

A Patristic Commentary



THE BOOK OF Matthew

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Chapter 1

The King's Lineage and his birth.

St. Matthew the evangelist was writing to the Jews about our Lord Jesus Christ being the Messiah King, the long awaited for by all the forefathers and the prophets, He is the one to offer the true salvation. Therefore, St. Matthew has declared his lineage and his birth.

1. The lineage of the Jesus Christ
2. The tree of lineage
3. The number of generations
4. The betrothed St. Mary
5. Joseph's dream
6. The birth of Christ the firstborn

1. The lineage of Jesus Christ

Some may ask the question: Why does the Holy Book lay so much stress on the lineage of the Lord Jesus? Why does St. Matthew mention it in the opening chapters and St. Luke the evangelist after the Lord's baptism? (Luke 3)

First, we know the agnostics even though its great men appeared in the second century, yet its roots began at a very early stage. The agnostics denied the incarnation, claiming that the Lord Jesus appeared as a mirage or shadow. They hated the physical body and considered it an enemy, and a dark factor. So mentioning the lineage is an assurance of the truthfulness of God's incarnation. The holy inspiration confirms that he, who is above all lineage, his become according to the body and has lineage. St Sawires the Antiochian says, "To know him whose lineage can not be counted, for it is written about him in Isaiah 53:8 "who could have imagined his Future?" More so, he was before all ages equal in eternity to the Father Himself. It was He who was counted in the lineage according to the physical body, for he is God in reality. He himself has become in the end of ages a man without any change.

ST. Matthew showed him as sharing our nature, so that no one would say he appeared as a shadow or a mirage. Secondly, St. Matthew wished to confirm that Jesus is the Messiah, the expected King. He therefore opens the lineage chain by saying ‘ the book of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David.’ St. Jerome says “St. Matthew disregarded all the names and mentioned David and Abraham, because God has promised only them openly of the Christ. He told Abraham (Gen22:18) “ and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” To David (Psalm 132:11) “one of the sons of you body I will set on you throne.” He has concentrated on King David and the father of all fathers Abraham, so as to declare He is the promised King, the son of David. He is the King hidden behind our human nature, the one to leave his perfect glory and splendor so as to give Satan a chance to have a fight with him like all other humans and consequently the Lord will overcome for our account. This is on one hand, on the other hand his being hidden gives us the opportunity to accept him and not be scared of his glory and escape the overwhelming greatness. We would rather accept encountering him and be united to him and firm in him. St John Chrysostom says the king does not constantly appear in a particular way for he sometimes puts the fine clothes and the throne aside and he gets disguised in an ordinary soldier’s clothes, so that the enemy would not concentrate on attacking him. But what occurred was the very contrary; the Lord has done so the enemy would not know him and escape fighting him. Also so that his people would not be astounded at his overwhelming glory, for he has come to save and not to scare.

3The real king has come incarnate, as a son to king David though the latter was actually a slave. He accepted the salve to be a father to him so we the slaves accept God a Father to us. As St. John Chrysostom says, “He accepted being called the son of David so as to make you the Son of God! He allowed a slave to become his father, so as to make you who is a slave having the Lord as your father! He was born in the flesh so as to give you birth according to

the spirit! He was born of a woman so you would no longer be a son to a woman!

Thirdly: With this lineage he wished to confirm he was of Abraham's offspring, a father to all believers who has obtained the promises that of his descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed. It is as if he has come as a mystery of blessing to all the nations, offering excessive fatherhood that does not cease with the physical flesh and blood relation as believed by the Jews in their relation with Abraham. He has offered the heavenly fatherhood to every believer of every nation!

2. The Lineage Tree:

Our teacher St. Matthew mentioned the King's lineage before writing the birth events. Whereas St. Luke wrote it after speaking of the holy baptism (Luke 3). Many fathers were careful to explain this lineage rather extensively, but I find it find it important to explain it simply and briefly in the following points:

Firstly: The lineage here was mentioned one following the other, starting with Abraham and ending with Joseph, Mary's man, from whom Jesus Christ was born. In the gospel of our teacher St. Luke, the genealogy came in the upward arrangement, from Jesus who was thought to be Joseph's son (Luke 3:23) up to Adam the son of God. The forum speaks before the birth events, so as to declare the incarnate word of God, who, though he alone is sinless, yet he came of sinful descent, so as to carry for us the sin we have inherited from our forefathers. This is why the arrangement was descending. It is as if the iniquity is descending from one

generation to the next, so the Lord carries it on his shoulders. But as for the other gospel, it follows the upward arrangement, for it follows the baptism, declaring through it the gift of God. He uplifts us so as to put us once more in our first position "Adam, the son of God" (Luke 3:37). The evangelist St. Matthew declares the Messiah, the one to carry our sins, and the evangelist St. Luke declares the pleasure of being God's children in him.

Secondly: The difference of the lineage in both tables is because St. Matthew when declaring the Lord Jesus as the one to carry our

sins, he mentions the natural lineage, according to flesh and blood. But as for St. Luke, he mentions our being children to God in Christ Jesus, in the lawful lineage sense, where a man can be attributed to the father of whom he is not physically born. As an example of this, St. Joseph was biologically speaking, a son to Jacob. But he was Hale's son according to the law, because Hale died having no son of his own, and therefore Jacob married his wife to produce an offspring to him, so his name would not be wiped out of Israel (Deut 25:5, Matt 42:4). It is as if St. Joseph who was engaged to St. Mary was son to king David according to both lists; whether it be the natural or lawful lineage, although there exists the difference.

Thirdly: Since St. Matthew the herald in addressing the Jews to confirm the fact that Jesus is the Messiah, the long awaited for he began the lineage with Abraham the chosen one, But St. Luke since he was writing to the Gentiles, the lineage ended with Adam the son of God, so as to include all humanity as children of God.

Fourthly: The lineage came concerning St. Joseph, and not St. Mary, although the Lord Jesus was not of his offspring. This is because the Law of Moses attributes a person's lineage to the father and not to the mother as the rest of the parental societies. If St. Joseph is not the biological father, yet he was blessed with the fatherhood of adoption. This is why we find St. Mary herself, the one to realize the mystery of his birth, telling the Lord, (Luke 2:48) "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." If the law makes a son for the dead one (Deut 25:5) when his wife delivers a child from the guardian, that's all the more reason the Lord Jesus would be attributed a son to Joseph, even if not his offspring. The angel gave Joseph at the right of fatherhood as he was named for the says, "she will deliver a Son and call his name Jesus."

Fifthly: The lineage did not mention the names of great women the Jews could be proud of such as Sarah, Rebecca or Rachel. It just mentioned Tamar, who wore the clothes of a harlot (Gen 38) and also the Canaanite Rahab the prostitute (Josh 2:1) as well as

Bathsheba named 'Etiloria' showing her sin with king David. ST. Sawires the Antiochian says, "this is to reveal our nature that has sinned and fell, and has fooled about and stumbled in indecent passions. These are the things Jesus came for to heal. When it tried to escape it was caught, when it dashed away in rage he caught it and stopped it and brought it back on the right track; Jesus therefore set it on himself the lineage of this nature that has been defiled, so he would cleanse it. It was sick and he healed it, it has fallen and he raised it. This was done in love and condescension to humanity. St. Jerome says 'In the lineage of Jesus' birth; no saint was mentioned, but rather the scorned ones. This means to say he has come for the sake of sinners, and was born of sinners so as to wipe out the sins of all.

The evangelist heralded the King's lineage freely without hiding what seems shameful. He broke down the haughtiness of the Jews who repeatedly say they are Abraham's children. He came as a physician curing our weaknesses and not as a judge!

Sixthly: St. Matthew our teacher mentioned in the descent some gentile women such as Ruth the Moabite and Rahab the Canaanite so as to declare he has come for the entire humanity, with regards to the gentiles as much as the Jews. St. John Chrysostom thinks Ruth is a symbol of the gentile church. She had left her father's house and clung to the church of God and accepted to be a member in it, for he says, 'As an example, look what happened to us. She was a stranger who was degraded to object poverty; and in spite of this, when Boaz saw her he didn't scorn her poverty and neither did he get disgusted at her defiled birth. Likewise Christ accepts the church, for it is estranged and is in bad poverty. Christ takes the church as partner for great blessings, but she has to be like Ruth. If she doesn't leave first her father, and rejects her house, her race, her city, and her relatives, then she will not obtain this marriage. In this way, the church leaves its traditions taken after its fathers; and at this point and not before, it will then become beloved by the groom. Concerning this, the prophet speaks to the church saying (Psalm 45:11,12) "Forget your people and your

father's house, and the king will desire your beauty." This is what Ruth did and she became a mother to kings, as happened with the church.

Seventhly: Among the descent of Christ there are those who have brothers. We also notice the Lord came generally speaking descending not from the eldest sons, but from those who are not the firstborn biologically, such as Abraham, Jacob, Judah, David and Jonathan. The Lord came to declare that primehood is not based on the physical birth but rather on the worthiness of the spirit. The Lord has come (the second Adam) as the first born of the entire humanity. In him the believers become first born and his church is regarded as the church of first born.

Eighthly: Our teacher St. Matthew mentioned in the lineage of the Lord fares different than Zareh. Fares represents the gentile church that has become the first born by being united with the first born Lord Jesus, whereas Zareh represents the Jews who have lost the primehood because of rejecting the unity with the firstborn. Zareh pulled out his hand first for he was the firstborn son but he was not born first. It was Fares who came first, yet Zareh replaced him and obtained the primehood. In this way the Jews appeared first as the eldest of humanity, yet they were deprived of primehood, and the gentiles obtained it instead of them. Ninthly: the bondsman of Babylon was mentioned to confirm that although the people were disciplined by becoming in bondage for a long time, yet they preserved their descent for the divined promise to be fulfilled of Christ's coming. St. John Chrysostom comments on the mention of bondage, and not referring to the estrangement in Egypt. He says, they no longer feared the Egyptians, but they rather still feared the Babylonians. The first was an old issue that of going down to Egypt. But the second was still a new issue that has recently occurred. The first did not happen because of the sins they had committed, but the second was because of the disobedience.

3 The Generation number:

The evangelist divides the generations from Abraham to the coming of Christ into three phases; each of these includes 14 generations:

- a. from Abraham to David; the phase ends with the royal glory declared in David.
- b. From David to the Babylonian bondage, ending with the shame in bondage.
- c. From the bondage to the Lord Jesus which ends with the fulfillment of salvation, and wiping out the shame for the Messiah has come to possess. In our study of the book of Exodus (Ch 33) Origen the scholar noticed the number of stations at which the people of old stopped from Ramsis to the east bank of the river Jordan these were 42 stations. These symbolize the generations mentioned by St. Matthew the herald (3 phases x fourteen generations = 42). The journey symbolizes the crossing of the entire humanity in the wilderness of this world, so as to be liberated from the land of bondage, and the Pharaoh's real bondage i.e. Satan and entering the promised land where we shall enjoy the glory of God's children. The coming of the Lord Jesus offers to every believer the possibility of this crossing to enter with him by the Holy Spirit to the heavenly Father's embrace.

St. Augustine noticed in this descent that Yeknia has been mentioned twice; at the end of the second phase and at the beginning of the third one (Josh 11,12). For Yeknia was a contemporary of the Babylonian bondage, after being appointed king instead of his father. The holy book has not mentioned anything about his iniquities, but rather about the people and the leaders iniquities. The kingship has been taken away from him and he was driven to bondage because of the people's sins. It is as if Yenias symbolizes the Lord Jesus who was counted twice; He came to the Jews so as to save them, but when they rejected him he went to the gentiles (Babylon) to save them. He is the corner stone that was rejected (PS 118:22). He bonded the gentile wall with that of the Jews so as to establish one church for all.

G.G. Boy thinks the evangelist St. Matthew divided the generations into three divisions. Each one is established on the astronomical number for David's name, that in the Hebrew number of alphabets used in his name add up to 14. It is as if the saint wished to confirm the descent of the Lord Jesus is of David for three times, or as if the Lord is King for all the five stages.

4. The betrothed St. Mary:

(Matt 1:18) "Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. The Holy book confirmed that St. Mary was with Child in her womb from the Holy Spirit, who has prepared and sanctified her so that the Word of God would dwell in her. He was the only begotten Son of God. He was not of man's offspring for being with child was fulfilled when she was still engaged to Joseph. Being engaged to the righteous Joseph was an essential matter for many reasons, some of which are mentioned by St. Jerome.

Firstly: So that he would be of the line of St. Joseph, the relative of St. Mary; hence he is the promised messiah of David's lineage of Judah's tribe.

Secondly: so that the virgin Mary would not be stoned according to the old law of Moses for being an adulteress. The Lord therefore gave her to the righteous saint who well knew the virtue of his betrothed one. Also, the angel assured him of the mystery of her being with child by the messiah, the savior

Thirdly: so that the virgin saint might find someone to comfort her particularly in her flight to the land of Egypt. But, as to the question: Was the Lord born of a woman or of a virgin? St. Augustine answers:

+ "If not born of her, we might have suspected being born of her would defile him, as long as his essence is not defiled then there's no fear of being born of a woman.

+ If he came as a man without being born of a woman, would make women desperate of themselves when recalling the first sin.

It is as if He's addressing humanity saying: You have to know in God's creation there is no evil, but it is rather the defiled passion that ruined the creation. Look, I have been born of a man, and born of a woman; therefore I do not scorn the creation. I only scorn the sin I have not brought. For the very same reason, we find that women were the first to herald the resurrection to the apostles. In paradise, woman spoke of death to her man, and in the church women declared salvation to men."

Helphidious, at the end of the fourth century, comments on the Gospel's words before they lived together she was found with child. This is good proof of their becoming together after the Lord's birth; he denied the virginity of St. Mary. I have previously dealt with this issue rather extensively; therefore I think it enough by using some statements said by St. Jerome in answer: If someone says 'before dinner' at the port , I sailed to Africa" are his words untrue, unless he is forced to have dinner after his sailing? And if I say St. Paul the apostle was imprisoned in Rome before he went to Spain" or if I say "death almost came to Helphidiores before he repents" Is it essential that St. Paul is set free from prison and leaves straight to Spain? Or is it necessary that Helphidious repents after his death? When the evangelist says "before they were together" he is pointing to the time before marriage; making clear that matters have been fulfilled quickly, because she was engaged and was soon to become a wife. Before this, she was found with child from the Holy Spirit. What follows does not mean he came to Mary after delivery"

5- Joseph's Dream:

(Matt 1:9) " Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly." The pregnancy signs were beginning to be apparent on the Virgin St. Mary. This was enough to arouse anger, and to give him the lawful right to take her to the priests so as to punish her by being stoned. But because he was righteous, and he well knew the saint's decency and purity, he was greatly disturbed. In tenderness and kindness, he did not open the subject with anyone, not event

the saint herself. He did not thing either of expelling her, but rather to dismiss her quietly” i.e. to divorce her. We know that according to the Jewish custom, the engagement period gives the same rights and commitments concerning marriage, except for the physical matrimonial relationship. This why the angel called her “Your woman,” (Matt 1:20) an issue that we studied previously.

St. Jacobe El Serongy comments on this noble behavior on St. Joseph’s part by saying, The elderly one looked at her tummy, the one he engaged and the righteous one was amazed! He saw the sensible and shy girl, and was astounded in his mind! She appeared so modest, and her tummy was full, he was bewildered as what to do! She looked so pure, and had a peaceful appearance, and what was in her tummy began to move! In her body she was so pure, and her pregnancy was apparent! He was overwhelmed with her decency and the glory she had, and yet because of her pregnancy he was angry. The righteous one was so sad at heart for this pure virgin’s pregnancy. He was too embarrassed to ask her and thought of dismissing her secretly. Some ask, was it necessary to dismiss her secretly? St. Jerome answers: The signs were so obvious, if he did not dismiss her he would be considered guilty according to the law. It is not only he who committed the sin is to pay the penalty, but also he who witnesses and does not act against her.

(Matt 1:20) “But just when he resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife , for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” God has seen the disturbance of this righteous man, and his wise and prudent behavior, and therefore he wished to calm him down. He sent Joseph and anel in a dream to reveal to him the mystery of conception. God did not offer him a vision when he was awake “for he was increasingly strong in faith and was in no need of a vision” as St. John Chrisostom said. St. Jerome comments on the angel’s address to St. Mary, that she is Joseph’s woman, saying “ We know it is the usual custom for the Holy Book to give this name to those engaged. This is what confirmed in the following Proverb in the book of Deuteronomy;

(Deut 22:23-24) “ If there is a young woman, a virgin already engaged to be married, and a man meets her in the town and lies with her , you shall bring both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death, the young woman because she did not cry for help in the town, and the man because he violated his neighbor’s wife. So you shall purge the evil from you midst.” (Revise Deut. 20:7) St. John Chrysostom also says, Here he calls the engaged one a wife,” and the Book is used to calling those engaged “married” even before the marriage takes place. What does the word “takes” mean? It means to protect her in your house, because he took her intentionally. Keep this you have taken, since she is in your custody from the Lord, and not from her parents. The angel says, “ Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means God is with us.” (Matt 1:21,23) The angel gave the righteous Joseph this honor to be a parent though the Lord Jesus was not of his issue. He gave Joseph the right to name him, though the name was not of his own, but it was a divine declaration. It is “Jesus” which means in Hebrew “Jehovah saves!” As the angel says “ He will save his people of their sins.” St. John Chrysostom says, “ His people are not only the Jews, but it includes all those who are drawn close to him, and accept the knowledge springing up from him. As for the word “virgin” in Hebrew it is “Olmah” this concerns a young virgin possibly engaged but still unmarried. This applied perfectly to St. Mary.

7. The Birth of Jesus the Firstborn:

8. (Matt 1:25) “but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son, and he named him Jesus.” Helphidioris insisted on denying the constant virginity of St. Mary. He said the word ‘until’ means he knew her after the birth. The expression ‘her firstborn’ points to the presence of other children who are not firstborns. St Jerome answers: The words ‘knew her’ does not necessarily mean marital relationship, though it could mean that too. It is as if St. Joseph did not know what St. Mary obtained as great blessings are concerned until she gave birth to Jesus Christ. As for the word ‘ until’, it does not mean his knowing

her physically has been fulfilled after her delivery. St. Jerome gave many examples for this. When the apostle says (1Cor 15:25) “For he must reign until he has put all the enemies under his feet” Will the Lord reign until his enemies are under his feet and at this point his reign will stop? The hymn singer also says (Psalm 123:2) “our eyes look to the Lord our God, until He has mercy upon us.: Is the prophet looking up to God until he Obtains mercy and at this point he turns his eyes from him to the ground? St. John Chrysostom says Here he used the word ‘until’ not that you doubt and think he knew her afterwards. It is to let you know that the Virgin was like this before the birth, untouched by any man. It may be asked, “why had the word until been used?” The answer is because it was usual for the Book to us this expression without specifying a certain time. With regards to the ark, it was said the raven has not returned till the land dried up (Gen 8:7) even though it never returned. As for the expression the ‘firstborn’ this does not mean the Lord Jesus had younger brothers from St. Mary, and that he is eldest. The firstborn is counted so for every one who opens the womb even if there were no other brothers to follow. St. Jerome answers Helphidoous ‘every single son is firstborn, but not every firstborn is the only son. The expression ‘firstborn’ does not signify a person with younger brothers. It points to whoever has an older brother than himself. The Lord tells Aaron (Numbers 18:15) “ The first issue of the womb of all creatures, human and animal, which is offered to the Lord, shall be yours; but the firstborn of human beings you shall redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem.” The Lord’s words here makes known the ‘firstborn’ as he who opens the womb. If he has younger brothers it would have been essential not to offer the firstborn of pure animals to priests unless there were younger ones to be born. Also no ransom would have been paid for man, and defiled animal, except after being sure of delivering younger brothers.

Chapter II

The worshipping of the kings for the King

When the messiah was born, the magicians came to accept his love and worship him. They represent the gentile church, attracted to her groom, the king. The church offers Him her life in love, in return for the sacrifice of his everlasting love:

- 1- The coming of the magicians 1-6
- 2- The wrath of Herod 7-8
- 3- The worshipping magicians 9-11
- 4- The magicians go away 12
- 5- The flight to Egypt 13-15
- 6- The killing of Bethlehem's Children 16-18

1. The coming of the Magicians:

Indeed, the coming of the word of God in the form of man has preoccupied God's mind before our creation. The way was paved in various ways among his people by means of the father, the prophets and the law. In spite of this, when it did come to pass, it was absolutely disregarded by the people, except for a very small numbers. This is why God put them to shame by means of some strangers, as the magicians who came to him as the first ones for the Gentile church. They came to a strange land to worship a little baby born in a manger, and not a royal baby in a castle. What led their procession was a heavenly star proclaiming a hidden mystery behind it. The magicians were priests, and at the same time they were Caldean or Persian kings, They spent most of their time studying astronomical phenomenon and guessing what the future holds.

It is probable those magicians came in a splendid procession, with three important men of their going before them, carrying their gifts to the amazing king. These represent all the human races in their

chain from Noah's three sons: Sam , Ham and Japhtheth. It is as if they are the eldest of the gentile people who came to meet the simple Jews – the shepherds- in worshipping the Messiah, forming one church for Him. ST. Augustine says, “who are these magicians other than the firstborns of the nations? The shepherds were Israelites and the magicians were gentiles. The first ones were close to him, but the last ones came to him from so far away. All have been quick to come to the cornerstone.”

What is this star? St. John Chrysostom thinks it was not a real star like the others. It was an angel that appeared as a star, sent by God, to guide the magicians working on astronomy. He justifies this in the following:

First: The path of the star that appeared was different than the motion of the natural stars.

Second: The star shone brightly at noon, when the sun was still shining, not like the rest of the stars that shine at nighttime.

Third: It appeared at times and disappeared at others

Four: It was low, leading them exactly to where the manger was.

Oreganus the scholar thinks it was a real star but of a unique kind. He says, “We believe what appeared in the East was a new star, unlike the ordinary ones. It is counted as one of the comets often observed, or the shooting stars or the meteors that are given different names by the greeks for their various shapes and forms.”

Why has the star been used?

Firstly: God used all different means to speak to his people, showing them the divine mystery of incarnation, and his deeds for salvation. But the eyes of their hearts were dimmed by the dark evil, and their hearts hardened. He therefore sent them strangers who were thirsty for the truth, so as to put them to shame. St John Chrysostom says, “This was to blame the Jews for their hardness, and to take away any excuse by which they object for their willful ignorance.” St. Jerome says, “ This was to make the Jews know the news of Jesus' birth from the pagans, according to Balaam's prophecy (one of their forefathers) that a star was to appear in the East. When the star guided the magicians until Judah, and they

asked about him, there was no more **any** pretext for the Jews regarding his coming.” Indeed, in every age the believers’ hearts get hardened, those who are the kingdom’s children, and sometimes the Lord speaks to them through the pagans and evil ones who have accepted the faith in fury zeal that puts them to shame.

Secondly: God who loves the entire humanity, declares himself to all, speaking to each on in his own language. He spoke to the Jews by the law and the prophecies; and he used the Greek philosophy despite its many misleading, as a way by means of which many philosophers accepted the gospel of truth. Here he speaks to the magicians, the men of astronomy in their practical language. God speaks to each person in the language he understands. He sent angels to the shepherds, and a star to the magicians. St. Augustine says, “The angels made Jesus appear to the shepherds, and the star declared him to the magicians. They all spoke from heaven! The angels inhabit the heavens, and the it. Through both of these the heavens declare the glory of God.

Father Gregory the great says, “It was appropriate that a sensible creature i.e. an angel be the one to declare to those who have used their common sense in knowing God. But as for the gentiles, they did not known how to use their mind in knowing him; therefore the angelic voice did not lead them, but rather the star. For this reason St. Paul says the prophecy is not for the unbelievers but for those who believe. But as for the symbol, the sign, this is not for the believers but rather for those who do not believe (1Cor 14:22). Some fathers such as the scholar Oreganus think the magicians realized their superstition have become obsolete. They felt during their work that something way above magic has happened in the world. They look up to the stars to see some sign form God in the sky. At this point they remembered the words of Balaam: (Numbers 34:17) that a star will proceed form Jacob and a steal track will proceed from Israel. St Jerome says, learn form the

appearance of this star from the prophecy of Balaam, for they are of his offspring?

Thirdly: Some think the magicians have taken over this tradition of the star's apparition at the coming of the king, the Savior from Daniel the prophet. The king had appointed him the commander for the magicians when in the Babylonian bondage. In his prophecies he assured us of the time for this coming.

Fourthly: God wished to produce from the **eater**, food, and from the dry thing, sweetness. The stars that were used as a means of misleading the people's worshipping (Amos 5:26) has become a means by which they enter to encounter God. Indeed, how amazing God's work is with us. He does not destroy what we have, so that if this becomes an evil way, He would change its course and turn it to what is good.

Instead of being a servant to the kingdom of darkness, it becomes a righteous device for the account of the kingdom of light. All what God has granted us as far as potentials, talents, emotions, motives... if defiled, God does not destroy them, but rather with his Holy Spirit he renews them, and sanctifies them, so they become the secret behind our spiritual construction, and means of witnessing to Him. What is amazing is that God used the stars for spreading the word among astronomers. Some of them tried to confirm their evil concepts with the same overwhelming work of God, and they claimed each person has his star, which defines his life, and he couldn't deviate from it. But many fathers attempted to face these claims such as the fathers Gregory the Great, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Augustine. We mention as an example some of these quotes said by St. Augustine "The star seen by the magicians had no authority over the recently newborn Christ. This star was not among those at the beginning of creation, and had the course according to its creator. It was a new star that appeared in this amazing birth of a virgin. Its service was reflected on the magicians who were searching for Christ. It went ahead of them to lighten up the way, until it led them to the place where the Word of God was as a child. The baby was not born because the star was

there, but rather the star appeared because Jesus was born. If we have to speak about destiny, let us then say the star did not define the destiny of Christ as the fortunetellers say, but rather it was Christ who has defined the destiny of the star.

Fifthly: The star came to complete Nature's witnessing to the Lord. If the rational humanity did not know how to welcome him as should be, then the dumb solid nature had to witness to him in its own language. ST. Augustine says, "the heavens witnessed for him by means of the star, and the sea carried him when he walked on it (Matt 14:16). The winds have become calmed down and obedient to his orders (Matt 23:27). The earth witnessed to him and trembled when he was crucified (Matt 27:51). In this way, nature presented praise in its own language to its creator. We too, since we have become a heaven, it is appropriate for us to witness to him in the appearance of his star in us. This star leads the sinners to the Messiah, the Savior, and they kneel down and worship in truth. What is this star but the living cross, declared in our inner life and our demeanor in the Lord. ST. Augustine says, " The magicians knew him by means of the star, as a beautiful heavenly sign presented by the Lord. But he does not wish the believer to stamp a star on his forehead, but rather a cross. In this way the believer becomes modest and is also glorified. The Lord lifts up those that are humbled, He who in his modesty has condescended. When did the appearance of the star begin? St John Chrysostom thinks the star appeared early, before the birth, maybe around two years before. It let the magicians so as to reach Bethlehem at the time of birth. Some others think it appeared on his birth. The magicians took some time to reach Bethlehem. This is why Herod investigated and commanded the killing of children tow years old and under. He has calculated the time lapsed based on the appearance of the star. By means of the star, the magicians encountered the Jews: The evangelist relates to us the encounter done between the magicians and the Jews on every level, in particular between the king and the chief priests and scribes. He says (Matt 2:1-6) "In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born

in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, asking ‘where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage. When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; calling together all the chief priest and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet: And you Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’ The Lord has been born in ‘Bethlehem’ which means ‘the house of bread’. Therefore the heavenly bread has come to us to be eaten by those hungry and thirsty for righteousness. Unfortunately the magicians came from the east, bearing the weariness of the journey, searching for their own food; whereas the king, the chief priests and scribes remained in their places guiding the strangers to the living bread. But as for themselves, they have not drawn near it. They might have become like the laborers in building Noah’s ark who had prepared the salvation ark and yet did not go in it! Indeed, what a great difference there is between the magicians and the Jewish chiefs; the aliens obtained the mystery of life, and the chiefs were deprived of it. ST Augustine says, “ The Jews have become like the carpenters who made Noah’s ark, and they paved for others the way of salvation, whereas they perished in the flood. They are similar to the landmarks put on the road, but are unable to walk in it. Those who ask have learned and completed the way, whereas the teachers uttered the teachings and yet they remained retarded and failed. “ St. Jacob El Serousy says, “They became preachers to him while walking on the road, preaching a King for the entire world has shone. Their preaching spread out for miles on the road, and they broke the hearts of the kings in their cities. The birth has urged them to preach in his name. The outsiders have become his witnesses and have reached the land of Judea. They looked upon it and found it to be peaceful, and silence overruling its wise ones who have not realized the king has come to save them. Those far

away have come to herald them of the king's birth. The daughter of the caldeans sent a gift to the savior, whereas the daughter of Abraham who is in his home did not pay him any honor."

2-Herod's wrath:

The name 'Herod' has been repeated among several Palestine rulers and kings, or some parts of it or some nearby ones. In the New Testament four kings have been mentioned in that name. This was during the Roman reign in Palestine, and among these was the great Herod. He was a born Adomite in whose blood was enmity towards the Jews. He had no right for kingship but had become one over Judea with the help of the Romans with whom his father made an alliance. He was violent and unusually strange, and in his last days he was exposed to hallucination. He was a blood thirsty man and killed a big number of the Jewish members of the Syndicate. Moreover, he killed his own two sons, Alexander and Aristopolis. Five days before his death he killed his son Antipater. At his last breath he ordered the death of all the great ones in Jerusalem so that grief overcomes the city, and the new king would find no way for happiness. But he died before that last wish took effect. Herod died three months later after putting Bethlehem's children to death. The Jewish historian Yousifous described how his ferocity in his last days was so awful that he ate meat in incredible amounts and was sick with gout and other diseases. He smelled so bad it was nauseating for anyone to come close to him. This portrayal reveals to us that beast's fierce feelings on hearing of the magicians' procession and their coming to worship the King of the Jews. This enemy of the Jews gathered the chief priests and the scribes asking them to let the throne be taken from him. St. John Chrysostom says, "He feared the kingship be taken to a Jew, and hence they would expel him, he and his descendants and cut them off the kingdom. Indeed, it often happens that the great authority is exposed to severe fears. The top of the trees could be moved by a simple breeze; likewise are those who live at the topmost, any rumors could scare them. But as for these who live in the low lands, wherever they may be, they are

like trees in the valley which no wind could affect that much. St. Gregory the great also says, "The earthly king was disturbed when the heavenly king was born, because the earthly authority got confused when the heavenly splendor appeared." The evil earthly Herod was disturbed when he realized that he who was served by the heavenly stars has come. The Lord of glory is shining gloriously in the heart just as he does in the manger, and this unbalanced Herod (Satan) the despot who reigned in evil. With the cross the Lord reigns in us and hence Satan's Kingdom collapses and is unable to stay firm. Herod tried to hide his disturbance deceitfully, for the gospel says (Matt 2: 7,8) " Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Thus he sent them to Bethlehem saying go search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." St John Chrysostom says " to tempt them to do so he pretended to be a virtuous hiding the sword behind this. He drew colorfully a picture of simplicity so as to cover up the envy in his heart. This is the way all doers go; they plan secretly to wound others, so they pretend to be simple and truthful.

3- The wise men kneel down and worship: (Matt 2:9-11) When they had heard the king, they set out and there ahead of them went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the Child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the Child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh." On leaving the king the star appeared to go ahead of them to take them where the Lord Jesus was laying. How badly in need we are get out of Herod's secret circle, the circle so sinful with the work of Satan, so the royal way would be clearly revealed to us.

ST. John Chrysostom thinks the star seen by the wise men, and its going ahead of them to Bethlehem means the service of the poor and the needy ones. He says "They saw the star and they were

overjoyed, and now you can see Jesus Himself a stranger and unclothed and yet you are untouched: They offered gold and yet you barely offer a piece of bread.”

One seeing the Lord they were restful and no longer weary. As St. John Chrysostom says “Before seeing the Child, the fears and troubles were overpowering them on every side. But after kneeling down, peace and security overcame them. They have become priests through their worshipping Him, for they offered him gifts. What do the Gifts of the wise men mean? St John Chrysostom says, “ They did not offer cattle or sheep, but rather, they offered the things that draw them closer to the heart of the church; for they offered knowledge wisdom and love.” St. Gregory the great father says, “ Gold is offered as taxes to the king, and frankincense is offered to God, whereas myrrh is used in preserving the dead corpuses. The wise men declared their secret gifts to those who worship him by gold since he is the king, by frankincense since he is God and by myrrh since he accepts death. Let us offer the newborn Lord gold, whereby we confess he reigns over all. Let us offer him frankincense since we believe he is God who appeared at a certain time though he is before all ages. Let us offer him myrrh, for we believe, even though he is godly and unacceptable to pain, yet he has become acceptable to death in our bodies. Furthermore, with these symbols we can understand something else. Gold symbolizes wisdom as Solomon witnesses (Prov 21:20, 70th translation) “Precious treasure remains in the house of the wise.” The frankincense that burns before God symbolizes the power of prayer as the Psalm says (Ps141:2) “ Let my prayer be counted as incense before you.” Myrrh symbolizes the death of our bodies, since the holy church says to those serving God until death (Song of sol 5:5) “ May hands dripped with myrrh” We offer the new king gold if in his eyes we light up with heavenly wisdom. We offer him frankincense if we burn up physical **thoughts** on our hearts altar, then we uplift to God our eagerness for heaven in a sweet scent. We offer him myrrh when we deaden in asceticism the evil physical passions. Then we can say that with myrrh we

preserve the dead body from corruption. We also say about the body that it has become corrupted when overcome by indecency. The prophet has said “The animals rotted in their waste.” These animals that end in their waste point to the lusty people who end their life amidst the stupidity of their passions. “Let us offer God myrrh to preserve our dead bodies from the corruption of indecency, and preserve it in righteousness.

