256 AD)

<sup>3</sup> Of the Holy Spirit, Book 3:18:137

<sup>4</sup> Hom. 25. Forty Gospel Homilies

The Lord Jesus Christ forgives sins (and also expels demons) through His Holy Spirit. This is clear in His words to His disciples after the resurrection, **“Receive the Holy Spirit..”, and then went on to say, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; and if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”** [22-23]

\* The task of the priest is to grant the Holy Spirit, to exercise his right to forgive - through the Holy Spirit- and to retain sins<sup>1</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

\* As a King, the Lord sent the disciples to be rulers, and He granted them the power to be thrown into prison and to come out from there. He assigned that same power to them and that was how He sent them out<sup>2</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**Pope Gregory the Great** warns against the abuse of such authority. This could occur if a person is driven by personal whims and not according to the nature of the One to whom they are subject. In such a case, the following words would be pertinent, ‘...to slay the souls that should not die, and to save the souls alive that should not live...’, (Ezk 13:19)<sup>3</sup>.

**But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus,  
Was not with them when Jesus came. [24]**

Thomas was characterized by his frankness. His decision was very clear when he stated that he would not believe unless he saw the hands of the Lord and the traces of the nails, and unless he touched the marks of the nails and put his hand in the Lord’s side, [25]. This happened during the first day and events reached their peak as the Lord continued to appear. His object was to attract this world and call everyone to enjoy the experience of the resurrection.

The absence of Thomas from the meeting of the disciples deprived him from the golden opportunity of seeing the Lord, hearing His words, and receiving His blessing. He might have been unable to attend – due to a health problem for example- yet what excuse could he have for refusing the testimony of his brothers who told him they had seen the Lord?

\* We have a reason for celebrating the holy liturgy at the beginning of the week on Sundays. Moreover we stand up for we have risen with the Lord, and pray for heavenly matters as we reach out to Him. We observe all this as we consider that this day represents a picture of the age to come. Therefore we consider that this is the beginning

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<sup>1</sup> Concerning Repentance, 1:2:8

<sup>2</sup> Homilies on St John, 86:3

<sup>3</sup> cf. Hom 25. Forty Gospel Homilies, 205

of the days of the week and we call it day one and not the first day. Moses accordingly repeats these words in the Book of Genesis: ‘So the evening, and the morning were ...’

**St Basil the Great**

\* That past Sunday (the day of the Passover) was the Sunday of salvation. But this Sunday- which comes eight days later, and which we call the Sunday of Thomas- is the commemoration and confirmation of Salvation. The former was the Sunday that stands in between the grave and the resurrection; while the latter one (Sunday of Thomas) is the day God spends to create. Just as He had begun the first creation on day one, He also began His second creation on that same day which is at the same time day one-in relation to the days following it; and day eight – in relation to the days that follow it....and the day He returns to live in heaven.

**St Gregory of Nazianzen**

**The other disciples therefore said to him,  
“We have seen the Lord,”  
But he said to them, “Except I see in His hands the print of the nails,  
And thrust my hand into His side,  
I will not believe.” [25]**

That is how the Evangelist reports to us the event of the first day of the Lord’s resurrection, which is also the eighth day of the disciples’ deep sense of loneliness and loss. The Lord appears to them in a similar way on both days. Then the Evangelist draws our attention to the Lord’s wounds so that we might all shout and say with Thomas, **“My Lord and my God!”**

\* Thomas disbelieved the disciples when they told him, “we have seen the Lord”. This was not because he mistrusted them. Neither did he discount their testimony or believe that the resurrection was impossible, for he did not say, ‘I do not believe you’. His words were, **““Except I see in His hands the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe”<sup>1</sup>.**

**St John Chrysostom**

## **5- The Lord’s Meeting with the Disciples on the Following Sunday**

**And after eight days again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them,  
Then came Jesus, the doors being shut,  
And stood in the midst, and said:  
“Peace be unto You.” [26]**

In the first century, it was usual in Palestine to include the first and last day when specific of a specific period of time. Therefore, the words ‘**after eight days**’ would convey to us the eighth day, or after the seventh day...which would be the first Sunday

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 87:2

after the Lord's resurrection. That was when the Lord revealed Himself to Thomas... the eighth day being as reference to the age and life to come.

The Evangelist reports another meeting with the disciples while the doors were closed. He had not met with them as a group throughout the week- between Monday and Saturday- in order to confirm that He would no longer accompany them as He used to do before His crucifixion. The time had come to prepare them for His ascension. After the resurrection, His natural place- as the Son of Man resurrected from the dead- was in the heavens. At the start of His ministry, the Lord had disappeared for forty days when Satan had tempted Him, (Matt 4:1-3). He wanted to confirm to His disciples that He had come to fight on their behalf, and to offer them His victory. Now He would remain forty days hidden from them, and meeting them only intermittently, to confirm the glory prepared for them by His ascension into the heavens.

The disciples used to meet together weekly on the day of the Lord which was the Christian Sabbath day. He appeared to them on that day to confirm His promise- that where two or three are gathered in His name He would be in their midst- in a tangible manner. Thomas made sure he would be present as he was eagerly expecting the Lord to appear to the disciples.

\* If you were to say: 'Why did Jesus not appear to Thomas immediately, and did so only after eight days?' Our answer would be, 'So that the disciples would inform Thomas and he so that his heart would be more eager. Besides, he would become a stronger and more willing believer as a result<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* Is it astonishing that the Holy One, Who- being resurrected and on His way to eternal life- would make His entrance through closed doors? He is the One who had come out of the sealed womb of the Virgin in order to die on earth. He appeared to His disciples immediately after His death to reveal that His body is incorruptible and materially real. He confirmed that His body, after the resurrection is made of the same nature as our bodies, yet different in its aspect of glory<sup>2</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

**Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here,  
And look at My hands,  
And reach your hand here,  
And put it into My side,  
Do not be unbelieving, but believing". [27]**

\*Note the Lord's compassion! For the sake of one soul, He revealed Himself carrying His wounds. He came to save each one personally.

**St John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 87:1

<sup>2</sup> Hom. 25. Forty Gospel Homilies, 201

\* After the resurrection, we will possess the same body, blood, and bones. What will be judged- according to the Holy Bible- will be our deeds and not the physical nature of these elements<sup>1</sup>.

**St Jerome**

**And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God.” [28]**

Thomas was not a doubting person to the degree he believed himself to be. As soon as he saw the Lord Jesus Christ standing before him and as soon as he heard His voice, he no longer felt the need to touch the wounds of His Master. He immediately proclaimed Him and cried out, **“My Lord and my God”**. Probably, just the sight of His Lord made him withdraw what he had told the disciples – that unless he touched the Lord’s wounds, he would not believe- and now he declared to the whole world what he felt in his heart. The Lord what Thomas had said without being informed by anyone.

Opinions differ, and some scholars believe that Thomas declared his faith without touching the Lord’s wounds. Others believe that he actually declared his faith but obeyed the Lord and touched His wounds, even though he no longer needed to do so in order to believe.

\* He saw the Lord’s Body and touched Him; and he comprehended His Divinity that can neither be seen nor touched<sup>2</sup>.

**St Augustine**

\* Just as the Father is God and the Son is Lord; so also the Son is God and the Father is Lord<sup>3</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

**Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you believed.  
Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” [29]**

The Lord did not tell him, ‘You have believed because you have touched My wounds.’ Rather, He said, **“because you have seen Me”**. Seeing the Lord led him to have faith.

\* The Lord, Who has the power to arise without any traces of wounds, retained them so that the doubting disciple could touch them. This would heal his wounded heart<sup>4</sup>.

\* When the doubting disciple touched the wounds in His Master’s Body, the wounds inflicted by his unbelief were healed. The lack of faith displayed by Thomas was more beneficial to our faith than to the believing disciples. When Thomas regained faith by touching the Lord, our minds were released of all doubt, and have become steadfast in the faith<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> To Pammachius Against John of Jerusalem, 28

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 121:5

<sup>3</sup> Of the Holy Spirit, Book 3:15:108

<sup>4</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 48:1

<sup>5</sup> Hom. 25. Forty Gospel Homilies, 206-207

## **Pope Gregory the Great**

\* The Lord knew how much the disciples' hearts were hurting. In order to heal them, He retained the traces of the wounds in His Body<sup>1</sup>.

\* It is possible to confirm that the disciple did not dare to touch the Lord when He asked Thomas to do so as it is not reported that 'Thomas touched Him'. However, whether Thomas believed by only seeing Him, or by touching Him as well, he surely saw and believed. What the Lord declared was a reference to what would happen concerning the faith of the Gentiles: "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed."

**St Augustine**

### **7- The Aim of the Gospel**

**And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples,  
Which are not written in this book.' [30]**

The Evangelist reveals the aim of writing this Gospel. It is not intended to present a full documentation of the life, work, and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. St John knew a lot which he did not record as his aim was to get every reader to enjoy the living faith and not just to believe. Living faith provides real knowledge which leads to eternal life.