4. The magicians leave:

(Matt 2:12) “ And having been washed in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.” In real simple faith, these men accepted what they were inspired with in a dream, and have not doubted the child. In faith they left the way they came by and went another road so they would avoid Herod’s encounter. They tell believers a living example to the soul when it meets the Lord Jesus, and no longer goes the old way where Herod, or Satan reigns. Father Gregory the great says “this new way is the road to paradise where the soul has to be committed to when encountering the Lord Jesus! St. Ambrosios says, “Let us leave Herod, the one with earthly authority for a limited time, and come to the eternal dwelling, to our heavenly city.” In bitterness do I say, there is nothing that grieves the heart of God such as when he sees among us magicians who have seen the heavenly star, and their hearts got lit up and they ran to where the Savior is, and he wiped away all estrangement to God, and have become so close to the father. He dwells in them, and they are sanctified to him by the Holy Spirit, yet, unfortunately, after they had offered their lives as precious gifts giving the Lord a lot of joy, yet they return once more to Herod’s way. They go back to their old self and yield again to Satan. It is as if they are handing over their inward Christ to Herod. He wipes out the enemy, that is God’s grace from heaven in them. In bitterness ST. Paul the apostle blames them saying, (Heb 10:28,29) “ Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God , profaned the blood of the

covenant by which they were sanctified and outraged the Spirit of Grace?” Therefore, let us not backslide to the deceitful Herod’s way, and let us not hand over our inner Jesus in his hands, and be crucified a second time-it is correctly expressed – and be exposed to scandal because of us, and the Spirit in us gets diminished.

5- The Escape to Egypt:

(Matt 2:13,14) “Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the Child and his mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the Child to destroy him. Then Joseph got up, took the Child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt.” St. John Chrysostom notices that the angel did not say about St. Mary ‘your wife’, But rather said ‘his mother’. Since the birth has become fulfilled, and no doubts are there at all, the saint has been related to the Lord Jesus and not to Joseph. The angel wished to confirm that the Lord Jesus is the focus to whom we relate. St. Augustine thinks the soul that is linked to the Lord Jesus through the live faith working lovingly and carries him in it spiritually, in just like St. Mary who carried him spiritually as much as she did physically.

Why has the Lord Jesus fled to Egypt:

Firstly: The flight to Egypt is only one part of the chain of suffering St. Joseph joyfully passed through. The inspiration testified he was a righteous men although this righteous life was blended with suffering without the believer’s losing his inward peace. St. John Chrysostom comments on the angel’s words to Joseph saying “ Joseph did not stumble on hearing this, and did not say that that was too difficult... hasn’t he said to me he would save his people? So how can’t he save himself, and why do we have to flee to Egypt, going on such a long journey, and live in another country? This is quite contrary to what you promised! Joseph said nothing of all this, because he was a man of faith. He didn’t even ask when he would return, since this was not said by the angel. The angel rather said, “Be there till I tell you.” He was not sorrowful,

but yielded and obeyed, standing all those trials joyfully. In this way God blends joy with toil, with all those who fear him. He provides for the life of the righteous blending one with the other. This is what God is doing here. Joseph saw the virgin pregnant and he was bewildered and skeptical. On the spot the angel stood next to him and wiped away his doubts and delivered him of his fears. When he saw the newborn baby he was greatly overwhelmed. Consequently this joy was followed by great turmoil, for the whole city became disturbed and the king was excessively angry and asked for the child to be delivered to him. Then joy followed this confusion by the appearance of the star and the worshipping of the kings. Once again, after this joy there was danger and fear because Herod asked for the child's life. Joseph had to flee to another town." This is an image of a true pious life. It is a continuous blend of hardships with joy which God allows for the sake of perfecting us and supporting us spiritually. With hardships we are perfected before God, and with joy we are filled with hope in God's protection and constant care.

Secondly: The flight of the Lord Jesus from evil confirmed the truth of his incarnation. As St. John Chrysostom says, "If since his early childhood he had performed his miracles, he would not have been considered a man."

Thirdly: His flight as a representative for humanity, offers us a spiritual program that has the basis of not resisting evil by evil. As St. John Chrysostom says "fire is not extinguished by fire, but by water."

Fourthly: Egypt was the head of the gentile world. In the Old Testament, it pointed with its Pharaoh to slavery, and with its fertile soil it pointed to a life of luxury and love of the world. The Lord could have resorted to a city in Judea or in Galilee, but he wished to sanctify the land of Egypt so as to establish in the midst of this Gentile land an altar for him. Concerning this, Isaiah the prophet says (Is 19_ "See, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt, the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them.... On that

day there will be an altar to the Lord in the center of the land of Egypt and a pillar to the Lord at its border. It will be a sign and a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt... The Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians will know the Lord on that day, and will worship with sacrifice and burnt offering, and they will make vows to the Lord and perform them... Blessed be Egypt my people” The inspiration was much concerned about this matchless journey, with it Egypt became a beaming center of live faith. Just as Joseph in Egypt stored wheat as a support to the world during the famine for seven long years, likewise the Lord Jesus offered bountiful blessings in Egypt to become a mysterious essential blessing for the entire world. This was made clean during the Alexandria school, and then emerging of monastic life and missionary work... St John Chrysostom says, “Let us go to the wilderness of Egypt where you will see it even better than paradise! There are numberless angelic hosts in human form, and endless martyrs and of the virgins.... Satan’s despotism has collapsed, and Jesus’ kingdom shone in all glory! This Egypt is the homeland of poets, wise men and magicians... it has shielded itself with the cross! Heaven with all its splendid planets is not more glorious than the wilderness of Egypt filled with hermit’s cells. At any rate, he who confesses that the old ancient Egypt is the one that forgot God in coldness and has worshiped cats, and feared onions and trembled of it.. someone like this will well realize the power of Christ.” St. John Chrysostom also speaks of this blessed visit to Egypt for its sanctification, sighing “ Because Egypt and Babylon were countries most kindled by the evil fire, the Lord declared since the beginning he wished to correct the two places for His account so he would bring them to a better existence. At the same time they would be an example to the entire world, and hence ask for his blessings. This is why he sent the wise men to one of them and to the other he himself with his mother went there.” He furthermore says, “Contemplate this unusual thing: Palestine was expecting him, Egypt welcomed him and saved him from revenge.”

7- The killing of the Children of Bethlehem:

8- (Matt 2:16-18) “When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old and under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: **Avoia** was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled because they were no more.” The killing of Bethlehem’s children was not mere coincidence. It represents past and parcel as stage of the life of our Savior. If the inspiration was concerned about in the Old and New Testaments. Jeremiah the prophet saw Rachel, Jacob’s wife buried there, crying over her children and her grandchildren, because of Herod’s cruelty against them. Some may ask: why has the king of peace allowed this tragedy to occur because of his birth? Whereas at that very same time the angels began praising God and blessing humanity with the joy of heavenly peace, as well as the strangers came carrying gifts to the child in the manger, and all of the sudden the Hebrew children get slaughtered for no sin of theirs. Those children presented a work of true witness and testimony for the entire world. They represent the church of the New Testament, which carried the simplicity of the Spirit first like children do. Herod could not stand this and thus persecutes it. Yet he couldn’t choke the voice of its testimony, because the children were like the prince blessed with the unity of the divine lamb wherever he may be. The crossing of Bethlehem’s children to above represents the church of princehood as a sanctified spiritual procession with the crucified Firstborn ahead. They are uplifted by him and with him through his true sacrifice so to share the heavenly host in their liturgies and new praises above. Briefly speaking, I say this occurrence despite the wailing and lamentation in grievous bitterness can never be denied. It signifies a revelation of the New Testament Church as a simple one with no complexity. It

carries the cross as an essential sign that concerns its nature. It is the church of firstborns, uplifted above, practicing its divine life while it is firm in the crucified heavenly head.

7- The Return to Nazareth:

St. Joseph was inspired to leave towards Galilee. He came to live in the a town called Nazareth. This is to fulfill what the prophets spoke of “he will be called a Nazarene”. St . John Chrysostom comments on this event saying, “Joseph returned to Nazareth to avoid the danger on one hand, and on the other one to be happy for living in his own nation. His going to Nazareth, this modest town, was to destroy the pride the Jews held of their being related to certain tribes or to certain outstanding cities. St. John Chrysostom says “Because not only was that place of little importance, but also the whole of Galilee. This is why the Pharisees say, “search and look, there is no prophet coming out of Galilee. (John 7:52) He was not ashamed to say he came from there, because he was not in need of any human concerns. He chose his disciples from Galilee as well. I wish we would never pride ourselves on our birth or our riches, but rather scorn those who do so. I wish we wouldn’t get disgusted with poverty, but rather ask for the riches of good works. Let us escape the poverty that makes people wicked, (Luke 16:24) for this is what makes riches poor; “send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I’m in agony of these flames”

The word “Nazareth”, or “Nazarene” is a Christian title in Hebrew it is Natzar which means a branch. From it is derived the Arabic word Nader. The Lord Jesus was referred to in more than one prophecy in the Old Testament as ‘the branch’. In Isaiah the prophet (11:1,2) “ A shoot shall come from the stump of Jesse. And a branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest on him the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.” In (Jeremiah 11:5) “The Lord says there shall come the days when I shall establish a righteous branch for David. A king shall reign and be successful, fulfilling truth and justice on earth”

(cf. Jer 33:15), (Zechariah 38) “ I am going to bring my servant the branch.” (Zech 6:12) “ Here is a man whose name is branch, for he shall branch out in his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord”. This is why the Jews expected the Messiah to be called the ‘Branch’ or ‘Nazarene’.

Chapter III

The Coronation Festival

The Baptism of the King

Before the Lord Jesus began his work among his people as the spiritual King, a coronation of the enthronement of the real king at the River Jordan had to take place. That has been prepared for the King's forerunner, St. John the Baptist, who was like the Lord's angel paving the way for Him.

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1. The King's Forerunner:

One of the Eastern customs was to have a forerunner for the king for the way to be paved. The lord Jesus Christ was a spiritual king who prepared for Himself a messenger beforehand.

Isaiah the prophet prophesied about him (Is. 40:3) "A voice cries out in the wildness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Also in Malachi the prophet (Mal. 4:5) "Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes."

The gospel says (Matt. 3:1) "In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wildness of Judea proclaiming." It is not understood by the words 'in those days' if it is after the return of the holy family from Egypt directly, or if it means 'in this age' or 'at this time'. St Luke defined the time of the Lord's baptism around thirty years of his age according to the body "Luke 3:3). A few months earlier it was St. John who turned thirty, the lawful age for the Jewish priesthood service.

St. John was proclaiming in the wildness of Judea, though it was not a barren wildness. It consisted of six towns with their surroundings (Is. 15:16,62). But these were not crowded, and not surrounded by fields or like the other towns.

St. John did not serve as a priest in Solomon's temple. He went out to the wildness to reveal what the human nature has reached, and how it left its holy job as God's temple and how it has become filled with dryness. It has become a barren desolate wildness, badly in need of the Messiah King to come down to it to quench it with the water of his Holy Spirit. This he would turn it into a paradise having the fruits of the Spirit. Isaiah the prophet, speaking on behalf of human nature that is eager for the world of messiah the King, he says (Is. 32:15) "until a spirit from on high is poured out on us, and the wildness becomes a fruitful field." Also (Is. 35:1,2) he says "the wildness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom, like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing." In the way St. John presents humanity as dry land to the King, and He changes it to his holy altar. John the Baptist was deprived of serving the priesthood of the temple so he could prepare the way for the highest Head of priests our Lord Jesus who makes out our wildness a new heavenly altar.

It may be that David the prophet saw the scene with the prophetic spirit, and his spirit was overjoyed in him. In the same wildness he wrote his Psalm 63, in which he says (Ps. 63;1,8) "O God, You are my God, I seek You, my soul thirsts for You, my flesh faints

for You, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water...My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me.”

Kind David the prophet saw the multitudes of those that repented at the hands of John the Baptist in the wilderness. Their hearts were kindled with thirst, the thirst for His Body, and for the waters of His grace. The Lord came for these souls to cling to Him, and be supported by His strength since it is the right hand of the Lord.

St. Ambrosius thinks the wilderness where St. John the Baptist preached is actually the church spoken of by Isaiah the prophet (Is. 54:1) “For the children of the desolate woman will be more than the children of her that is married, says the Lord.” The Word of the Lord has come so as to bear fruit out of the previously wild and desolate one.

How has St. John the Baptist prepared the royal way?

This was done by drying out for repentance saying, (Matt 3:2) “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near.” He was like a lion roaring in the wilderness, and so Jerusalem and all of Judea and the surroundings of Jordan went out to meet him. His words were so basically truthful, uttering the word of God without any human coatings or misleading. These words sprung up of an honest heart, full of integrity with what the tongue speaks. Therefore the word had its great impact. Indeed, the secret behind the attraction of St. John the Baptist’s message is the fact that he was covered up in God’s word. He proclaimed his message through his practical life.

‘Repentance’ in Greek means ‘bowing down’, which means ‘changing the direction’ Man gives God his own face and not his back through his unity with the Messiah, the Resurrected from the dead, and as a result his heart became transformed as well as his concepts and all his zeal.

“The kingdom has come near”, has come at the door, for more. As St. Paul the apostle, says, (Rom. 10:8) “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart.” As for the road to obtain this kingdom, it is for us to realize. Our bad need to the Messiah’s work in us. When man condemns himself, the heart is thus opened to accept the Messiah’s work in it. St John Chrysostom says, “ John came to lead them to repentance, and not to be punished. Though repentance, they condemn themselves, and hasty to obtain forgiveness. If they do not condemn themselves, they are unable to ask for His grace. And if they do not ask for that, they will never be able to obtain forgiveness.

St. Ambrosius says, “Many look up to John as the symbol of the old law; for he is able to scourge sin, but he is unable to forgive it.”

Isaiah the prophet described St. John the Baptist saying, (Matt. 3:3) “ The voice of one crying out in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make the paths straight.”

It is the voice that comes before ‘Divine Word’. As Father Gregory the great says, ‘from our discussion you come to know that ‘the voice’ comes first, then you hear ‘the word’. This is why St. John declares himself that he is ‘the voice’, for he comes before ‘the word’. Because he comes before the Lord, he was called ‘the voice’, and due to his service the people heard ‘the word of the Lord’. He cries out proclaiming ‘make His paths straight.’ The Lord’s way to the heart is a straight one, whenever in modesty the words of truth are accepted. The way is straight if we practice our life in accordance with His commandments. This is why it is said (John 14:23) “Those who love Me will keep My word, and My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” But if anyone is haughty and lifts his heart in pride, and is kindled with the fever of greed and he who defiles himself with lust, he shuts the door of his heart against the

entrance of Truth. He closes up the door with evil habits lest the Lord reigns over the entrance.

Our teacher St. Luke the xxx completes this prophecy saying (Luke 3:5,6) “Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God,” What are these valley’s that are repentant and confessing their need of the Savior. These are the one filled with the waters of the Holy Spirit, the Donor of life. And what are these mountains and hills that go low other than the pride of Israel and Judea, for the Jews became haughty and believed they were righteous. St. John came to destroy this pride and loftiness so that the modest ones accept the Lord’s salvation. Hence, the crooked souls will become corrected, and their nature will change, which was previously like and rocks to become smooth. In this way God’s salvation is offered to all people, the Jews and the Gentiles as well.

+ Let the Lord’s path be prepared in our hearts, because man’s heart is big and wide, as if it’s the entire world. Look at its greatness, not how big physically, but rather in the mental power that gives it the capability to embrace great knowledge for the Truth.

Therefore, make the Lord’s path be prepared in your hearts through an appropriate life and good complete works. This path will keep your life straight, and the Lord’s words will enter into you without any obstruction.

The scholar Origin.

The cries of St. John were not only uttered by his mouth but they were released by the deeds of all his life, declared in his inward life and outward appearance as well. His attire was like a silent and effective sermon, and also his food.

The evangelist says, (Matt. 3:4) “ Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.”

St John Chrysostom is amazed at how the evangelist speaks of the mission of St. John the Baptist, which was prophesied by Isaiah the prophet, and there speaks of his clothing and his food! He described his appearance to remind the Jews of Elijah the zealous prophet, for he came as Elijah did, before the Lord. By such an appearance, moreover, he presented to us a lesson in the ascetic life away from the life of luxury.

As St. John Chrysostom says, “ I wish we could forget this kind of life, so spoilt and frivolous. Repentance can never be established on a life of luxury, both at the same time. Let John the Baptist teach you this matter by his clothes, his food, and his dwelling place.”

St. John did not put on long robes like the Pharisees, and neither did he wear the silky clothes like those of the king’s entourage; he rather wore the appropriate clothes for his call to repentance.

(Matt. 3:6) “ And they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.”

John the Baptist preached repentance, and so the multitudes came to him to baptize them, confessing their sins. The Jews knew other baptisms such as the ‘intervention Jewish baptism.’ As for John’s baptism it was a symbol of the Christian baptism; it was begun by St. John the Baptist to prepare the way for the New Testament baptism. John’s baptism could not grant becoming God’s children. This was an issue solely granted by

the Christian baptism for the entering of the Lord Jesus 'the only begotten Son' to it. In its essence it didn't have the ability for the forgiveness of sins or for sanctification. It had the power extended as a symbol from the power of what is symbolized, just as the copper serpent had the power of healing through the cross that it symbolized.

+ St. John baptized with water and not with the Holy Spirit. This baptism was unable to forgive sins and so it washed with water the bodies of these to be baptized. But as for their souls, it couldn't wash them. So, why then was St. John baptizing? In his birth he was prior to Him who was to be born, and also in baptism he was prior to the Lord who was to baptize. Also, with his preaching he became the forerunner of Jesus.

Father Gregory the great.

+ Let us briefly take the various kinds of baptism:

Moses baptized, but it was in water, in the cloud and in the sea. But he did so in a symbolical way

St. John also baptized, but not in the Jewish ritual. It was not only in the water, but for the forgiveness of sins as well. But it was not in a complete spiritual method, for he did not add it was 'in the Spirit'.

Jesus baptized but it was in the Spirit, and this is perfectly complete.

There is also fourth kind of baptism, fulfilled by martyrdom and bloodshed. This kind Jesus Himself was baptized with, and it was highly honorable, more than the others.

In spite of this, there is a fifth baptism and it is more commonly adopted. This is the baptism of tears. King David constantly wept in tears every night on his bed, washing it with his sincere tears (Ps. 6:7).

St. Gregory Nazianzi.

1- Preparing the Way:

St. John prepared the Lord's way in the people's hearts. It is not by gathering them around him on his account, but rather by entering with multitudes of people into the life of repentance, confessing their sins. The Pharisees and the Sadducees came to baptize by him with their bodies but not with their hearts. This is why he blamed them (Matt 3:7) " You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ."

St. John was not a reed shaken by the wind, and would be shaken before those commanders in hypocrisy. He was extremely eager for their salvation, exposing the evil in them, calling them 'brood of vipers'.

The opposing chiefs agreed together against St. John, just as they did against Christ Himself. Pharisees used to represent the Jewish church authority, and copying the traditions in a deadly method. The Sadducees represented the opposing side to the authority, against traditions, denying the resurrection and did not believe in existence of spirits. The Pharisees looked on St. John as being a greater danger in a rebellion against the authority. The multitudes came from all towns to see a living example of a practical life of repentance. This was an issue of great scandal to the Pharisees and all the religious men in authority. As for the Sadducees, though they resisted those in authority, yet saw in St. John someone of

far greater danger than the men of religious authority. He won the multitudes in his side, and offered the spiritual concepts that destroyed the Sadducees ones.

At any rate, St. John stood bravely before the Pharisees and the Sadducees, putting them in shame and calling them 'brood' then 'brood of vipers'. It is said this animal When just born, the little ones eat their mother's belly and kill her, then they go out to the daylight. These people do the very same thing, for they are murderers of fathers and mothers (1 Tim 1:9), killing their own breeders with their hands."

St. John the Baptist continues speaking of the Pharisees and the Sadducees (Matt 3:8,9) "Boor fruit worthy of repentance do not presume to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our ancestor, for I tell you God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham".

The Jews, generally speaking, and their spiritual leaders in particular, depend on being physically related to Abraham the father of all fathers. But St. John made it clear to them this pretext is an obsolete one. If they claim they are 'Abraham's children' they are actually 'vipers' children, for they do not have Abraham's living faith, and neither do they follow his precepts. They rather carried the evil of vipers in them. According to ma's thoughts and behavior, he shows whose son he is. Those living unwisely are called 'sons of stupidity' (Chron. 30:8) and those living in iniquity are considered 'sons of iniquity' (Col. 3:6) and he who disregards his own destruction is called 'son of damnation' (John 17:12).

As a contrast, those who experience the new life resurrected in Christ are considered 'the sons of resurrection' (Luke 20:36). And those who love God's light, and seek to find it, these are called "the sons of light" (John 12:36) and 'children of daylight' (1 Thess. 5:5)...etc

If those commanders have depended on their relation to Abraham, they have to confirm being as such, in the same spirit our father Abraham lived in. Otherwise God will raise children to him from these stones, and He actually did so.

Out of the Gentiles that were so hardened, God raised sons to Abraham through the faith in Christ Jesus, Abraham who had seen Him and was overjoyed (John 8:56).

St. John Chrysostom sees this similarity came by when this nation was born through Isaac that was granted to through Sarah's infertile womb, as if it were hardened as a rock. It was as if it were dead as a stone, unable to deliver any children. God has risen out of it children to Abraham through the strength oh His Devine promise, and through Abraham's faith in God, the One able to resurrect from the dead. This is what its prophet meant to stay (Isaiah 51:1,2) " Look to the rock from which you were knew, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham and to Sarah who love you; for he was bout one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many." Here now He is You of His childhood for God have made him a father to them in a miraculous way, as if out of the rocks he has raised up children. Now also, He is able tp do likewise."

St. Augustine thinks these stones that have become children to Abraham point to the gentiles who worshipped the idols and have become stones. When they have accepted the faith which was Abraham's they have spiritually before his children. For he say's, It is meant 'by stones', that it is all the Gentiles, not because of their

ability to tolerate as the rocks that were rejected by the builders, but because of their stupidity and faith slothfulness. They have become as the things they worshiped, for they worshipped the silent dumb pictures, and hence they, too, became unfeeling. (Psalm 115:8) “ But when they began to worship God; so are all who trust in them.” But when they began to worship God, what did they hear concerning themselves? (Matt 5:45) “ So that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sunrise on the evil and out the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous”,; so man becomes similar to whoever he worships. Therefore, what is meant by the words (Matt 3:9) “ God is able to raise out of these stones children fathers to Abraham.” ? That is to say to become children of Abraham’s by following his example in his faith, and not by our physical birth. He moreover says, “ We were, ... in our fathers stones because we worshipped stones as gods out of these stones God will create us children to Abraham.

St. Jerome says, “God can make out of these stones, children to Abraham.” He points here to the Gentiles, for they are stones because of the cruelty of their hearts. We read (Ezekiel 36:26) “ and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” The rock or stone is a symbol of cruelty, and flesh is a symbol of gentleness. He wished to show God’s strength and ability to create out of dumb stones, a people of faith.

(Matt 3:10) “Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

What does he mean by saying “the ax” that cuts the unfruitful tree, or the trees that carry bad fruits, other than the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. This cross that attacks the root of our corrupt nature so the old man is destroyed, and setting up the new man instead; this is the likeness of the Creator who presents the fruit of the joyful Holy Spirit. He buries the ancient man in the waters of a baptism as in the tomb of the Lord, or throw him into the fire to present for us life’s experience. It is therefore not surprising that the prophet says concerning the Christian baptism, since it is the way for pulling down the ancient man and establishing the new one. He says (Matt 3:11) “ I baptize you with water for repentance, but One is more powerful than I is coming after me, I am not worthy to carry His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

St. Mari Jacob El Seroujy says, ‘The baptism is the great fire in which people are sealed to become ‘not dead’.

St. Caprianous says, “Baptism is where the old man dies, and the new one is born, as declared by the apostle, confirming we have become saved with the renewal washing.”

St. John the Baptist sees he is unworthy of carrying the shoes of our Lord Jesus. At another place he declares he is unworthy of untying His shoe, lace (John 1:27). What does he mean by saying so?

The word of God, the inconceivable, has become like One who puts on His shoes by means of incarnation, for He has become like one of us, walking among us. Therefore St. John the Baptist declares he is unworthy to carry this unsupportable mystery which is that of the incarnation, and neither is he worthy to loosen His seals (the laces) for this is quite indescribable.

St. Gregory the great says, “Who doesn’t know that shoes are made of the skin of dead animals? For the Lord has become incarnate, and appeared among the people as one of .../ for His godliness was worn by Him as a cover susceptible to death. Therefore the prophet says (Psalm 60:8) “ on Edom I hurl My shoe.: The Gentiles have been pointed to as Edom. Through the body He has become known to the Gentiles, just as the has come to us as normal. But the human eye can never penetrate the mystery of incarnation. There is no way whatsoever by which it is realized how the Word has become flesh, and how the high Spirit the Donor of life has become freshened up in a mother’s womb, and how He who has no beginning has become in her womb and has come to existence. Therefore, the shoe laces are nothing but the seals of the mystery. But John was not incapable to loosen or untie the mystery of incarnation. I know He was born after me, but I am absolutely unable of understanding the mystery of this newborn. “ Look John who is filled with the Spirit, the Spirit of prophecy, and the one enlightened with knowledge declares he knows nothing of this mystery.”

The secret of St. John the Baptist’s success in his modesty. When he says he is unworthy to untie the Lord’s shoe strings,

St. John Chripostom says, ‘ He is way higher than myself and I do not deserve to be the least of His slaves, because the untying of the shoe-strings is the most humble of all chores.”

He asked them for practical repentance that carried spiritual fruit, and offered them the baptism as the mystery in crucifying their old self and obtaining a new life. He spoke modestly saying he was not worthy of realizing the unsurpassed mysteries of the Lamb. He told them clearly of the coming of this Lamb as a Judge (Matt 3:12) “ His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will clear His threshing floor and will gather His wheat into the granary, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.”

In this way John the Baptist introduces the Lord Jesus as a Judge. He patiently leaves the wheat with the chaff for a while. But the time will surely come for harvest, and the wheat will be taken to the granary, and the chaff to fire. Today the righteous are living with the evil ones, the believers with the unbelievers, until the great day of the Lord comes in which He Himself will do the selection. His winnowing fork will be His hand, not given to anyone else. He alone knows the hearts, and is able to separate the wheat from the chaff in great wisdom, with no mistakes whatsoever.

St. Augustine assures us that if the wheat is there, and it is mingled with the chaff, this will not harm the wheat, and neither will it lose its crown. The time will come for it to be separated from the chaff, which will be burnt in fire,

This chaff will not destroy those who are the wheat of the Lord. They are few when compared to others, yet they are a great harvest.

(Matt 24:31) “ And He will send out His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” The elect will cry out saying (Psalm 12:1) “ Help, O Lord, for there is no longer anyone who is godly; the faithful have disappeared from humankind.” The Lord will tell them (Matt 24:12,13) “ But the one who endures to the end will be saved (when sin will be strapped).”

3- The Baptism of Christ:

(Matt 3:13-17) “ Then Jesus came for Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him”. John would have prevented Him saying ‘I need to be baptized by You, and do You

come to me?’ But Jesus answered him “ Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as He came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to Him and He saw the Spirit of God descending like as dove and alighted on Him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.”

The church celebrate the baptism of Jesus Christ since it is God’s appearing, in which the Holy Trinity is declared is Him. Many have come to the river Jordan confessing their sins, but with Jesus in the waters, is reality has been revealed as One of the Holy Trinity. He came amongst the sinners to be revealed, and hence we can be aware of His mysteries not just rationally, but to experience His tremendous work in us. St. Augustine speaks about the appearance of the Holy Trinity in the baptism, saying, “ Next to the river Jordan, we look and contemplate, as if it is a godly scene before us. Our God Himself has been declared to us, for He is the Trinity. Jesus came to be baptized by mans of John, the Lord by means of the slave, an example of modesty. In humbleness He showed us love has been perfected and fulfilled. When John told Him ‘ I am the one in need to be baptized by You, and You are the One to come to me?” He answered, “ Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.”

When the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in the shape of a dove, a voice from the heavens followed, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Here we have the Trinity as if separated: the father in the voice, the Son in man, and the Holy Spirit in the shape of a dove. Here we can see the Holy Trinity distinguished One from the Other. They are the one God, and yet, the Son is other than the Father, and the Father other than the Son, and the Holy Spirit is not with the Father or the Son. We know this Trinity is unutterable, dwells in Him, renewing all, creating, calling, condemning and saving. This Trinity as we know is unutterable and inseparable.”

We can realize to what extent the church is concerned about baptism from the words of St. Jerome, “The Savior Himself did not preach the kingdom of heaven until after His sanctification in the Jordan, by being in the water on His baptism.”

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Chapter IV

The King's Victory

When the king is enthroned it is essential for him to present for his people something appropriate for his kingly role. This is why there starts an open conflict against Satan for the account of this people .so they can be granted victory. He Them away from Satan's kingdom and establishes them as a kingdom of his own .The Lord gets into this battle for the sake of this people, and every triumph is only given for their account.

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1-The Trial and Temptation :

The temptation of the Lord Jesus occupies a major role in our salvation since it is part and parcel of God's work in salvation.

The evangelist spoke in detail making clear the times of the temptation, and the role of the Holy Spirit in it, as well as the place when the temptation took place, and who the tempter was ,the link between the temptation and fasting. The temptation is of three kinds; how you are attacked, and the way to overcome, and the fruits of that trial.

Firstly; The time of the temptation;

(Matt.4: 1)" Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil". The evangelist begins speaking about the temptation by the word 'then'. It is as if the temptation is a normal matter, essential for the Lord to encounter in an open conflict with Satan, the ruler of the dark kingdom.

Prior to that, the Lord had accepted to go into the baptism waters instead of us. He had opened the way to heaven, granting us the right of being the Father's children in him. It is just like the kingdom of heaven offered us by our Messiah; our king has cost immensely. The issue did not end with his incarnation and his entering the baptism waters, but like moreover went into a long battle, one of its images, was seen in the temptation on the mount. It has also glittered in its perfection on the cross. We too, when we go into the baptism waters and wear Jesus Christ we are committed to

entering the battle aroused by the darkness. Behind every grace from God is a spiritual war. As St. John Chrypostom says 'Wherever Christ is present, there must be a spiritual war. The Lord Himself has opened the way of tribulation saying (Is. 63:3) ' I have trodden the wine press alone and from the peoples no one was with me. Each of us becomes zealous to climb with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the war land all by himself. There is no father or mother to support, he just carries in him the Lord Jesus the Conqueror who alone is able to fight with us and for us on the account of His kingdom in us.

St. Paul apostle saw in the Lord a living example for every soul that enters into the tribulation wilderness. He is not though, an outer, far away example to follow, but he is rather a living example overpowering us with the capabilities of triumph. His capabilities are considered our own, for the sake of

(Heb. 2: 17,18) therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement

for the sins of the people. Because He Himself was tested by what He suffered He is able to help those who are being tested.”

The secret of the Lord’s victory is that He entered the tribulation conflict without Satan having a place in Him.

Satan could not enter into Him or forcefully take what he has. For the Lord says (John 14:30) for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me. St. Paul the apostle also says (Heb. 4:15)”but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.

+The Lord has given us but his example, how we can triumph as He did when tempted.

Father Serapion

+Jesus our leader. Allowed himself to be tempted so as to teach His children how to fight.

St. Augustine

+Since He is our intercessor, who helps us to overcome tribulation and has become our example.

St. Augustine

+Indeed, it is appropriate that He who has come to die instead of us, to also overcome our trial with His own.

Father Gregory the Great

Secondly: the Role of the Holy Spirit

The evangelist says The Jesus was led us up by the Spirit into wilderness (Matt. 4:1). It is as if the Holy Spirit is the One that led Him to the battle. This was not haphazard, but rather to fulfill God’s plan, which gives pleasure to the Father and also the Son. He did not climb like one being led involuntarily. The Holy Spirit is only His Holy Spirit one in essence. What He does is only to fulfill the will of the Spirit, which is one with the Father’s will and the Son’s will.

He did not climb up the wilderness as one obliged to, or as a prisoner. He was rather led easily to the conflict

St. Jerome

+Satan went up to man (Adam) to tempt him but Satan cannot attack Jesus, it was Jesus who went up to him.

St. John

God’s love has urged the Lord Jesus to go to into conflict against Satan for our sake and account. In this way the Holy Spirit kindles the believers heart not only to bear the

temptation joyfully, ... by the Lord Jesus who dwells in him, but also to bend in love so as to consider the trials oh His bothers as His own. Their bondage is His and the moans over their weakness and suffers for every soul's sake that is careless about the salvation way. After being a sign of God's wrath, these tribulations have become a gift God allows for His children so they carry the victory that is Christ's' in them

+ Satan's temptation are directed mostly aquarist those who have been sanctified, for he is all the more eager to obtain victory over the righteous.

St. Hilary, bishop of Boitier.

+ It was not only Jesus who was led to the wildness bye the Spirit, but all the children of God as well, those filled with the Holy Spirit. They are not convinced of being slothful, but are urged by the Holy Spirit to do something great. They therefore go out to the wildness as if struggling with Satan where there are unjust deeds motivated by Satan. This is because all of the righteous ones are out of this world and body. They have no will that belongs to the world or to the body. They just go out to the wildness to be tempted.

St. John Chrysostom

God does not take away temptations, but He rather allows us to experience them. St. John gives us the following reasons:

Firstly: To inform you that you have become of greater strength.

Secondly: To keep you humble and not to be puffed up with your great gifts, since temptation has pressure on you.

Thistly: Moreover, to make evil Satan be assured that with temptations you have absolutely left him, and you have escaped his grasp.

Fourthly: By temptation you become more strengthened and harder than steel.

Fifthly: To obtain a clear guide to the treasures promised you. Satan does not wish to fight you unless he sees you in greater honor. As an example of, at the beginning he attacked Adam, because he saw him in great honor. For the very same reason, Satan got prepared for the fight against Job because he saw him crowded in glory, praised by all.

Father Tadros presents several reasons for God allowing those temptations to happen. One of which is for correcting us and making us more distinguished. It also could be because of certain sin we committed, or to reveal the glory of God, or may be as a sign of God's punishment for us.

- a) So as to test them, as we have read about the righteous Abraham and Job, and other uncountable saints who have faced tribulations.
- b) For the sake of correction; when God disciplines those who are righteous on account of their simple involuntary sins and lapses. He wants to uplift to a greater to a greater level of purity. This is according to the words (Heb. 12:5-8) " My child, no not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, and lose heart when you are punished by Him, for the Lord disciplines those who He loves, and chastises every child whom He accepts...for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not His children."
- c) As a punishment for sin, as God threatened to do by inflicting the children of Israel with plaques and diseases (Deut. ...32:24) "The teeth of beasts I will send against them, with venom of things crawling in the dust".

- d) Indeed, we find a fourth cause mentioned in the Holy Book, it is that the hardships boon lit upon us are simply to reveal the glory of God and His deeds, as the Gospel says (John 9:3) “ Neither this man nor his parents sinned, he was born blind so that God’s work might be revealed in him.”. Also (John 11:4) “ This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for the glory of God so that the Son of God may be glorified through it”.
- e) There are others kind of inflictions that blight those who disregard the sinful ties in their life. We read about Dothan, Abiram, ... and Koroh that were punished. Also about those spoken of by the apostle (Rom 1:26,28) “ ...God gave them up to degrading passions God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done”. These are all considered deserving punishment because they are not worthy to be healed by God’s care, the Giver of life.

We may add to the previous justifications an important matter in the believer’s life, which is that temptation is a right and suitable climate for the crucified Messiah to be transfigured in the believers life. At the beginning of the temptation, Satan was doubtful about the personality of the Lord Jesus. He constantly asked the question “If you are the Son of God..”. But when the Lord overcome him, angels came to minister to Him, and Satan was expelled away from the face of the Messiah, not through words, but through deeds. As much as we go in conflict with the enemy, the Messiah is revealed, He who dwells in us, and declares His Kingdom in us. It is there that the angels serve us and Satan’s weakness is revealed before us, and also before the Lord Jesus who works in us. Indeed, what the wise Christian takes as blessings in a certain tribulation is not equal to what he obtains because of his worship for long years at relaxing times! The cross is the panorama for the crucified Messiah to appear in His Holy bride!

Thirdly: The Place of the Tribulation:

The Lord Jesus chose the wildness to be the site for the tribulation, in other words, it is the open battle filed between Him and Satan. The choice of this site offers us spiritual concepts that concern our life with God, among which are:

- a) According to the Jewish traditions, the devil and evil spirits are looked upon as to dwell in the wildness, barren places and graveyards...etc. It is as if the Lord Himself wished to face the battle with Satan on his own land, i.e. like someone in the lion’s den. When speaking of St. John the Baptist in the previous chapter we saw how he set out to preach in the wildness of Judea, forerunning to the Messiah, the King, the human nature as a barren wildness, so he would change it to paradise with the waters of His Holy Spirit. I can say that the battle field is in fact the ‘wildness of the human nature’, which has become barren and a homeland for the devils. The Lord entered it to take it away from those that Satan had possessed to establish his kingdom in it. In this way, every sinner realizes that the spiritual battle is not his own, but it is rather the battle of God with Satan. As for the sinner, he is only the site of the battle and its field; and if he hides behind the Messiah, he will overcome by Him.

- b) The Lord was led up to the wilderness to be tempted, declaring that wherever the person is in isolation, that is to say in the wilderness, the devils get bold enough to fight him. But the Lord was not in inward isolation, since He never came to be separated from His Father and His Holy Spirit. He did not get isolated from humanity either, it was rather there in His heart. In other words, he was in isolation according to the body, outwardly, but not inwardly. This is why there was no place for the enemy in Him. Likewise, if we become isolated from God and people, Satan finds a dwelling for him in us. I mean the inward isolation; that is to say, lacking the love for God, and being a member in the spiritual church. Satan finds us all by ourselves and he overcomes us. But if we are in love unity with God and people, even if it is in apparent isolation, we shall overcome him.

St. John Chrysostom says, "Look where the Spirit leads Him; not to a city, or a public place, but to the wilderness.

In this way He lured the devil, giving him an opportunity not only by fasting but also by means of the site. It is at this point in particular, that Satan wrestles with deserted people left all by themselves. He did likewise with Eve at the beginning when he caught her all by herself, away from her man.

When Satan sees us among others, all in one unity, he has not enough confidence to attack us. We are greatly in need of constantly assembling together so that we wouldn't be exposed to Satan's attacks."

Isolation at this point does not mean to be physically separated from others, but to be isolated in a heart filled with selfishness, a heart unable to enclose others within. This heart only asks for what concerns Him only, but not for others. As the wise one says (Prov. 18:1) "The one who lives alone is self-hen." God reproached Israel for its evil, He said (Hosea 8:9) "For they have gone up to Assyria, a wild Wandering alone". St. Jude describes the heretics (Jude 17,18) "there will be scoffers, indulging their own ungodly lusts. It is there worldly people, devoid of the Spirit..."

Fourthly: Who is the Tempter?

After the evangelist had confirmed that it was the Holy Spirit that led Him up to the wilderness to be tempted, he made it clear that the tempter was Satan himself. In Greek he is called 'Diabolos' i.e. the one to complain. He has no other work than to complain of us so as to stop God's mercies from reaching us. He was also called Satan i.e. the one to resist. He is an opponent who never ceases to resist us, as the apostle says (1Pet. 5:8) "Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour."

St. John Chrysostom Says, "Satan was desperate when he saw Jesus fasting for forty days. But when he saw Christ fasting, he began to hope once more. 'the tempter came to Him (Matt 4:3). You too, if you fast, and suffer from a certain temptation do not tell yourself 'I have lost the fruit of my fasting.' Because if you fast, and are tempted, you will overcome that tribulation.

Fifthly: The link between fasting and temptation:

War begun with the beginning of the forty days fasting. As St. Luke the evangelist says (Luke 4:1,2) "... and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days He was

tempted by the devil. It was severe when He got hungry. Hunger was like Satan's luring to argue with Him. At the same time, fasting is the weapon the Lord provides to His believers to shield themselves during the spiritual battles, blended with prayer. The Lord was not in need of fasting, since there was no sin in Him. But He fasted so as to sanctify our fasting with His own. He encourages us to fast, just as a mother who tastes the medicine before her sick child so He, too, would drink it.

+ In your hunger, draw near to Him, so He would teach you the greatness of fasting, and how it is the strongest shield against Satan. It is necessary that after the baptism bowl, one has to fast, and not to go to luxury, eating and drinking. He fasted not because He needed to, but so as to teach us, without controlling your tummy, Adam was kicked out of paradise and the flood occurred in Noah's time, and thunder befell Sodom. By committing adultery, there came the warning to control the tummy. This is what Ezekiel meant by saying (Ezek. 16:49) " This was the guilt of your sister Sodom; she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease." In this way also, the Jews indulged in their great evil by slipping into iniquity through their drinking and their indulgence,(Is . 5:11, 12).

St. John Chrysostom

+When there is excessive conflict by the tempter, we have to fast, so that the body could perform the Christian duty in the war against the world passions. This is by repentance and urging the soul to triumph, all in modesty.

St. Augustine

Father Hillary, bishop of Boitier says, " He hungered after forty days... This does not mean He was defeated as a result of asceticism, but rather in submission to the human law".

The Lord has fasted for forty days, and the church likewise sanctifies this forty days fasting, since it has been sanctified by the Lord Himself. The church presents the issue of temptation' at the beginning of the fasting reading to announce to its children that where there is struggle there comes war. And where war is, there must be spiritual struggle, through fasting and prayer.

Why has the Lord hungered at the end of forty days? This is to confirm his humanity, for if he fasted more than Moses (ex. 24:18) or Elijah

(1 kings 19:8) they would have through His shadow, not having a real body as we do. He hungered so as to give the chance to renew the war with Satan. St. John Chrysostom says 'Satan became desperate when he saw Jesus fasting for forty days But when he saw Him hungry, hope begun to rise once more, and it was then that the tempter came up to Him." As for the number '40' this has a symbolic meaning. St. Augustine thinks number 40 implies number '10' four times. Number 1'10' points to our complete blessing, or to 'knowledge'. Number '4' points to 'time'. Therefore the number 40 signifies the perfection of our time in a blessed life or a life full of knowledge.

The number 4 points to time because the cycle of the year contains four seasons (summer, winter, autumn, spring). The cycle of the day includes four hourly stages (dawn, noon, evening, nighttime)

The number 10 points to the completeness of knowledge and blessedness, for this includes the knowledge of the Creator (3) that is to say the Holy Trinity, in addition to His creation of man (number 7 = the soul according to the model of the Trinity + the body of the world – the four corners of the world).

10 (the perfection of the knowledge) = 3 (the knowledge of God) + 7 (the perfect knowledge of man)

Moreover, the fasting of the Lord Jesus for forty days, signifies our commitment to abstinence all the days of our estranged life, so as to live a totally blessed life. Also, so as to have a sincere knowledge towards God and His creation.

Father Gregory the great gives us another interpretation for number '4'. He says, "In this earthly dead body here are four elements. Through this same body we submit to the commandments of God and the commandments of the law given to us through the Ten Commandments. Through the bodily passion we have scored the Ten Commandments. Therefore it is only fair to discipline that very same body four times ten times".

Sixthly: The first temptation or the 'bread' temptation:

(Matt. 4:3,4) "The tempter came and said to Him,

"If You are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread. But He answered 'It is written' One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

The devil was confused when he saw Him whom heavenly.

Father spoke of saying 'This My beloved Son' during the baptism to get hungry. He was bewildered about Him, and this is why in every temptation he wished to be assured He is the Son of the God, saying 'If you are the Son of God'. St. Jerome also says; Satan wished to know by means of these temptations if He were truly the Son of God. But our savior was very accurate in His answers, and left Satan skeptical. 'Satan wished to use the same weapon he uses when he attacks humanity. It is the weapon of doubts about the Fatherhood of our God to us. About his care and protection to us. As for the Lord's approving weapon \, it is the Word of God. In every temptation, relies on God's written word saying 'It is written'. In this way He carries us to Him as God's word incarnate so we hide in Him, cling to the written word by which we condemn the devil himself. The apostle says (2Cor. 6:3) 'Don't you know we shall judge angels?'

The first temptation was that of the bread, or the temptation of the 'tummy,', a satisfied soul tramples even on honey. The enemy can not find a place inside us for himself, if our souls are filled with the Lord in a state of satisfaction and overflow. In this state we are similar to the life of angels, and the tummy Has no power over us.

+ The first man yielded to the tummy and therefore he was expelled from paradise to the valley of tears.

St. Jerome

+ Just as the resurrection provides us with a life equal to that of the angels, those same angels have no food. This is enough to believe that man who lives according to the

rituals of angels will be liberated of this act _____ that of being enslaved to food and drink.

St. Gregory El Neissy

Be assured that the devil attacks the heart by means of filling up the tummy.
Father John of Chrysostom

Satan asked of him to change the stones into bread. But as t. says “the Savior decided to overcome Satan not by disposition (the changing of stones into bread) but by humility he also refused to change the stones into bread to declare that he who does not feed on God’s word does not live.”

St. Jerom

+Be master over your turnery before it over powers you, that who feed his greed, and hopes to overcome it by the spirit of vulgarity is similar to he who puts out fire by using oil.

St. John Klimakos

+Essayer, because of his greed, lost his prime hood and became his brother’s killer
St John Chrysostom

Seventhly: The Second temptation: on the pinnacle of the temple: (Matt. 4:5-7) “ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the son of God, Throw yourself down, for it is written “He will command this angels concerning you and on their hands they will bear you up, lest you dear our foot against a stone.” Jesus said to him, “Again, it is written, “Do not put the lord your God to the test.”

Satan offers us his temptations in sweetly coated words that are full of poison. “This words are smoother than oil whereas they are sharpened swords. “ He uses the word of God after deviating it. In (Psalm 91:11,12) it says “For he will command his angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways.” This is a sign of God’s constant care of us. Satan used this to push the lord Jesus to tempt his Father. Also Satan wished to ruin his mission away from that if carrying the cross, and exposing his ability to ask the angels to protect him instead of passing through the life of suffering.

St. Jerome says, “The devil interprets the written words wrongly. It was more appropriate for him to complete the same Psalm which is addressed against him that says you tread upon the serpents and scorpions and vanquish the lion and dragon. He speaks of the support of the angels as if they were weak and in need of help. But he is deceitful, for he never mentioned he would be trodden on by feet.”

What is so bitter is that Satan struggles with the children of God in the holy city on the pinnacle of the temple. This is the very highest of the holy sites, and he actually never ceases to fight us whenever we may be.

Satan's words to Jesus to throw himself down are commented in by St Jerome "there are constantly Satan's words, for he wishes that downfall of all."

St. John Chrysostom was greatly touched as to how patient the Lord Jesus was ever in his dealing with Satan during the tribulation, He says, "Jesus did not deride him or rebel against him, but very greatly he talked with him for the second time out of the Holy Book. He teaches us how to overcome Satan not by miracle making, but by being tolerant and long suffering, and not to do anything with the aim of pride and vain glory."

Eighthly: The third temptation: The easy way : (Matt. 4:8-10) "again the devil took them to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor, and he said to him "all these I will give you, if you fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, " away with you Satan! For it is written " worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."

Satan was called a liar, and a father to liars; he never ceases to deceive with his lies. This is his nature, which he cannot get rid of. He thought he was able to deceive the Lord by saying 'All these I give You, and there is no need for the cross if only You worship me.' These are the same blows the adversary uses against so many. He opens the quick feasible way to fulfill goals that seem successful and effective. But the Lord was not deceived, because He knows the real power of His Father, and what is His Father's is only His own...He was in no need of anything. In this way the believer is aware of the richness of his heavenly Father, and his eyes are open to see he is an heir with Jesus. The adversary will not entice him in any way, however easy or quick or be it a fulfillment of xxxxx or any temporary honor of any sort.

St. Jerome says " He showed Him the transient glory of the world from the top of the mountain. But as for the Savior, He came down to the bottom places to overcome Satan in all humility." St. Jerome also says, " You are so proud and puffed up! Satan does not possess the entire world so to give his kingdoms away. But, rather, as you know it is God alone who grants the kingdom to so many.

Anba Antonious thinks the words of the Lord ' Get away Satan' is a grant offered by the words of the Lord ' Get away Satan' is a grant offered by the Lord to His believers. They are able to speak of Jesus who dwells in them, the very same words in full authority. He therefore says " Let Satan be put to shame by our means, because what the Lord says is said only for our sakes. When the devils hear these words from us, they flee away through the Lord who has rebuked them by these words."

These three temptations the Lord faced and overcame are the very same temptations that faced Adam and had met his downfall as a result, when he was in paradise. These are greed, vain glory, and covetousness. The adversary lured him to eat and fill his tummy, though this was not allowed him, and to become he and his wife as God. Consequently he would obtain the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. What the first Adam fell into, the second Adam overcame. As the eternal glory will be ours through the last Adam.

St. John Chrysostom thinks these three tribulations enfold all the rest of the other tribulations," It seems to me that with reference to the major tribulations, this speaks of all the ordeals as they are included in it. This is because the leaders of evil, which are

countless, are these: to be enslaved to food and work for the sake of vain glory and to yield to the madness of riches.”

The evangelist concluded his speaking of tribulations saying that Satan left Him and angels came to serve Him and minister to Him (Matt 4:11). St. Luke the evangelist says that Satan left Him for a while (Luke 4:13). War never ceases or gets peaceful. But with every victory the angels rejoice, and they come to us carrying this victory as a crown of glory which uplifts him to heaven for our eternal account. They serve us here, not in the bodily service, but in spiritual service. They therefore cherish us as our guards do.

St. Jerome says, “Tribulation comes prior to victory then the angels come to serve to make firm the of the victorious ones”.

St. John Chrysostom says, “After your victories that spring up from His victories, the angels receive you as well, and praise you and serve like your guards would do, in every day”.

Father Serenus speaks of the unceasing war of the devils against us, saying, “The evil spirits fall in grief because they perish by our means, in the same way they desire our own perishing. But their defeat does not mean they will leave us alone with no return”.

2- His departure to Galilee.

The Lord Jesus departed to Galilee. He left Nazareth and came

To live in Capernaum, by the sea, in the suburbs of Zebulon and Naphtali (Matt 4:14-16) “so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: ‘Land of Zebulon, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.’

The Galilee region is kind of circular and includes twenty cities that Solomon gave us gifts to Hiram, king of Tyre. The Jews were rather few, and most of the inhabitants were Phoenicians, Greeks and Arabs. This is why it has been called the ‘Galilee’ of Nations, or Gentiles. The condition of this region reached its very worst level. Then the Lord Jesus came, the Teacher of humanity, the sun of righteousness who shines on those sitting in darkness, (Isaiah 9:1,2).

As for Capernaum which means ‘the Comforter’, this is considered one of the most important regions in Galilee. It is a Roman citadel well xxxxxx fortified by Roman commanders.

3-The Calling of the Disciples:

At the sea of Galilee the Lord called the two brothers Simon Peter and Andrew and also the other two brothers James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

The sea of Galilee is a sweet water lake, 13 miles long. Galilee is on the west boundary, where the river Jordan pours its waters in the north. This is called Genesareth and the sea of Tiberias. It derives its names from countries linked to it from various angels.

From Galilee, where there is jet darkness, and a place scorned and disregarded, Jesus called four of His disciples. They were fishermen, and as St. Paul says (1 Cor. 1:17) “He chose the ignorant of the world to put to shame the wise ones”. Origen, the xxxxx says, “It seems to me that if Jesus had chosen some of the seemingly wise ones, of the ability to think and speak with the multitude, and if He had used them to preach His teachings, then

many would have doubted that He used similar ways as the philosophers who are leaders of a certain sect, and His teachings wouldn't have seemed from God".

St. Jerome says, " The first ones to be called to follow the Savior were illiterate fishermen. He sent them to preach so that no one relates the change of the believers to eloquence and knowledge, but rather to the work of God".

4-Preaching and Work:

When the Lord Jesus called his disciples to work in His kingdom, He wished to make clear that His message was not for an earthly kingdom, and neither was it to get rid of the Roman political burden as the Jews thought, but rather to liberate the heart of the power of sin so that He reigns over it.

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The King's Constitution (1)

The average list provided us with the King's constitution, or the message of the throne, which He declared to go people. This is to be committed by His kingdom. It has been called the Sermon on the Mount, because the Lord Jesus delivered it when sitting on the mount

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1-Introduction to the constitution:

The Sermon or the Mount composes the three chapters 5,6,7 of the gospel of our teacher St Matthew. The fathers of the first church were concerned about it, as well as the non-Christian wise men since it presents a live constitution for a perfect complete life. St Augustine says," In it there are all the excellent principles necessary for a perfect Christian life."

The evangelist began to declare this constitution with the introduction (Matt5: 1.2) "When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up the mountain: and after the sat down, His disciples came to their, then He began to speak, and taught there saying" The Messiah the King met his people on the mount to speak to them, and declare the constitution for His kingdom. In the old times, Moses the prophet went up the mount to receive the law after fasting for forty days. This is in addition to a lot of preparation performed by the priests, The Levites and the people. It was not possible for anyone other than Moses to receive the law or to hear God's voice.

They just saw the mountain in smoke, with thick clouds surrounding it, and thunder roaring. But now the word of God has descended in the form of a slave, to set down with humans on the mount speaking directly, in simplicity, to them.

The mount, as St.Augustine says, signifies the lofty spirit. This spirit has been uplifted above temporary matters, and was soaring in the heavens. On this mountain God's holy city appears, which can never be hidden. The holy church appears, embellished by the life of the saints. On this holy mount, the lord Himself ascends so as to speak to his people .The mount there fore, is a true witness for they're through the practical sanctified life.

Moreover, the mount points to there lofty souls of the fathers and prophets of the Old Testament, as well as to the disciples and apostles of the New Testament, since they all represent one high mountain. The Lord has sat on it speaking, because this is the goal of the law and the prophecies, which leads us to the Messiah, the Savoir. Furthermore, it is the goal of the preaching and listens to Him.

When the Lord sat on the mount, His disciples came to Him. As St. Augustine says, "To be Physically close to him and listen to His words, as well as being spiritually close to Him and carry out His commandments".

Indeed, whenever we enter the divine commandment by practicing it, the Holy Spirit that supports us in fully carrying it out. This is like a high mountain where we find our Jesus speaking to us with His divine mouth calling to us and we respond understandingly.

"He opened His mouth and taught them saying "God was not used to speaking to us directly with His divine mouth.

He used to teach us through His deeds with us His constant care. He furthermore, spoke to us through the constant prophecies. But now, He has come to speak to us with His mouth directly. The expression 'he opened His mouth in Greek, Points to the importance of the subject matter, and its propriety on one hand, and on the other what is said springs directly from the speaker.

It is not reported by others, that is to say it springs out of His thoughts, and inspiration, and from the bottom of His heart. The Lord has opened His mouth to tell us the most important message in His constitution, revealing what is inside Him, and declaring His inner mysteries towards us. It actually opens this heart to us.

The verb 'taught' in Greek is in the past continuous. St. Matthew the evangelist says that Jesus opened His heart's sacraments, so as to teach them the mysteries of His love to them.

2- The Blessed nesses:

The Messiah, the King began His constitution with the positive side. He did not mention the forbidden things, but he rather attracted them to the 'righteous life' He revealed to them the rewards so as to motivate them. St. Augustine says, 'As long as we love to see the rewards, we have to continue the struggle to attain them. Let us be kindled in our eager work to obtain them.'

1-Blessed are the poor in spirit:

What is this 'poor in spirit' other than the life of humility, through which man realizes that without God he is nothing, at all.

His heart is therefore opened in humility so as to enjoy His blessings, Adam's sin was to disregard God's will by fulfilling his own personal will. This is why the truly rich word of God came in poverty for our sake. He not only declined His glory, but also by declining His will, which is one with that of the Father, In representing us he became poor so as to accept the richness of his good Father's will saying not my own will, but thine

Pride is the source of all downfalls, whereas humility or the poverty of the spirit is the entrance to the heavenly kingdom "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"(ch, 5:4)

As pride is the source of all evil, humility is the basis for all the control of the spirit. St. John Chrysostom.

Indeed, the blessed nesses cannot begin other than this beginning, since it is set to achieve the highest peak of wisdom 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10). On the other hand, Prides is the first of all sins"(Josh 10:15).

Let the haughty one search for the earthly possessions and let him love them, but "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"

Saint Augustine.

Indeed, there is no poverty more severe or more holy than when man knows about himself he is powerless and cannot defend himself. He asks for daily help from the goodness of others.

In this way he knows that every moment of his life depends on God's protection. He cries out every day for the Lord (Psalm 40:7) As for me I am poor and miserable, Lord take care of me."

This foundation of modesty has been set for the whole building to be erected on, in safety. If this modesty is taken away from us, even if this person has reached the heavens, then it will absolutely collapse and has a deplorable downfall. He might have fasted and prayed, and has been charitable and decent, and doing all sorts of good deeds, yet, without this modesty all what you have gathered inwardly will surely fall down and perish.

St. John Chrysostom

The poor in spirit is humble, fears the word of God, and confesses his sins, he does not pride himself on his merits and his righteousness.

The poor in spirit is he who praises God when good things happen, and rebukes him when things happen to come.

The poor in spirit does not hope for anything else but God, because the hope in Him alone does not fail.

The poor in spirit is he who renounces all what he possesses and follows Jesus. He is hence freed from all earthly burdens and flies to Him as if on wings

St. Augustine

B- Blessed are they who mourn

The modest person flies in the spirit to the "spiritual grief" There, he realizes his sins, and feels its burden, and is truly repentant. He is aware as well of his human weakness, and grieves for every downloaded soul.

The Lord was sinless, yet he took us to this door' the spiritual grief" He these met the wicked ones (Mark3:5)"He was grieved at their hardness of heart". On entering Jerusalem,

He went over the hardness of their hearts. Jesus was found weeping but He was never found laughing! Indeed, He was pleasant, pouring His peace on others, and never frowned, yet He was never found to laugh.

St Paul embodied his master's Spirit, and spent his years of service weeping in tears for the sake of everyone's salvation.

He said (Rom.9: 2)' I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart...for the sake of my own people, my hundred according to the flesh." He moreover said (2

Cor.2:4)"For I wrote you out of much distress and anguish of heart and with many tears.

Grief means to be sorry for losing loved things. But those who are called to God miss these things they were used to having in this world such as valuables, because they no longer are thrilled with them as before. If they have the joy of eternal things, then they are no more hurt, or very slightly so.

They are therefore comforted by the Holy Spirit, the comforter, that is thus called the Paraclete". So they would obtain joyfully the eternity on account of missing the temporary pleasures.

St. Augustine

Here, he does not mean those who generally grieve, but those who grieve over sin, since the other kind of grief is absolutely forbidden. These are they who grieve over an issue concerning this short life. This is what St. Paul declared clearly saying (2Cor. 7:10) "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret. He demands we are sorrowful not only for ourselves but also for the wickedness of others.

This quality has been attributed to the souls of saints such as Moses, Paul and David. Yes, indeed, all of these grieved over sins that did not concern them.

St. John Chrysostom

When God grants comfort and solace, even though you are inflicted by numerous sorrows, yet they become as icy surfaces that you stand on and which soothe you coolly. In truth, what God grants us is so much greater than what we tolerate concerning sorrows.

St. John Chrysostom

A long journey with no tears does not reveal the desire for seeing the mother country. If you desire something you're not in, then pour out your tears. You tell God (Psalm 55:9) that you have put your tears before His face, and that your tears have become your food day and night.

My tears have come to be my bread, and I was comforted in my affliction, I fed on it when I was comforted. I was hungered. Is there any righteous one who lacked tears as such? If he did not have these tears then he was not distressed over his estranged life.

Put out the fire of sin with your tears, and cry before the Lord, Cry and be comforted before God, who has made you, and He does not scorn what His hands have made.

He, who cries here, finds his solace, for he fears to cry again!

Let the tears be my portion now, so my soul would be comforted over its illusions. Let my body wear true health, which is immortality. Let no one tell me. You are happy for he who tells me so wishes to delude me.

St. Augustine

Just as when rainfalls cover the ground and produce fruits and this rejoices the people, likewise are the tears if they fall on the heart, spiritual fruits are produced as well as the souls spiritual and physical comfort together.

St. Macarius the great

A man dressed in the robe of holy pain granted by God to him, is like someone, dressed for a wedding, and he knows the joy of the soul's spirituality.

No one can contradict that the tears poured out for God, are useful and rewarding, we shall know its use when we depart from this world.

A person, who is on the road of continuous grief and moaning for the sake of God's love, is never in the loss of joy everyday.

St. John El Dergo

C- Blessed are the Meek

Constant sorrow over our sins and those of others polishes the soul and makes it humble. Whatever serious issue overcomes him can never make him lose its inward peace.

Humility in fact is not to be silent, but it is rather the strength of the inward spirit that is aware of the mysteries of eternal salvation, and therefore earthly matters do not disturb it. He understands its true message, and is not affected by vain trifles; He is like a lion that is not shaken before anyone who thinks he's provoking him. He is neither like the bird that is shaken badly by any action of a little child.

Likewise is the humble soul, for it is aware of God's abilities working in it, It comprehends the power of the spirit, and therefore it lives in inward humility, reflected by outer action.

The Creek word translated here 'humble' is used in describing the tamed animals. It is as if the Lord is blessing our native, which was previously fierce, and it has succumbed to God its trainer, It has therefore become a tamed creature, previously fierce and violent with others, and ever with itself.

It has become meek and submissive, and its instincts and motives have been tamed. As for the reward, it is to inherit the land which is "the body of dust" for previously it was fierce and rejected the spirit, but now to has become a servant to it, kindled with the fire of the Holy Spirit.

Humility does not mean a life of weakness or submissiveness, for the Lord has offered himself an example for humility. He said, learns of me, for I am meek and humble of heart. This is not because He was in need of any taming, but it is rather a natural humility, unacquired, by which He tamed us, He granted us His life in us, and we carry His humility inwardly.

The world considers a humble person as losing a lot, because of the deceit of the evil ones. But the Lord assured us of the reward, which is "the inheritance of the earth".

As St John Chrysostom says, the earth here means literally:

"When it is believed that the humble one loses his money, the Lord contradicts this." He does not only motivate us with the absolute blessings to come, but also with the present blessings, what He says does not mean He is limiting His blessings to present issues only, but that he links them to other blessings as will. When He speaks of spiritual matters, He does not disregard the matters pertaining to the temporary life. Neither does He, by promising the matters concerning the present life, limit His promise to this alone.

St. Augustine thinks 'the earth' here, means the land of the living mentioned in the book of Psalms (142:5) where the soul rests by providence. This is like the body that rests on land and feeds on its food.

We can interpret 'the land' here symbolically, since it is the evil ones tied to earthly matters. Through Jesus Christ our Lord we have become a heaven; that with the modesty of our heavenly Christ we can inherit and gain this earth or land, and it too can become a heaven. This is because the wicked ones have accepted the heavenly life in them.

The land moreover points to the body; through the inward humility reflected on our behavior with others, not only makes others submit to us spiritually and are changed to heaven by means of the holy Spirit working in them, but also makes our body surrender to us and no longer resists the spirit.

St Augustine wares us that our understanding of the inheritance of the land should not been literal and becomes our goal.

He says, "You wish to possess the land, but beware of it possessing you. You will possess it if you become humble, and it will possess you if you are not so. When you hear this saying, that is to say of possessing the land, do not allow yourselves to be security greedy.

You want to inherit the land, be careful not to let the land inherit you. If you are humble you will inherit it, and if cruel, it will inherits you. You will truly inherit the land when you cling to the makes of heaven and earth!

Of what use is boasting in pride of miracles when you are humble and meek at heart? Are not you like those saying at the end ‘haven’t we prophesied in your name and in your name we have perfumed many miracles. And what do they hear? I do not know you, get away from me, you evil does.

St Augustine

The Lord finds rest in the humble hearts. But as for the disturbed spirit it is a place for Satan. The humble and meek inherit the land; or rather have authority over it. But as for the wicked ones, they will be expelled from their land.

St. John Clemakos

St. Ambrosios speaks in his first book of ‘the duties of priests about the humility a Christian has to be committed to. This concerns the priest in particular; in his inwardly life that touches his whole being upwardly, and it extends to all his behavior even in his worship and mission. We pick some of these excerpts:

“How beautiful is the virtue of meekness, and how sweet is its tenderness. This is apparent not only in our actions, but in our words as well, so we don’t pass the line, in our decent conversation, or even in the tone of the words which are unacceptable. Let our words be a mirror that reflects the mental image:

“Even in praise and hymns, we have to be conscious of our meekness. It is the first basis worthy to be followed.”

“One of the most important appearances of modesty is silence, so that all the other virtues settle down. Silence is not to be blamed unless it springs from the spirit of pride or childish behaviors”

“There is no doubt there is modesty in the look of the eye. This modesty in its turn takes away from the woman the desire to stare at a man, or the desire to be looked at by men.

“In our prayers, modesty is greatly acceptable and pleasing, and grants us great grace towards God”

“More than anything, we have to hold fast to humility in our action, in our features, in our walking. It is most probable that the physical action reveals the mental mood.”

D- Blessed are those who thirst and hunger for righteousness:

When the believer carries the humility of Christ unworldly, he inherits the land that all the more asks to be quenched and watered by Christ himself our lord. He cries out (Psalm42: 1)

“As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God “The Holy Spirit makes us enter through this hunger and thirst to a deeper unity with the Lord Jesus our righteousness.. He uplifts us to the Father’s embrace so we could see Him, and get satisfied with Him. The human s says therefore (Psalm17: 15)”As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness (in Christ);

When I awake I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness”

By means of the Lord Jesus, we enter to His Father’s embrace, so we see His face and get satisfied, for we have been awakened from our sleep, and carry His likeness in us.

When we thirst for God. The Lord Jesus comes to us, for He is the Rock that has been struck, and it overflows with the water of life. St Augustine thus says,” Our thirst is quenched by means of the rock in the wilderness, If you strike the Rock in the wilderness then the Rock is Christ, stricken by the roof so as to overflow with water, but to make it overflow, the Rock has been stricken twice, because the cross has two panels.

We can understand this statement, if we go back to the old congregation in the wilderness when they hungered and thirsted, Hunger for then was not merely a feeling in the empty stomach between meals.

The thirst was not merely the desire for some water to quench the ordinary thirst. The situation was a matter of life or death, hunger and thirst in the wilderness were not two supplementary or ordinary issues, and it was rather a struggle for life against death. Likewise is our eagerness for the Lord Jesus our righteousness. This is not secondary in our life, but it rather represents our life to eternity or our perish to eternity. In Greek the expression 'to righteousness', which means 'to all righteousness'. Our hunger and thirst is not for a portion of righteousness, but rather to enjoy the perfect righteousness. This means to rejoice in the Lord Jesus Himself, our perfect righteousness. I wish our inward man hungers and thirsts, and hence he would have the food and the drink special for him. The Lord Jesus has said (John6: 4)" I am the bread that came down from heaven." Therefore this is the bread for those who are hungry. Let us be eager for the drink like those who are thirsty (Psalms 36:9)"For with you is the fountain of life"

St Augustine.

If we wish to be filled, we have to hunger and thirst. We have to ask and entreat and knock like those hungry and thirsty. Satisfaction has to be preceded by hunger, so that man would not be disgusted with the bread offered him.

Let there be the thirst for wisdom and righteousness. You will not be satisfied with wisdom, and be failed with righteousness before this your life is terminated, and reach to where the Lord has promised you.

St. Augustine.

E- Blessed are those who are merciful:

The spiritual hunger urges us in the spirit to enjoy the Lord Jesus, and to liberate us to go to the Father's embrace.

The sign for this satisfaction is our joy in his qualities in us, especially the mercy filled with love. The Lord says (Luke6: 36)"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. "It is not a commandment to be observed, as much as it is a divine grant for us to be blessed with in our partnership with God, the merciful, in His Son.

Mercy is God's commandment to us, and is his free gift which opens our hearts not only with materialistic giving's to the poor, but also by carrying the merciful nature in all our behavior St John Chrysotom says," here it seems he is speaking not only about those who manifest mercy by offering money, but also about the merciful in their actions. To manifest mercy has many forms, and the commandment is very broad"

Mercy does not spring up from weakness or seclusion, but rather from strength. We recall the attitudes of Caesar Adrian us, when it was said that someone humiliated him before he became king. When he became king he told him' you have been saved, man, because to day I am king" In this way man realizes his royal position in being united with the king of kings. He embodies in him mercy, even to those scorning him, since it is a divine royal quality.

We notice the word" mercy' here, does not signify merely the materialistic donation, or even the feeling. It rather means the practical sharing others. It is as if we replace them, and feel their sufferings and hardships.

The lord himself had done so, he who has been merciful to us, drawing close to us, and accepting our nature, and bearing our sufferings. This is why St. Paul the apostle says (Heb13: 3) "Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; Those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves ever being tortured" If we share our brothers their sufferings, and support them with love and mercy, then the Lord Jesus himself will come to us in our pain to grant us His love and His mercy!
As a contrast 'to judge with no mercy is for him who has done no mercy; and mercy boots over judgment' (James3: 13).

The deeds of mercy are the seeds to the coming harvest. He, who is miserly when sowing, will also harvest miserly.