**But these are written,  
That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God,  
And that believing you may have life in His name. [31]**

Believing in Christ as the Messiah and Son of God does not leave a person unchanged and in the same status. This faith leads the believer to enjoy eternal life, rejoice in the Lord's name and in His person as He is life itself.

\* '... **in His name**' or through His name, for He is life<sup>2</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

### **The Events related to the Day of the Lord's Resurrection<sup>3</sup>**

Many scholars have attempted to provide a sequence of events for this amazing first day of the Lord's resurrection. They based their attempts on the writings of the holy Gospels. Wescott has put them in the following order:

**Saturday** \* Before 6 a.m., Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, went to the tomb, (Matt 28:1)

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon on N.T. Lessons, 38:2

<sup>2</sup> Hom. 87. PG 59:521

<sup>3</sup> B.F. Wescott: (Cf. Leon Morris, p. 696)

\* Later on, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of Jacob, and Salome prepared the spices and oils, (Mk 1:16)

**Sunday** \* The resurrection occurred early in the morning, and it was followed by an Earthquake and the angel came and opened the tomb, (Matt 28:2-4).

\* Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, and probably some other women went to the tomb at dawn. Mary Magdalene headed to the tomb immediately, and returned with Peter and John, (Jn 30:1).

\* The other women arrived there by sunrise, (Mk 16:2). They saw an angel, and received a message for the disciples, (Matt28:5 etc; Mk 16:5etc...)

\* Other women came later on while it was still early in the morning, among them was Joanna, (Lk24:1 etc). Two angels, who appeared as two young men, appeared to them, (Lk 24:4 etc...).

\* Peter and John came to tomb, (Jn20:3-10). Mary Magdalene saw two angels, (Jn 20:11-13). Other women told the news to the disciples, (Lk 24:10 etc...).

\* The Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene, (Jn20:14-18; Mk16:9).

\* The Lord appeared to other women on their way home and as they were returning from their visit to the home, (Matt28:9 etc...).

\* The Lord appeared to two disciples on their way to Emmaus, (Lk 13:24 etc...)

\* He appeared to Peter later on in the evening, (Lk24:34; 1 Cor 15:5).

\*He appeared to the twelve while they were gathered with others, (Lk 24:36; Jn 20:19).

End of Chapter 20

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## CHAPTER 21

### A FEAST IN TIBERIA OR THE CROSSING INTO THE COMING AGE

As the writer concluded the previous chapter by stating his aim in writing his Gospel, some have assumed that this chapter had been added at a later time. However, there is no strong proof supporting that claim, besides, all other transcripts that have been found of that Gospel do contain this chapter. Indeed, the Church has not separated or made a distinction between this chapter and the rest of the other chapters of this Gospel.

Some wonder: what was the need for this chapter after the writer had expressed his aim in writing and seemed to have concluded His Gospel? He began his Gospel by revealing the origin of the eternal Word Who had no beginning. He concluded in the previous chapter by reporting His appearance as the One resurrected from the dead on the eighth day of the Christian Passover and which essentially symbolizes eternity. In this chapter – chapter twenty one- the Evangelist appears to be taking us to the thresh hold of the Coming Age. The beloved St John the Evangelist concludes His Gospel by reporting the meeting of the Lord Jesus Christ with some of His disciples by the lake of Tiberias where He eats with them as though at a banquet. This is like an invitation to enjoy the heavenly banquet.

This chapter is considered to be the long report of the Lord's appearance in Galilee after His resurrection.

\* It is appropriate to note that the Lord is described as though He was someone setting up a final banquet with seven of His disciples. Why did He do so other than to indicate that these alone were filled with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit- Isaiah 11:2,3- and that they would be with Him in His eternal banquet?...The apostle St Paul correctly declares: **"...Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."**, (Rom 8:9). What he means is that it will no longer be possible to rejoice upon seeing the Divine glory if a person is not led by God Who lives within him<sup>1</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 25, Forty Gospel Homilies, PL 76:185-6

|                                           |       |
|-------------------------------------------|-------|
| 1- The Lord's appearance by Lake Tiberias | 1-14  |
| 2- His conversation with Peter            | 15-19 |
| 3- His words about John                   | 20-22 |
| 4- Concluding words of St John            | 24-25 |

## 1- The Lord's appearance by Lake Tiberias

**After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and in this way He showed Himself. [1]**

Here St John reports to us one of the instances when the Lord appeared after His resurrection from the dead. It was not a day of worship, nor was the appearance within the Temple, or during a prayer gathering. He appeared on a working day and as they were engaged in their job which was fishing. Our Lord is eager to reveal Himself to mankind even as they perform their work. This is what happened when He sent angels to announce the news of His birth to the shepherds who were staying up all night to guard their sheep.

Earlier, the Lord had appeared several times to the women and to the disciples in Jerusalem and at the tomb. He commanded them to go to Galilee, and promised that they would meet with Him, (Matt 28:7, Mk 16:7). This promise was fulfilled as St John reports in this chapter. Some believe that this is the seventh time that the Lord appears after His resurrection, and the third time He appears to the disciples [14]. The meeting reported in this passage occurred on the third day after His resurrection.

The verb 'appear' occurs in the text as 'genoumenis' which has been translated into Hebrew as 'made apparent' to indicate that **'He made Himself visible'**, or 'He proclaimed Himself'. It is as though the natural place for the Lord is to be in the other world after His resurrection; and that these appearances are revelations that He makes to His disciples and to others so that they are assured of His resurrection... This action reveals the sublime state of our Lord Jesus Christ since we can no longer meet Him in this world. He is the One who makes Himself present in this world whenever He wishes. He is the One who becomes visible according to the time and place which He chooses. He did not appear on that shore as a person would do by moving from one place to the other: He suddenly stood there and appeared to His disciples in this manner.

The verb **'He made Himself visible'** could also indicate what went on in the thoughts of the disciples as a result of that. They had not yet experienced the joy of knowing Him after His resurrection. Consequently, He spoke to them as a stranger would do, and called them by using the general term of **'children'**, [5].

\* Do you notice that He neither stayed with them forever, nor in the same manner as before? He appeared suddenly, in the evening, and then vanished. He then appeared another time on the eighth day and also vanished then. After that He made an awesome appearance again by the shore. What does **'appear'** convey? It is clear that He could not

be seen except when He condescended to do so, for His Body is incorruptible and possesses the inseparable purity of a spiritual Body<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* He re-established their hope in Him and which they had not regained. The Lord intended to come to them to remove the despair that filled their minds. He returned to them alive and out of the tomb, He made the great proclamation concerning the reality of the renewal of His Body which He presented before their eyes and hands. He could be seen as well as touched, and held so they could examine the traces of His wounds. He did that so that Thomas, who had refused to believe previously, would declare his faith. Earlier, the Lord had breathed the Holy Spirit upon them and they had heard with their ears the words coming from with His own lips: **“As the Father has sent Me, I also send you....If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”** Suddenly, they had become once more fishers of fish and not of men<sup>2</sup>.

**St Augustine**

This scene took place by the shore of Lake Tiberias in Galilee. The disciples had traveled north to the place of their homes and where the Lord met them.

The ‘Lake of Tiberias’ was the name used for the ‘Sea of Galilee’ in the Lord’s times. In the Old Testament it was known as the ‘Sea of Chinnereth’. In Luke 5:1 it is called the ‘Lake of Gennesaret’. In about the year 20 A.D., a city was founded on its shores and it was called ‘Tiberias’ after the name of the emperor. So the lake became the Lake of Tiberias’. This change occurred over several years, and the evangelist has used the name that was popular at the time of writing this Gospel.

**Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin,  
Nathanael of Cana in Galilee,  
The sons of Zebedee, and two other of His disciples were together [2].**

Seven disciples had come to the shore of Lake Tiberias and the Lord appeared to them. He could have done so in compliance with the Roman law which required seven witnesses to testify. The Lord made Himself visible to these seven disciples, among them was Nathaniel whom John had not mentioned after the Lord’s meeting with him in chapter one. Some believe he is the same as Bartholemew, one of the twelve disciples. As for the two disciples whose names are not given, these could be Philip from Bethesda and Andrew from Capernaum.

**Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing”. They said to him, “We are going with you also”. They went out, and immediately got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing. [3]**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 87:2

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 122:2

There is no doubt that the period through which the disciples lived between the time of the Crucifixion and the ascension was filled with obscurity. Even though the Lord's appearances had opened the doors of hope to them, and had revealed many divine mysteries, yet their psychological condition was unstable. The future was unclear, and they could not comprehend the nature of their new life after being physically separated from the Lord Jesus Christ. They had received the mission of preaching to the whole world, but they had not yet experienced the joy of the Holy Spirit that would guide them in their new task. It is true that the Sunday of the Resurrection had replaced the sadness of the Friday of the Crucifixion; yet what was God's plan for them? The situation was a most difficult one and therefore Peter called them to go fishing and they responded in order to do any activity. The time had not come to begin preaching about the Lord and His redeeming action. They had to wait until the Lord's ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit upon His Church.

The disciples did not know how to lead an idle or lazy life. Therefore they went fishing, though not as a form of leisure but in order to work and provide for their physical needs. The apostle Peter called them to go fishing as a source of income to them. Before the Crucifixion, they lived on what others provided in the money box (Lk 8:3). This is the reason why St John the Cassian reports, about monasticism in Egypt, that the monks were committed to work in order to provide for their needs. They had to care for the poor; and they had to consider that their work was a training that developed their spiritual development. The monk was not to be too engaged in these tasks, yet he was not to depend on relatives or others to provide his necessities.

\* By disdaining all wealth, we choose to obtain our daily needs through the work of our hands and without any dependence on the wealth of our relatives. Our reading and meditation on the Bible will therefore become deeper as we will not tend to remain idle if we do nothing else besides that. It is preferable to belong to the working poor according to the example that the apostles have set, or as we have seen in the laws of our fathers. Then we would find much joy in doing so.

**It is also worth noting that there is an even greater danger than the previous one; and that is of obtaining your food through the help of others even though you are physically sound and well built. This is appropriate for those who are weak only...**Therefore it is necessary for everyone to depend on their daily work and the proceeds of his hands for his livelihood. We need to remember the commandment to love which the apostle teaches when he forbids the wealthy from helping lazy people and says: "For even when we were with you, we commanded you this. If anyone will not work, neither should he eat," (2 Thes. 3:10).

These are the words which the **blessed Anthony** told a certain person, and he taught by setting him as an example<sup>1</sup>.

**Fr Abraham**

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<sup>1</sup> Cassian Conferences, 24:12

It is so beautiful for brothers to meet together, not only to worship in Church but also to exchange conversation filled with love. Besides, their reciprocal love would increase if they work together as they will find joy in such practical unity.

St Peter's decision was a natural outcome; even though some feel that it was not according to God's will since he went with his companions without asking God, in prayer, for guidance. That is why they did not catch any fish all night long. Any way it was a practical lesson that demonstrates failure of any human endeavor- whatever the goal- as long as it is not supported by Divine help. This is especially true in the case of fishing for souls for the kingdom of God.

\* The Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Truth, has said: "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God," (Lk 9:62). Why did Peter return to do what he had left? We know he was a fisherman while Matthew was a tax collector. Peter resumed his work after he had become a believer, whereas Matthew never returned to be a tax collector. That is because obtaining a livelihood through fishing is one thing, while tax collecting is another. There are many jobs that cannot be partially or wholly done without committing mistakes. It is forbidden to resume such jobs after becoming believers as they are associated with sin<sup>1</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

St Augustine responds to the following question: 'Since the Lord has said, "...seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you", (Matt6:32), why was no food provided for them and they had to go fishing?' It was the Lord who had made available the fish in that place so that it could be caught. He made the disciples feel a need which obliged them to go fishing, and consequently, they discovered the miracle which He had prepared for them. Moreover, this incident would strengthen the message proclaimed by the preachers of His Gospel. Indeed, the Bible reinforces itself by the great mystery which makes its imprint on their minds due to the huge amount of fish that was caught<sup>2</sup>.

\* The disciples were not forbidden to pray for the needs required by their work as long as that work was intrinsically legal and acceptable; and as long as this did not affect their apostolic mission which they had to continue doing. They had to pray and work whenever they needed to get their daily food. Therefore no one should think or doubt that St Paul did not achieve the stature of those who had abandoned everything and followed the Lord Jesus Christ. St Paul found it necessary to work with his hands in order to provide for his needs and not be a burden on anyone to whom he preached the Gospel. More significantly, he states that he "...labored more abundantly than they all...", and then he adds: "...yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me," (1 Cor 15:10)<sup>3</sup>.

**St Augustine**

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 24: Forty Gospel Homilies, PL 76:1184

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 122:4

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 122:3

**But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore:  
But the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. [4]**

The disciples did not recognize the Lord Jesus Christ. This could have been to the lack of light and visibility as it was too early in the morning, or because they were too far away, or because He had taken a different form as in Mark 16: 12 (on the road to Emmaus).

**St John Chrysostom** says that the Lord did not reveal Himself to them in order to engage them in conversation.

\* Before the resurrection the Lord had walked on the water before their eyes, (Matt 14:25). What does the sea indicate other than to the present generation that is so disturbed by the conditions and noise of this passing life? What does the stability of the shore indicate other than the continuity of eternal and endless peace? Since the Lord had actually crossed over beyond the limits of this mortal life, He therefore stood on the shore after His resurrection. Through this act, the Lord was as though telling His disciples about the mystery of His resurrection<sup>1</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

**Then Jesus said to them,  
“Children, have ye any meat? “  
They answered him, “No”. [5]**

The word for ‘children’ in the Greek language is ‘Paidia’ and it is used when a speaker addresses someone with whom he shares strong ties and tender emotions. The Greek word ‘pais’ literally means ‘young children’ or ‘the loving ones’. St John the evangelist used it when he spoke about the youngest child of one of the nobles, (4:49), and he used it again for a new born child, (16:21). However, it is possible to use this word for adults, while it may also be used for soldiers. The Lord spoke to the disciples as a father would speak to His dear children. Although He possessed a glorified Body after the resurrection, yet this glory was revealed in the spirit of eternal love and sublime tenderness. Based on their ages, the disciples could not be classified as children, yet they became God’s children and enjoyed His divine adoption.

As a father who is filled with tenderness and concerned with providing their physical need for food, the Lord satisfied all their physical and spiritual needs. Our risen Lord continues to **pass through each of the homes of believers**, especially those of the poor and the needy, and He asks: ‘My children, do you have food?’ He knows they have no food; yet He arouses in them the desire to pray with faith and ask Him to satisfy their need. He does not satisfy their need through a human hand, but He fills them with food provided from stores; and waters them Himself in one way or another by His sources of love. He opens their eyes of their hearts and enables them to see Him and become acquainted with His mysteries.

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 24: Forty Gospel Homilies, PL 76:1184

\* His manner of speech was more like that of human beings and as though He wanted to buy something from them. However, when they indicated that they had not caught anything, He ordered them to throw their nets to the right side of their boat<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

Their answer to Him was a negative one -‘No-’ which expressed their bitter disappointment as they had worked all night and had caught no fish. They did not want to talk about this not in any detail, for it is hard for a person to speak about His failure.

**And he said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat,  
And you will find some.”  
So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in  
Because of the multitude of fish. [6]**

It seems that, according to their experience as fisherman, they had to throw their nets to the left of their boat when they fished in that part of the lake. However, without knowing who was the One giving them advice, they humbly obeyed and struggled patiently, without raising any objection or assertion of self confidence gained by their long practice in the fishing industry. The gentle conversation of the Lord and His attitude could have obliged them to obey and submit to His advice.

Catching such a great number of fish was a miraculous work. It was made to proclaim the Lord’s care and concern to provide people’s needs; especially for those who had abandoned everything for His sake. It was not done merely to underline the authority the Lord had even over the fish and the seas. **This was a symbolic act in which the struggle of the disciples through the night corresponds to the struggle of the prophets and the holy men of the Old Testament. These struggled to catch souls for the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, they caught nothing. Then the Lord came and opened the doors of Paradise with His Cross. He also granted the disciples the authority to catch fish. Consequently, the boat of the Church was filled with fish.**

The disciples had struggled all through the night, and they felt that they had failed as they had caught nothing. However, the Lord does not disregard or forget the struggle of His children, and in a few moments, He compensated their great fatigue and labor due to a long night’s work. In this manner, the Lord renews the spirit of hope within us. You might be tired as you serve for many long years, yet fruit appears at the last moments of our lives on earth.

Indeed, when the Lord directs to serve for His kingdom, and when we obey Him, there will not be any empty nets. He is the only One who knows where to find the souls that are thirsty for the joy of salvation. Even though there may not be any clear signs marking them, He is the One who will lead us to them. He is also the One who will attract them to the net of His holy Church.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 87:3

\* We read twice in the Holy Bible that the Lord gave the command to cast the nets.

The first time occurred before His passion, (Lk 5:4-6). He did not indicate if the nets should be thrown to the right or left side. The disciples caught so many fish **that the nets were breaking**. The second time occurred after His resurrection, and the Lord commanded the disciples to throw the nets on the right side; and although the number of fish caught was very great, the nets did not get broken.