Where as he who sows plentifully, will likewise harvest plentifully. He who does not sow anything will not profit anything.

Give what you have, and you will be worthy of taking what is not yours!

St. Augustine

He who has no mercy is not worthy of God's mercy. He will have no portion of God's compassion by his prayers.

The martyr Kaprianos

He who has mercy on any man the Lord's door becomes open to his pleadings at all times.

A spiritual elder

If you see a miserable person, remember that though what is apparent is not the Christ, yet it is he who is asking of you and takes from you in the clothes of this one. But you are embarrassed if you hear it is Christ who is asking, and yet not give him.

St. John Chrysostom

F- Blessed are the pure in heart:

He who copies the Lord, and has mercy filled with love, then God will work in his heart his inward eyes are opened for seeing God. A pure heart is the inner spiritual eye that sees what is unseen.

'Purity as expressed in Greek signifies the washing and purification to remove the stains of clothes. It also signifies the selection of what is good from what is bad, as the chaff is separated from the wheat, and the army selection of the cowardly. It is also used as to mean the presence of a pure element, unblemished, as offering milk with no foreign element. Similarly is the heart that constantly kneels at the Lord Jesus' feet: this is constantly washed by the holy blood, and is purified from any particle. The Holy Spirit Himself that he has obtained joyfully in the process of the mystery of the baptism and the holy ointments, He will guard him. There will be no opportunity for an evil thought or a bad look to overcome him. He will permit no evil passion to have authority over him. In this way the heart is purified and is cleaned in all its heaviness, feelings and motivation. He does not ask for anything except God alone. He could see God through his faith in the Holy Spirit that dwells in him.

Let us cleanse our hearts by faith so as to be prepared for their who is indescribable, that is to say to the invisible revelation.

Let us struggle in purity, so that the one that uplifts man to God is purified

St Augustine

Here he calls: the pure' meaning those who have obtained all virtues, or those who have no feelings of wickedness in them, or those who live in piety, There is nothing we need

to see God as much as the last virtue. This is why St. Paul also says (Heb.12: 14)' pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord"

St. John Chrysostom

This is the goal of our love. This is the end by which we become perfect and do not perish. For, if we see God, we shall no longer be in need of anything of our actions or good deeds, or our pure desire and eagerness. Because what can we ask for if God is present? What will satisfy man if God does not satisfy him?

The Lord of glory has numbered the blessed ones, and the reason for them being blended. He mentioned their deeds and their rewards without mentioning that any of them has 'seen God'. But when He mentioned the purity of heart, he promised them to see God. This is because the heart contains the eyes by which you can see God. These eyes are spoken of by St. Paul the apostle when he said (Eph.1: 18)'the enlighten of your heart's eyes'. It is now enlightened by faith, for it is appropriate to its weakness. But in eternity it will be enlightened by witnessing God since it has become strengthened.(2Cor 5:6,7)' while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord for we walk by faith ,not by sight." Now that we have faith, it is said of us (1Cor.13: 12)" For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face"

St Augustine

What the entire divine holy books offer do not aim that purifying the inward vision, which prevents it from witnessing God.

Just as the eye has been created to see the temporary light, even if obstructed by something's that prevents a person from seeing that light, similarly is the eye of your heart. If it is hurt or injured, it diverts from the light of righteousness, and could no more dare or is able to look at it.

What is it that obstructs the purity of your heart's eye? It is the lust, stinginess, iniquity, excessive pleasure all these hinder the heart's eye and shut it in blindness.

St. Augustine

Are we to see God in a relief picture?

The fathers warn us of thinking about godliness in a three dimensional way witnessed by the physical eye. It is actually above all the senses. He declares Himself in the heart in a most wonderful way: In a way by which the heart is enabled to tolerate and be blessed with as if in glory.

The lord has blessed so many, but has not promised the witnessing of God except to those pure in heart. We do not see God in a certain place, but we rather see Him in a pure heart. We do not search for Him with the physical eye. He is not limited to vision or hearing by the ears and he is not known by His footsteps. He is rather though absent physically, Yet we see Him, He could also be present physically, and yet not see Him. All His disciples did not see him, and therefore he said (John 14:9)"Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?"(Eph.3: 18,19)" I pray that you may have the power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." He will see Christ and also the father.(1Cor 5:16)" for now we do not know Christ according to the body " but according to the spirit . May God have compassion and mercy on us and fill us with the fullness of God so we could be able to witness Him.

St. Ambrosios

Do not let yourself think you will see God face to face; lest with these thoughts you prepare your physical eyes to see Him, and search for a materialistic face to God. Be cautious as to who is He to whom you say honestly” My heart tells you...you face O Lord I desire “ search for Him with your hearts.

The Holy Book speaks of God’s face, His arm, His hands, His feet, His throne and His footstool ...yet do not assume this means human members, If you wish to be God’s temple, break down this vague statue ie.imagining God in a physical relief image. The hand of God means His strength, His face means knowing Him, His feet are his presence, and his throne is you, if wish. Indeed, what is God’s throne other than the place where he dwells? And where does God dwell other than in His temples? (1Cor 3:17)”For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.”Be watchful therefore for receiving God! (John 4:24)”God is spirit, and those who worships him must worship in spirit and truth.” Let the Ark of the Covenant enter your heart, and let Dagon fall if you wish (1Sam 5:3)

St.Augustine

G- Blessed are the peacemakers:

To witness God with a pure heart does not merely mean discovering God’s mysteries in thoughts. It is rather entering the divine life and become blessed with the partnership of God, so as to make the works of Jesus Christ i.e. ‘Peace’ since we are God’s children, St John Chryostom says,” Yes, this is the work of the only begotten Son, to unite those divided and reconcile the strangers, The Lord has been called “the prince of peace (Is 9:6). His gospel is ‘the gospel of peace’ (Eph 6:15) His kingdom is that of ‘righteousness, peace, and joy in the spirit ‘(Rom 14:17). As for the price to this peace, it is His precious blood shed on the cross.

St. Augustine thinks peace making is not an outward deed performed by man. It is rather a nature by which the sons of God are inwardly blessed with. This is by means of the inward peace that comes to dwell between the spirit and the body through the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus, then the kingdom of heaven is manifested in us.

The absolute peace prevails when there is no resistance God’s children are peace makes, for the children have to be like their fathers. They are inward peace makes, because they control the motion of their souls, and make it yields to what is correct ie to the mind and spirit. They also ...suppress their bostily passions. In this way the kingdom of God is manifested in them. A man becomes as such: All that is supreme and magnificent in man control with no resistance, the other physical elements. This is in addition to this magnificent element yielding to what is more perfect: this is the ‘Truth’, the only begotten son of God. Man cannot have authority on worldly issues unless his ‘self’ yields to what is greater than it. This is the peace that grants the good will power. This is the life of the wise man, the maker of peace.

St.Augustine

Peace is the power of Christians, (Phil 4:7)’ and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding.

Blessed are the peacemakers; not only by restoring peace to those unreconciled, but also to those who have peace inwardly,

If there is no peace in my heart, of what profit is to me that others are at peace?

St. Jerome

Christ our Lord is the 'Peace'. Let us keep peace, and it will protect us in Christ Jesus.

St. Jerome

Perfection in peace means everything is acceptable. There for the peacemakers are the children of God, for nothing contradict God, and the children have to be as their fathers. The peacemakers, within themselves, are those who prevail over their psychological tendencies, and make them yield to the mind. This means to the thought and the spirit, they have surrendered their bodily passions and have become the kingdom of God, where everything has become organized. Everything sublime and lofty in man commands what is a base, that which is shared in common between man and animal? In turn, what has become sublime in man, i.e. the thought and the spirit, is in essence yielding to what is greater and more sublime, ie. God.

Actually, it is quite impossible for you to judge who is baser than yourself, unless you submit to He who is higher than yourself. This is the peace granted by God on earth to those who have the good will power.

Do you wish for peace? Do righteousness, and peace is yours (Psalm 134:11)"

Peace and righteousness have embraced '

Let peace be a friend and a lover to you, and make your heart a pure bed for it. Let you be comfortably relaxed with it, with no bitterness at all. Let there be a sweet embrace, and a friendship that never ceases.

St. Augustine

(John 14:27)

"Peace I leave with you. My Peace I give unto you". He has given us this as an inheritance. He has promised us all gifts and rewards He has spoken of though keeping peace. If we are heirs with Christ, let us live in peace; if we as sons to God, we have to be peacemakers. It is appropriate for the sons of God to be peacemakers, with a compassionate heart, simple in talking, united in love, tied together firmly in brotherly love.

St. Kapriamos

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake"(Matt 5:10-12) "Blessed are those who are persecuted 'for righteousness sake', for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they have persecuted the prophets who were before you. Because we are children of God, by being united with the only begotten Son of God in the baptism water, we have to practice His work which is peace making. This is highly resisted by Satan, and he arouses against us even our very relatives. We notice in the previous blessings, the Lord addressed everyone in general. But at this point, in particular, He addresses those present. This is because the believer accepts the tribulations whether he is shepherded or is shepherd as personal gift presented to us from God

In the same way the Lord concluded his blessings, by the possibility of scorn and persecution he likewise promised the heavenly reward for those who bear this 'for righteousness' sake ', or as he says, ' for My sake '. He is our righteousness, and what is said about us deceitfully and scornfully, are lies.

The scholar Oreganos wrote to the two saints Ambrosius and Protokritos, when they were being judged in persecution aroused by Maximian Trax; he told them, "During the trial,

that is actually occurring now, I wish you to constantly remember that great reward prepared by the Father in heaven for those who are wronged and unjustly treated because of righteousness, and because of the Son of Man.(Acts 5:41)' they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name". If you are sad, call upon the Lord's Spirit in us, to keep that spirit of grief away, and wipe out the worry from your hearts.(Psalm 42:5)"why are you cast down , O my soul ,and why are you disquieted with in me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my help and my God." So, do not let our souls be frightened, even before the chairs of judges, or when facing swords raised to cut our throats. Our souls are preserved in God 's peace that surpasses all understanding. We can feel secure and at peace when we recall those who have left the body are alive with the God of all (2Cor 5:8).

When St.John Chrysostom suffered the pain of persecution from Audoxia, supported even by religious men, he wrote from his prison to the bishop Kiriakos:'When I was kicked out from the bishop Kiriakos:'When I was kicked out from the town, I did not worry. I said to myself' If the ear press wishes to cleanse me. Let her do so. Because the earth is the Lord's!! If she wished to saw me, I took upon Isaiah as an example! If she wished to drown me in the ocean, I remember Jonah! If I'm thrown in fire, I find the three youths that stood this in the cauldron! If I'm taken before fierce beasts, I recall Daniel in the lions' den!

If she wishes to stone me, St Stephan the first martyr is there before me! If she wished to behead me, let her do so, for the Baptist shines there before me! Naked have I come out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I leave the world! St Paul reminds me,' If I still please the people I am no slave to Christ.

St.Kaprianos wrote to some confessors, telling them 'In all these matters, we are more than victorious, for He who has loved us'

The Arrangement of the Blessings:

St John Chrysostom says 'Every commandment paves the way for the successive one, All the commandments put together are like a gold chain offered to us. The humble one for sure, is sorrowful over his sins. The grievous one becomes modest, righteous and merciful. He who is merciful and righteous and repentant is surely of a pure heart. These are the ones to make peace. He, who obtains all of these, is only being prepared for the conflict against dangers. He does not get disturbed when spoken of wickedly. He bears these sad tribulations that are so uncountable:

St.Augustine explains the Sermon on the Mount, and how the blessednesses are linked together, so also linked to the Lord's spirit of the seven deeds as mentioned in Isaiah the prophet (Is 11:2,3)

The arrangement of the rewards:

Some might ask if the rewards mentioned in the blessedness's are rewards of various matters, In other words they are asking if the poor in spirit will enjoy the heavenly kingdom, and will not be granted solace; or satisfaction, or mercy, or seeing God...etc? If all these rewards are one gift, then why does the Lord distinguish them one from the other.

To comprehend these rewards, we first have to be conscious of the word 'blessedness', Actually, it does not mean 'more thrill or joy ', it is a quality that touches the nature of a person.

This is why the Greeks called their Gods' blessed' or 'Makarious' and not 'joyful', Blessedness is concerned with a person's inward life, and not merely joy that springs from an outer circumstance surrounding him. It is as if the Lord in His blessed nesses has not presented to us any outer rewards. These are actually rewards that touch our inner nature, as we ourselves becoming the kingdom of God. We carry the same merciful nature that is God's in us, as well as His peace and purity, in this way the rewards are variable, but are completely perfect, and they touch the one inner nature from many angles.

Maybe this is what he meant when St. Augustine answered the question: 'Are the other blessed ones deprived of seeing God?'

For he says, 'Do not understand from these commandments and their rewards that the poor in spirit, or the meek, or the sorrowful. Or those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, or the merciful will not see God. Do not think that the pure in heart will see God! Whereas the others who are blessed will be deprived of seeing Him. All of these qualities concern the one and same person. All those blessed will see God. But they do not see Him because of their poverty in spirit, or their humility, or grief, or hunger or thirst for righteousness, or their mercy. They only see Him because of the purity of their hearts. This is similar to the various physical members of man, where each has a special function to do.

For instance we say 'Blessed are those who have feet because they walk, and those who have hands for they work, and those who have a voice for they shout, and to those who have a mouth and tongue for they speak, and to those who have eyes for they see likewise is the spirit, for humility paves the way to obtain the kingdom of heaven, and meekness paves the way to possess the land, and grief to obtain solace, and thirst and hunger for righteousness to obtain satisfaction, and mercy to obtain mercy also from the Lord, and the purity of heart to see God.

St Augustine

The Blessed nesses and our inward Christ:

The Lord commands us to be meek saying "Blessed are the meek" He moreover says (Matt 11:29) "Take My yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart! He also says 'Blessed are the peacemakers', whereas the apostle says about Jesus the Lord of glory that He (Eph 5:9) He has made the two into one, and has destroyed the barrier wall, which is enmity.

The Lord says "blessed are those persecuted for righteousness 'sake', and yet the Lord himself has been expelled out of Jerusalem to carry the shame of the cross. Furthermore, he says 'Blessed are those who mourn', and yet we find Him weeping and mourning over Jerusalem because of the burden of its sins (Luke 19: 42).

In short, we say that the qualities we obtain through the blessings are the same ones that pertain to the Lord Jesus himself. They are not just duties we struggle in all by ourselves. Therefore our entrance to the blessed life is only by means of our inward Jesus; He alone grants us to share His qualities in us. He is the secret behind our modesty, our peace, our tolerance in tribulation, and our sorrow over our sins and those of others as well! Let us possess him, and thus possess the partnership of His glory, in its deposit here, and its absolute perfection in the great day of the Lord. Let us hold fast on to Him and be blessed with the true life of blessing!

3-The Christian Mission:

(Matt 5:13) You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot! The Lord spoke of the blessedness as a spiritual ladder on which the believer is raised by means of the Holy Spirit so as to obtain the sanctified life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Then He made clear the believer's commitment to working in the life of others. He drew the similarity to that of the salt, which we cannot do without in any meal. He called it the salt of the earth' because it functions in the human life, that which has become land through their link to earthly beliefs.

The food salt, or sodium chloride, has certain unique properties that apply to the life of a true believer. We mention some of these.

A- this is the sole among all others, because whenever it is used within reasonable limits, is not apparent in its taste in the food, but it brings out the flavor of the food itself. If put too much in the food, it makes the food tasteless and flavorless, and the saltiness is apparent.

Similarity, it is appropriate for the Christian to melt in the life of others, but in moderation, without making them lose their personality, or talents or personal qualities, He does not have to make them an identical copy to him, just as a vessel in which he pours the personalities of others, and makes them lose their vitality, which will make them like too salty food. The spiritual Christian is he who is like a soft breeze that passes by so others could breathe the qualities of love, and not the feelings of strong winds.

B-Sodium chloride is composed of two elements: chlorine and sodium, both of which are poisonous and deadly. But put together they form salt that is indispensable in our daily food.

Moreover, the Christian is also formed of two elements: the spirit and the body. If divided apart by sin, they lose their peace, and become as dead, and man becomes an obstruction. For this reason the Lord Jesus intervened so as to grant the real peace by his Holy Spirit. He made the Spirit as well as the body to be subjected to one univard unity, so that the whole of man would be the secret behind the sweetness of others, and a witness to the Truth. Just as the spirit takes the leadership of the body in spirituality, the body too, in its turn, when sanctified, helps and supports the spirit: In that case, man will live in sanctification both in spirit and body. He will declare its inward unity in the Lord, and the work of God before others.

C-Food salt is one of the cheapest food items; it is easy to obtain in most of the spots in the world, yet it is so indispensable. Likewise it is appropriate for the believers to live in the spirit of humility as their Lord did. They offer their lives cheap, for the sake of their love to everyman whenever he may be.

St. John Chrysostom comments on the Lord's words to His disciples 'you are the salt of the earth', saying 'I do not send you to two towns, or ten or twenty, or to one nation as I have sent the prophets. I am rather sending you to the land, the sea and to the whole world, which has become in an evil situation. By saying 'you are the salt of the earth', He meant that all of the human nature has lost its flavour, and that we have gone badly because of our sins.

But the Lord warns us lest we ourselves would go badly; we who have to be like salt. Then, in that case, we will no one to salt us and to wipe out corruption away from us.

These words are addressed in general to every believer, and in particular to the shepherds and servants.

If, through you, the nations are protected from corruption, if you then lose the heavenly kingdom because of the fear of being temporarily kicked out; then, who are the ones to be sent by the Lord for the salvation of your souls, if He has sent you to save the souls of others?

St. Augustine

The priest intercedes to God for the sake of the sinful congregation, but these are no one to intercede for the priest when he sins.

St. Jerome

If others fall, they may obtain pardon; but if the teacher falls, is excused and he falls under severe penalty.

St. John Chrysostom

After He had spoken of the believers being the salt of the earth, He directed our mission as being the light of the world. He said (Matt 5:14-16) "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works, and give glory to your Father in heaven."

In our love to people, we are eager to serve them and blend into them as the salt in food, and then offer them by means of repentance, as good food the Lord is happy to receive. God therefore does not leave us to melt in the earth, but He rather uplifts us and considers us light to shine to the world. He establishes us as the moon that receives the light of the sun of righteousness that reflects its splendor on the earth and consequently, it is enlightened. In His love, He reflects His light on us, and thus the believer becomes more brilliant than the visual sun.

No one could hide it, not even the believer himself if with all his might he tries to. No one could offend him, not even the evil ones or those to oppose him. St. Paul the apostle says (Phil 2:15) "so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world." St. Peter moreover says (Peter 2:11,12) "Beloved, I urge you...conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when He comes to judge."

St. John Chrysostom says. "The life we present before them is more brilliant than the sun. If anyone speaks wickedly of us, we are not grieved for this ugly picture, but we rather grieve if made ugly justifiably. In addition to these words, the Lord reveals the impact of preaching. St. John Chrysostom says. "It is as if they have wings to cross the world speedily, faster than the rays of the sun, so as to spread out the light of correction."

The word of God is based on truth, and therefore the church declares it openly as a grinding light put on a pinnacle before all heretics. It is spread out mysteriously, in diversified ways in the darkness. This is what Pope Athanasius the apostle assured us of in his speech to the bishops in Egypt, where he made clear the method of the Arians, and their deceitful system in work.

The Lord Jesus compares as to a city established on a mount and which cannot be hidden. What is this city established on a mount other than the man carried by the Holy Spirit to the Lord Himself, so as to sit with him listening to His commandments and to His

sermons? There, he clings to Him, and sits at His feet, and becomes similar to a Holy city in which God Himself dwells, There, He gathers all the angels and saints, and through it the sinners encounter the Messiah, the King, in repentance.

The believer becomes sanctified on the holy mount in Jerusalem, which is seen by all, and all rejoice. This concept reminds us of the words of St. Jerome in one of his letters, 'what is praiseworthy is not that you are in Jerusalem, but rather because you live the holy life, as a holy city. The city that we praise and ask for is the one that has not slaughtered the prophets (Matt 23:37).

Neither did it shed the blood of Christ, but is rather happy with the river streams (Psalm 96:4). That which is built on the mount does not hide (Matt 5:14). The apostle speaks of it as a mother to the saint (Gal 4:26). The apostle rejoices on having the nationality in it with righteousness (Phil 3:20) I

Together with this similarity, that of the city established on a mount and cannot be hidden, the Lord wished to encourage His disciples to serving the good news by the word .He assured them that hardships can never hide the truth, or wipe out the work of God. St.Jerome Chrysostom says," I assume no city as such could be hidden .It is quite impossible that their preaching ends here into silence and disappearance."

He also compares us to a lantern that cannot be hidden under a bushel, but rather has to be placed on a tower, and give light to all those in the house. What is this bushel that puts out the inner light of the lantern other than the submission to materialistic standards in our spiritual life? (John 3:34) "For He gives the Spirit without measure."

Our materialistic human accounts often obstruct our faith. As a result our prayers and pleadings lose a lot of their zeal and effect. This is why the Lord Jesus when He sent His disciples to preach, he took away from them all materialistic abilities, and they had no gold or silver or brass, no provision nor two cloaks, no shoes and no rod (Matt 10:9,10). He did so to sweep away from them all materialistic thoughts, leaving all the accounts in the hands of the Lord Himself. He will therefore be their richer, their food and drink, their clothes and their protection.

The bushel also points to the obstruction of the spiritual light, in which man wraps up his spirit in physical dense pleasures that are temporary. He imprisons the spirit and deprives it of being, Liberated to soar up in eternal eagerness. The body is transformed into a hindrance to the spirit, instead of becoming of support to it in the worshipping process. And in the sanctification of each member for the account of the Messiah King.

I wish we did not imprison the spiritual light in us, in the wrapping of physical passion. But rather let us fly with it to place it on top of the tower i.e. on top of the body with all its senses, hence, the body will not be in control, but in fact it will be enslaved to the true light. St.Paul the apostle put his lantern on the lighthouse when he said (1Cor 9:26,27)"So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as through beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others, I myself should not be disqualified" In this way the lantern shines in the house. As St.Augustine says,' I think what is called 'the house 'here is the human dwelling, that is to say 'the world itself'. This is as he had said' You are the light of the world'. If someone interprets the 'house as being' the church '. This is also correct.

St.John Chrysostom comments on the lit lantern according to the words of the Lord Himself, saying 'in truth, it is I who switches on the light. But as for the continuity of its being lit, this is fulfilled through your own struggle, surely, disasters are unable to

obstruct your brilliance if you still live your meticulous life, and thus you could be the cause of the change to the whole world. Therefore, appear as living a life convenient to His grace, so that when preaching anywhere, this light accompanies you.

Thus our light shines before all people which is no other than the light of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. They will then see the work of God in us, and glorify our Father who is in heaven. We do not present the spiritual deeds asking for our own glory, but rather the glory of God. As St. Augustine says, "He did not only say 'to see your good worker', but He added 'and glorify your Father who is in heaven'. This is because man pleases others by his good deeds, not just to please them only, but for the glory of God. He pleases heavens so that God is glorified in His works. It is fit for those who admire the good deeds to glorify God and not man. This was apparent when our Lord healed the paralytic, for St. Matthew our teacher says (Matt 9:8) "When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to human beings.

We have to realize that God when calling His disciples 'the light of the world', the disciples did not feel as such. Otherwise they would have lost their humility, and the spiritual light would have been extinguished. Moses the prophet did not know his face was shining, but due to the people's request, he covered his face with a veil. We are badly in need of this, not to witness to ourselves, but rather let God Himself and others witness to His light in us.

4-The completion of the law:

The Messiah the King asks us to declare the divine light is us, in our practical life. Our life will then become a lantern on lighthouse lighting up to all who are in the house. Our heavenly Father will then be glorified before all. So, what are the Messiahs commandments to which we are committed in our life? Are they commandments other than in Moses' law? Does it contradict it?

The Lord answers in assurance (Matt 5:17) "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill". The Jews, particularly their leaders, thought they were learners of the law, and protectors to it, although they contradicted it by their unlawful deeds. As St. John Chrysostom says 'though they did not fulfill the law, yet they looked upon it with a live conscience. They broke the law daily by their deeds, yet they kept it literally with no changes, and nothing added to it.

But actually they and their leaders added not what was better, but what was worse. They set the honor to the apart, and yet added some new things of their own. But as for our Lord Jesus He came to fulfill the law and the prophets in various ways. Among these are:

Firstly: The prophecies have been fulfilled the Messiah's person's Augustine says, "He fulfilled the prophet's words in a way and deeds that confirmed all what was said of Him. The evangelist was used to saying in every case 'so that it may be fulfilled what the prophet said;' (Matt 1:22,23). This was on His birth, and when the children sang in amazing praise of Him, and on riding the colt (Matt 21:5-16) and many other examples. These matters were fulfilled, and they would not have been if He had not come.

Secondly: The Lord fulfilled the law by submitting to it without breaking one single commandment. He says to John the Baptist (Matt 3:15) "Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." He told the Jews (John 8:46) "which of you convicts Me of sin?" "he told His disciples (John 14:30) "for the ruler of this world is

coming ,he has no power over Me” Moreover, the prophet witnessed of him saying (Isaiah 53:9) “there was no deceit in His mouth”

Thirdly: St John Chrysostom says the Lord Jesus has not only fulfilled the law in Himself, but He is fulfilling it in us as well. He said “This is what is so amazing: not that he fulfilled the law, but that He granted us too to be like Him. Paul declared this by saying (Rom 10:4) “For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes”. Also in (Rom 8:3,4)”For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do; by sending His own son in the likeness of sinful flesh.” He also said (Rom 3:31)” Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.” As long as the law was on element to justify man, but was unable to fulfill this, Christ came down and man entered the righteous way by faith, and confirmed the goal of the law. What the law could not fulfill literally, has been fulfilled by faith. This is why he said,” I did not come to break the law, but to fulfill it.”

Fourthly: The Lord furthermore fulfilled the law by fulfilling its words, by going to its very depth. In the old times, the law commanded not to kill. The Lord came to confirm the commandment not only by not killing but by not being angry for no reason as well. That is to say He uprooted it, and the law was more than being kept safe. He therefore did not break it, but rather presented it more powerfully and vividly. St.John Kasian says,”the gospel word commands us to amputate the roots of our downfall and not to snatch away its fruits, when canceling all the motives, untruthfully, it will not upraise again.”

The Lord confirms the holiness of the law ever in the very least of its words, in the least of its commandments .He declared our commitment in fulfilling it in our practical life as in its education. He says (Matt 5:19,29) “Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you. Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and “Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. The Pharisees thought they kept the law by being zealous in teaching it. They did not realize they were breaking it by their wicked life. Education without work is considered breaking the law, and the teaching will be of no avail. Also working without witnessing before others decreases the reward.

The Lord confirmed He did not contradict the law. (Matt 5:18). For I truly tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all is accomplished.” St. Augustine comments on this saying, “If the addition is complete, then more like by the beginnings also complete. This is why it is understood when He says’ not one letter, not one stroke of a letter from the law’; this expresses the fulfillment of the law, He pointed to a small letter, because the letter (i) is the smallest of all letters, only a little line. He also pointed to the dot on the little line, showing by this that the least part of the law has its importance.

Edification without deeds condemns the teacher. Also deeds without the support of others decreases the reward.

He, who is unable to teach himself, and tries to correct others, is scorned by many. More so, such a one will have no strength in teaching at all. His deeds will make his words stand against him.

St. John Chrysostom

The Lord took the law to perfection, and therefore the children of the heavenly kingdom have to rise up to a better life than that of the scribes, and the Pharisees. The fathers offer us a new interpretation to this:

The righteousness of the Pharisees was not to kill, whereas the righteousness of those crossing to the heavenly kingdom is not to be wrathful at all. Therefore, the smaller commandment is not to kill, and he who breaks it, is called the least in the kingdom of heaven. He, who follows this, is not necessarily a great person. He rises to a higher level than the first one, but he will be perfect if he never gets angry, and consequently he is no killer.

St. Augustine

Since the reward here is greater and the power granted by the spirit is deeper, then our virtues also have to be greater. Here He has not promised us a land flowing with milk and honey, or a life of relaxation, or a lot of children, or the blessing of the mustard seed, wine, cattle and herds. But now ours is the heaven and all heavenliness, adoption, and brotherhood to the only begotten Son, and the sharing of the inheritance with Him; Also to be glorified with Him, to possess with Him, and endless other rewards as well. As for obtaining greater help. Listen to what St. Paul says (Rom 8:1.2) "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death."

St. John Chrysostom.

Between the Blessedness and the fulfillment of the law:

Before we speak of the law fulfillment, we wish to point out what St. John Chrysostom said about the presence of a strong link between the blessings mentioned at the beginning of the sermon, and what has come here. The blessedness offered us the positive angle for the good virtuous life in Christ Jesus our Lord and reward. But here, the Lord presents to us the negative angle by forbidding us to do evil, not only in apparent actions, but also by uprooting evil from the inward heart, and He warned us of the punishment.

To be poor in spirit is identical to no anger; because the poor in spirit or the humble hearted has no place for anger in his heart. The purity of heart equals not to look upon a woman lustfully, and not to put the treasure on the ground.

A pure heart does not lust after bodily adultery or love of money

To be merciful and to be spiritually mournful, as well as to tolerate scour and being expelled --all of these mean to go through the narrow door. There, man is eager to bear the pain for the sake of Jesus, and his heart is filled with mercy, suffering with others, accepting their scorn and wickedness, and offering good instead of their evil, Hunger and thirst for righteousness meets God's commandment to do what you want people to do to you. The spirit that is zealous for the Lord Jesus cannot help presenting the Lord Jesus to others, manifested in their outwardly behavior as well as in their inner feelings. To make peace is equal to leaving the offering of bread (the Korlsaan) since no man is able to meet God presenting this holy bread without enjoying reconciliation with others.

5- Killing

After the Lord had confirmed that He did not break the old law, but that He rather fulfilled it, He changed this general speech to the application of the old law commandments. He clarified how to attain perfection, beginning with the commandment

of not to kill. He said,(Matt 5:21.22)”you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times ‘you shall not murder ; and whoever murders shall be liable to judgment ‘But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister ,you will be liable to judgment .” He who teaches us not to be angry does not break the special commandment of not to commit murder .He rather completes it, because when we are not angry we are purified inwardly in our heart, and outwardly also by not killing.

St. Augustine.

The words ‘to kill’ are contrary to the commandment ‘do not kill’ .As for Jesus Christ who does not allow anger, this makes firm the old law thoughts in a more perfect way. He who asks to avoid killing is not stopped like he who avoids even anger. The latter is farther away from crime.

St. John Chrysostom

What does the Lord mean by saying ‘falsely’? He wants us not to lose our brothers and sisters because of temporary issues that are vain and futile, however of value they may appear to be. But if it is for the sake of their eternity, it is appropriate for a father to be angry with his son, and the teacher with the student. This is not revengeful anger but rather anger for discipline, springing out of love. No one can teach others in hateful anger. Truth cannot be declared through falsehood. Man cannot lose himself, thinking he is correcting others. St. John Chrysostom says, ‘Do not stand on your side in a battle, and do not take your own revenge. If you see someone committing an error that is fatal, stretch out your hand to help him.

When man becomes angry on seeing his brother committing evil against him, let him look on his brother as killing himself, and making himself perish, so he gently and kindly supports him until he quits this wickedness, and not ask for what is his.

Some excerpts about anger from our fathers:

There is nothing more dangerous than fury, and nothing crueller than wrath!

These are drunkenness of anger, which is more dangerous than getting drunk with wine.

St. John Chrysostom

The Lord then takes us from anger as an inward hidden outburst to the anger accompanied by an outward expression, the word does not imply an ugly meaning, it is merely some kind of scorn. The Lord says (Matt.5: 22)’and whoever says to his brother ‘Raca’ shall be in danger of the council” St. Augustine says he asked a Hebrew man about the word ‘Raca” He answered it does not mean anything except an outburst of anger, hard to be translated into another language. St. John Chrysostom thinks it is a Syrian expression, used when talking to servants, and lower class people, instead of saying ‘you’. There is some kind of disrespect to the person being addressed.

When a person goes to a works stage declaring his anger in a word directed to him, then he becomes worthy of the council, and not only a verdict. In the verdict, there is some doubt about it. The judge urges the accusation on to be assured of its truth. But as for the council, it implies some kind of assurance that the accusation is definite and final on the accused person. The judges then decide on the penalty under which he falls. In the Jewish system, there used to be trials in the villages, and towns that had as members from 3 to 33 persons. The accused ones would stand there facing certain crimes. But as for the council, it is of a higher level than these trials, because it is the highest order of justice of that time, and was called the “Synhedrion Council”. It is clear from the words of the Lord that He derived this similarity to show the danger of anger accompanied by a word .Man

will not stand before a minor jurisdiction that could have its verdict brother, but before a greater jurisdiction council that wishes to pass a verdict on him.

As for the third stage, this is when the angry person is terribly kindled with anger. He does not express himself in a meaningless word, or merely shows discomfiture, but he rather says hurting words. He therefore deserves a greater punishment (Matt.5: 22)'But whoever says' you fool' shall be in danger of hell fire."

The word 'hell' or gohanem' is composed of two Hebrew words: 'gah' and 'hanoom' ie 'inside hanoom'. Hanoom is a valley in which was thrown away all the cattle remains in special containers. These were constantly filled with worms from the remains of animals & fire was continuously burning there.

Therefore it was a symbol for Satan and his hosts for an eternal punishment to them, and it was said that its "worms do not die and its fire is never quenched 'in this valley Ahaz and Manasseh made their children cross the fire (2Kings 16:3,2 Chron.. 28:3; 33:6).

This is hell, the place for eternal punishment to Satan who by nature has become a killer. He who leaves himself to the spirit of anger in helplessness, and does not stop with an inward outburst or speaking about it in a meaningless word, but rather dashes forth saying hurting words.... this person is handed over by God to such a one's master, and he stays with them in hell. God leaves him there to his heart's content that yields to anger. If anger is so dangerous, then how can we hold back our tongue from uttering wrathful words?