The righteous are indicated to be on the right side, and the wicked on the left side, (Matt 25:33). The first catch indicates the Church at the present time where the righteous and the wicked are gathered. The Church does not choose those who enter her doors as she does not know who she could choose. Look closely at the last catch taken on the right side where the Church of the chosen alone is found, and where there are no wicked deeds. There you will see the fullness of the Lord's glory.

In the first catch, the nets were breaking due to the wicked ones who had entered with the chosen ones. They pierced the nets with their blasphemy. In the second and last catch, many fish were caught and the nets did not get torn. This is because the holy Church, composed of the chosen ones, possesses the peace of her Creator. No obstacles and no divisions exist within her to tear or break Her down<sup>1</sup>.

**Pope Gregory the Great**

**Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter,**

**"It is the Lord."**

**Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord,**

**He put on his outer garment, (for he had removed it),**

**And plunged into the sea. [7]**

Peter '... put on his outer garment', or the fisherman's clothes, or 'ependuteen' which is like a man's coat nowadays.

The words '...for he had removed it' are used to indicate a specific person who does not wear the outer clothes. This expression was also used when Saul took off his outer clothes 'himatra' and lay down naked the whole day and night, (1 Samuel 19:24). It is reported that David was girded with a linen ephod and then uncovered himself in front of the maids of his servants, (2 Samuel 6:14, 29).

**Peter '... plunged into the sea':** clearly, he was close to the shore- 132 yards approximately- and that the water was shallow, since he put on his outer clothes in order to cross over to the shore. If the water was not shallow, he would not have worn his outer clothes so that he could swim to the shore.

John, whom Jesus loved, realized that He was the Lord. Indeed, the Lord reveals His mysteries to His beloved ones. He does not deprive anyone from the joy of knowing Him. Everyone who places his head on the Lord's chest enjoys the divine mysteries. Moreover, a person who accompanies the Lord to the Cross and shares His passion is

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 24. Forty Gospel Homilies, 181-182



blessed by the purity of heart and clarity of vision which enables him to outrun others in comprehending heavenly matters. This is how St John reached out to the Lord, and he could not hide his knowledge and consequently proclaimed it. Even though Peter outran him to meet the Master, John rejoiced that all could enjoy what He saw and experienced.

**St John Chrysostom** considered the apostle Peter as being characteristically enthusiastic and jealous, while St John had a calm nature. Consequently, although John was the first to calmly recognize the Lord, Peter was to first to reach the shore as he plunged into the sea and swam to Him. He could not wait to go with the others who were with him in the boat<sup>1</sup>.

\* When Peter recognized the Lord, he left the fish and the nets and put on his clothes... he must have been filled with great awe and longing! Although the distance was 100 yards approximately, he could not wait for the boat to reach the shore, and so he plunged and swam<sup>2</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

Although Peter had denied the Lord three times, yet he had shed tears of repentance and experienced a love and friendship that time could never tear away. As soon as he knew that the Lord was standing on the shore, the boat could no longer hold him and he could not wait till it would come to the shore. He threw himself into the water in order to hurry and meet with his Beloved.

\* While the other disciples did not know, the disciple whom Jesus loved told Peter: **“It is the Lord”**. Being chaste, John was the first to recognize the chaste Body and that He was ‘Jesus’ Himself. However, the other disciples did not see Him in the same manner<sup>3</sup>.

**St Jerome**

**But the other disciples came in a little boat;  
(for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits,)  
Dragging the net with fish. [8]**

Two hundred cubits or 100 yards approximately.

**Then as soon as they had come to land,  
They saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. [9]**

Just as the great catch of fish was miraculous, so was the sudden provision of fish placed over the coals and the bread which had been prepared by the Lord Jesus Christ. The disciples had found [9] like those at the house of the high priest (Jn18:18); but this time there was fish over the coals and bread next to them. The scene had a sense of ‘celebration’ to it.

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 87. PG 59:522

<sup>2</sup> Hom.76. PG59:522

<sup>3</sup> To Pammachius Against John of Jerusalem,35

Although the Lord asked them if they had any food, and as though He was hungry, yet He offered them food that did not require or depend on weak human efforts. The Lord has truly invited us to work for His account, but the gladdening fruit and heavenly food, which pleases the Father, are the work of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and the act of His Holy Spirit.

\* The One who desired to grill His Body by pain while He was in the flesh, feeds us with His divinity for He says: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven,” (Jn6:51). Therefore He eats with them grilled fish and bread to reveal to us that He has suffered pain while He was in the flesh, and has offered us food through His Divinity<sup>1</sup>.

**St Gregory the Great**

\* He prepared grilled fish on coals in order to be a tangible proof to the doubtful disciples, who did not dare to come close to Him as they thought they were seeing a spirit and not a body<sup>2</sup>.

**St Jerome**

**Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish which you have just caught”. [10]**

\* The Lord commanded the disciples to bring of the fish that they had caught in order to clarify that the miracle before them was not a mere imagination.

\* Things seemed to evolve counter to nature. What are these things?

First: They had caught a lot of fish

Second: The nets were not broken

Third: Before they came to the shore, the coals were ready and the fish on top, and the bread with them. These were not prepared from materials that were actually present. They were there through a special Providence and in harmony with the Lord’s work before His crucifixion<sup>3</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land full of large fish,**

**One hundred and fifty and three:**

**And although there were so many, the net was not broken. [11]**

The first time the disciples had gone fishing, (Lk 5:11-11), we saw how their nets were getting torn for they were subject to the laws of the world. In this passage, however, **‘the net was not broken’** as it was subject by the laws of eternity.

The Evangelist focused on the number of fish, yet in his mind they did not indicate quantity but quality of existence. We note how he indicated that the wedding in Cana took place on **‘the third day’**, (Jn2:1). He also wrote about **seven** miracles, and **seven** sermons. The word **‘God’** occurs eight times in the introductory chapter of the

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 24. Forty Gospel Homilies,184

<sup>2</sup> To Pammachius Against John of Jerusalem,34

<sup>3</sup> Hom.76. PG 59:522

Gospel, and it occurs eight times throughout it. The word 'Logos' occurs four times in the first chapter; and forty times in each of the Gospels. As for the number 153, innumerable thinkers have invested it with different meanings across the years.

**St Augustine** presents to us a symbolic interpretation to this miracle. He states that the disciples who went out fishing were seven which is the number that denotes perfection or fulfillment of the times, (seven days in the week). The Lord came to them in the morning which stands for the end of all time. Drawing the nets to the shore symbolizes the coming Judgment at the end of time. As for the attempt to catch fish throughout the night, it indicates the ministry before the Lord's resurrection when no one enjoyed the blessing of the resurrection or the spread of the holy Word. The act of throwing the net on the right side of the boat points to the great harvest of believers after the resurrection.. In fact, the net contained big and small fish to convey that there are the good ones as well as the wicked ones within the Church These will be picked and separated from each other on the day of the Lord. The number of big fish were 153 and this corresponds to the righteous men in the Old Testament, (ten is a symbol for the law). Add to them the seven disciples in the new Testament, (seven being a symbol of perfection), and the total is 17. The number 153 is the result of adding all the numbers from 1-17.

Some numbers are designated as being three dimensional or three-sided: for example the number 10 is the tripartite of number 4, ( $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10$ ). The number 153 is the tripartite of number 17 and it includes 7 and 1 which make 8. The number of disciples who stood on the shore was 7, and the number 8 stands for eternity.

**St Gregory the Great** notes that every act recorded in the Old Testament is associated to the Ten Commandments. Besides, they are completed and fulfilled in the New Testament through the Holy Spirit who grants seven blessings: '...the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord...'.The two Testaments are referred to as number 17 [7+1]; and all the major events recorded are 17 in number. When this is multiplied by 3, the result is 51. The jubilee is celebrated in the year (50) and we begin with the year 51...this is the year of rest in the Old Testament. In the New Testament we multiply 51 by three (in reference to the Holy Trinity) and the result is 153. This is the number of the chosen ones, from both the Old and New Testaments, who are in the heavenly Church or –in other words-in our heavenly home<sup>1</sup>.

**St Augustine** presents a wonderful comparison between the two miracles of the fish that are recorded in the Gospel of Luke 5:3-7, and in the Gospel of John 21:1-11.**Pope Gregory the Great** used this in his own writing. It is possible to summarize this comparison in the following points with some changes<sup>2</sup>:

1- The first miracle (Lk 5) occurred before the Lord's resurrection, whereas the second miracle occurred after His resurrection. That is why the first miracle is taken to indicate

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<sup>1</sup> Hom.24. Forty Gospel Homilies,182-183

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate122:7-9

to **the Church in the present world** which enjoys the blessings of the Lord Jesus Christ. The second miracle refers to **the Church in the world to come, or the Church that comes after the resurrection**. At that time the Church will enjoy the glory of the Lord.