St. Augustine answers, 'we are terrified ...because who is it among people who is not afraid to say 'the truth'; But whoever says' you fool' shall be in danger of hell fire" At the same time the Holy Book says (James 3:8) "But no man can tame the tongue". Man can tame the ferocious animals, but as for his tongue he is unable to tame it: He can discipline all what he fears, and all what he has to be cautious of, but as for "himself" he could not discipline, though he does not fear this 'self: Therefore, let us resort to God who is able to tame it! In our turn let us search for God so He tames us. You can tame the lion that you have not created, so is your creator unable to tame you? From where did you get all this strength by which you are able to tame their ferocious animals? Can God's picture, which is man, be able to tame the fierce lion, and is it unable to tame His image? The Lord finally concludes His words about not to be angry by reconciling the brothers before sacrificing a sacrifice of love to Him, He says (Matt 5:23-26)" Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly I say to you, you will by no means get let of there till you have paid the last penny"

St. John Chrysostom comments on this expression, "what goodness! What increasing love is this towards man! God does not get concerned about personal honor to Him for the sake of our love to our brothers! This is His will, to give love great esteem, considering it the greatest sacrifice, without which no sacrifice is accepted! If you are making a mental prayer, it is better for you to leave your prayer, and get reconciled to your brother, and at this point you offer your prayer."

St. Augustine says ' If you are unreconciled, then get reconciled. If you get the chance for reconciliation do not leave yourself in conflict."

God is pleased with us as a one Church, a sanctified bride, and thus he accepts the offering of every member through the life of partnership based on love. Without love, it is quite impossible that partnership is established, and that an offering is not acceptable. What a beautiful phrase was said by St. Jerome, expressing the Church and the life of partnership, "I do not know of any peace without love, or of any partnership without peace."

St. Kasian comments on the apostles saying (Eph. 4:26) "Be angry, and do not sin, do not let the sun go down on your wrath," He says "How can we assume that the Lord does not permit anger to remain even for a moment, whereas He does not permit us to offer our spiritual prayers, if we remember someone feels bitterness towards us. The apostle commands us (1Thes 5:17) "Pray without ceasing" Also (1Tim 2:8) "I desire therefore, that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" So, it is either we don't pray at all and retain wrath in our hearts, and hence be guilty against the apostolic commandment or the evangelical one which commands us to pray incessantly, or, to be daring and offer prayer deceiving ourselves, and disregarding the divine commandment (Matt 5:23,24) Then, at this point, it is appropriate for us to realize we do not offer prayers to God, but rather stubborn behavior in a relentless spirit"

Leaving the cloak:

The Lord gives us another example of facing evil with good. He said, (Matt 5:40) "If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also." If someone has taken your tunic and has become your enemy and wished to take you to court, causing you a lot of trouble. To buy your peace of mind, leave your cloak as well. In this way you save your time, your heart, your thoughts. You will moreover win your enemy to your side by means of love and kindness. St. Augustine says "I wish we could scorn all those things we consider ours, and because of which our brothers reject us.

I wish we could give them these things.

The tunic is the shirt a person wears his cloak or his robe. It is usually made of cotton. As for the cloak, it is heavier and of more value than the tunic. A person wears it during daytime and wraps it round him at night. If your cheap tunic has been taken forcefully, then out of free love you are offering what is of greater value. The Christian person, because of his kind heart, and the freedom of his inward spirit, does not moan because of his usurped rights, but he rather joyfully offers what he has in love. This is the absolute inner freedom.

The Lord commands a bad tempered person to be quick in reconciling his adversary, as long as he is with or the road. Otherwise the adversary will hand him over to the judge. The judge in his turn will hand him over to the officer, who will put him in jail. He will not leave it till he pays the last penny. Who is this adversary other than "the divine commandment of God." This is included as part of the animosity with the bad tempered man. The "commandment of love" stands as a true adversary to him. It condemns him in the Lord's Day before the Great Judge, that is to say, the Lord Jesus (John 5:22). He hands him over to the angels, as an officer to be thrown into "the outer darkness" (Matt: 8:22). He does not leave there because he is unable to fulfill the divine justice right.

St. Augustine says, "nothing will stand as an adversary for the lovers of sin as God's commandments, that is to say, His law recorded in the Holy Book. This is the book that has been granted to us to accompany us all the way, that is to say, in the present life. We are to carry out its teachings hastily and not to disobey them, so we wouldn't be taken to the

judge .We have to submit to it hastily, for who knows when we shall depart from this world from this world? Who is able to submit to the Holy Book other than he who reads it and listens to it in piety? He submits to it as if to a powerful sultan, and does not get uncomfortable from what he finds contrary to his sins. He rather gets to love it for to pricks his conscience, and is joyful over it for it cures his illnesses. He prays so he could understand what seemed obscure to him, and unacceptable, He knows well enough he has to pay full reverence to such authority as this”.

6-Adultery:

(Matt 5:27,28)”you have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not commit adultery “. But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her already committed adultery with her in his heart”.

St.Augustine says,” Iniquity is completed in three stages: it being provoked, enjoyed, and satisfied.”The law has forbidden satisfying sin i.e.. Carrying it out. But the Lord Jesus came to uproot it by preventing sin in its first stage. Sin starts when it is provoked by the first evil look, then the mind accepts it, enjoys it, then it is carried out. It is easier for the believer to face it in its first stage before it has a place in the mind, or pleasure when practicing what is sinful.

We have to notice He did not say’ he who lusts after a woman, but ‘he who looks at a woman to lust for her, that is to say, to look upon her with this intention.

This look is not a provocation for physical pleasure but rather for executing it. Because though it is caught, it will be done if circumstances permit.

St. Auhustine

God has not created eyes for you to go into adultery, but rather to advice His creation with your eyesight.

If you wish to look in pleasure, look upon your wife, her constant love to you, the law has not forbidden this. But if you love curiosity towards beauty, which is not yours, in this way you are harming your wife because your eyes are roaming everywhere. You also harm she whom you are looking at, and getting close to her in indecency. Even though you do not touch her with your hands, yet flirt with your eyes, and this is considered adultery.

It is not she who shot arrows at you, but it is rather you who caused to yourself this fatal embarrassment by looking at her.

St. John Chrysostom

God always cuts the roots of sin in an amazing way, for He says” Do not commit adultery “(Ex. 20:24), He also says” Do not covet “because adultery is the fruit of lust which has the evil one as its roots.

St.Aklimendos the Alexandrian

The Lord speaks of lust and the look, and then speaks of the stumbling block, saying (Matt 5:29,30)”If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell”.

He, who is obstructed by his right eye, falls for sure in the same evil with his left eye as well. So, why has he referred to the right eye, and also added to it the hand? This is to show He is not speaking of the members, but of those who are close to us.

St. John Chrysostom

We need great courage to amputate one of our members; this is why He means, by the eye, something cherished to us. It is usual for someone who desires, to express his love to another party, saying "I love him as my own eye, or maybe more than my eye" It might be that the Lord meant by the eye, the great amount of love.

There is no interpretation to the right eye more movement than that He means the friend greatly beloved. His relation has become as dear as the relation of a body member to the body itself.

This friend is wise, and a guide to the other party, as if with his eyes he could see the way, and an honest guide in divine matters/ because he is the right eye. As for the left eye it refers to a friend advising you in personal matters, the physical needs. We do not need to speak of it as an obstruction, as long as the right eye is of greater importance than the left one.

This means if the right eye is a stumbling block, we pluck it out, so how about the left eye if it obstructs us? The guide is a stumbling block if it leads its friend to perilous heresy in the robe of religion and education.

As for the right hand, it refers to the person who helps and works in spiritual matters. Vision in spiritual matters has the same place as the right eye. Also, working in spiritual matters has the same position as the right hand. Consequently, the left hand means the necessary matters for bodily needs.

St. Augustine

The Divorce:

(Matt 5:31,32)" Furthermore it has been said ' whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce' But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery."

Marriage had become absolutely debased among the Gentiles.

Previously, the Romans had sanctified marriage; a man respected his family, and the woman played a major role in the family. The Greeks, where divorce was prevalent, influenced this trend in concepts, it was said a woman married eight times in five years. The Greeks were known at that time to be corrupt; they even tried to isolate their women for fear of preaching iniquity.

In Corinth, a thousand priests devoted themselves to building another temple to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. They collected money by indecent ways. As for the Jews, they sanctified their marriages, and they hated divorce. The Lord says (Malachi 2:15,16)"Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce". One of the phrases of Rabbis' the altar overflows with tears when a man divorces a young woman! To such an extent was divorce loathed. But God allowed it for then due to the hardness of their hearts. The Jewish schools for interpretation disagreed about the causes that permit the divorce. The school of 'Shamei' tends to narrow it down, and allows no divorce except in the case of unchastely. As for the 'Hillel' school, it was extremely liberal. A man could divorce his wife for whatever reason, however trivial it may be, such as burning the food, or going out with a head uncovered. He could even divorce her for no reason at all other than another woman has attracted him.

The Lord Jesus came to uplift the believers to a level of spiritual maturity, and serious responsibility, where a man could not divorce his wife except for committing adultery. St Augustine comments on the Lord's words regarding no divorce, saying "The law of Moses did not order divorce, but ordered he who divorces his wife to give her a book of divorce, By doing so, his wrath is cooled down. The Lord who has commanded the hard hearted ones to give a statement of divorce referred to the fact he did not wish for divorce whenever possible. Thus when the Lord himself was asked about this issue He said (Matt 19:8)"Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives" Because, however much the cruelty of the one to divorce may be in divorcing his wife, for he knows that by this book of divorce she could re-marry, therefore he would cool down and not divorce her. To confirm this principle, of not divorcing recklessly, the Lord of glory made this one exception, which is that of committing adultery. He commanded the necessity of tolerating patiently all other hardships for the sake of love in marriage and piety. The Lord of glory assured the same principle by His calling her that marries a divorcee ' an adulterer'.

The Swearing:

(Matt 5:33-37)"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord: But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King .Nor shall you swear by your because you cannot make one hair black or white. But let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your ' No', ' No '. For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.'

In the Old Testament, it was not possible for the believers when still spiritually young to refrain from swearing. This is why He asked them to perform their oaths to the Lord.

Sometimes he commanded them to swear by Him, not because He wished for any swearing, but as a sign of worshiping Him alone with no other God. In this way, He forbade them from swearing by to Gentile gods, the who surrounded them

In the New Testament, when we entered the spiritual maturity, the Lord commands us not to swear at all, but are words have to be "Yes", ' Yes ' or ' 'No', No' St.John Chrysostom comments on this by saying that the oath is similar to the wind for the ship of anger, without which it could never sail in man's life. He says "Put a law on a bad tempered man, so as not to swear at all, then, in that case there will be no pretext for teaching him to be well –balanced." St.John Chrysostom considers no swearing is the sign that distinguishes a Christian and his special language:" Let us accept this as a seal from heaven, and then we will be looked upon everywhere that we are the King's sheep. I wish we know who we are through our mouths and language."

9-The Resistance of Evil by good:

(Matt 5:38,39)"you have heard that it was said 'eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also."

In the old times, the Lord forbade His people to resist evil by greater evil. He allowed them this because of the hardness of their hearts. But since we are in the New Testament, He has uplifted us to facing evil not by equal evil, or less, or even silence, but to face it with goodness; thereby uplifting us to the summit of perfection.

St. Augustine sees that the Lord Jesus has entered with us to the level of perfect Christianity, as being the top most level of love connecting man to his brother. He sees the relationship among people as to take six grades:

First grade: is apparent in the crude man who begins an attack on his brother.

Second grade: man rises above the first level; he does not begin injustice but if attacked by evil, he faces it with a greater one

Third grade: It is the grade of the Law of Moses, which rises with the believer above the previous two levels. It does not permit man to resist evil by doing a greater one, but it permits him face evil with an equal level one. It does not command to face evil by evil, but it forbids man to an sever evil by greater evil. But he can face evil by a lesser one, or by keeping silent, or even by goodness is he is able to.

Forth grade: to face evil with a lesser one.

Fifth grade: to face evil with silence, that is to say, not to face it with any evil, and not to resist it.

Sixth grade: this is the one to which our Lord has uplifted us, which is facing evil with goodness, regarding the evil person as someone who is sick and needs treatment.

St. Jone Chrysostom comments on the resistance of evil with goodness saying, "Fire is not extinguished by other fire, but by water. There is nothing to block the evil way for the evil doers as the one wronged to face the harm done in a gently way. This attitude does not only stop them from further injustice, but it also creates a feeling of regret for what they had done. They become amazed at the tolerance and so repent at what was done.

This makes them bond to you all the more. They not only become your friends, but also slaves to you instead of being hostile and enemies as before."

What does He mean by the right cheek and the other one?

The Lord has given us examples for facing evil with goodness. The first of which is that if someone slaps us on the right cheek, we turn to him the other one as well.

The fathers made it clean the Lord when speaking of the commandment, has not meant it to be understood literally. This is because man is not slapped on the right cheek, but rather on the left one, unless he who slaps is left handed. The right cheek signifies the spiritual honor or the spiritual glory. If someone ill-treats us to break down our spiritual honor, then in love we offer the left cheek also, that is to say, and the materialistic temporary glories as well.

Father Joseph warns us of carrying out the commandment literally, when the heart has no true love towards the hitter, particularly when some provoke others so as to slap them, a situation that could harm the divine commandment. He concludes his word, saying, 'If your outward cheek accepts the slap, then let your inward man modestly accept the slap on the right one. In this way the outward man tolerates in gentleness, and the body yields to the trials of the one who slapped, and hence he would not slap the inward man."

Many have learned how to offer the other cheek, but have not yet learned how to love him who slapped.

Christ the Lord of glory was the first to follow the commandment He had set. When the slave of the chief priest slapped him on His cheek, He answered saying, (John 18:23)" If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike me?" The Lord did not offer His other cheek, and yet, despite that, His heart was willing to save all not only by slapping His other cheek by this slave, but also by crucifying His whole body.

St. Augustine

The Second Mile:

(Matt 5:41,42)' And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away."

This commandment is so important that Christianity is called the religion of the second miles, in which the believer offers others more than what they ask for, in love. This is done to win himself and others by his love. To go the other miles is a sign of spiritual strength and openness of heart in love, Man does not do what is asked of him grudgingly, but rather offers more than what is required of him.

The Jewish person, under the Roman law, was threatened at any time to be ordered by a Roman officer to carry a particular message for a very long distance, or to perform a certain chore. This is just as the soldiers commanded Syrion the Cyrene to carry the cross. If this person is in cruel bondage, he accepts to walk this mile asked of him. Under the grace of absolute freedom, he gladly accepts the second mile even without being asked to. It is only a sign of his liberty.

The Lord has surely not meant as much the carrying out of this commandment by walking on foot, as much as what is implied by preparing the mind for the execution of the commandment.

St. Augustine

To love the enemies:

(Matt. 43_48)"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 pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven."

The law did not command to hate the enemy as a commandment the believer has to conform to, the breaking of which means the breaking of the law. It was only a permission given to them due to the hardness of their hearts. It enforced the love of close ones, and permitted facing hostility with an equal one so as to pave the way for a perfect road, to make man love his neighbor on a general level, that is to say, all people. This is made clear in the law itself, which offered a portion of love to the enemies, even if only a fraction.

It was said (Ex 23:4,5)"If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it," If was also said (Lev. 23:7)"You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were an alien in his land despite the fact that the Edomites and the Egyptians were one of their most hostile enemies.

This was on one hand; on the other hand, the people at the beginning of their relation with God. Were unable to discern between the sinner and sin. This is why God permitted them to kill the Gentiles surrounding them, as a symbol of killing sin.

It was also usual that the Jews would hastily fall into worshipping the gods of the Gentiles surrounding them.

The Lord Jesus asked the believers to rise with his Holy Spirit on the ladder of love, and to love even the enemies, and to be kind to those who hate them, and to pray for those who persecuted them. In this way they will carry that heavenly Father's model and His image. St. John Chrysostom says the Lord Jesus has come to raise us to the perfect love that in his eyes reaches the ninth level. He offered us those levels as such:

First level: man should not initiate to wrong his brother.

Second level: If man is wronged, he is not to take revenge with greater injustice. It is sufficient to take an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. This is the level of Moses' law.

Third level: man does not have to face he who has wronged him with equal evil, but rather to face him in a peaceful spirit.

Fourth level: man denies himself, and hence would be ready to tolerate the pain he has unjustly suffered from, as well as the hostility.

Fifth level: at this stage, he not only tolerates the suffering, but he also has to be invariably ready to accept more suffering than the unjust person wants to inflict on him. If he usurps his tunic, let him leave his cloak as well, and if he commands him to walk a mile, let him walk two with him.

Sixth level: to bear the injustice more than the unjust one desires, without having inward hatred towards the unjust person.

Seventh level: the matter does not stop with non-hatred, but it rather extends to love' love your enemies'

Eighth level: this love towards the enemies is transformed to doing good, do good to then hate you! So you face evil with doing well.

Ninth level: the believer prays for those who persecute him and ill-treat him.

In this way, man reaches this level. He is not only willing to accept more suffering and scorn, but also to offer practical love in return. He stands as a father compassionate on all humanity. He prays for all asking the forgiveness of his enemies and those who persecuted him and kicked him out, He is taking God's image, the Father of all humanity.

St. John Chrysostom sees that the coming of the lord for us, its goal was to uplift us to this sublime level. He says, 'The Lord has come for this reason, to implant these matters in our minds, so as to make us useful to our enemies as much as to our friends'

Nothing pleases God as much as when He sees the man persecuted by his brother, to open his heart so as to embrace him in love, and to lift up his hands in prayer for his sake! In him, God sees His image and His model. This is why the Lord concludes His commandment by saying, (Matt 5:45) 'That you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust'

In the baptism water we obtain the spirit of adoption. We are blessed with the authority to become God's children (John 1; 12).

With the deeds of love, which are the fruits of His Holy Spirit in us, we practice being His children, mature in it and praise it.

His fatherhood in us evokes us to love, and love recommends us being His children.

St. John Chrysostom says, 'This is why we call Him' Father' in our prayer. It is not only to remember His blessings but also for the sake of virtue, so we do nothing inappropriate as such a relation.'

What follows are some excerpts about love to the enemies, from our fathers:

If he were not evil, he would not become your enemy. Therefore, be zealous for what is good to him, and hence his evil would stop, and he would no more be hostile to you.

Saul used to be the church enemy, and for his sake there were held prayers, and he became a friend to it, He not only stopped his persecution, but he struggled to support it as well prayers were held against him, but not against his nature, they were against his lies. Let your prayers be against the lies of your enemies, until these die before them, and they live. Because if your enemy dies, you will love him as an enemy, but you will also

lose him as a friend. But if his lies die, you will love him as an enemy, and at the same time you will gain him as a friend.

When you suffer the cruelty of an enemy, remember the Lord's words (Luke 23:34)" Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

St. Augustine

Prayer does not profit us for the friend's sake as much as it does for the enemy's sake. If we pray for friends, we are no better than the tax collectors. But if we love our enemies and pray for them, then we are similar to God in His love for humanity.

We have to avoid hostility with any person; and if it does arise, let us make peace with him on the same day. If people criticize you for this, God will reward you. But if you wait till your enemy comes to you, asking you for forgiveness, this is in vain to you.

He has thus taken away your prize and has gained blessing for himself.

St. John Chrysostom

The Perfection:

He speaks of the levels until He reaches its topmost. This is the love to all, even the enemies, with nothing in return. Then the Lord declares the objective for this, which is to enter the perfect life, and be like the image of God Himself. For He says (Matt 5:45-48)" That you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you great your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."

The aim of God for us is to see His children carry His image in them, and to be attracted to Him in love, so as to live with Him in His divine embrace and be blessed with His glories. The goal of our spiritual life and our encounter with Him is to enjoy His Fatherhood to us and be prepared to become like Him, and hence be considered worthy and perfect just as He is perfect!

He says," Those whose ways of thinking have become compassionate and full of love towards their brother in the image of their Father; these are the ones who are His children!!

St.Gregory El Nassy

If it is impossible to be like God in essence, yet in the progress of virtue we are similar to God, for God grants us this blessing.

Pope Athanasios the Apostolic

Christ has brothers that are similar to Him, those carrying His divine nature when in sanctification. In this way Christ is being formed in us. Those who become partners in the divine nature through the partnership of the Holy Spirit, these are the ones who carry the wonderful seal of Christ's' similarity, and shine in the souls of the saints, in indescribable beauty.

Father Cyril the great.

Chapter X

The ambassadors of the king

The Lord Jesus chose his disciples and his apostles as ambassadors in his place, working through his Holy Spirit so as to fulfill his kingdom in us.

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1. The Calling of the twelve disciples:

(Matt 10:1) “And when he had called his twelve disciples to him, he gave them power over unclean spirits to cast them out and to lead all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease.”

The Lord called those twelve to become his own disciples. They were to listen to him, accompany him in his miraculous deeds, his prayers, and even when eating. This was to make them understand, by means of the Holy Spirit, his mysteries, and live according to his thinking. This way of thinking is what we call the evangelical or the apostolic thinking. The apostles have lived it as a living gospel, and have made others disciples according to it. In this way, the essence of the church rituals has been handed down in a live and practical fashion, from one generation to the next.

The evangelist mentioned the names of the twelve apostles, after he had declared the power they were given from the Lord, over the unclean spirits so they expel them. Also they were granted the healing power over diseases and all weaknesses. We notice two points in this selection of disciples: Firstly: The disciples were not of unusual talents, neither were they prominent figures in society. They were ordinary people, and most of them were from a poor class. This was to assure us that the source of powers cause from God and not from their own.

Secondly: The selection was an amazing combination of personalities. Among them was St. Mathew the tax collector, who was thought by many to have sold himself to the Romans for the sake of materialistic gain. As a contrast, there was Simon the Zealous, and the one abiding to the law. He was among a group of Jewish radicals, abiding to their nationality to the furthest degree. These asked for their freedom from under the Roman rule, however difficult that may be, and for whatever price. They refused any ‘king’ except God himself, and unfortunately they were ready to sabotage and destroy anything for the sake of liberating their nation from under the Roman rule. Among the disciples these was the bold and forward Simon Peter; there was also his brother Andrew who tended to be silent. John the son of Zebedee was also one of the disciples, he was full of love; and Thomas was a doubtful person. They all gathered in Jesus Christ to be sanctified together as members one to the other. They worked in one Spirit for the preaching of the one gospel.

On more than one occasion we indicated that number twelve referred to the kingdom of God on earth, where the trinity rules in the four corners of the world; the north, the south, east and west.

2. The Limitation to Preaching:

(Matt 10:5,6) “These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them saying, ‘Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.’”

In the beginning of their preaching, he put limits to their preaching area ‘the Jewish nation’ without going out of bounds to the city of Samaria, or to the way of the Gentiles. But before his ascension he declared to them the limits to their preaching by saying in the self-source gospel (Matt 28:19) “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” He has not allowed them to preach among the Gentiles until the Jews declared their rejection to the Messiah. This was not a bias to the Jews against the Gentiles, but it was for the Jews not to be skeptical of his Messiah message. Once they rejected him, the door for the Gentiles was opened, even though the Lord Jesus himself did not deprive Samaria of his service, and also some of the Gentiles from obtaining his graceful blessing.

We notice the word ‘commanded’ in Greek ‘Paragelleia’ is used in certain circumstances only, such as:

First: in military leadership in the armies. It is as if the Lord is the highest Commander in a perpetual battle against Satan and all his deeds. His disciples are therefore to be prepared for the service, not as a way for honour, but rather for the constant spiritual struggle and fight against the adversary himself. It is not against humans, but fight against the adversary himself. It is not against humans, but against Satan and the evil spiritual forces (Epa 6:10-12)

Second: the teacher or the philosopher uses it with his students and those who pursue him. It is as if the Lord Jesus is speaking to his disciples as the ones to pursue him, and become students at his Lords so as to carry on his thoughts.

Third: It is used by a friend when he calls his other friends for help or support. The Lord is manifested here on the level of friendship with his disciples, above any official formalities and protocol.

Fourth: It is also used in the commands if an emperor. It is as if the Lord Jesus is the King who sends ambassadors that carry this qualities as a true witness for him, and declare his spiritual constitution in their like as well as in their preaching.

St. Kaprianos thinks this commandment is still alive, and the church still abides by it. The city of the Samaritans only means those who have separated themselves. The way of the Gentiles only means the way of heresy. The church therefore, with its big heart open to the world, whether believers or not, is ready to wash the feet of all. But it does not accept in its partnership those separatists, or the teachings of heretics. It constantly warns its children and keeps them away from them.

3. The Topic of Preaching:

(Matt 10:7) “And as you go, preach saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”

He defined the topic of preaching, which is ‘repentances’ since this is the way to the heavenly kingdom. We have previously spoken of repentance, that it is not a negative aspect that is, deserting evil and rejecting every iniquity. It is rather a positive aspect of great impact in the believer’s life. It is the acceptance of the deeds

of the Holy Spirit in us that which donates, gives and satisfies. Repentance is the change of the inward heart's direction, and also the thoughts and all of man's potentialities. At first it was heading towards the worldly things, than it has been diverted towards Jesus Christ our Lord by the Holy Spirit, and it was now heading towards the heavenly kingdom. In other words, when man refuses iniquity and all what is foreign to God, he then is blessed with the heavenly Lord himself, and all what he has of blessings, gifts that are satisfying. It is as if repentance is the unloading and the loading incessantly. You leaves, and you takes, hunger and satisfaction at the same time.

God does not want us to live a life of deprivation and suppression. On the contrary, during repentance, he wants us to live a life of satisfaction, joy, praise, and enjoying the overwhelming matters. So, man lives on earth but in heavenly thinking.

In this way, we can differentiate between the repentance working in us by means of the Holy Spirit, and the repentance, which we ourselves make. The former leads us to the heavenly kingdom, where we live with the Father in his Son by the Holy Spirit, the latter is a deprivation of what is earthly, and yet without enjoying what is heavenly. The first one engenders killing sorrow, and intolerance in the heart, worry and bitterer. The first is released by the soul from one glory to the other, until it reaches the top of the heavenliest. The second slides with man from one degradation to the next. He therefore lives in continuous depression that pushes him to the abyss!

4. The Abilities of Preaching:

(Matt 10:8-10) "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons, freely you have received, freely give. Provide neither gold nor silver, nor copper in your money belts. Nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs, for a worker is worthy of his food."

Before he asked them not to possess gold or silver or copper, he offered them wonderful abilities that support them in the service, such as healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, raising the dead, casting out demons. It is as if the Lord has not deprived them of earthly temporary matters, except after he had offered them the treasures of his deep love.

St. John Chrysostom says, "Because he wanted to train them in perfection, he asked them not to think about what concerns tomorrow. He was sending them as teachers to the entire world." This is why he made them angels, despite being humans. He freed them from all worldly concerns, so they would be preoccupied only with one concern – that of teaching. He rather wished to set them free even from this matter by saying (Matt 10:19) "Do not worry about how or what you should speak."

The student does not have to possess anything because the Lord Jesus is his gold, his silver, his copper, his food, his clothes, his path, and his road.

The Lord Jesus is our gold; in the Holy Book gold signifies the heavenly life, whereas Jesus is the mystery behind our entrance to the heavenly life. He is our heavenly treasure that attracts our hearts to him.

The Lord Jesus is our silver; and silver signifies the word of God (Psalm 12:6). Indeed, the wisdom of the living God who works in us and therefore us, so he would take us to His Father's embrace.

Our Lord Jesus is our copper. We wear it and thus become strong, treading on the way, and obstacles cannot make us stumble on the way to the kingdom.

The Lord Jesus is the food we survive on. We thus live in constant satisfaction. We do not covet the temporary things and we do not ask for its pleasure.

The Lord Jesus is the robe we put on, that shelters us in the Lord's eyes, and thus we are considered righteous in his precious blood.

He is our way by which we go to his Father so as to live with him in his embrace. We are partners in the eternal glory.

He is the rod that has destroyed the devil through the cross. We have hence been granted victory and conquest.

So, the Lord Jesus has not deprived his disciples of anything. He presented himself as the mystery of satisfaction behind all our needs.

As for the shoes, these there were not made of leather of dead animals that symbolize the destructive evil deeds. This is why St. Jerome says, when the soldiers threw the lot for the Lord's government, there were no shoes they could take off from them, because even though the Lord has died physically, yet he did not hear any dead deeds.

We can say, that the capabilities the Lord offered his disciples, these are the abilities of repentance at its very best. For, when they possess the Lord Jesus himself instead of the gold, the silver, the copper, the food, the government and the rod, then he becomes everything for them. They can ask the world to repent, that is to say, to accept the savior, as the source of satisfaction for them, instead of iniquity that has only provided them with hardship, need, and bitterness.

The preacher of the Lord Jesus court present to others the Lord Jesus as the mystery for the spirits' riches, and its healings, where as he is linked to the worldly matters, and is enslaved to them.

St. Amboosios comments on this divine commandment, to the disciples the preaches by saying "He cuts as though with a scythe the love of money that nurtures continuously in the human hearts." But, when he cuts the grants them the alternative by which St. Peter can say (acts 3:6) "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. He has not given him money, but he gave them in the name of the Lord health, which is way better than money."

The same saint comments by saying, "the church has gold not to store it, but to distribute it and spend it on the needy."

5. Their Attitude during the Preaching:

(Matt 10:11-13) "Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out. And when you go into a household, greet it. If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you."

When they enter a city or a village asking for a home having a good name, they then stay in it, and they do not go from one house to the other; so their serving the word would not be transformed to a service of favours. They should concentrate their thoughts and struggle in the preaching service alone.

On the other hand the Lord wished them to live with no worries. He wished them not only to have no gold, silver or copper, but also not to get disturbed regarding the service itself. They had to teach the word as it is, and not to get disturbed if it is refused by anyone! They are preachers for sure, but it is God who works in them and through the.

6. The World's Rejection to them:

The disciples' message was to declare spiritual and inward peace in reconciliation with the Father in his Son our Lord Jesus through his Holy Spirit. The spirit too, gets reconciled with the body, and man gets reconciled with his brother. But the evil ones cannot tolerate reconciliation, and they do not accept love, they rather force it with ferocity, for he says (Matt 10:16) "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves."

St. Augustine comments on this divine saying "Meditate my brothers on what the Lord Jesus does! Imagine if one single wolf goes in the midst of a lot of sheep, even if they are by the thousands... will the whole herd not become terrified, though the ability of this wolf cannot make him devour them all? So how much more will God's guidance be like, that which he encourage us with? For he does not let a wolf amongst sheep, but he rather lets sheep amongst wolves! He did not ask them to draw near the wolves, but to be in their midst. Indeed, there was a small herd of sheep, but if the wolves devour them, these are changed to sheep."

In bitterness St. John Chrysostom also says, let us be ashamed when we do the contrary and stand as wolves against our enemies! As long as we are sheep, we shall win despite the mountain of wolves surrounding us, ready to devour us. If we become wolves, we shall be defeated, because the support of our shepherd leaves us. He does not help wolves but only the sheep. In this way he will leave you, and withdraw since his strength will not be manifested in you."

Why does God send us in this way as sheep amongst wolves?

Firstly: the believer, when he lives in the Spirit of his Master 'the true Shepherd,' is considered a lamb by being united in them. The Lord then is committed to protecting him and working through him. He works in the humble sheep and not in the fierce wolves. He declares his strength in those who are weak, by saying to his apostle "My grace is sufficient for you, because my strength is made perfect in weakness." Based on these words, the proper says, (2 Cor 12:9,10) "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs in precautions, in distresses, for Christ sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Secondly: a student does not face ferocity with other ferocity he faces it with practical love, and he thus wins unbelievers to the faith. St. John Chrysostom says, "Before anything else, he knows well the nature of things. That ferocity is not put out by the same attitude but rather by gentleness."

The Lord completes his talking by presenting to his disciples this piece advice (Matt 10:16) "Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." Meaning 'gentle and human.'

God has sent his disciples and his apostles as sheep in the midst of wolves. But he will not rescue them from the ferocity of these wolves unless they accept this piece of advice when they are in his excessive grace, and act wisely as serpents and are harmless as doves that is so gentle and sweet.

What is the Wisdom of the Serpents?

St. Jerome things a Christian in his modesty is like a dove that carries no envy, and does not plot any traps to anyone. He is nevertheless obliged to have the wisdom of serpents, which means not to give an opportunity to anyone to plot an ambush for him. He says, "Be as modest as a dove, and do not plot any ambush to anyone. Be also wise and smart as a serpent. Do not allow anyone to plot an ambush for you. A Christian who allows others to deceive him is certainly to be blamed. It is as if he is

also trying to deceive others.” St. Ambrosios says the same implication, “Wisdom is put first, so that the harmless dove would not be hurt.”

St. Augustine says, “What I love about the dove is that it carries no envy whatsoever. But I fear the poison of the serpent. We have a lot to hate about the serpent. In spite of that, there is a lot in its example for us to follow.”

When the serpent feels its getting too old, and the long years it has lived, it shrinks, and makes it a point to enter through a small hole, so its old skin would be stripped off. It is then that he starts a new life. You have to follow this example, as you are a Christian. Listen to what the Lord Jesus says (Matt 7:13) “Enter through the narrow gate.” St. Paul says (Col 3:9) “... since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed.” We have to copy the snake; let us die not for the sake of the old man but for the sake of the truth.

- b) Copy the snake moreover in this matter: to keep your head in safety that is to keep Christ in you. Have you not noticed what happens when the snake gets killed? How it keeps its head secure whereas all its body is being beaten? He wants this part of his body not to be hit, for he knows this is where his life is focused. We likewise, our life is Christ who himself said, (John 4:16) “I am the way, the truth and the life.” As the apostle also says (1 Cor 11:3) “the head of every man is Christ.” He who keeps Christ inside himself, keeps his head that protects him.”

What is the modesty of the dove?

St. Augustine says, “Copy the dove and be secure. Look how cheerful the dove is when among its fellows. The doves are always in groups wherever they fly, or whenever they eat. They do not like solitude, but rejoice together in unity. They retain their love and their cooking is nothing else but the cries of explicit love. In kisses they give their children food. Even when they strive about their nests, as we often see them do, this is like a peaceful strife. Do they get divided among themselves when quarreling? Never they fly together, and live together, and even when fighting, they do so peacefully. Observe the disputes of the pigeons about which the apostle says (2 Thes 3:14,15) “if someone does not obey our words of the message, do not interact with him, so he would be put to shame.” That is to say, “Make a fight, but let it be a fight of doves, not a fight of wolves. Do not consider him an enemy, but warn him as a brother.” The dove loves others even if in a fight. But as for the wolf, it hates others, even when it is gentle.

Concerning this matter, Father John of Kronsdatade says, “Borrow from the serpent only its wisdom, and keep your heart pure and humble and incorruptible.” Be gentle and humble as I am, and do not give in to wrath and fury, because (James 1:20) “because the wrath of and does not make the righteousness of God.”