2- In the Gospel of St John, the miracle occurred in the early morning hours and after a very long night. This refers to the appearance of the Church in her full glory with the second coming of the Lord. He will shine upon her with a new morning.

3-In the Gospel of St Luke, the Lord does not ask them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat; but He tells them to go farther into the deep sea. Consequently, their nets were filled with good and bad fish. In the Gospel of St John, the Lord asks them to cast their nets on the right side, and as a result, they caught fish that was all good. The first miracle refers to the Church that is filled with believers; though not all are righteous as the good and the wicked are mixed together and it is impossible to separate them. Inside the Church, there are the true believers who enjoy fellowship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, there are those who appear to be believers but who are hypocrites and careless about their salvation and that of others. They are wholly preoccupied with satisfying their vanity, or their physical lust and its pleasures, as well as clinging to material matters. In the Gospel of St John, we find the Church, at the onset of the new age, separating the true believers from the wicked ones. The good and righteous will stand at the right hand side of the Lord Jesus Christ as God's blessed children who are entitled to the eternal inheritance; whereas the wicked will have no place on the right hand side of the Lord. They will stand on His left and as though they do not exist as they have no share with the Savior.

4-In St Luke's Gospel, the nets **were about to break**; but in St John's Gospel they were filled with fish, yet we do not hear this expression. The Church is exposed to so much in this world in the form of attacks of conjurors, heretics, and troublemakers that she seems near breaking point due to such divisions. However, the true Church remains mysteriously covered and without divisions in God's sight. All her members remain steadfast members in the one Body of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the heavenly Church- i.e. after the Resurrection- we see one net which will not be exposed to any breaking. Rather, she will glow with the brilliance resulting from her union with the Lord Jesus Christ who is her heavenly Bridegroom.

5-In the first miracle there were two boats: in them were the circumcised people (of the Old Testament, and the uncircumcised (the Gentiles who became believers). In the world, both the Church of the Old Testament and the Church of the New Testament have existed. In both of them, the Messiah has worked in one way or another. However, with the coming of the night, there will not be any distinction, for they will all be found in one boat holding together.

6-St Augustine comments that the boat was about 200 cubits away from the shore. As it contained both the circumcised and the uncircumcised, then the number 100 refers to those standing on the Lord's right hand, and the number 200 refers to both groups

standing together and at the same distance. This implies that both groups enjoy the same rewards and the same glory.

- 8- Many fathers have presented different interpretations for the 153 fish. They are all symbolic meanings to this number.
- 9- The fish are described as being big, in reference to believers who are considered to be great in the kingdom of God.

**Jesus said to them.**

**“Come and eat breakfast”.**

**Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, “Who are you?”**

**- knowing that it was the Lord. [12]**

**“Come and eat breakfast”**- the word ‘eat’ occurs as a literal translation for the Greek word ‘aristeasate’. Some believe that the origin of the word has been used to mean ‘breakfast’; as it had been used this way in the writings of Homer, Xenophom, and Plutarch. It was also used to refer to an early meal, or even for lunch. The Lord seemed to be inviting them to ‘come and eat breakfast’ as it was early in the morning.

As a personal friend, **Jesus said to them “Come and eat breakfast”** [12]. He invites them to the feast He had prepared for them. So they ate and were filled. Nevertheless, a lot of fish was left for them to sell and have the money to buy their daily needs.

They recognized the Lord, although neither the disciples nor the Lord had exchanged any words. It is as though He had carried them into the silence of the heavens where only the language of heavenly love is spoken, and where no human language is heard.

\* **‘...none of the disciples dared ask Him...’**, and none began to speak with Him. They just sat down and looked at Him silently and in great fear and awe **‘knowing that it was the Lord’**. That is why they did not ask Him **“Who are You?”** They could see from His looks that He was changed and they were greatly frightened. Yet in spite of that, they knew He was no one else but the Lord, and this made them control their need to ask.

**St John Chrysostom**

**Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. [13]**

The Lord dealt with them as a friend; and offered to them what they needed. However, they felt shy and because they knew He was the Lord, they did not dare ask: Who are You? In order to open for them this door for meeting with Him, and to prove His great love, the Lord came to them, took the bread and the fish and offered it to them.

St John the Evangelist does not report whether the Lord shared the food with them or not. Surely His risen Body was not in need for food, however He might have eaten in

order to confirm that He possessed a real body and that what they saw was not a shadow or figment of their imagination.

\* The Lord made it clear that the miracle was not an imaginary one. However, the Evangelist does not say that the Lord ate with them. St Luke is clear as he reports: ‘...He took it and ate in their presence,’ (Lk 24:43). The Lord ate not because the nature of His Body needed the food, but He humbly ate in order to prove His actual resurrection.

\* He no longer acted as He used to do before...in this incident, the Lord did not look up to the heaven (to bless the food), nor did He do other human actions. This confirmed that the way He had acted before was a sign of His humility. He wanted to make them know that He would neither be staying with them forever, nor in the same manner in which He had been with them before. This explains why St John reports that **‘this was now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples...’**<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**This is now the third time that Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead. [14]**

**‘This is now the third time’** that Jesus appeared to His disciples while they were all or partially present together. He had appeared to ten of them, (Jn 20: 19); then to eleven of them, (Jn 20:27); and then to seven of them, (Jn 21:2). Some scholars believe that this was the seventh time that the Lord appeared between the time of His resurrection and the time of His ascension:

- 1- To Mary Magdalene, (Mk 16:19; Jn. 20:15-16).
- 2- To the women who went to the tomb, (Matt 28:9).
- 3- To two of the disciples on their way to Emmaus, (Lk 24:13).
- 4- To Peter only, (Lk 24:34).
- 5- To the ten disciples when Thomas was absent, (Jn.20:19).
- 6- To the eleven disciples on the eighth day when Thomas believed, (Jn 21:26).
- 7- To seven disciples, (Jn 21:2), and that was some time between the eighth and fourteenth day after His resurrection.
- 8- To His disciples on a certain mountain in Galilee, (Matt 28:16).
- 9- To more than 100 brothers at one time, (1 Cor 15:6), if that was not the time appearance as the previous one mentioned here.
- 10- James saw Him, (1 Cor 15:7).
- 11- To all His disciples on the day of His ascension into the heavens, (Mk 16:19-20; Lk24:50-53; Acts 1:3-12; 1Cor 15:7).

These are the appearances that have been mentioned in the Holy Bible, but we can confirm that there were many other appearances that have not been mentioned.

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on ST John,87:2

\* To clarify that the Lord Jesus Christ, after His resurrection, neither stayed for a continuous time with His disciples nor lived with them as He did before, the Evangelist states that **‘This is now the third time that Jesus showed Himself to His disciples’**.

\* When you hear about these events, you become aroused and consider how those who were with Him were happy; and how glad they will be on the Day of Judgment. Let us do our best so that we get to behold that amazing Face. If now we get aroused and become eager just by hearing, and thinking what it would have been like if we had lived at the time when the Lord lived on earth. What it must have felt to hear His voice, see His Face, to come close and touch Him, and serve under His leadership! Then think how great it was to see Him in a Body that was no longer corruptible, and no longer doing human acts. Now He possessed a Body that is guarded by the angels; and consequently, we ourselves have put on pure form that has no mingling with our former selves.

We see Him and enjoy all other blessings that cannot be expressed by any language. I beg you to use every means that will enable you not to lose such a glorious blessing. There is nothing that is impossible if you have the will; and there is nothing burdensome if you are focused and ‘walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory’, (1 Thes 2:12)<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

## **1- A Dialogue with Peter**

The Lord confirmed to His disciples that He is the Creator of both the body and the spirit. He offered them breakfast which He had prepared with His hands in order to provide for their physical needs. Then He became concerned with providing their spiritual food to satisfy their spiritual needs

The dialogue between the Lord and Peter took place after the disciples had eaten and were filled. It could have taken place during the meal when the Lord would have turned to Peter and spoken with him. The Lord had previously met with the disciple, after His resurrection, at least twice or three times but He had not spoken to Peter in that manner. It could be that the Lord wished to console Peter and show him that His repentance had been fully accepted, and that what he had done would not affect the relationship between him and the Lord. After giving him this assurance, the Lord opened the topic. Some scholars believe that Peter did not speak about what had happened as he feared that the Lord would declare other weaknesses or failures that he would face. Peter realized that the Lord knew his inner depths more than he knew himself. The apostle Peter was in need of that meeting with the Lord in order to regain confidence in God’s working power in him.

**So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter,  
“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?”  
He said to Him, “Yes Lord, You know that I love You.”  
He said to him, “Feed My lambs”. [15]**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 87:3

The Lord took this tender and personal initiative towards Peter in order to reinstitute his full fellowship with him. This is a relationship that exists with all those who have become sealed with the seal of the resurrection. The Lord did not use the new name of 'Peter' which He had given him, and it was as though He were renewing the promise with him.

**“...do you love Me more than these?”** Some scholars believe that though the Lord asked: Do you love Me more than all the others, He intended to ask if Peter still believed that his love for the Lord was greater than that of the others. Peter had made this declaration when he had said that he would follow to Lord even if he had to die for Him and even if others would deny Him. Peter the son of Jonah did not dare to utter the words: ‘... **more than these**’, for he feared he had a weakness of which he was unaware. He had repented for having declared that he would not deny Him even if all others would; therefore he felt embarrassed and in awe. Peter had learned not to depend on himself and to submit himself into the Lord’s caring hands. He therefore said, **“You know...”**. He no longer trusted his own testimony, and it was impossible to ask that others witness for him. He asked for the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who perceives the heart and has the power to sustain the weak.

The Lord did not ask him about his repentance for having denied Him three times. He was satisfied to ask about Peter’s love for Him. **Repentance is essentially the practice of loving God.** This is what the Lord requires of every sincere repentant. That is why He praised the repentant adulterous woman. He told Simon the Pharisee: “...her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much,” (Lk 7:47).

In order to regain Peter to the ministry of saving souls, the Lord Jesus Christ asked him, **“Do you love Me?”** This reveals that the Lord does not entrust a person with this ministry unless his heart is filled with love for Him. What that person offers to mankind for its salvation actually consists of offering the Lord Himself. Someone who does not love the Lord cannot minister to souls and cannot be concerned for their salvation since he does not realize their value to Him. The Lord has died for these souls and offered His precious Blood to redeem them. The Lord used the word ‘**aghapas**’ to express sublime love and its honor, Peter, however, is embarrassed to use the same term and humbly used the word ‘**phileo**’ which is used to speak about the love for friends.

\* The Lord asked Peter to **“Feed (His) lambs”...**, and did not mention his denial or challenge what he had done. It was as though the Lord was telling him: ‘You had said that you would sacrifice yourself for my sake, so now I am asking you to sacrifice yourself for my lambs’.

\* Actually, there are so many ways which would endear us to God and would reveal that we belong to the shining chosen ones. One of the most effective ways to win the approval of the Most High is to show a tender concern for our fellow brothers. This is what the Lord asked Peter to do<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John. 88:1



\* When the dead assumes eternal life, and the corruptible assumes the incorruptible and swallows death in the victorious Lord Jesus Christ; then God reigns over all. Consequently, wisdom is not found only in Solomon, or sweetness only in David, or zeal in Elijah and Phineas, or faith in Abraham, or total love in Peter who was asked, **“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?”**. Besides, zeal is not only found in the preaching of the chosen fathers, or virtue in just one or two. Rather, God is wholly perfect in everyone; and the fragrance of fellowship with the saints is evident in every set of virtues while God reigns over all<sup>1</sup>.

St Jerome

**He said to him again a second time,  
“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?”  
He said to Him, “Yes, Lord, You know that I love You.”  
He said to him, “Tend My sheep”. [16]**

The first time the Lord asked the question so that Peter would compare himself with his brothers, and find out if his love for the Master was greater than theirs. Now that Simon Peter had learned to be humble, and did not answer with pride and confidence in his own power; the Lord no longer compared him with his brothers when He posed the question for a second and third time.

\* If we watch the sheep and are fearful, and are concerned about the sheep, then how much are the sheep more concerned about themselves? Our share is to watch the sheep, and your share is to be obedient. Our share is to vigilantly keep watching, and your share is to be humble sheep. If we seem to be speaking from a higher platform, **we lay ourselves at your feet in fear, for we know the danger of that sublime position<sup>2</sup>**.

St Augustine

\* Peter’s faith had been shaken due to the suffering of the Lord, and now he shed bitter tears as he heard the Lord’s tender words, **“Tend My sheep”<sup>3</sup>**.

St Jerome

**He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things: You know that I love You.”  
Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep.”[17]**

In the first two times, the Lord Jesus Christ used the word **‘agapas’**; and Peter used the word **‘philo’** in his answer which conveys the endearing relationship of love that exists between cherished ones. In the Lord’s question for the third time, the word **‘philo’** occurs and He seems to be asking Peter, **‘Do you love Me, dear friend?’**

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<sup>1</sup> Against Pelagians, 1:18

<sup>2</sup> Sermon on the N.T. Lessons, 96:1

<sup>3</sup> Letter 35:1

The distinction between the two expressions has occupied many of those who have studied this Gospel. Many find that the word ‘agapo’ is a general word that denotes love which is based on poised mental thought coupled with practical devotion of one’s life for the loved one. As for the word ‘philo’, they find that it refers to emotional love that involves personal tenderness towards the loved one. Therefore the Lord seems to ask His disciple, ‘Will you devote your life to Me?’; and the disciple answers, ‘I love You with all my feelings.’

William Hendrickson makes a distinction between the two expressions as he says: The word ‘agapo’ is used generally here, as well as in the rest of the other Gospels, to refer to love offered with one’s whole being. It dictates not only the emotions, but the mind too, and plays an outstanding role as it is based on appreciation of the loved one due to obvious reasons. The word ‘phileo’ refers to instinctive natural or spontaneous love in which emotions play a main and greater role than the mind or will. In this manner, we could make a distinction between the two expressions: in the first two questions, the Lord asked Peter if he felt a sort of sublime love and richness in his emotions, mind, and active will. Peter’s response conveyed that he could not claim to have love that matched such a wonderful standard; but that he was sure that he carried strong genuine feelings of love towards the Lord... even though this was less than the love that the Lord asked for<sup>1</sup>.

C.H.C.MacGregor finds that the first verb denotes the presence of appreciation and respect between the two parties; while the second denotes the presence of personal emotions between two members of the same family<sup>2</sup>.

St Peter was saddened as the third question reminded him of his denial for three times. It is painful to remember our sins even though we have been forgiven. He might have been saddened through fear that the Lord perceived a weakness in his depths of which he was unaware. That is what had happened before when he declared himself ready to die with the Lord.

The Lord invited Peter three times to watch His sheep and care for them through his love for the Owner of the sheep. The Lord had claimed Himself to be like a good shepherd who lays down his life, (Jn 10:11). Isaiah accordingly says: ‘He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young’, (Is 40:11).

\* May the role of love be the factor that feeds the sheep of God. ..those who aim at watching over the Lord’s sheep as though they were not the Lord’s, but rather owned by them, will be condemned since they love themselves and not the Lord. Such shepherds desire to boast, to possess power, or to make money. Seeking to be obedient, to serve and to please God...what do these indicate other than that you love Me and therefore neglect to feed yourself while you feed My sheep because they are Mine and not yours? Seek My authority and not yours, seek My profit and not yours. In doing so, you will avoid

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Leon Morris: Reflections on the Gospel of St John, Hendrickon Publishers, 2000, p.737.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 737

following the path of those who belong to the dangerous times- who love themselves and all the consequences that come along with the onset of these evil ways<sup>1</sup>.

**St Augustine**

\* As surely as he had denied the Lord three times, he proclaimed Him three times. It was night time when Peter had denied the Lord, and now it was daylight when He proclaimed Him<sup>2</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

**“...Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself  
And walked where you wished;  
But now you are old, you will stretch out your hands,  
And another will gird you  
And carry you where you do not wish.” [18]**

Having restored to Peter his status as an apostle, the Lord went on to inform him concerning his martyrdom. In using the words ‘Most assuredly’ the Lord wanted to confirm that what He was saying was greatly important and serious, and that it would surely be fulfilled.

In his youth, he was free to gird himself whenever he wanted, and to go wherever he wished. Because of this freedom, he submitted himself into the hands of his Savior so that He would gird him and carry him according to His divine will. It would not be according to Simon’s plans or those of other believers. He submitted his will to the Lord so that He might be glorified even at his death. For this reason, Peter will be glad to suffer. Even at his death, which would glorify God, he will be glad as he witnesses to the divine Truth.

Wetstein finds that the expression ‘you will stretch out your hands’ refers to the custom practiced in Rome when a person was crucified. The head of the person was placed on the cross and his hands would be stretched out to the extreme. Then he would be led through the streets of the city where he would be crucified.

Another person would gird him with iron chains and he would be carried to a place against his will. He does not wish to be crucified for having loved the Lord, but because he wishes to live to preach and serve Him.

\* The Lord clearly told Peter about the manner of his death for Peter the apostle always desired to go through dangers and difficulties for the Lord’s sake. Therefore He was telling him: ‘Rest assured that I will fulfill your desire in that matter, and even in your old age you will meet troubles which you have not experienced in your youth.’