St. Augustine also draws a companion between the pigeons and the ravens. The dove that Noah sent came back to him carrying an olive branch. But as for the raven, it went out with no return, for it live on what is rotten. The dove asks for wham is Noah’s, that is to say for what is Christ’s. But as for the raven, it asks for what is for himself only, even if it is rotten or corrupted. In addition to this, the pigeon even when eating, does not tear what it before it, as the ravens do. This is why the dove is the symbol of peace and humility, whereas the heaven is the symbol of selfishness, tearing down, and division.

St. Augustine also says “The birds are smaller in size than the doves, yet they kill flies so that they eat them. But as for the doves, they do nothing of the sort. They do not live on killing others, and are not satisfies on others account.”

We spoke earlier about humility in the Christian sense in our book ‘love and the life of humility.’ I find it enough at this point to present its concept according to St. John El Dergy, for he says, “the humble person has the spirit of natural purity according to his creation, and which intercedes for many people. Envy is the corruption of humility. It is a mischievous way of thinking under a fake cover of modesty.” Yet he discerns the natural modesty, and the striving modesty saying, “it is so great to have the modesty that some people have by nature. It is a blessing and gift, but it does not equal the modesty acquired by toil and strife, after repentance for sin. The first is a shelter, kept safe against much overdoing or exaggeration. The latter leads to the highest level of modesty and gentleness. The former has no great reward, but the latter has boundless and endless reward.”

The Lord continues his advice to his disciples (Matt 10:17-20) “But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for my sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.”

St. John Chrysostom asks the question, “Why isn’t there any more imprisonment and standing before judges and overseers?” He answers that God permits man to be trained in struggling as much as his energy and stature allows him to. The little one is allowed to be trained in struggling with someone of his age, and so on. It is as if God does not allow us in our spiritual or vocational life to be tempted more than we could tolerate.

God allows the ordeal to happen, and he asks us not to worry, or to be disturbed as how we should act, or what to speak. It is his Holy Spirit who works in those who are oppressed, and he declares the glory of Christ. He manifests his splendor in us as a testimony and witness before others. St. Augustine says, “He releases you from the fear, and grants you the love that kindles up your zeal in preaching him. It is then that his perfume of glorification to the world is manifested, and so give praise to him.” St. Jerome speaks of God’s work at this difficult time saying, “You can see we have no barns to store things in, but in spite of that, we receive an overflow at this needy time.”

It is as if the essence of a servant’s life ‘is to live with no worries in Jesus Christ’. He is not to be concerned about the materialistic needs, and neither should he worry about the fruit of the service, nor of what is expected of ordeals and sufferings.

When the Spirit of our Father speaks in time of tribulation, he declares an important fact of faith; it is the bright manifestation of God in the believer’s life, particularly in time of hardship. He who permits the pain is the one to receive the suffering in us. It is he who grants us the victory and the crown, and it is he who receives the crown in us. In St. Kaprianos’ letter it is said, “what we utter and answer in time of hardship is given to us at this moment from heaven. It is not us that speak, but it is the spirit of God that does not get separated from those who believe in him, and he speaks in them and is crowned in them.” In another letter he says, “His work means we win, and obtain the submission of the enemy in the great conflict.”

In this way, God is glorified in us, and we are filled with certain victory. As St. John of Kronstadt says, “All what the devil does is that he gives us a hard time. But this is nothing if our hearts are confident in the Lord, and are well based in him.”

As for resistance, this is endless. It could spring up from the people of the house itself, and encompass all. (Matt 10:21,22) “Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.”

The Lord made clear his divine role towards them, showing them his power till they fulfill their work of preaching. But he does not forget their positive role, answering them ‘he who endures to the end will be saved.’ St. John Chrysostom says, “The will of God does not stop with his own role only, but he asks them to perform the good deeds as well. Notice how from the very beginning he made a portion that concerns him, and another that concerns his disciples. The making of miracle is of his deeds, but the declining of wages is of their own deeds. The opening of doors for all humanity is grace from above, but not to ask for anything except it be very necessary this is of their own self-control, ‘because the labourer is worthy of his wages.’ The gift of peace is from God, but the search for who is deserving, and not to enter the house of he who is undeserving, this is of their own commandment. To punish those who do not receive them in is of his work. But to leave them away gently, without cursing them or insulting them, this is of the modesty of the apostles. The gift of the Spirit, and not to worry, is of the work of him who sent them. To become like lambs and as doves in bearing everything gently; this springs from their peacefulness and their wisdom.”

Page301_ It is God who grants you power, but it is appropriate for us to be patient to the last, struggling in the spirit of hope. As St. Kaprianos says, “It be fits us to be persistently patient, struggling all the while, loving brethren, so that when we obtain the hope in truth and freedom, we are then blessed with the truth and freedom itself.”

St. Kaprianos wrote to strengthen and encourage those confessors in prison about their struggle to the last breath, so they be blessed with salvation by means of their patience till the end. He says, “Whatever there may be before the end, it is a step by which we climb to the summit of salvation.” He proclaimed to them that whenever they confess, learning the suffering, the adversary gets more enraged, and danger would consequently be more severe. Therefore we have to face it with more patience.

Everybody, even the house members, hate them not because of any crime they committed, but because of his name. But god does not leave them. He rather supports them with his gifts and blessings. As for them, they have to be patient till the end, well armored with his blessings. But if they are persecuted kicked out, what should they do? The Lord answers (Matt 10:23) “When they persecute you in this city, flee to another.”

At this point the Lord offers us an important principle amidst all those tempests. We do not throw ourselves in the middle of these tempests, and provoke those who annoy us; we should rather leave them, not because we fear for our life, but to fulfill god’s mission in us that he entrusted us with. But we should give no opportunity for those who bother us to increase their wrath and rebellion. St. Athanasius the apostle stressed a great deal on this statement, in his defense about

his running away from the face of Ariosites. Moreover, St. Peter the pope, the last of the martyrs, spoke about this issue in details in his ninth law.

+ Our Savior commanded we run away when we are persecuted, and hide from those who search for us. We should not expose ourselves to certain dangers and we should not enkindle all the more the fury of those who persecute us by our appearing before them. He, who gives himself up to his enemy to be killed, does the same thing as someone who kills himself. But when we escape as our Savior commanded us, we then know our suitable time and we declare our real concern towards our persecutors, lest which they commit bloodshed they become criminals and disobedient to the old law that said (Ex 20:13) “Do not kill.”

Pope Athanasious the apostolic

+ He never commanded them to remain with the enemy, but rather escape of they were to be persecuted.

St. John Chrysostom

+ The Lord wants us to run away in time of persecution from one city to the other, so no one would be put in the midst of danger, that could not be tolerated by the weak body or an indulged mind, whereas this person is to obtain the crown of martyrdom.

St. Ambrsios

7. Not to be Afraid:

The disciples’ undergoing suffering, even from members of the same household, is not meaningless. He made clear to them the following reasons so they accept him fearlessly:

Firstly: (Matt 10:24) “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master.” The Lord has overcome suffering, and he does not take away this suffering from his disciples, but he makes them overcome by it. As St. John Chrysostom says, “The will of god is not to save you from fears, but he urges you to scorn them; for this greater than getting rid of it.”

Secondly: The Lord says, (Matt 10:27) “Therefore do not fears them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops.” It is appropriate the disciples need not be afraid, because what they carry as hidden divine glories, and what they have been granted as spiritual blessings will not be suppressed forever. It will be partially revealed at this age, and completely fulfilled in the coming age. The preacher realizes God’s hidden gifts, as being God’s child, and being blessed with his Holy Spirit, and they partnership of life with him in the only begotten Son. He is not afraid of the world hardships, but he is rather increased in splendor and the throne of glory.

+ What is it that grieves you? Is it because they call you hypocrites and deceivers? Be patient for a little while, and they will call you they world’s rescuers, and those who have been kind and charitable to the world! This will uncover the hidden things, and will reveal the slander of your enemies against you. It is then that you righteousness will be revealed as rescuers and charitable workers if you prove

this through your deeds. People do not listen to words, but rather look at your actual deeds.

St. John Chrysostom

Thirdly: The Lord supports his disciples in accepting the ordeals fearlessly. He declares to them that their inward life will not be harmed, and neither will their bodies, without permission from their heavenly father. Their should are kept safe by means of the fiery Holy Spirit, and hence no one will be able to draw near them. Even the very hairs of their head that fall when combed, these are counted by the Father.

The Lord says, (Matt 10:28) “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear there who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

+ The inspiration teaches us not to fear that which scares, and to fear that which does not scare. For he said, “do not fear those who kill the body, but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

The saintly martyrs did not fear what is fearful, because due to their fear of God, they feared no man!

The martyr says when facing another person like himself, “I am not fearful because I am to be feared i.e. He does not fear man because he fears God alone.”

You can kill the dwelling of the spirit i.e. the body but are you able to kill the one who dwells in it? You are able to release my spirit, but you cannot harm it in any way. By doing so, my body will rise a second time, this is not on which you have authority. When you release the spirit the body rises and the spirit returns to it as its swelling. It is then that the body no more dies.

Look! I shall not fear your adversary even when it concerns my body. Even though you have authority over it, yet the very hair of my head is all counted by my creator.

St. Augustine

You martyr, do not fear the sword of your persecutor, but rather fear your tongue lest you persecute your own self, and hence you destroy your spirit and not your body. Fear your spirit lest you die in hell fire.

St. Augustine

+ Do not fear, or let your heart get weakened, and do not be disturbed when your money is withdrawn, or your food, or drink, or pleasures, or clothes, or house or even your very body. But fear the adversary that pulls away your spirit from the faith, and from relying on God, and the love to God and the close ones. This happens when hatred, and enmity, and the link to all that is worldly, and pride and all other iniquity is sowed in your heart.

Father John of Krostodt

Fourthly: Fearlessness is based on man’s realization of God’s protection to him as a loving Father. He cares about man as much as he cares about all creation for his sake. This care extends in our life from the counting of the hairs on our head to his care about the glory that he prepares for us in heaven.

(Matt 10:29-33) “Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. Therefore whoever confesses me before men, him I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me before men, him I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven.”

The scholar Oreganus comments on the numbering of our hairs, saying, “He does not mean by saying so the hair we cut with the scissors, and trash away, or the fallen hair due to aging. The numbered hair before God is that from Nazareth, that which belongs to Samson. It is there that the power of the Holy Spirit dwells. He gives the victory over the Palestinians, i.e. the power of the soul, and the many thoughts that spring up from awareness and understanding, and that is symbolized by the head of the disciples.”

8. The Inward Wars

After he had spoken of the struggle in witnessing to him, and their acceptance of being persecuted in this world and all the hardship, he drew their attention to the inward war. The preacher as well as the believer, daces the resistance of his body and his feelings, even if from the family members. It is an excessively ferocious war because it takes place in the inward soul. The enemy wages it so man would be divided against itself.

(Matt 10:34-36) “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and daughter against her mother, and a daughter in law against her mother in law; and a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.”

St. John Chrysostom comments on this fierce war. He says, “It is not only friends and colleagues that stand against man, but even his own relatives. It is then that nature gets divided against itself. War is not limited to those in one home, whoever they may be, but it is also waged to those who hold great love for one another, among the very intimate ones.”

Here, at this point, God presents his priority to all. There is no one to reign over the heart but him. No one is allowed to enter the heart except it be through him. He therefore says, (Matt 10:37-39) “He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.” Indeed, it is God who has commanded us to love, and he came to us so he grants us the nature of love towards him and towards people, even towards the enemies. He does not accept that we love anyone, even our earthly life here, unless it be through him. He is jealous of anything, as a groom asking for the heart of his bride. St. John Chrysostom says, “God who loves us immensely, wants himself to be loved by us.” Let us leave everyone for his sake, so we come back and possess everyone with greater love potential; for we love them in Christ Jesus, our Lord who dwells in us, and hence he is of a sublime heavenly level. We love them above all earthly measures.

+ The Holy Book commands us we obey our parents. Yes indeed, but he who loves them more than he loves Christ, loses himself. The adversary is standing there, holding a sword so as to kill me, am I going to think about my mother's tears? Am I going to scorn the blood of Christ for a father's sake? I am not to be linked to his burial if I am a servant to Christ (Luke 9:59,60). If I am a true servant to Christ, I am indebted to do this burial to all.

St. Jerome

+ When speaking to a widow, he told her, "Do not love the man more than you love God, then, you will not be a widow. Even when you do, you will not feel as such, because you have the help of the loved one who does not die."

St. John Chrysostom

+ If we love God with all our heart, we have to prefer no one else even the fathers and children.

St. Kaprianos

The mother Paula carried out this commandment, as St. Jerome wrote about her in his letter to her daughter Yostikom, for he says, "I know that when she heard of someone severe illness, particularly the one she loved immensely called Toxotius, she applied the words (Ps. 77:4) "I was disturbed and could not speak." She cried out the words of the Holy Book (Matt 10:37) "He who loves son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me." She prayed to the Lord saying "Lord, keep your children safe those you have set to die, that is to say, those who die physically for you everyday."

As a reward to this bitter inward war, and this voluntary leave for God's sake, God honors his disciples and apostles, and he considers them his agents. All acceptances of them means an acceptance of him. Every gift given to them is only offered to him personally. What great honor this is that God grants to his honest servants. They carry him in them, and they accept other's behaviors towards them for his own account.

(Matt 10:40-42) "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward."

Some of the father's words honoring God's servants and his priests in our Lord Jesus Christ:

+ Do not look upon the merits of people, but look upon the job of priesthood. Believe that the Lord Jesus is present at the time of the priests prayers. If he has said (Matt 18:20) "When two or three are gathered in my name there am I in their midst", so how much more so would he grant us his presence when the church assembles, and the sacraments are fulfilled?

St. Ambrosior

+ Due to my ignorance in these matters, I made fun of your children and your saintly servants; but I have gained nothing of all this except your scorn of me.
St. Augustine

+ Honor him who has become a father to you after God.
The Discoles

+ The priest on the altar performs in place of Jesus Christ.
St. Kaprianous

+ Are we afraid of him who is supported by people, and not be afraid of him who is supported by God? We scorn the one God has appointed, and we blame him and debase him with thousands of shameful remarks?
St. Augustine

+ What overwhelming joy is his, that through him the Lord has received honor and glory.
St. Jerome

St. Jerome thinks the servants not only receive from people honor in the name of the Lord Jesus, but every believer as well receives the grace from the heavenly father himself. This is because he sees his beloved Son glorified in us. This is why the saint calls upon this God, saying "Look upon us, you can see your Son who dwells in us."

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Chapter XI (Page 310)

The Acceptance of the King

After the calling of the disciples and the apostles as ambassadors to the Messiah, the king, the evangelist St. Matthew made clear the attitude of the Jews regarding his preaching message. John sent two of his disciples so he would become with the, all together, as disciples on the hands of the king himself. The lord accepted this work, and witnessed of John.

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1. John's sending two disciples:

(Matt 11:1) "Now it came to pass, when Jesus finished commanding his twelve disciples, that he departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities."

The Lord called his disciples to preach, and offered them the power of the spiritual work. He made clear to them the subject of their mission, its limitations, its curriculum and its hardship. He began himself 'to teach and to preach', so they would accept the Spirit of teaching, not one through the commandments but also practically through his life, his attitude, and his preaching. This is the live spiritual leadership. It is not merely orders and instructions, but rather making the disciples get trained in testimony by practicing the missionary work itself. It is at this point that the people would taste it and experience it practically.

(Matt 11:2,3) "And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said to him 'Are you the coming One, or do we look for another?'"

John the Baptist has realized his departure was drawing very near. His mission was almost done altogether. So he sent two of his disciples to the Lord asking him, not out of doubt about him, but to present to his disciples the opportunity to get in touch themselves with the work of Jesus Christ, and get tied to him. They would hence be attracted to him, and attract their other brethren, the disciples of John, to follow him as well. It is impossible that St. John would doubt Christ. It was he who witnessed of him when still in his mother's womb, when St. Mary came in, carrying in her womb the Lord Jesus, a little embryo. It was then that St. John joyfully leapt, and this was the first hidden preaching work, where the embryos John testified to his mother Elizabeth about the word incarnate. He was the first to come forth joyfully, kneeling in worship, overjoyed in praise, when still in his mother's womb. St. John came as the Lord's forerunner, for he was spoken of (Matt 11:10) "Behold, I send my messenger before your

face, who will prepare your way before you.” So, how could he have prepared the way, and yet doubt him?

+ He voluntarily pretended to be ignorant, not to learn, for he was knowledgeable of the mysteries of incarnation, but it was to speak to his disciples of the Lord’s surpassing him, and to convince them of what was mentioned in the Holy Book: that he was God who came down in the flesh, and that all people are his servants to pave the way for his coming. This is according to what the singer said ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’

St. Cyril the great

+ He chose himself disciples to bear testimony to Christ, not to be separated from him. They esteemed their Master immensely, and they have heard from him, and were astonished. When John’s death drew near, he wished to make them firm in the faith of Christ himself. He therefore said to two of his disciples “Go, and ask.” This is not because of any doubts on my part, but is rather for your own teaching. God and ask hear of him what I have told you of him. You have heard of me, I the messenger. Be firm in what I said by means of the judge.”

As for the words of Jesus, it was for their teaching as well: “The blind can see.” It is as if he is letting them: “You have seen me and therefore know me! You have seen my works, then you should know their doer. Bless is he who is not obstructed in me. This I say for your sake and not for the sake of John.”

St. Augustine

+ As a prophet he prophesied in his life of his imprisonment, and so he was a symbol of the quiet and silent law that was also imprisoned.

The law informed us of Christ, and the forgiveness of sins. The law promised humanity of the kingdom of heaven, which was fulfilled by John to make the law objective put into effect. But the law, in the person of John was silent. The evildoers imprisoned him, and when put in bondage, no one came to know Christ.

The Law, symbolized by John, sent its apostles, to observe the deeds of the gospel. They also observed the truthfulness of the faith through the eight of these miracles. (Gal 4:31) “So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.”

John did not mean to treat a particular ignorance in him but he was treating the ignorance of his disciples. He had previously declared that Christ came for the forgiveness of sins. And now, he was sending the disciples to Christ to witness his deeds then the teachings of Christ would be firm in them, and they would preach nothing but him. They would no more be waiting the now Christ.

St. Hillary, Bishop of Portiere

+ It was normal that this old law that spoke of Christ, and who has become imprisoned in the hearts of the believers, and put in jail, it was normal it lacked the light, this is because these used to be a great deal of torture behind the bars of misconception.

This is why it could not continue till the end as an observer for the divine goals unless supported by the gospel's message.

St. Amboosios

St. John when in prison was carrying secretly the binding of the old law thereby breaking it. He sent two of his disciples to be blessed by the gospel, which would enable them to enter the kingdom of God. At this point the law hands over humanity to God's free grace. His sending two of his disciples refers to the Jewish people and the gentiles. The Jews have broken the written law, and the gentiles also broke the normal law. St. Paul the apostle says, (Rom 3:9) "For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin." All were in need of the faith in Christ for the sake of salvation.

St. John Chrysostom thinks St. John the Baptist has sent his disciples to the Lord Jesus because there arose some jealousy among them. In the gospel of our teaching St. John it is written (John 3:26) "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.'" Once more, the book of our teacher St. Matthew speaks of John's disciples coming to the Lord saying, (Matt 9:14) "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?"

St. Cyril the great believed in that same opinion

Jesus' answer to John's disciples was a practical one. He told them (Matt 11:4-6) "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: the blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And bless is he who is not offended because of me."

The Lord presented a live picture through hearing and vision to the disciples of St. John. They heard the words of his divine and unlimited love towards humanity, and saw his deeds. Finally he warned them being offended in him. For, when in his suffering, and the cross bearing, they who do not enter his deep mysteries are offended of him.

This warning is not addressed to St. John the Baptist. For, previously, John himself declared the mystery of the cross by saying 'Here is the Lamb of God, that carries the sins of the world' (John 11:29), by being called 'The Lamb of God' the cross is declared, by which the sins are carried by him. The talking is therefore addressed to John's disciples so they would not be offended of him.

St. John Chrysostom thinks the disciples of John have doubted in their hearts, so the Lord rebuked them without hurting their feelings; "He added the last statement rebuking them secretly, for they were offended because of him, he could see in them their objection of him, and he made no one see it, but left them to their own conscience,

attracting them to himself by saying “Blessed is he who is not offended because of me.””

+ What does he mean by saying “Blessed is he who is not offended because of me?” he is as if saying “for real I do make miracles, but I shall not be disgusted of bearing the scorns. For I am walking in the way of death. I wish those who honor me because of the miracles, would not scorn me at death.”

Father Gregouy the Great

2. The Lord’s Testimony of John:

The evangelist says, (Matt 11:7) “As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?””

The Lord Jesus did not speak about St. John the Baptist except after the disciples departed ‘So he would not seem deceptive to the man.’

The Lord praised him saying ‘A reed shaken by the wind?’ As St. Augustine says, “Surely, John was not a reed shaken by the wind, because he was not carried away by every teaching wind.”

+ (Matt 11:8) “But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in silk garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses;” For John was wearing coarse and rough clothes, for they were of camel’s hair.

(Matt 11:9) “But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet.” Why was John better than a prophet? This is because the prophets have prophesied of the Lord’s coming, and desired to see him but were unable to. But as for him, he obtained what they had asked for. He has seen the Lord, and pointed his finger at him saying, ‘He is the Lamb of God who carries the sin of the world’ (John 1:29). In this way, John presented a testimony of him, for he said (Matt 11:11) “Assuredly I say to you, among those born of women, there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

He is younger from the point of view of time, although the greatest in honor. John is surely very great among the people, who have no one among them greater except it be Christ!

By saying the ‘least in the kingdom of heaven’ that is to say among the angels. The least among the heavenlies is greater than John. In this way, the Lord presented a picture of the greatness of the heavenly kingdom, so we would be eager for it. He put before our eyes a city that we have to become eager to dwell in it.

St. Augustine

+ “Among those born of women, there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

What he meant is that John is greater than all people, if you wish to say, he is an angel (Matt 11:10). But he who is an angel or a prophet on earth, is the least in the kingdom of heaven, that is, lesser than the rank of angels. Moreover, he who is the least in the kingdom of heaven, that is to say, the angel, he is greater than he who is the greatest of all humanity on earth.

St. Jerome

+ John was like all those before him, being born of women. But those who accepted the faith in Christ are not born of women, but are children of God. As the wise evangelist says, (John 1:11,12) “But as many as received him to them he gave the right to become children of God...” We have therefore become the children of God in the highest born again (Peter 1:23) “Not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the world of God which lives and abides forever.” Therefore, all born not of vain corruption, but of the world of God that remains, surpasses that born of woman. Notice that before the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and his ascension to the heavens, there was none among women with the spirit of adoption, and no one was called children to God (John 7:39).

So, Christ does not lessen the position of the prophets; He just wished to manifest the evangelical life, and how much more sublime it is than the life of the old law.

St. Cyril the Great

What did you go out into the wilderness to see?

The wilderness is to be understood in a secretive way, as the place deprived of the Holy Spirit, that has no place for God’s dwelling. The ‘reed’ means the person absolutely absorbed by the glory of the world, and that has emptied his life. There is not inward fruit of the truth; he only carries the appearance of joy outwardly and not inwardly. He responds to every drift of wind, that is to say to the suggestions of the evil spirits, and therefore he could never be stable or firm. He says, “What did you go out to the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?” Have you gone to see a man that knows nothing about God, and that responds to the breeze of every evil spirit? He spoke to them in a spirit of praise, and not as someone who rebukes. He wished to confirm that they do not see in John something empty or hollow or changeable.

+ The clothes or garments mean secretly the body worn by the soul. It is soft when in luxury and indecency. As for the kings, this name here concerns the fallen angels, those that rule people as the world rulers. These have the luxurious garments and dwell in the houses of the kings. This means those that had their bodies corrupt and worn out during time of indecency. They are dwellings of the devils that choose those places as houses for themselves, appropriate for their plots and evil deeds.

St. Hillary, Bishop of Poitiers

+ What is meant by the reed is the human soul that loves the world. It is this that if touched by any praise or blame, is deviated on the spot from the way that it desires. It there is a breeze of praise, coming from a human mouth that is sweet to her, it rejoices, and gets uplifted, then bends in gratitude. And if a breeze of blame comes from the same source that presented the breeze of words of praise, it bends down a second time on the other side, and yields to the power of the storm. As for John, he was not the reed shaken by the wind. He was not conceited with praise and was not upset by being blamed. He was not risen with any success and was not thrown down by any ordeal. John was not the reed shaken by the wind. He was a man unmoved by any circumstances, and is deviated from his way.

I wish we could keep stable our soul in the midst of the changeable winds of peoples' tongues, and condemning would not arouse us to anger, and neither would success move us to have harmful givings.

Father Gregory the Great

+ John the Baptist did not put on silky and soft garments, because he did not disregard sin and was hypocritical to those who practiced it. He rather blamed them shamefully and severely, in bitter words, saying (Luke 3:7) "Brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" King Solomon also says, "The words of the wise are similar to nails and spurs, and do not tolerate the stupidity of sinners but rather wounds them."

Father Gregory the Great

(Matt 11:12) "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violence take it by force."

John the Baptist came as the forerunner to the Lord Jesus, and thus the way to the kingdom was opened. Every believer is able to steal it violently by living struggle. Indeed, the kingdom is God's free gift, but it is not offered to the slothful and careless, but rather to those struggling as if they are stealing it.

St. Jerome says, "Without force you will not obtain the kingdom of heaven. If you do not knock zealously you will not receive the heavenly bread. Is it not true theft when the body of man wants to become like God, and ascends to the place from where the angels have fallen, so as to condemn angels?"

St. John El Dergy speaks of the necessity for struggle and force saying "All those who begin the goal struggle which is hard and narrow, but at the same time easy, it is appropriate for them to realise they have to jump in the fire, if they really wish for the heavenly fire to dwell in them. Let everyone search himself, and eat his bread with bitter herbs, and drink the cup with tears, lest his service would lead him to self-condemnation." He also says, "Let us run zealously as people called upon by our God and our king, lest due to our short life we would be found on the day of our death, fruitless and thus perish in hunger."

Father John from Kronsdaht speaks of the struggle in violence saying, “Who made the way for the chosen ones to be narrow? The world pressures the chosen ones, and the devil pressures them and on the body as well. This is what made the way to the heavenly kingdom so narrow.” He also says, “If we do not struggle daily to overcome the attacking passions, and possess the kingdom of God in our hearts, the passions will possess us over powerfully and violently, and thus steal our souls just as thieves do.”

Father John presents himself as an example for struggle in prayer saying, “People say if you do not feel like praying, then it is better not to. These words are silly and deceitful and worldly. If you pray only when you feel like it, you will cease praying altogether, and this is what the body desires. “The kingdom of heaven is taken by violence;” You will not be able to work for your salvation without taking yourself by violence.” He moreover says, “You do not terminate your work only when you feel like it, but you terminate it in particular when you do not feel like it. Know well that this applies to every normal deed regarding the time. It applies in particular to the deeds that concern the salvation of the soul such as prayers, reading the word of God, disciplinary books, and sharing in the divine service, and good deeds, and preaching the word of God and so on. Do not yield to the lazy body that is filled with evil, for it is ready to be in constant relaxation to lead us to eternal perishing during the temporary peace and earthly pleasure. It was said, (Gen 3:19) “with the sweat of your face you eat bread.””

St. Ambrosius stresses the importance of constant struggle with no lenience at all. He says, “To lose one hour is not an easy matter, for the hour is a part of our entire life.”

Some way ask, “Why does the Lord Jesus say “The kingdom of heaven is taken by violence?” St. Jerome answers, “Look, is it not considered by violence when the body wants to become a god, and ascends to the place from where they angels have fallen, and condemn angels?””

St. Ambrosius thinks the church has been able, in faith to take by force the kingdom from the Jewish syndicate. It has obtained becoming the children of God whereas those intended have become deprived of it.

The Lord Jesus continues speaking saying, (Matt 11:13-15) “For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah, he answers, “I am not.” So, how can this be?”

The scholar Oreganns says “He is John and is not Elijah at the same time. It is not his person, because he does not know about himself that he has played the role of a previous personality. In this way St. John the Baptist confirms his rejection of the concept of copying the spirits. That is to say, re-incarnation for a second time. He came as having the same concepts and tendencies as the prophet Elijah.”

This was supported by many church fathers such as St. John Chrysostom and St. Augustine and others.

Father Gregory the Great says, “The angel spoke to Zechariah concerning John (Luke 1:17) “He will also go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah.” Just as Elijah came prior to the second coming, so does John come prior to the first coming; Also, just as Elijah is the forerunning to the coming Judge, so does John forerun the Savior now. Therefore John is Elijah in the spirit, and not in his person.”

This is what the Lord says, “He who has ears to hear let him hear,” that is to say, he who has the inner ears, that are able to hear the spiritual issues and be aware of them, can hear and be aware that Elijah came as a forerunner to the Messiah the Savior, who was spoken of by many prophets, and that was paved for by the old law through the symbols and the shadows.

These two ears are a gift from God. As St. Jerome says, “Isaiah says, “The Lord gave me ears (Isaiah 50:5). If I am not an ear to the heart, he granted me an ear to hear God’s message with.””

3. The Rejection of the Jews to Him:

The Lord spoke of St. John the Baptist, and bore testimony of him for being the forerunner who has prepared the way for him. He made clear that some have rejected him just as they have rejected the heavenly king himself. They presented justifications and pretexts that were all wrong for their rejection.

(Matt 11:16-19) “But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children setting in the marketplace and calling to their companions, and saying “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you, and you did not lament? For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The son of man came eating and drinking and they say ‘Look, a glutton and a wine bibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ But wisdom is justified by her children.””

He was rejected by the scribes, the Pharisees and the Sadducees... Also by those studying at their hands, carrying on their haughty spirit. But they were unable to be released from their ego, and to accept the word of truth, and to realise wisdom, God sent to them he who could lament, such as John the Baptist, the rebel against sin. But they did not regret as sinners to repent; they rather rebelled against him. Then the Lord himself came to them, playing the flute of tender love, and yet they did not dance joyfully. The prophet came to them undesirable of even the necessities of life such as food, drink and garments. He wished them to go back from this idle life of luxury. They then accused him of hearing a demon in him. The Son of God came to them in the flesh, in their midst, sharing their human life to attract them to him in love. He was as their friend, but they scorned his attitude as a lover of sinners and tax collectors.

When man’s inner vision is corrupted, he could find for himself all the justification to reject God’s work. He cannot stand. God’s love and his tenderness, and neither does he accept his discipline. He is not attracted to the sweet divine words, and is not warned by the threats either.

The Old Testament came charged with the constant praise to make joyful the bride's heart with her Groom. The Jews did not realise the joy of these praises; it rather shut the door in the Groom's face. The prophets too came to offer the wonderful inheritance, in an attempt to soften their hard hearts. But they were not warned.... they did not accept they Lord Jesus, they Groom to rejoice and brighten up their hearts. They did not accept the Redeemer who would save them from the everlasting damnation.

After the Lord had presented his teaching and his powerful deeds, confirming to them his love, he began to rebuke them for not repenting. He said, (Matt 11:20,21) "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes."

Nothing saddens God's heart as the hardness of the hearts of his children. To these was given God's many blessings, and yet their hearts were unmoved; whereas if these blessings were granted to strangers, they may have repented hastily, and returned to God. This is why the Lord assures us that many come from the east and the west to the kingdom of God, and they would be blessed with Abraham's embrace, whereas the kingdom's children would be deprived of it.

For a second time, the Lord assures us that though the strangers are expelled from the kingdom, yet their bitterness is less than the bitterness of the children of the kingdom that are expelled from it. For he says (Matt 11:24) "But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the Day of Judgment than for you." He who knows much and errs, is beaten more!

4. The Simple and Good accept Him:

Those who believed themselves to be wise have rejected him, whereas the simple accepted him. He therefore proclaimed to them his divine mysteries. He offered them a praise of joy and overwhelming to his Father for their sake;

(Matt 11:25) "And at that time Jesus answered and said 'I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.'"

Indeed, God desires to declare his mysteries to humanity with no differentiation. He does not forbid anyone for knowing him. But those who think themselves wise and knowledgeable as the haughty Pharisees or the Genurites who thought they know concept of gnosis, and how that was able to save them, these are heavy with their ego. They are unable to enter the way of God's true knowledge. But he who accepts the Messiah the king in simplicity of heart, and carries his cross in modesty, would be as a child in his Father's embrace. Then the Lord will grant him to know him, for the Lord Jesus says (Matt 11:26,27) "Even so father, for so it seemed good in your sight. All things have

been delivered to me by my Father, and no one know the son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the son, and the one to whom the son wills to reveal.”

+ ‘I thank you Father...’

Look now, how Christ who is so far away from sin says ‘I confess, I thank you Father.’ Confession does not concern sinners only, but it sometimes concerns those who praise God as well. Therefore we confess in our praises to God, and in our blaming of ourselves. Both of these matters are a good confession, whether it be in the blaming of yourselves, you who are not without sin, or be it in your praises God who is infallible....

+ Listen to the confession of God, “I confess to you Father, Lord of heaven and earth.” This confession, as said previously, means gratitude “because you have hidden this from the wise and prudent and have revealed it to babes.” What is this, my brethren? Understand what he means by the wise and the prudent, and as a counterpart. ‘The babes.’ He did not say he declared it to the stupid and the ignorant, but rather ‘I declared it to babes.’ He hid it from those who are wise, those who are truly haughty and scornful, those who falsely pretend to be great, but in reality they are only haughty. Who are the babes? They are the foolish ones; by saying ‘I declared it to babes’ he made it clear he meant ‘the pride under word ‘wisdom and prudence.’

(Rom 1:22) “Professing to be wise, they become fools.” Here you find a treatment you know about controversy. For, when you claim to be wise, you are then ignorant! Confess to yourself that, all by yourself you are ignorant, and hence you become wise. But you witness by saying so that this is the truth. Confess this in your heart, because this is the truth. If you testify this, you do not testify this before people without confessing it before God. You then declare that all what you have put together is dark.... Know for sure you are not a light to yourself, but in truth you are an eye, and not light. Of what use is the eye even when open and good, without the presence of any light? Know well you are not a light to yourself, and you have to cry out as written (Psalm 18:28) “For you will light my lamp; the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness.” For I was all in all darkness, but you are the light that scattered my darkness and shone in the light except it be for you!