\* What is intended by the expression ‘**where you do not wish**’? Here the Lord is speaking about natural feelings, the needs of the body, and how the spirit leaves the body

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 123:5

<sup>2</sup> Exposition on St Luke 10:90

involuntarily. Even when the will is steadfast, nature is weak...therefore the expression **‘where you do not wish’** refers to natural human feelings<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

\* Love was the end result achieved by this person who had denied his Master. He had lost his path through his own boldness, and fell through his denial. He was washed by his tears, was forgiven by his confession, and crowned by tolerating suffering.

This is where he ended: by dying with complete love for the sake of the One to whom he had boldly promised he would die for Him. He did so when he was strengthened by the Lord’s resurrection...the object of his promise which he vowed when he was still immature. The ultimate order of things was that the Lord should die first, and then Peter would die as a result of preaching the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>2</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God.  
And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me”. [19]**

Denying the Lord three times had shaken Peter deeply. Therefore the Lord sought to grant him the joyful spirit of hope, and assured him that he would glorify God. He would do so not only through his preaching but also to the very last breath of his life when he would glorify Him in his death. In this manner, he could sing and proclaim: “For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s, (Rom 14:8).

Thirty four years later, after this dialogue, Peter’s martyrdom took place and it was for the glory of God. He had considered himself unworthy to die in the manner of his Master and therefore requested to be hung with his head downwards. This has been recorded by **Josephus, Prudentius, St John Chrysostom, and St Augustine**.

\* There is no longer a reason to fear crossing over from our present life, since we have come to possess a strong example of the life to come through the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, Peter you do not have to fear death any more, for He is alive whom you sorrowed over when He died. The One whom you tried to prevent, driven by your mortal love, (Matt 16:21-22), from dying for our sake is alive<sup>3</sup>!

**St Augustine**

\* He did not say ‘you are expected to die’ but he said: **‘...by what death he would glorify God’**. This is intended to teach us that suffering for the sake of the Lord constitutes glory and honor for the suffering one<sup>4</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> Homilies on St John, 88:1

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 123:4

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 123:4

<sup>4</sup> Homilies on St John, 88:1

It seems that when the Lord told Peter **‘Follow Me’**, He began to walk and Peter followed Him. However, when he looked behind him, he found that John was also following him. He probably was tested by some kind of curiosity as he wished to know whether John too would be martyred with him.

## 2- The Lord’s Words about John

**Then Peter turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, Who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, “Lord, who is the one who betrays You?”[20]**

St John does not write his name as he probably felt he was worthy to have his name mentioned in the Holy Bible. At the same time, it was impossible to ignore the special love the Lord expressed towards him.

**St Augustine** comments that John was the one who enjoyed the Lord’s love more than any of the disciples because he was a celibate, and had led a pure life since his childhood<sup>1</sup>.

**St Augustine**

**Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, “But Lord, what about this man?”[21]**

Some scholars find that Peter was a curious person, and was concerned with matters that concerned others rather than focusing on his obligations as the Lord’s disciple. He might have felt jealous of John who had practically leaned and put his head on the Lord’s chest, even though he had not proclaimed never to deny the Lord. Moreover, John had followed the Lord to the Cross, and the relationship between him and the Lord had not been hurt in the way it had with Peter.

\* This is one of the great mysteries of divine love. Even in the case of the Lord Jesus Christ, there was no exception concerning the death of the flesh. Although He is Lord over nature, He did not refuse the Law governing the body He had put on. It is necessary for me to die, but in His sight this does not have any importance<sup>2</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

\* Peter asked the Lord a question concerning someone other than himself; and John was silent, while Peter talked. This illustrates Peter’s love and loyalty towards John. He loved him greatly, and expressed it in many instances later on. There are many references to their mutual affection and close fellowship in the Gospels and in the Book of the Acts. He wished to have John as his partner and so he asked the Lord, **“what about this man?”** In other words, ‘Is he going to have the same path as mine?’

**St John Chrysostom**

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate

<sup>2</sup> On the Decease of His Brother Saytrus, Book 1:4

**Jesus said to him,  
“If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?  
You follow Me.” [22]**

Some scholars explain that the Lord wished to clearly tell Peter that John would not die as a martyr. Ancient historians state that John was the only disciple out of the twelve who did not die in this manner.

The Lord’s words ‘...till I come’ do not mean that John would not die until His second coming. Rather, they are intended as a reproach to Peter for his curiosity and preoccupation with the future and with his missionary work. Some other thinkers consider that it is an indirect way of stating that John will not die until the destruction of Jerusalem occurs at the hands of Titus the Roman. Many have interpreted the Lord’s words as an indication that John would live to see the Lord’s coming to judge Jerusalem and pronounce its destruction. St Peter was martyred in the year 67 A.D. – that is seven years before the destruction of Jerusalem, while St John continued to live for about thirty years after that.

**St Augustine** and other writers believe that the Lord’s words mean the following: If I wanted John to live to the Day of My coming, and then took him with Me after being subject to a natural death, how does that concern you? Follow Me so that you might carry your cross. Indeed, history reports and confirms that John is the only disciple who did not die as a martyr but died a natural death. He remained alive when all the others had died as martyrs.

Some seem to believe that the apostle Peter was alone with the Lord when they were talking together. Peter knew how much John loved the Lord and so he thought that he would join them as they walked; but the Lord indicated His wish to leave matters I His hands. He might leave John, and return later to him after He had ended His conversation with Peter.

\* Peter spoke these words as he paid a lot of attention to John. He did not want to be separated from him. Therefore the Lord wished to show him that His love for John was much greater than his. Therefore He said, **“If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?”** Peter had always been fiery and rash in these matters, so the Lord wished to restrain him and teach him not to go beyond his limits by uttering these words.

\* The Lord teaches us not to mourn, or be upset, or curious. We should not ask questions that seem to be outside the scope of matters directly affecting us<sup>1</sup>.

**St John Chrysostom**

**Then this saying went out among the brethren  
That this disciple would not die.  
Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die,  
But, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?”[23]**

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<sup>1</sup> Hom. 88 PG 59:527

Because John lived long after all the disciples had been martyred, many believers thought that he would not die and that he would live to see the Lord's second coming. However, St John corrects them as they had really misinterpreted the Lord's words, and he confirms that the Lord did not say any such thing.

Some thinkers find that the two apostles mentioned here refer to two ways of life within the Church: the meditative and the active. A person who practices a meditative life is not subject to death like the one who leads an active life. Death in the case of a meditative person leads to perfection. This is especially true when the Lord comes. At that time, there will be no need for missionary or charity work, for it will be a time for offering praise and meditating on Him.

\* Nothing should frighten us of death, and nothing should make us sorrowful because the natural life we have accepted has been taken away from us, or we have sacrificed it for His sake and as an obligation to which we have committed ourselves. Who of us wishes to let things continue to be as they are whether for religious reasons or to practice a certain virtue? This is what they thought was the promise given to John. But this was contrary to the truth...he himself denies in his writings that there was any promise that he would not die. We learn from this example that it is inappropriate to hold on to empty hopes<sup>1</sup>.

**St Ambrose**

**St Augustine** writes that what is reported here concerning the two disciples has a symbolic significance. St Peter represents the believer who struggles on earth and witnesses to the Lord through his great love. That is why Peter is considered to be the one who loved the Lord the most; and the Lord had asked him, "**Peter, son of Jonah, do you love Me?**" St John, on the other hand, represents the believer who has enjoyed eternal glory in the life to come. He was not asked the question, "Do you love Me?" for his whole being was absorbed in his love for the Lord. Whereas Peter was the one who loved the Lord the most, John was the one whom the Lord loved the most and therefore he named himself 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'. The Lord invited Peter '**to follow**' Him as a loving believer is committed to translate his love into willingness to share in the Lord's pain and to follow Him to the cross. The Lord said about John: "**If I will that he remain till I come**" where death cannot creep into a believer who enjoys eternal glory. Believers like Peter follow in faith, while those like John enjoy the glory of the resurrection while they live<sup>2</sup>.

### **3- Concluding Words of St John**

**This is the disciple who testifies of these things,  
And wrote these things,  
And we know that his testimony is true. [24]**

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<sup>1</sup> On the Decease of His Brother Saytrus, Book 2:49

<sup>2</sup> cf. St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 124:6-7

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the writer records that he is the disciple of the Lord. Moreover, he states that he gives a true testimony of what he saw and heard himself from the Lord; and that his testimony proclaims the truth.

**And there are also many other things that Jesus did,  
Which if they were written one by one,  
I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be  
written. Amen. [25]**

Some scholars believe that the last two verses have been added by those to whom St John had delivered the Gospel. They might have done so in order to confirm that the Gospel is a testimony of that trusted disciple.

As we noted in the introduction, this Gospel often repeats the term ‘**the world**’ in order to underline that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Savior of the whole world and not just the Jews.

The miracles and deeds done by the Lord are more than can be counted. Besides being innumerable, they are greatly varied. Consequently, some scholars believe that this verse could be interpreted literally. It is impossible for the world to record fully all the acts of our infinite Lord. His works are unlimited, some are apparent while others are invisible.

The goal of the Gospel is not to include all the work and words of the Lord Jesus Christ. Rather, the purpose is to reveal His character, features, and effect in the life of the believer. The other evangelists have used expressions that reveal the many miraculous deeds of the Lord, (Matt 4:23-24; 9:35; 11:1; 14:14, 36; 15: 30; 19:2; etc). For example, St Paul uses an expression from the Lord’s sayings, yet it does not appear in any of the four Gospels, (Acts 20:35). What has been recorded in the New Testament about the Lord’s person, and His deeds and words have been food enough for the Church. Therefore she has enjoyed knowing Him, as well as and His teachings and His deeds.

Some critics have misunderstood this concluding verse. However, many scholars have recorded similar expressions which have not been criticized. They appear in the works of Eastern as well as Western writers. Such statements involve a certain degree of exaggeration and are a form of expression which also appears in the different books of the Holy Bible. An example of this is what the spy says, in Numbers 13:33: “...all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature...there we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight”. In Daniel 4:11, we read: ‘The tree grew, and became strong. Its height reached to the heavens. And it could be seen to the ends of all the earth.’ In Deuteronomy 1:28, we read: ‘The people are greater and taller than we; the cities are great and fortified up to heaven’. Josephus, the historian, reports that Jacob was given the promise that Canaan would belong to him and his



children who would fill all the land where the sun shines- whether it be on earth or in the seas<sup>1</sup>. In the West, Cicero writes that the splendor of the Roman people can barely be surpassed by the glory of the heavens, while the planet earth can scarcely contain it<sup>2</sup>.

\* We do not assume that the writer is specifically referring to the actual area of the earth which cannot contain Roman splendor. Otherwise, how is it possible to write about it if the world could not contain it at the time of writing? It probably could be that it is impossible to understand these writings due to the readers' capacity.<sup>3</sup>

**St Augustine**

**Amen:** This word is used to conclude all the Gospels. It means 'Let it be so'. It would be correct to use it to mean 'May we have faith in what has been written here, and obedience to what He has commanded us, and may we enjoy His promises to us.'

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<sup>1</sup> Antiques lib. 10 ch.20

<sup>2</sup> Phil. 2:44

<sup>3</sup> St Augustine: On the Gospel of St John, tractate 124;8

## **Meditations**

### **Inspired by the Gospel of St John**

#### **Chapter Twenty One**

- \* My spirit moans with your disciples, and shouts out:  
I have worked hard all night and have caught nothing.  
My experience, potentials, and energy seem useless!  
May You carry me over, O Lord,  
For by Your word I could catch many fish in the nets of the Church.  
Say one word, for souls are lost in waters of the world.  
Not to me, not to me,  
But to You many are attracted by Your Word.
- \* Grant me the love and purity of John so that I may know You  
With the peace of a strong heart, he proclaimed: 'It is the Lord!'  
Grant me Peter's jealousy,  
So that I may run towards you and worship at your feet.
- \* Prepare for me grilled fish,  
Grant me food for my soul,  
So that she would not hunger nor thirst for the world.
- \* I know that You long that I spend time with You.  
You reproach Me in a spirit of love,  
And without hurting my feelings with any word!  
With Peter, who denied You, I proclaim:  
'You know that I love You'  
Yes, I love You.  
Even though my soul moans on account of my sins;  
According to Your words I will tend Your sheep  
You carry me in the palm of Your hand,  
Therefore I will carry my brothers in mine.  
Who can carry the burdens of Your people,  
If You would not carry them all!
- \* I join myself with Peter and here You whisper to me:  
'Do you love Me more than these?'  
You ask if I love You,  
With all my heart, mind, and will  
I devote all my energy to You and to Your children  
O most beloved One  
And I reciprocate your appreciation and pride in me  
O amazing One, who am I to be loved?  
You have made me a member of the divine family!

Therefore I shout with Peter:  
'You know that I love You!'  
You are wholly mine,  
And I am wholly yours, O beloved of my heart!  
What do you wish me to do?

\* I have been spoiled throughout my life!  
Now I stretch out my hands as on the cross  
That I may be crucified with You  
Just as Your disciple Peter, and with my head downwards.  
My life is in Your hands  
For You are the amazing Shepherd of my soul.

\* You astounding acts are so many,  
If I were to write them, the world would not be able to contain these books.  
Rather than record them in books,  
Let Your Spirit engrave them in my heart!  
Then I will become – through Your Holy Spirit  
An open Bible that people may read.

Amen

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**END OF BOOK TWO  
Of  
THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN**

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The healing of the man born blind- discourse after the healing: (a) discourse between the neighbors and the man born blind, (b) discourse between the Pharisees and the man born blind, (c) discourse between the Pharisees and the parents of the man born blind, (d) another discourse between the Pharisees and man born blind, (e) discourse between Jesus and the man born blind, (f) discourse between Jesus and the Pharisees. Meditations inspired by Chapter Nine.

### **Chapter Ten: The Good Shepherd**

Our Messiah satisfies all our needs- the good Shepherd- oneness with God- the Lord at the place of His baptism. Meditations inspired by Chapter Ten

### **Chapter Eleven: Raising Lazarus from the Dead (the Grantor of the Resurrection)<sup>84</sup>**

Reporting the death of Lazarus to the Lord- the Lord travels towards the family of Lazarus- raising Lazarus from the dead- the effect of bringing Lazarus back to life. Meditations inspired by Chapter Eleven

### **Chapter Twelve: Super in Bethlehem**

Pouring frankincense on the Lord's feet- the Lord's victorious entry into Jerusalem- the Greeks honor the Lord- the heavens glorify the Lord- the testimony of the prophets to His glory- some leaders praise Him- the testimony of the Lord to Himself. Meditations inspired by Chapter Twelve

## **PART THREE**



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### **The Lord Reveals Himself to His Disciples Chapters Thirteen to Seventeen**

#### **The Farewell Discourses of the Lord Jesus Christ: John 13- John 17**

##### **Chapter 13: The Service of the Washing of the Feet**

Washing the disciples' feet- the Lord's words concerning His traitor- the glory of the Son of Man-brotherly love-warning Peter about his denial. Meditations inspired by John Chapter Thirteen

##### **Chapter Fourteen: The Other Comforter**

Eternal rest-the Messiah is the means to attain comfort- prayer and comfort- the other Comforter- His proclamation to the disciples- the Teacher and Comforter-the Lord's joy due to His imminent departure. Meditations inspired by John Chapter Fourteen

##### **Chapter Fifteen: The Farewell Discourse**

The need to be steadfast in the Lord-their love for each other- facing the hatred of the world-sending the Comforter to the disciples. Meditations inspired by John Chapter Fifteen

##### **Chapter Sixteen: Sending the Comforter**

The wounding arrows of love-sending the Comforter- the promise to meet with the disciples after the Lord's resurrection- answering their prayers- His ascension into the heavens- abandoning the Lord during His ordeal- His victory on their behalf. Meditations inspired by John Chapter Sixteen

##### **Chapter Seventeen: The Farewell Prayer**

A personal prayer- A prayer on behalf of others in general- a prayer for the safety of the disciples- a prayer for their sanctification-a prayer for unity- a prayer for their glorification. Meditations inspired by John Chapter Seventeen

## PART FOUR

### **The Son of Man-The Burnt Offering Chapters Eighteen to Nineteen**

#### **Chapter Eighteen: The Religious and Civil Judgment of the Lord**

Delivering Himself to the soldiers- Before Annas- Peter's denial-a discourse with the chief priest- Peter's denies the Lord twice- in the Roman Governor's residence, the Praetorium. Meditations inspired by John Chapter eighteen

#### **Chapter Nineteen: The Crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ**

His trial before Pilate- the sentence to crucify Him- the title for His guilt- the distribution of His clothes- the Lord's concern for His mother- giving Him vinegar- giving up the spirit- piercing Him with a spear- His burial. Meditations inspired by John Chapter Nineteen

## PART FIVE

### **The Lord's Resurrection testifies to His Divinity Chapter Twenty**

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### **Chapter Twenty: The Resurrection: The First day and the Eighth combined The Resurrected Lord**

Dawn: the empty tomb. In the morning: Mary Magdalene and the two angels. On the same morning: The Magdalene meets the Lord. The Lord's appears to His disciples on Sunday evening. He meets with them on the following Sunday. The purpose of writing the Gospel of St John. Meditations inspired by John Chapter Twenty

### **Part Six**

### **Concluding Words Chapter Twenty One**

### **Chapter Twenty One: A Feast by the Sea of Tiberias or The Crossing Over into the Coming Age**

The Lord's appearance by the Sea of Tiberias- His conversation with Peter-His words about John- the concluding words of the Gospel. Meditations inspired by John Chapter Twenty One

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