+ “I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.” You have hidden it from those who thought themselves enlightened, whereas they were darkness. And therefore they were unable to be enlightened. But as for those who are darkness, and have admitted being so, these were little children and not great people. They were humble, not proud; they had the full right to say, “You will light my lamp.” They know themselves, and praise God, and they were not misled from the salvation path.

St. Augustine

Indeed, he did not forbid anyone from knowing him. But for us, the way to him is full of obstacles, and the gate is narrow; no one could enter except for the humble and simple hearted. What is this way other than Christ himself who says ‘I am the way, the truth and the life.’ He carries us in him since we carry his humility, modesty and love....

etc. We are like members in his holy body, so he enters with us to his Father's embrace, and hence we come to know his mysteries, and the Lord God will rejoice over us. For this reason the Lord continues his words saying, (Matt 11:26-30) "Even so father, for so it seemed good in your sight. All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and 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. Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

The Lord made clear in his words the following:

- A) Son is the way to know the Father.
- B) The Son calls those who are weary to enter the true knowledge of relief.
- C) The Son invites us to carry his yoke through his humility and modesty of heart.
- D) His yoke that we carry is sweet and easy to bear.

A. The Son is the way to know the Father:

No one is able to realise who the Father is in his essence except the only Begotten Son, the only one in essence. No one could be aware of who the Son is except the Father alone. It is God's will that we come to know him, and love him, and accept being united with him. This is why the Son came in our own nature, so he enters with us to God's knowledge. He carried us in him so we would be able to see what is in visible, and be aware of what no one was even aware of. There is no other way by which the soul could come to know its God, except it be by being united with the only Son. St. Augustine speaks to the Father saying, "We say that with Christ we have found the door by which we enter to you."

In our study of the Eucharist, we have come to realise that the sacrifice of Christ carries us to be firm in Christ Jesus, the sacrificed, since he is our head. During this, we come to know the Father, whom the Son knows.

The first liturgies stressed the mystery of the Eucharist as the mystery of knowing God through his Son. In the liturgy of Bishop Serapion, it is said, "Let their souls be blessed with understanding and knowledge, and the mysteries, so they share in it. Let all be blessed together through the only Son, Jesus Christ."

B. The Son Calls the weary to enter the true knowledge of relief:

The Lord calls all those who are weary saying, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

It is not surprising for the Lord to call all those who are weary to obtain relief in him. He had declared he alone knows the Father and the Donor of knowledge. In him we come to discover the immeasurable love of the Father, and we come to know his tenderness towards us. St. Paul the apostle says (Rom 8:32-35) "He who did not spare

his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also free by give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us." In Christ Jesus we have come to know the Father as the lover of humanity. He did not spare us anything, but he offered his own Son a reason for us. So, what more could we possibly ask for? In Christ we have seen the Judge and the Intercessor at the same time. Of whom then shall we be afraid? This is the mystery for the relief of all!

St. Ambrosios comments on the Lord Jesus' call to those who labor and are weary, to come to their rest, saying, "The Lord carries for us a lot of tenderness, and so he calls us to him and does not frighten us. He came in modesty, and in humility. He is gentle to us, does not throw us outside. Likewise, he chose appropriate disciples that interput the will of god, because they gather God's people in love, and do not scatter them in cruelty."

St. John Sabaa calls upon Christ as the mystery behind his relief and comfort, saying; blessed is he who carries in his heart your remembrance at all times; because you constantly make us drunk with your sweetness!

Blessed is he who in his heart constantly asks for you. From him runs life, so he be blessed! If you are sorrowful in your pleadings, you will rejoice in his presence! If you suffer so as to be able to see him with your tears and tribulations, then he will manifest his beauty inside you, and you will thus forget your sorrows."

C. The Son Calls upon us to be modest and humble of heart:

We cannot enter the way of real knowledge except it be through Christ Jesus himself, the modest and humble of heart. We have him in us, and carry his qualities, and be equipped to realise the divine mysteries.

+ "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me"; this is not in the making of the world, not in the creation of visible matters and invisible ones; not in the miracle making and the raising of the dead in the world that he has created. But it is rather "Because I am meek and humble of heart." Do you wish to be great? Then you have to begin from the end!

Do you wish to establish a strong high-rise? Think first of the basis for modesty!

What is the topmost for establishing this high-rise that we are building? Where will it reach to, this high structure? I say instantly; to see God! Do you not see how awesome it is to witness God? He, who reaches this point, can be able to understand what I am saying, and what he hears! Because the summit is so high, think of the foundation. What foundation is this? What are you saying? Learn of him for he is humble and modest of heart. Dig in you the basis of modesty thus deep, then you will attain the summit of love!

St. Augustine

D. The Sweet Yoke:

When the simple ones go through the door of true knowledge by means of their unity with the Lord Jesus himself, they carry him in the, they then find his yoke easy and light to carry. Their spirit finds comfort inside him. Indeed, he called us to carry the cross, and die with him everyday. But as long as the cross belongs to him, and death is partnership with him, the sufferings change to sweetness, and death to life, and crucifixion to resurrection. In this way the yoke becomes easy, because it is the yoke of Christ, the burden is light because it is he who is carrying it.

+ If you do not believe our words, listen to what those who witnessed the martyrs' features in their struggle when being whipped and skinned, how they were experience overwhelming joy¹ when they had to tread on burning coals, they were overjoyed, and their hearts were thrilled, as if buying on a bed of flowers. This is why St. Paul says when departing from this life by means of a violent death (Phil 2:17,18) "I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me." Look at the strong language by which he calls all the world to share him his over joy.

St. John Chrysostom

+ "Carry my yoke on you, because my yoke is good and easy to carry! When I say, you want to repent, and you wish to follow me, do you find this my commandment hard and cruel to fulfill? It is not too hard on you, and neither is it heavy, because I'm your helper. Love makes easy the hardness of the commandment."

St. Augustine

+ Anything is heavy and hard on him who has heartily embraced Christ's yoke. This is founded on real modesty, having constantly fixed eyes on the Lord's sufferings, and glad with all what overcomes him, saying (2 Cor 12:10) "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

+ How can the sweetness of Christ's amazing yoke be bitter except it be because of the bitterness of our evil? How can the divine burden which is so very light, be heavy to carry? It is because of our obstinate impertinence, we think lightly of the Lord, who by him, we carry his yoke. The Holy Book itself testifies of this clearly, saying (Prov 5:22) "His own iniquities entrap the wicked man, and he is caught in the cords of his sin." I confirm, it is clear that we are the ones to make the easy and good ways of the Lord to be difficult ones. This is due to the rocks of our wicked and heavy passions. In foolishness we make the royal path a rocky one. We depart from the way trodden by the feet of saints, and even the Lord himself walked in it. We search for a path untrodden by those who were before us. We ask for places filled with thistles, and we get blinded by current pleasures and lust. The garment for the wedding gets torn by the thorns in the dark. The path is covered by rails of iniquity, so that we not only get torn by the thorns sharp and piercing, but are also bitten by the fatal serpents' bites and the snakes hidden behind (Prov 22:5) "Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse."

Father Abraham

+ We can hear the apostle, being under the easy yoke and the light burden saying (2 Cor 6:4) “But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes...etc.” In another place in the same epistle he says, (2 Cor 11:24) “from the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day. I have been in the deep.” There are moreover other risks, countable indeed, but quite intolerable except by the help of the Holy Spirit.

He used to suffer constantly and immensely from all these ordeals, so heavy and risk, about which we have spoken, but at the same time, the Holy Spirit worked in him to cancel the outward man, and renew the inward one-day by day. By tasting the spiritual relief in the Lord’s rich joy, this makes easy the present hardships, in the hope of blessings of the future, and alleviates the cumbersome ordeals.

How sweet it is, the yoke carried by the Lord! How light this burden is to carry!

+ How easy it becomes to bear the temporary ordeals, so as to avoid the eternal damnation and obtain eternal rest! The chosen vessel said overwhelmingly in excessive joy, (Rom 8:18) “For I consider that the suffering of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.”

Look as to how this easy yoke and light burden, if hard on some few who have chosen him, but it is easy for those who love him.

St. Augustine

+ Anything worrying us, and grieves our hearts from the very bottom, and overpressures us, is from the devil, who is himself the eternal confusion and hardship. But as for the Lord, he is the heart’s peace and its rest.

Father John of Kronstadt

Briefly speaking, the simple hearted accept the Messiah the king, and carry his cross as a sweet yoke. The secret behind its sweetness is that, as they are carrying it, they desioner their king is carrying the crossing the cross with them, and instead of them, and in them too. He welcomes the yoke if it is Christ’s yoke. We shall not be able to encounter our Christ away from his yoke; neither shall we recognize his Father without his cross.

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Chapter XII (Page 334)

The Concepts of the New Kingdom

After speaking of the rejection by some people of the new kingdom, and the acceptance by some simple hearted ones, Jesus began to speak of the concepts of this kingdom. This concerns the Sabbath worship, the humble demeanor, the struggle against the demons and salvation.

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1. The Concept of the New Sabbath:

The Sabbath was of particular importance to the Jews. They understood it in the literal sense that was fatal indeed. This why the Lord spoke of the new spiritual concept for the Sabbath. We have talked the Sabbath issue more than once in previous places.

The Lord allowed his disciples to pick up corn ears and eat. This provoked the Pharisees; for the evangelist says (Matt 12:1,2) “At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. And his disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, ‘Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.’”

The law permitted picking heads of grain that belonged to others. (Deut 23:25) “When you come into your neighbor’s standing grain, you array pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor’s standing grain.” Because of love, God allowed man when hungry to pluck the heads of grain to eat. But he does not exploit love and use the sickle. This is why the Pharisees did not object to the mere plucking, but rather because of its being done on the Sabbath. They considered this a kind of harvesting and sowing, both of which forbidden on the Sabbath.

The Lord wished to uplift them above the literal concept of the Sabbath, revealing to them that even on the Sabbath, God allowed things, even if apparently literal and forbidden. Among these:

Firstly: King David the prophet and what he did (Matt 12:3,4) “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: How he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for hi to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?” The showbread eating was only allowed for the priests alone (Lev 24:5-9) King David the prophet is considered, literally speaking, to have broken the law (1 Sam 21:1-6). But God does not look upon the outer apparent

deed, but rather upon the aim of the inner heart. David was not easy in disregarding the law, but there was no other alternative for him. So he, and those with him, were not regarded as breakers of the law.

Secondly: The priests' attitude (Matt 12:5) "Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is one greater than the temple." The priests in the Old Testament did not stop work on the Sabbath; it rather increased, because of the oblations and sacrifices, and the presence of a lot of worshipers. They did chores that if performed by others out of the temple, were considered defiling the Sabbath.

Because of the honor of the temple, and the fulfillment of its mission, these people did not stop their work. If they did so, this would be considered negligence on their part for the right of the temple. This concerns the old temple. Well, what if the Lord himself, the dweller of the temple, has come down to earth? Will not our real Sabbath become the constant work for the account of the Lord of the temple? So, the Sabbath is not physical rest, springing up from work cessation, it is rather rest that springs up from our constant work with Christ Jesus our Lord, the God of the temple, and the mystery of our rest.

Thirdly: what was mentioned in (Hosea 6:6) tells us "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice." (Matt 12:7,8) "But if you had know what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

The Lord has founded the roots of the spiritual concept of worship and rituals in the Old Testament (Hosea 6:6) "I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than sacrifices." Sacrifice, are of great importance to God's people; and yet God does not want the outward appearances. He wants what the sacrifice carries such as the mystery of love and mercy. Likewise, if the carrying out of the commandment of keeping the Sabbath as a sacrifice for God's obedience so does God want the core of this obedience, which is the love and the mercy.

Thus, the Lord Jesus did not break the Sabbath, he rather sanctified it by saying about himself he is 'Lord of the Sabbath.' Thus is similar to God's pleasure when he says about himself "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." Likewise he calls himself "The Lord of the Sabbath." By saying so, he does not break the Sabbath commandment, but he rather reveals its depth. Indeed, the Old Testament stressed keeping the Sabbath is extreme accuracy. When the people found a man hewing rocks in the wilderness on a Sabbath, a divine decree was issued to Moses (Numbers 15:35) "The man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." We spoke earlier of the importance of the Sabbath, and the crossing to Christ himself as the mystery of our real Sabbath. In it the Father is relieved regarding us, and we rest in it regarding the Father.

St. John Chrysostom says, “For real, the Sabbath fulfilled many useful beneficiaries,. For instance, it makes them kinder to the labors in their homes, showing them a humane spirit. It also taught them God’s care for his creation as mentioned in Ezekiel 20:21. Moreover, they have been gradually trained to avoiding evil, convincing them of the importance of spiritualities.”

The Sabbath was the weekly feast they celebrated, to make them cross over to the real spiritual relief. As St. John Chrysostom says, “Keep the feast constantly, and make no evil pay this is the feast. Let our spiritual affairs be strong. Leave the earthly affairs so as to be blessed with the spiritual rest. Avoid all deeds of covetousness as the Jewish people did, by drawing themselves away from the sufferings inflicted upon them when in Egypt.” The old Sabbath according to St. John Chrysostom is to stop work, as if it were a liberation from the work of bondage the people suffered from in the olden times when in Egypt. It is a withdrawal from labor chores, or a constant exit. As for the new Sabbath, it is entrance to the Promised Land, and obtaining the divine promises of God. It is not only a cessation of the bondage labor, but it is also practicing the spiritual work in the land of Canaan. This is why he says, “We are committed not only to depart from Egypt (symbolic) but also to enter the Promised Land.”

As for the action of the disciples, they have crossed over the heavenly plants in the new Sabbath. They have plucked ‘Christ’ the real head again as a heavenly food, which satisfies the soul, and supports it. What they did was in the name of the entire church, where it enters with the Holy Spirit to God’s altar, to accept the head grain of the ‘Eucharist’. It is a gift from god on which it feeds so as to reach perfection, and be ready for Jesus Christ, the eternal groom.

The Lord wished to stress this spiritual concept of the Sabbath, by healing the withered hand on the Sabbath. It is not only the disciples that worked on the Sabbath, by plucking the heads of grain, and be blessed with rest when eating from the Eucharist grain, but also the Lord himself when he worked and found his rest in offering his divine love to us. This is to change the withered human nature to a source of constant work. It is as if on the Sabbath, man finds rest in God, and God finds rest in us. God is the One to grant healing, and transforms withering into life. Man accepts this so he may work with a new potential, and he does not come to a stop.

The Jews in their literacy avoid work on the Sabbath, even when they are to defend themselves, their country or their family. Antiochus seized this opportunity, and so he fought them and destroyed so many of them (1 Kings 2:31-38). We should not be surprised if we see some of the fanatics asking him (Matt 12:10) “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” This question was not posed for the sake of knowledge, but rather to make fun of his actions, and accusing him. But he answered them not as a defense for himself, but rather to take them with him for the knowledge of his kingdom. He spoke to them gently to arouse their compassion and tenderness, for he said (Matt 12:11,12) “What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” It is said that the ruler of the syndicate

had a sheep that had fallen into a pit on the same day, and it was raised. It is as if the Lord wished to put him to same, declaring to him that man is of more value than a sheep.

2. The Precious Modesty or Humility:

(Matt 12:14-17) “Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against him, how they might destroy him. But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew from there. And a great multitude followed him, and he healed them all. Yet he warned them not to make him known.”

In their envy, they wished to destroy him, but they actually destroyed themselves. They deprived themselves of him, for he departed from there. Hence, they were deprived of ‘life.’ In this way, when the heart is filled with envy, the Lord cannot stand staying there he leaves it for his own destruction. St. John Chrysostom comments on their attitude, saying “You do not harm the one you envy, but you only stab your inner self with the sword.” When Joseph’s brothers envied him, he was exalted, but as for them, they lost their peace.

Father Ephrata speaks about envy, saying ‘Envy occurs between husbands and their wives, and so the children follow as disobedient to their parents! Because of envy, man kills his brother with his tongue, and he drags another mercilessly.’ This killing, and this perishing, actually regresses on the one who envies, because he bosses God’s grace and the heavenly peace. St. Basilios the great says, “There is nothing of more destruction to the soul than the pair of envy. It does not harm other, yet its evil impact reaches in particular the soul that receives it. Just as rust ruins iron, likewise envy ruins the soul it dwells in, and it absolutely destroys it. It is said that serpents are delivered by eating up its mother’s entrails. Likewise does envy devour the soul that gave it birth. Envy is suffering that springs up from the success of others. This is why the one who envies does not live without pain, and his mental depression does not leave him.”

The flames of envy were kindled in the hearts of the Pharisees, and thus they wished to kill Jesus Christ. As is his attitude, he did not face evil to resist it, but “He departed from there.” By doing so he presented to us a living constitution in facing the evil of others to us, which is to go away from it as much as can. This is what we saw happening in the escape from the land of Egypt, and when speaking to his disciples (Matt 10:23).

The Lord asked his disciples to depart from the city they are expelled from, and not to face those who disturb them. Pope Athanasios the apostolic defended his escape from the face of the Arianites. In the laws of St. Peter the last of the martyrs, it was mentioned it is not appropriate to provoke those who resist, so the fire of hardship would not be kindled. He says, “Maybe they do not know that the Lord of the house, and our greatest teacher, he withdrew far away, so many times from those who wished to entrap him. Sometimes he would not walk openly because of them, and in the time of his suffering, he withdrew. He did not hand himself over to them, because he expected their coming to him with swords and rods. He told them (Matt 26:55) “Have you come out, as

against a robber, with swords and clubs to take me?” They ‘handed’ him to Pilate (Matt 27:2), what happened to him was repeated with his disciples who followed his example. They recalled his divine words he said to make them firm in time of persecution, saying (Matt 10:17) “But between of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues.” He says they will deliver us up, not that we deliver ourselves up. You will be let before rulers and kings for my sake; it is not you who will leak yourselves. He wishes us to go from one place to the other where those who persecute us are, and this is because of his name.”

The Lord Jesus faced the uprising of the evil ones, and their wish to destroy him, by departing from that place of evil; he did not wish to rest, but he rather wished to offer love to all in his incessant work. He poured out his compassion and tenderness on all. He worked in humility, taking care of every soul, however wrecked it may be, and of whatever nationality. The evangelist says, (Matt 12:15-21) “And great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all. Yet he warned them not to make him known, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet saying, ‘Behold! My servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased! I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will declare justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and smoking flax he will not quench, till he sends forth justice to victory, and in his name the Gentiles will trust.’”

In this way the evangelist concentrates on the prophecy of Isaiah the prophet, that has been fulfilled in the person of the Messiah. He confirms to us that:

- A) The Chosen One to fulfill the Salvation.
- B) In Him, the Father is pleased with us.
- C) The desire and hope of the Gentiles.
- D) With Humility he grants Victory.
- E) He is patient with the Weak.

The Father says about the Messiah the Savior “This is my Son in whom I am well pleased.” The Father has chosen his only begotten Son to fulfill the salvation. He declared the perfection of divine love; we thus enter into him and obtain the membership in his body. Therefore we, too, become chosen by the Father, the center of his love and pleasure! St. Paul the apostle says, (Eph 1:3-5) “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to himself, recording to the good pleasure of his will.”

In other words, the Lord Jesus does not resist evil, but he overcomes it with goodness. He offers his love instead of their envy and hatred. Therefore we, too, when we accept being united with his father in him, we appear as God’s chosen ones. We stand before the Father blamelessly, carrying the holiness of Christ since we are members in his body that in blameless and sanctified. The Father thus, calls us his children

according to our firmness in his only begotten Son. He is pleased with us because we love him, and in us his good will has been fulfilled.

If the Father calls his only Son “My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,” therefore he, who finds a place in the Son, will hear these divine words addressed to him personally, and in hence considered God’s lover.

He says, “I put my Spirit on him, and he informs the Gentiles of the truth.” Who is the Spirit of the Father other than the Spirit of the Son? The Father has sent his Holy Spirit on St. May to prepare the incarnation miracle of God. He sent his Holy Spirit to ascend with him to the mount, to enter the decisive fight with Satan on the tribulation mountain. It is the Spirit of the Son who will never be separated from him. From the very beginning, he is from the Father and dwells in him! Here, he is offering us his Holy Spirit, after the redemption has been fulfilled, and he has ascended on the right land of the supremacy, so we could carry the mission of Christ himself, “informing the Gentiles of the truth.” Through the cross, the Lord has been declared in the truth. He offered the perfection of God’s love to humanity. He paid the price of our sins, till the very last penny. What remains for us to do is to work in his Spirit, to testify to the truth that was given to us by the only begotten Son!

No one can inform us of the truth in its completion, except the crucified Son. The work of the church, therefore, in its preaching, is to present Christ himself, by the Holy Spirit, to declare the truth. We should not be surprised to hear the savior say, “I am the truth.” It is as if there is no other work for us to do except to accept him in us, and testify for him. That is to say to present him to others through our life in him, and thus we shall be blessed with the truth, and others will be blessed by him as well.

The Jews had thought that the truth would not be declared except it be by the force of time, or by using violence. They expected the Messiah to be an earthly king, and an adequate leader, who could seize other countries for Israel’s account, and hence would establish Dairds Kingdom to rule the entire world! This materialistic concept crept to the thoughts of the leaders as well as to the people. This is why the Lord wished to correct their thinking by every means, and on more than one occasion. Here the Lord confirms the mystery of his victory is to declare the truth through the humility that is filled with love. “He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and smoking flax he will not quench, till he sends forth justice to victory, and in his name the gentiles will trust.”

Sin has harmed humanity and destroyed it. Its salvation therefore will not be by violence and force of time, but rather by the spirit of peaceful humility that is filled with love and gentleness. Humanity needs the Savior, not for his condemnation, but to have mercy on it, and that he might support every bruised reed till it is straightened. He supports every smoking flax till it is kindled. He is patient with all, so they may accept the truth by means of love. They would then be filled with hope instead of despair which had wrecked them.

St. Paul the apostle possessed the Spirit of his Master when he wrote, (1 Thes 5:14) "Comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all." St. Ambrosios also says, "Lord, grant me that the fall of each person be before me, so I could bear it with him. Let me not rebuke him disdainfully but rather grieve and weep. When I weep for others, I weep over myself, saying, (Gen 28:26) "Tamer is more righteous than myself." St. John El Dergy says, "You active shepherds, ask for the lost one, and carry him on your shoulders joyfully, and you will be able to heal the painful fatal illnesses. Love makes great the strong ones, and it is the gift of the physician.""

3. Overcoming the Demons:

Christ the Lord presented anew concept of worshipping and a true spiritual behavior, and consequently he declared the concept of victory over the devil, by his healing the blind and mute; and he healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the altitudes were amazed and said, 'Could this be the Son of David?' "The multitudes realized he was the Son of David, the Messiah, the King who is able to get out the evil spirit that has deprived this man of his mind, his vision and his utterance. The establishing of the Messiahs Kingdom therefore, only declares the collapse of the devil's kingdom, that makes man lose his sound mind and blinds his spiritual vision from seeing the heavens, and it also dumles his tongue and could not utter any praises."

The multitudes saw by this miracle a declaration of the Messiah Kingdom, the Son of David's Kingdom. But at the same time the Pharisees blasphemed against him, saying, (Matt 12:24-33) "Now when the Pharisees heard it they said 'This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons! But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to the, 'every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters abroad. Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come. Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree in know by its fruit.'"

St. Augustine paid particular attention to this chapter, because some misunderstand the meaning 'the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.' The shut the door of hope before so many others and also before themselves. They suspect they have fallen in it, which will deprive them of forgiveness. For this reason, I shall mention briefly the words of the saint, after dividing his words into six sections. I wish first, to make clear that the blasphemy against the Spirit in reality is the insistence on no repentance. Man therefore sins against the Holy Spirit, which makes the church united and one entity.

Also the sharing among its members old together is Christ Jesus our Lord. By so doing, man deprives himself of the spring of forgiveness, and he deserves condemnation because of the Spirit being divided against himself.

St. Augustine comments on this chapter about:

Firstly: Christ is not Beelzebub the heard of the demons.

Secondly: It is Satan's kingdom and not the church that is divided against itself.

Thirdly: Is there any man who did not blaspheme the Holy Spirit?

Fourthly: was blasphemy meant to be a general one or a special one?

Fifthly: What special meaning did the Lord mean by blasphemy?

Sixthly: The surrounding circumstances in which the Lord spoke those words.

Firstly: Christ is not Beelzebub:

St. Augustine says: "For the Pharisees not the assume that Christ is the ruler of the devils, getting out devils, they have to listen to what he said (Matt 12:27) "And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges." Undoubtedly, by them he means his disciples, those who are sons of these people. It is absolutely certain they have learnt nothing of the satanic art from their good Master, so they could overpower the demons. This is why he said to them 'they will be your judges.' They are loyal, and of the poorest category, and know no envy, but they are rather described as having my sanctifies strength. They are witnesses to me and judges to you. This is why he added "But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you." If I with God's Spirit, cast out demons, then it is your children, whom I have taught nothing deceiving, but rather only the simplicity of faith, cast out demons...this is why the kingdom of God will come upon you, and the kingdom of Satan will perish, and you as well along with it."

By his saying, "By whom do your sons cast them out?" he manifests they do this according to his graces, and not as they deserve. This is why he says (Matt 12:29) "Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house."

Therefore, your sons who believed in him, and those who will believe in him, will cast out demons by the simplicity of holiness and not by power of Beelzebub. For real, they were as evil and as sinful as you are. They were in Satan's house and a vessel for him; so how could they be saved from him? For it is he who tied them with darkness and overruled then, if the Lord had not tied him with the chains of his justice and has taken from him the vassal which was for scorn and degradation, and he made it for mercy? This is exactly what the devout apostle said when he rebuked those who relied on their own righteousness, saying, (1 Cor 4:7) "For who makes you differ from another?" That is to say, who will differ you from the eternal destruction that you inherited from Adam? Or who will change you from being a scornful and degraded vessel? No one is able to answer that in his self-righteousness he is changed from being a vessel of degradation. The apostle adds (Eph 2:3) "What other thing do you have, which you did not take?...and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others." For he was a persecutor of the church, he was resistant and envious and he blasphemed. He was a vessel in the house of

this strong evil one. But Christ, who tied this strong devil, took the damned vessel and made it his chosen one.

In this way the Lord Jesus confirms it is not by Beelzebub the ruler of the demons, that he casts out demons. But he is the only Son of God who works by his Holy Spirit. The sign for this is apparent in the life of the simple disciples who lived among them, and they realize their entire past life. Now, they carry power and authority, which confirms the manifestation of God's kingdom." The Lord says "but if I cast out demons by the spirit of god, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you." The Lord has appeared among us, crushing down Satan's kingdom and establishing God's spiritual kingdom. He performed and fulfilled his authority on our account, for all of us, and he granted it to his disciples, so God's kingdom would be declared in all the nations.

Pope Cyril the great says, "He said well 'the kingdom of God has come upon you'; this means that since I have become man as you are, and cast out demons by God's Spirit, by this humanity had become enriched in me from the kingdom of heaven. It has attained glory by casting out demons, and rebuking the evil spirits." St. Ambrosius also says, "He had manifested by doing so, the existence of the royal authority of the Holy Spirit, which is God's finger. We too, since the Holy Spirit dwells in us, we have become a royal dwelling. This is why he says on another occasion (Luke 17:21) "The kingdom of heaven is in you.""

Secondly: The Demon's kingdom, and not the Church, is the one divided against itself:

St. Augustine says, that Christ's church represents God's indivisible kingdom; it is the Catholic Church. But as for the heretics who carry Christ's name, and are separated from the church, these do not belong to God's kingdom.

Their presence does not mean a division has happened in Christ's body. They just have the name but not the membership.

Indeed, any division whatsoever, be it on the level of the Catholic Church or the local one, or the church of the house, or inside the believer's heart, is all foreign to Christ's Spirit. Man loses his true membership in the Only Begotten Christ's body. It is the work of Satan!

Thirdly: The adversary makes the most of the Lord's words concerning the unforgiveness of blasphemy against the Holy spirit, so he may crush down some souls. He makes them doubt they have thought of blasphemy against the spirits, so as to shut down the door of hope for salvation. St. Augustine suffered as a bishop regarding this point amongst his people. He wished to invoke in them the Spirit of hope, and thereby destroying all Satan's doubtful attempts. He began by assuring us that each person is liable to have thoughts of blasphemy, whether it be by uttering a word of blasphemy particularly before his faith. Will salvation door be shut down before all?

St. Augustine says, “Who is he who has not sinned with a word against the Holy Spirit before becoming a Christian, or before becoming a follower to the Catholic Church?”

- 1) The atheists: These worship many other false gods, and kneel down before statues, and say the Lord Jesus performed his miracles by the power of magic. They are like those who said by the power of demons he casts out demons. They blaspheme against our holies every day. Is not this blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?
- 2) The Jews: Do not the Jews by uttering these words; have urged the discussion I am talking now? Do not they repeat, up till today, the blasphemous words against the Holy Spirit, by denying his presence in Christians? The Sadducees have denied the Holy Spirit; but the Pharisees have not denied him, and they rather confirmed his presence. But they denied his relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, for they considered him the ruler of demons, casting out demons, even though he cast them out by the Holy Spirit.
- 3) The Heretics: The Jews as well as the heretics who believe in the presence of the Holy Spirit, deny his relationship to Christ’s body, that is the one and only Catholic Church. These undoubtedly are as the Pharisees who despite their confessing the presence of the Holy Spirit, yet they denied his presence in the Lord Jesus. They attributed the casting out of demons as his being the ruler of demons.

It has become clear that the atheists, the Jews and the heretics have all blasphemed against the Holy Spirit. Should these be disregarded, and lose the hope according to the words, “but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.” Is it possible not to have any blasphemy against the Holy Spirit except it be by the Christian who has been raised up since his Childhood in the Catholic Church?

Indeed, all those who believed in God’s Word, and have followed the Catholic Church, whether they be atheists, Jews or heretics, have obtained the grace and peace of Christ. If they have not obtained the grace and peace of Christ. If they had not obtained the forgiveness for the words they uttered against the Holy Spirit then our promise for them, and our preaching of returning the God to obtain peace and the forgiveness of sins.... All this would have been considered fake and false. The words did not say ‘It will not be forgiven except by the baptism’, but he rather said ‘will not be forgiven in this age or in the age to come.’

- 4) The Christians: Some may think the Holy Spirit is not sinned against except by those who were washed in the water of the new birth. This sin of theirs is because of their ingratitude to the greatest gift that the Savior has granted them with. They threw themselves, after being given the gift, in the perishing sins such as adultery, killing, departing from Christianity or from the Catholic Church. But how can we prove the authenticity of this? I cannot say so, because the church will not reject the repentance for any kind of iniquity. St. Paul the apostle says it is possible to rebuke the heretics, that is to say the

Christians who have gone astray, for obtaining the reentrancy “I wish God would give them the repentance to know the truth, so they would wake up from Satan’s ambush, for he has then in his grip (2 Tim 2:25,26) of what use is their correction if they have no hope in attaining repentance? Likewise the Lord did not say ‘The baptized Christian who says a word against the Holy Spirit’, He rather said ‘But as for him who says a word ... that is, he who says a word, whether he be an atheist, or a Jew, or a Christian or a heretic.’”

Fourthly: By ‘blasphemy’, does he mean the general or specific meaning?

St. Augustine had confirmed that the doors of God’s mercies are open to all, even to those exposed to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, whether it be before the faith in Jesus Christ, by the Jews or Gentiles, or even after the faith such as when falling into heresy against the Holy Spirit, or by committing bitter evil iniquity. He began to make clear the words of Jesus Christ about ‘the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.’ This is in the statement just mentioned, that he did not mean the general meaning, which is every blasphemy against the Spirit, he rather meant a specific implication.

St. Augustine says, “The Lord did not say ‘every blasphemy against the spirit will not be forgiven’ or he who says any word”, but he said ‘but as for him who says a word.’ So, if you mention the word ‘every’, the church would not have been able to embrace sinners, evil ones, and those who resist, so as to give them Christ and the holies of the church. They could be Jewish, Gentiles, atheists or heretics, or even those weak Christians who belong to the Catholic church itself. God forbid this would be his meaning!

I say, God forbid he says ‘every’ or ‘any’ blasphemy against the Holy Spirit has no forgiveness. So, undoubtedly, there are blasphemies and certain words, that, if said about the Holy Spirit, these have no forgiveness. What is this word then? This is God’s will, to ask this question, so he reveals it to us; it is his will that we ask him, and not to protest his words.

The Holy Book mostly uses this method: to express a certain issue, with no specification if it is of a general or personal meaning. By so doing, this is no urgency to understand it in the general or personal sense. For, he does not use the word ‘all’ or ‘some’. He does not speak in a general or personal method.

Examples:

- A) To make this clearer, contemplate on the Lord’s words said by him about the Jews (John 15:22) “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin.” Here he does not define the meaning. He did not mean to say the Jews would have had no sin if Christ had not come and spoken to them. The truth is, he came and found them heavy with sin (Matt 11:28; Rom 5:2; Matt 9:13). How then, if Christ had not come they would have had no sin? He did not say ‘any sin’, lest the truth would lie. He did not say, either, in a specific way ‘certain specific sin’, lest we are not trained to search eagerly. For, the Holy

Book is rich in clear excerpts so we be trained in it. With the first, the hunger is stripped off, and with the second we obtain the sweetness.

We return to his saying, and we find the Jews have necessarily committed some iniquity, but not all of them. These are they that were not existent before his coming, which is denying the faith in him. By his saying 'they had no sin we do not understand.' That is 'They had not any sin', merely some. Likewise, today, when we listen to today's gospel 'The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven' we do not understand this as all blasphemy, but rather certain kinds of it.

- B) (James 1:3) it is said "God does not test anyone." It should not be understood that God does not test anyone by any kind of ordeal, but he does not tempt them by certain ones, otherwise what is written would be fake (Deut. 13:3) "for the Lord you God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." Therefore God does not test us by ordeals that lead us to iniquity, but he grants us to be tested by the ordeals that us to iniquity, but he grants us to be tested by the ordeals that he tests our faith with.
- C) Likewise when we hear (Mark 16:16) "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." Of course, we do not understand it as all who believe in whatever level of faith they have. In (James 2:19) "the devils also believe and treble." We do not understand this as all those who were baptized; because Simon the sorcerer, despite accepting the baptism, yet he could not be saved. His words 'He who believes in Me and is baptized,' he did not mean all those who believe and are baptized, but rather only some of them. These are the ones who are well based in this faith made clear by the apostle's words (Gal 5:6) "but faith working through love."

Fifthly: What was the personal meaning he meant by the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?

St. Augustine interprets what the Lord meant here was 'the insistence on no repentance, till the last breath in our life. He says the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Son, of his properties is the partnership between the two trigasion. The Holy Spirit gives us the partnership will God, for with him God's love is poured in us, and thus our sins are covered. By this his job is the forgiveness of sins, and our reconciliation with god.' In the other hand, it is the Spirit that provides the partnership among the members of the one church in the Lord. He is the one to grant the member the repentance and regret, as well as giving the church the right to release the sins. Therefore, the function of the Holy Spirit in our life is repentance so as to obtain absolution. Thus blasphemy is the insistence on no repentance and consequently, the deprivation of being a true member in the church.

St. Augustine says, "Brethren, you know well in the mystery of the invisible trinity, on which our faith is based, and on which the Catholic Church is established and

it preaches it, that the Father is not the Father to the Holy Spirit, but to the Son. The Son is not a Son to the Holy Spirit but to the Father. As for the Holy Spirit, he is not the Spirit of the Father alone, or of the Son alone, but is the Spirit of the Father and the Son. We have been hassled the concept of the Father, and the Son, and the partnership of the Holy Spirit, all these of one equality. By this, the Father's pleasure has been for us to obtain by means of him who ties the unity between the Father and the Son, the partnership among us all, and with the Holy Trinity." With the same gift we all gather in unity, which we obtain by means of the Holy Spirit, who is God, and at the same time God's gift.

The primary gift of God in the Holy Spirit is 'forgiveness of sins.' This is the key word of the Lord's forerunner heraldry, John the Baptist, saying, (Matt 3:1,2) "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This is also what our God started in his heraldry (Matt 4:17) One of the subjects John the Baptist spoke of, to those coming to be baptized, are his words (Matt 3:11) "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." The Lord moreover said (Acts 1:5) "For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." Although we may interpret fire as the ordeals suffered by the believers for Christ's sake, yet it makes sense that what is meant here is the Holy Spirit himself. This is why when the Holy Spirit descended it was said (Acts 2:3) "Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them." The Lord himself said (Luke 12:49) "I came to send fire on the earth." The apostle says, (Rom 12:11) "fervent in spirit." From the fiery Holy Spirit, there comes zealous love, fervency and fire, (Rom 5:5) "Because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." As a contrast the Lord said, (Matt 24:12) "...the love of many will grow cold." Hence, absolute love is the gift of the absolute fiery Holy Spirit. But the foremost gift of the Holy Spirit is the forgiveness of sins (Col 1:13) "He has delivered us from the power of darkness" and (John 12:31) "Now the ruler of this world will be cast out," who (Eph 2:2) "Now works in the sons of disobedience." With the Holy Spirit, by whom God's congregation are gathered in one, the evil spirit is expelled, that which is divided among itself.

In this way St. Augustine makes us reach the function of the Holy Spirit, which is the life of partnership with God, and our brethren, through which there will be no place for Satan in us. This is achieved by means of repentance. He therefore goes on to say "An unrepentant heart utters a word against the Holy Spirit, against this fire gift, and against this divine blessing. Unrepentant is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, that will not be forgiven in this age or the one to come."

Can there be judgment on anyone because of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?

St. Augustine says, "Unrepentance, or the unrepentant heart, is an unconfirmed issue as long as a person is alive physically. We should never be desperate at all of anyone as long as God's forbearance leads the sinful one to repentance, and as long as

God has not taken him quickly from this world.” (Ezekiel 18,9) “If he has walked in my statutes and kept my judgments faithfully – he is just; he shall surely live” says the Lord God. “A person could be an atheist today, but who can tell, he could be a Christian by tomorrow. Brother, the apostle urges you saying (1 Cor 4:5) “Therefore, judge nothing before the time.” I repeat my words that blasphemy cannot be attributed, under any condition, to a man still alive.”

Why is blasphemy against the Son of Man forgiven, whereas blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unforgiven?

St. Augustine says “Indeed, every sin and blasphemy is forgiven to people, and not only what is said against the Son of Man. As long as the sin of unrepentance is not there, that which is addressed against the Holy Spirit, by whom the Church forgives all kinds of sin, then all sins are forgiven. The words of the Lord of glory, “He who says a word against the Holy Spirit is greater than the Son. We have not heard of any nonsense admitting such a thing. What is meant by this is that he who resists the truth and blasphemes against it, which is Christ himself after he had declared himself among the people, for he had become man and dwelt among us, (John 1:14), and if he has not said a word against the Holy Spirit, that is if he has regretted his resistance and blasphemy against Christ, then his sins are forgiven him. Therefore, we should not assume what was said by some people, what is said against the Son of Man is forgiven him, and what is said against the Holy Spirit is not forgiven him, because of the incarnation of the Son. Consequently the Holy Spirit is greater from this angle. The Holy Spirit is equal to the Father and the only begotten Son in essence due to his godliness. If this were true, not every word or blasphemy would have been forgiven, except that which is said about the Son of Man regarding his humanity only. But we find the gospel saying, (Matt 12:13) “Every sin and blasphemy is forgiven to man.” Also (Mark 3:28) “all sins are forgiven to man, the blasphemy they blaspheme with.” This includes what blasphemy is said against the Father. Has the Father taken the enrage of a slave until the Holy Spirit has become greater than him regarding this issue? For the blasphemy said against the Father is forgiven, whereas the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not forgiven? For sure, it is not so.”

In this way St. Augustine makes clear that all blasphemy is forgiven; but the specified ‘the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit,’ by which he means unrepentance, and not as distinguishing him from the Father or the Son.

The Saints showed the Father that he forgives sins (Matt 6:14) and that the Son also forgives sins (Matt 9:6). This is because forgiveness is the work of the Holy Trinity, but it concerns the Holy Spirit since he is the Spirit of adoption (Rom 8:15) the Donor of partnership (Phil 2:1). Therefore, the forgiveness of sins is not granted unless by the Holy Spirit through the Catholic Church that has the Holy Spirit.

Sixthly: The Circumstances in which the Lord said these words:

St. Augustine says, “The Lord has explained clearly what he wished us to know: that he who speaks against the Holy Spirit, that is he who resists, by unrepenting, the church unity that has been granted to give the forgiveness of sins, he will not be given this Spirit. Let no one think that Christ’s kingdom is divided against itself because of those who assemble in unusual assemblies, out of the fold, yet under the name of Christ. This is why I repeat (Matt 12:30) “He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with Me Scatters abroad.” He who gathers without Christ, however much he has gathered in his name, will not have the Holy Spirit with him. He therefore obligates us to understand that forgiveness is not fulfilled for any sin or blasphemy, under any condition, except it be by our unity together in Christ him who knows no discrimination.”

It is as if the Lord Jesus when speaking of ‘the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit,’ he not only warns us of not obtaining forgiveness by our unrepentance, but he also asks of what is positive: “The work for Christ’s account! He who does not work with him, is like him who resists him.”

The Christian is committed to working for Christ’s account so as to build us the church. Otherwise he is considered as one who destroys his kingdom. As St. Jerome says, “He who does not belong to Christ is against him.” St. Kaprianos says, “He who breaks the peace of Christ and his words acts in contradiction to him he who gathers away from the church, such as in the heresy assemblies, scatters the church.” St. Ambrosios therefore says, “He speaks here of those who destroy the church unity.”

When Heliodors’ family bitterly and cruelly resisted his going to the monastery, St. Jerome wrote to him of the words of the Lord “He who is not with me is against me and he who does not gather with me, scatters abroad.” He says “Remember the day your name was recorded in the church records, when you were buried with Christ in the baptism. You pledged loyal allegiance to him, and you declared that for him you leave your father and mother. Indeed, the enemy struggles to slaughter Christ in your heart. Run away in tearful eyes and go to the flag of the cross.”

Lest some are obstructed by thinking they are naturally evil, these are they who are unable to offer repentance through good deeds. The Lord Jesus therefore speaks to the Pharisees saying, (Matt 12:33) “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit.” By so saying, he opens for them the door of hope. Even though they have fallen into blasphemy, but by their own will power they could be blessed with God’s ability to change the tree of their life. If their words that were full of blasphemy reveal the kind of tree inside their old self, yet they are able through the Lord to change the nature of their tree.

St. Augustine comments on the Lord’s words, saying, “Man has to be changed, himself first, so that his deeds be changed as well. If a man remain in his evil state, his deeds can never be righteous. If he remains in a good state, he will never carry evil fruits.” He moreover says, “Change the heart, and thus the deeds will be changed, too. Uproot the passions, and implant love instead, for the love of money is the source of all evil (1 Tim 6:10) Likewise love is the source of all goodness.”

St. Ignatius comments on the statement ‘from the fruit, the tree is known’ saying, “He who speaks of faith is known by his deeds. It is not enough we declare our faith, but we have to manifest it practically till the very end.”

If we are in need of changing the inner tree, which is the heart, by our Lord Christ, the Giver of the new man in the baptism water, through his Holy Spirit, so we could produce good fruits, and not one bad fruit be there, we are also obligated to struggle against uttering one bad or evil word. This is why the Lord continues to say, (Matt 12:36,37) “But I say to you that every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

St. John Chrysostom speaks of the tongue control, saying, “The gold vessel is not used for defiled things, since it is so expensive. How much more the tongue would be, which is of more value than gold and gemstones? We should not defile it by ugly words, swearing, and insulting others.”

(Sirach 8:21) The wise one says those who have fallen due to the tongue’s obstruction are more than those who have fallen by the swords. And Jesus says, (Matt 15:11) “Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.” The wise one also says, “Put a door and a lock to your mouth,” (Sirach 8:29).

Father John of Kronstadt says, “Be careful with your words, for the word is priceless! Speak of the creative word of God, for the word of God is source of all creation. In him you find the present, the past and the future.” He moreover says, “If you speak with your close one, speak with reason, and in decency, in a constructive way. Avoid every vain word since it is the poison of a serpent.”

The Concept of the Verse:

(Matt 12:38-40) “Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered saying, ‘Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.’ But he answered and said to them ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.’”

St. Cyril the great thinks the Lord refused to give them any sign because they asked for this in deceit. The Lord had performed before this, miracles, and yet they accused him of being the ruler of demons, casting out demons. They therefore deserved no blessing of any of his miracles. He therefore says, “Their request sprang from deceit, and it was not answered, as the Book says, (revised Hosea 5:6) “The evil ones ask for me, but will not find me.” They attributed to Beelzebub great amazing works, and there were not ashamed to break down others as well as themselves with the very same matters that were supposed to make them firm in their faith of Christ. This is why he refused giving

them another sign, for the holies are not to be offered to the dogs, and neither the pearls to be thrown to the swine. For how can those ones who accused Christ bitterly for the miracles he fulfilled, to be blessed with other ones? This is why he told them they will be given except the miracle of Jonah which signifies the cross and the resurrection from the dead. Christ could have rejected to die physically on the cross, and would not have offered the sign to the Jews. But these sufferings were necessary for the world salvation, and it was given to the Jewish unbelievers so as to condemn them. In his words to them he said (John 2:19) "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." His trampling on death, and connecting the corruption by his resurrection is a great sign of the power of the incarnate word and his divine authority. This is enough evidence, as I think, of the serious people's judgment. But they squandered great amounts of money to be given to Pilate's men, so as to say (Matt 28:13) "His disciples came at night and stole him away." His resurrection was not to be disregarded, but enough to convince the peoples of the entire world that Christ is God, and that he has willingly suffered physically, and rose again, commanding the bounds of death to depart, and corruption to be cast out. But the Jews did not believe even in this. This is why they were truly spoken of as (Matt 12:42) "The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it.""

It is as if the Lord wished to assure them that the sign was not a way of showing off, but it was a godly and divine deeds, with the aim of man's salvation. Prior to all this, is the sign that implied a symbolic significance to the Lord's burial and his resurrection from the dead, so as to grant us being buried with him, and being blessed with the power of his resurrection, that is to say, the miracle of Jonah the prophet.

The aim of the signs and miracles is 'man's spiritual life.' This is why the fathers believe the righteous life is better than performing miracles. God does not condemns us if we do not live by his Holy Spirit, the appropriate life befitting his own children. The Lord confirms that in the great day, he will condemn the evil ones, even if they had performed miracles in his name, and he considers them as strangers to him.

+ We do not have to ask for miracles, but rather for the spirit's health.

Do not ask to see a dead one rise from the dead, for you have learnt that the entire world will rise.

Do not ask to see a blind one have vision, but rather let all now hope to have a better vision and useful one. Also learn to look in purity, and thus correct your eyes. If we live appropriately, the sons of unbelievers will be amazed at us, more than those who perform miracles.

+ If you wish to perform miracles, you also have to get rid of any obstacles, and thus you will fulfill absolute miracles.

St. John Chrysostom.

+ We should to be deceived, merely because they are called in Christ's name, without their having any deed. Even miracles should not deceive us, because the Lord who has performed the miracles to unbelievers, warned us not to be deceived by miracles, thinking that where there is the visible miracle there is the invisible wisdom. He therefore added (Matt 7:22,23) "Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name?' And then I will declare to them 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness!' For he knows no other than those who practice righteousness."

St. Augustine.

The link between Jonah and Jesus Christ is the link of the symbol and the symbolized One. St. Cyril El Orshilymy says, "Just as Jonah was cast in the belly of the whole, likewise the Lord Jesus, he descended voluntarily where invisible whale of death is, to force him to throw up those he had swallowed. As is written (Hosea 13:14) "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death.""

St. Basilios the great says, "He gave them a sign but not from heaven, since they did not deserve to see it. It was from the deep spit of hell; I mean the sign of his incarnation, his divinity, his sufferings, and his glorification due to his resurrection after he had entered into hell to release those who have died in hope." St. Ambrosios says, "The sign of Jonah points to the Lord's suffering. It is also a witness against the great iniquity done by the Jews. By Nineveh's people he points to the penalty, because the Jews were the ones to torment the Lord Jesus. At the same time it signifies mercy; for the Jews should not despair of any forgiveness if they practice repentance."

The people of Nineveh were blessed with Jonah, the preacher released from the whale's belly. As for us, we are blessed with the real Jonah, the one able to release us from the deep abyss, and make us enter with him to his heavenly kingdom (Matt 12:41) "indeed, a greater than Jonah is here."

We, furthermore, have him who is greater than Solomon. He not only spoke in wise words, but he also casts away from us Satan's kingdom. (Matt 12: 42-45) "The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and indeed a greater than Solomon is here. When an unclear spirit goes out of man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation."

St. Cyril the great comments on this excerpt by saying, "This woman came to listen to Solomon. She came a very long way to fulfill this goal, so as to listen to his wisdom concerning the nature of visible issues, the animals and plants. But as for you,

you have among you the wisdom himself and you are listening to him. He has come to tell you of the heavenly and invisible issues, proving his words by his deeds and his miracle. But you run away from his words, and go far away from its amazing nature. How then there is no one found greater than Solomon? He is here among you.” I ask you another time to notice his smart words, for he says ‘here’ and not ‘in me’. This is to attract us to his humility when he gives us his spiritual gifts. On the other hand, it is not appreciated among the Jews to hear him say ‘A greater than Solomon is in me.’ If they had heard him say this, they would have been bold enough to say, ‘Look! He is saying he is greater than the kings who ruled over us in glory.’ For the sake of wisdom, the Savior used the language of humility saying ‘Here’ instead of saying ‘in me.’

St. Ambrosius says, ‘Here, too, he is condemning the Jewish people, for he expresses himself forcefully about the mystery of the church in the queen of the south. She desired to obtain wisdom; for she came from so far away to hear the words of Solomon, the peace-maker, she is queen of the indivisible kingdom, comprising many different nations in one body.’

The Lord Jesus has come down, he who is greater than Jonah that led the people of Nineveh to repentance. He is also greater than Solomon to whom the queen of the South came from the farthest places, so as to listen to his wisdom. Now it has become possible for us to be blessed with the new kingdom. He has cast away the devil that has dwell in the heart for a very long time, so that the Lord would come in instead. This free gift given to us, condemns us if we are careless about it, and yield our heart to the adversary a second time due to our negligence. Satan will come forward in a more ferocious way, so as to dwell in what he has lost. We see this practically when the believer leaves the sanctified life, and becomes in his wickedness, way worse than before his faith or repentance.

St. John Climacus believes this divine saying applies perfectly to this enthusiastic young man who is successful in leaving the passions of the body and of the luxurious life; yet after entering the aesthetic monastic life, he falls due to his carelessness, inside the safe harbor. For he says, ‘what a pitiful sight this is: we can see those who survived the dangers of the sea, these suffer their ship wreckage inside the very harbor.’

5. The Unity with Him:

(Matt 12:46-50) “While he was still talking to the multitudes, behold, his mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with him. Then one said to him ‘Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with you.’ But he answered and said to the one who told him, ‘who is my mother and who are my brothers?’ And he stretched out his hand toward his disciples and said, ‘Here are my mother and my brother!’ For whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

The Lord stretched out his hand toward his disciples. This points to his incarnation and his dwelling amongst us. By doing so, he has taken us to a new relation, considering us his mothering and his brothers.

In reference to St. John the Baptist's words to the Pharisees and the Sadducees (Matt 3:7,9) "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones." We have to realize that St. John did not deny the physical relation to their father Abraham, but in their evil they lost their spiritual link to him, and have become children to vipers since they keep making the same things. On the other hand, the Lord Jesus did not deny St. Mary's relationship to him, that is to say her motherhood to him according to the body. He assures us of it and on firms it through her life in the faith, working according to the Lord's will. St. Mary the virgin has opened the way, not only to women but to every person as well, to carry the Lord Jesus spiritually in their hearts, and the spirit would be as a mother to him.

+ He did not say 'You are not my mother' but he said, "Who is my mother?" It is as if he is presenting a new concept in being tied to him, not through a physical link by means of the flesh and blood, and in laws. It is through obedience to the Father's will. Can you see how, on every occasion he did not deny the natural relationship, but he has rather added to it what is by means of virtue?

St. John Chrysostom.

+ This means that even my mother whom you call blessed; she is rather blessed for keeping the word of God. This is not only because the world of God has become in her physically and has lived among us, but also because she kept the word of God himself, he who has created her, and has become physical in her. I wish we do not get happy by physical marriages, but rather pride ourselves if spiritually he is bonded to God.

St. Augustine.

We have previously spoken of what we can call the motherhood of the spirit to the Lord Jesus, for she has carried him inside herself. As for the concept of 'the Lord's brethren' since they were sons to Mary, Klopas' wife, sister to St. Mary (John 19:25). This is in our book 'St. Mary in the Orthodox Concept.'

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Chapter XIII (Page 370)

The Parables of the kingdom

The Lord Jesus presented to us new concepts of the heavenly kingdom concerning the worshiping, demeanor, struggle, salvation and the unity with God. He thus presented to us certain examples regarding this heavenly kingdom of the Messiah. These reveal to us his mysteries from various aspects:

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1. The Parable of the Sower:

The Lord Jesus met the multitudes out of the house; for else evangelist says, (Matt 13:1,2) “On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. And great multitudes were gathered together to him, so that he got into a boat and sat and the whole multitude stood on the shore.” When explaining the parable to the disciples, he was with them in the house, after he had dismissed the multitude (Matt 13:36). So, what is meant by the house?

Firstly: He may have meant ‘the sanctified church, as a group of believers.’ The Lord Jesus went out to meet the unbelieving multitudes who have not yet become members in the church, and have not been born as children of God. He went out to them to encounter them through his love by means of his preaching word. He sat at the sea, which signifies the world filled with confusion. This is to take them to his church, by his entering the boat of our humanity, and his speaking to them of the heavenly kingdom, all through parables.

In love, he talks to them; yet he can trust no one with the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom, and tasting of the eternal glories to those out of the house. He dismisses the multitudes so as to encounter his disciples alone inside the house, and he speaks to them in matters that are glorious and unutterable.

The scholar Oregenus says, “When Christ is with the multitudes he is outside his house, because the multitudes are out of the house. This work springs out of his love to humanity, for, he leaves the house, and goes all the way to those unable to reach him.”

Secondly: The house also points to heaven, for it is God's temple. Humanity has been unable to ascend up to heaven to meet its Creator, therefore he came down to earth, like someone going out of the house to meet mankind, by means of their humanity. They do not fear him as a judge, and so run away from him. They rather listened to his voice in the wooden boat, that is, through the cross. He attracts them in love to the heavens, which is 'his house,' and he reveals to them his mysteries, as a groom tenderly speaking to his bride about eternity. He does not speak to them openly about his mysteries, but through the personal love relationship in their meeting together under one rooftop!

I truly wish we would not merely stand with the multitudes at the seashore only to listen to parables. We should enter by his means, and in him, to his house. Let us be blessed with the spiritual membership in his church, and enter his heavens, and fall in his divine embrace, so he would speak to us of his love, so mysteriously sublime.

The sower went out to sow:

God's objective in us is 'the exodus;' He takes us, like the people of Israel from the land of bondage to the prosperous Promised Land. He is eager to take us out of the sinful bondage to the glorious liberty of that belongs to God's children. This exodus was impossible for us to perform; He therefore, went out first from his glory, so he takes out, on 'the exodus,' from our corrupt nature. We would then meet him, and be in him, enjoying the new nature which is in his likeness.

St. John Chrysostom speaks of this divine exodus in the following way: "He who is everywhere went out. Yet he is unlimited to a certain place. He came to us in the robe of our own bodies. Christ speaks to us in truth of his drawing near to us, as an exodus. This is because we have been dismissed out of God's presence, like those indebted, rebuking and expelled from the king, goes out to them, and speaks to them out of the kingdom. When they are well prepared, he gets them to God's presence. This is what Christ did." He moreover says, "He did not go out to a certain site. He rather declares a life and provision that concern our salvation. He became close to us by taking on our own physical shape and form. Since we were unable to enter due to our iniquity, he himself came out to us. Why did he do so? Is it to destroy the land that begot thistles? No; He actually came out to take care of the land, and sow the tender word. He calls his teachings 'the seeds,' and the people's souls he calls 'a fruitful field,' and he calls himself 'The Sower.'"

The Lord Jesus is the sower who always goes out to sow his love in us, so we produce in our hearts a tree of love which God would wish to pick its fruits. He says, 'You' have come to my paradise, my sister, my bride, you have picked my bitterness with my perfume; you have eaten of my sweetness with my honey, you have drunk of my wine with my mild (Isaiah 5:1) eat, my friends, drink, and revel my loved ones. God has sown the seeds in his paradise, but our first fathers accepted the weeds instead of the Lord's seeds. They therefore carried the fruits of bitterness and disobedience.

God came back once more to his congregation through Moses, so he takes them from the land of bondage, offering them the law as divine seeds. But the heart was tied to the idol worshiping of Egypt, particularly the gold Abis Bull, and therefore

they rejected God's seeds, and so they produced a tree of constant complaints and rebellion. At the right time, the word of God himself, came out to us incarnate, and dwell amongst us, to be accepted quickly in us, and hence produce the fruits of his Holy Spirit. His going out was perfectly fulfilled by his going out of Jerusalem, carrying the shame of the cross, so we too, could go out with the cross out of our ego. This means out of our haughty selves, and encounter him at the cross, and accept the spring of his pure blood, as seeds of love working in us. The apostle make there words clear by saying (Heb. 13:12,13) "Therefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with this own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to him, outside the camp, bearing his reproach."

The Seeds:

What are those seeds the Lord sows in our life just as on the ground? In the olden times, Moses and the prophets received the word from God, that is to say, they used it to be blessed with it in their life, and offered it to the people, it was naked! But as for the Lord Jesus, he is in essence the divine word. He wishes to be buried in the believer's heart, so he declares himself the tree of life in him. He does not offer anything outside of him to be borrowed; he rather offers his life a mystery of a life to us. His resurrection is our own resurrection as well, his victory is our prime victory, his glories are the mystery of our own glorification. He is the sower and the seed at the same time.

The Ground:

The ground that receives the Lord Jesus himself as a seed, either rejects or accepts it. The Lord Jesus offered to us four kinds of soil:

The way, the rocky ground, the soil full of thorns and the good soil. Indeed, the sower and the seeds are one and the same; but whether there is the fruit or more at all depends on the ground that receives the seeds. Some believe this parable means there are variable natures that are unchangeable under any condition. The evil one commits evil deeds due to his nature, where as the good does good due to his good nature. It is as if man is obligated to do actions that are quite impossible not to do them; it is as if he has no will power. This allegation has been faced by many fathers. Here I wish to confirm that this concept is not to be derived from this parable. For, if God knew this, why has he given us this parable? He says "He who has ears to hear let him hear" (Matt 13:9). It is as if he commands us to listen to his words, and ask that our nature be changed to the good soil.

+ When you hear of this do not begin to think of different natures, as the heretics do. These mention that one has an evil nature, whereas another has a good one. They also state that some are led by their will power during their formation to what is good or bad. In addition to this, the words 'it has been given you mean you have a will power of your own.'

St. Gregory El Nazinzi.

+ On the possibility of the transformation into good soil:

Upturn the good soil with the tool, take away the rocks from the field, wipe away all thistles from it.

Beware of keeping the cruel heart that does not preserve Good's sword in it, and it soon loses it.

Beware of having a light soil, in which the roots of love do not delve deep.

Beware the good seeds are not choked; these are the ones planted during my struggle, by means of the passions and worldly cares.

Be the good soil, and let each one bring forth a hundred fold, a sixty fold and a thirty fold.

St. Augustine.

What does he mean by his words 'He who has ears to hear let him hear?' St. Jerome comments on this statement, "Isaiah says, 'The Lord has given me an ear' (Isaiah 50:4). Know the meaning of what he says, 'The Lord has given me an ear,' for I have the ear of the heart. He granted me the ear that hears God's message. What the prophet hears, is only heard in the heart. We likewise cry out in our hearts saying, 'Our Father, Abba,' this is a silent cry, but the Lord hears the silence. In the same way the Lord speaks to our hearts that cry out 'Our Father, Abba.'"

Firstly: The road

(Matt 13:4) "And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them." This road or wayside is the haughty heart that is on a higher level than the cultivable plains. It is desired by the soaring birds that are by the demons of pride that hinder our real encounter with God the Word! The wayside is constantly open, with no fence to keep it from the passers by. This is like man who has open senses to every alien, with no guard to protect it. How badly in need this man is of crying out to God with the psalmist saying 'Lord, put some protection to my mouth and a safe door to my lips! He would then be blessed with the Holy Spirit himself as a fiery fence surrounding him, and evil cannot draw near unto it.'

St. Cyril the great speaks of the wayside saying, "The road is always solid, trodden on by all the passers by, and this is why the seeds are not sowed there. Likewise are those who have violent thoughts that are unyielding. The word of God, so divine, does not enter into them, and does not support them so as to be blessed with the joyful fruit of virtue. Such people are like the wayside trodden upon by the defiled spirits, and trampled upon by Satan himself. They therefore, do not bring forth any sanctified fruits because of their stubborn and hard hearts."

Secondly: The Rocky Places

(Matt 13:5,6) "Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away." This stony place covered with a thin layer of earth represents the hypocritical heart that hides its stony nature behind bright and glamorous appearances. It accepts the word speedily to shoot up a plant which rejoices everyone. But the inward hypocrisy is sufficient to kill its vitality. It cannot stand the scorching of the sun and so it burns and withers, since there are no roots. He wishes his hypocrisy to be covered up. But in ordeals this is revealed and his bottom base is discovered. Pope Cyril the great says, "There are others who have the faith but they do not care much about it in their hearts; this is just words to them. Their religion has no roots in them. They enter the church, and are glad to see big numbers assembled there, all ready to share in the holy sacraments. But they do not do this as a serious goal and a sublime will power. When they are out of the church, they instantly forget the holy edification. When the

Christians are in peace they keep the faith, but when persecution is waged, they think of running away asking for safety. Jeremiah speaks to such people, saying, (Jer. 46:30) "Order the buckler and shield, and draw near to battle!" For the Lord's hand that defends you can never be defeated. St. Paul, the knowledgeable one says, (1 Cor. 10:13) "But God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

Thirdly: The earth full of thorns and thistles:

(Matt 13:7) "And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them." This signifies the soul choked by the thorns of the worldly cares. God's word will not be active in a heart that clings to the worldly pleasures, or what the Lord calls (Matt 13:22) "The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches." We notice here he does not say, 'The world and its riches' but 'the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches!' The drawback is not of this world, or its riches. It is rather in our thoughts that are weighty with cares and pride and deceit. St. John Chrysostom says, "I wish we would not blame things in themselves, but rather blame the corrupt mind. You can for instance be wealthy but with no pride for the wealth. You can be in the world without being choked by its cares." St. Eklimentos the Alexandrian makes it clear by saying, "We should not blame the money, but rather the misusing of it. It is also not a virtue for man to be poor, but the virtue is in practicing the meekness of the spirit, which is not cling to money."

Father Gregory the great speaks of the pride of riches saying, "Who would believe me if I explain that the thorns are the riches? Particularly because thorns hurt us whereas riches thrill us. In spite of this, there are thorns that hurt the spirit with the pricking of thoughts that arise in us. These also promote us to commit sin. It stains us with corruption as freshly oozing blood. Riches deceive us, for they cannot continue forever, and neither does it satisfy the needs of our hearts. The only real riches is that which makes us rich in virtues. This is why dear brethren, if you wish to become rich, love the real riches. If you want to heavenly glories! Ask for the heavenly kingdom. If you love to enjoy the glorious honors, be quick to have your names numbered among the heavenly hosts in glory."

St. Cyril the great comments on the thorns, as being the cares of life, its riches and its pleasures. He says, "The Redeemer sow the seeds, and these face hearts that apparently seem strong and fruitful. But after a short while the cares and hardships in life choke it. The seeds then wither and fade. As Hosea the prophet says, (Hos. 8:7) "They sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind. The stalk has no bind; it shall never produce meal. If it should produce, aliens would swallow it up." Let us be smart sowers. Let us not distribute the seeds except after cleaning the earth of its thorns, so we could say with the psalmist, (Psalm 126:6) "He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Everyone who sows seeds on an earth producing thorns and thistles is exposed to two losses: the seeds that become ruined, and the great effort. Let us know well, the divine seeds can never flourish unless we uproot from our minds the worldly cares, and rip off from ourselves the proud and vain riches, (1 Tim 6:7) "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." Of what use is our possession of the vain fleeting things?" (Prov. 10:3) "The

Lord will not allow the righteous soul to famish, but he casts away the desire of the wicked.” Have you not noticed that the corrupt evil, such as greed, covetousness, wickedness, drunkenness, frivolity and pride, all of these choke us? As the Redeemer’s apostle says, (1 John 2:16) “For all that is in the world the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but the who does the will of God abides forever.”

Fourthly: The Good Ground

(Matt 13:8,9) “But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundred fold, some sixty and some thirty. He who has ears to hear let him hear.” It is the low lands that have been subject to upturning, and has hence been exposed to sunlight, and water has flowed into it. This is the modest spirit that accepts trials as the upturned soil. The inner soil, or the inner man is exposed to the sunbeams of righteousness itself, that is to say Christ. The spirit thereby receives the flow of water of the Holy Spirit active in him. Such a spirit brings forth fruits of a hundred fold, sixty fold and thirty fold.

+ It is a rich ground, fruitful and produces a hundred fold! Good and fruitful are those souls that receive the word in depth and keep it, and take care of it.

It is said about those souls what the Lord said by one of the prophets (Malachi 3:12) “‘And all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land’ says the Lord of hosts.” When the divine world of God falls on a soul pure any sad matter, it produces deep roots, and brings forth wheatears carrying increasing fruits.

St. Cyril the great.

The good ground is God’s gift to us by his Holy Spirit, given to us in the natural new baptism, on Christ the Lord’s image. This is able to stick firmly in Christ, and bring forth plentifully the fruits of the Spirit. Previously, in iniquity, we were a difficult path trampled upon by feet, and the birds would pick the seeds from it. For our sake, the Lord Jesus became the path that the adversary would not be able to draw near it, and the birds would not dare pick up anything from it. It is the safe road that knows no cruelty or violence. It is the way of truth that takes us to the Father’s embrace. But as for being stony ground, this is not unusual, because humanity has accepted gods of stone instead of the living God; and has worshiped idols for a very long time. Then Lord Jesus came as the cornerstone that binds the whole structure. It is not hard stone that kills the plants, but it is living stone, able to build in us a heavenly paradise that rejoices the Father! As for the thorns and thistles which choke the spirit, the Lord has carried these on his head. He paid the price of our iniquity so we be justified before the Father, and be found blameless in his eyes. We then have no thorns or thistles, but rather the fruit of the joyful Spirit!

Let us raise our hearts in thanks to him who has taken away from us what we deserved due to our disobedience and being diverted to a cruel path and stony ground, thorns and thistles. He granted us the new nature, so rich in him, to make out of us a heavenly paradise, bringing forth plentiful fruits.

The Grades of Fruit:

The Lord spoke of four kinds of ground, but not all the grounds reacted to the seeds. Even those that did react, it was in variable degrees. Some produced a hundred fold, some sixty and some thirty. St. John Chrysostom says, "Tell me then how the greatest part of the seeds was lost? They were not lost because of the sower, but rather because of the ground that did not react with it, that is to say, the souls that did not listen to it."

Some fathers such as St. Jerome think this fruit, though in different amounts, yet springing up from one and the same ground and field; but one man produces thirty; and he is the married one who preserves the bed undefiled, and carries a pure love relationship between husband and wife. Another one brings forth sixty, who is the widow or widower who bears the hardships of a simple life, and toils in joy. As for he who produces a hundred fold, this is the virgin.

2. The Need of Parables:

(Matt 13:11-13) "And the disciples came and said to him 'Why do you speak to them in parables?' He answered and said to them, 'because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance, but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables.'"

God speaks on the tongue of the psalmist (Ps. 78:2) "I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old." In this way the Lord speaks in parables, so as not to deprive anyone of his mysteries, for (1 Tim 2:4) "Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." He wished to attract to him all those who are eager to know the truth. Humans were used to be attracted towards mysterious stories, and they start a secret relationship, during which he offers them his holies that are unutterable. This is on one hand; on the other hand these parables as St. John Chrysostom, implied indirect rebuke to the hearers "He did not wish to rebuke them violently and directly, so they fall not into despair." Moreover, when speaking in parables, the Lord does not throw his holies to all lest those undesirable of the truth scorn them, and trample them with their feet.

The Lord says, (Matt 13:12) "For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him." As much as man is honest over God's holies, God pours on him the glories of true knowledge from day to day. He thereby tastes of the Lord's parables, by means of which he enters his house to hear the mysteries of the divine heaven. The voice of God is declared to him more clearly until he reaches the perfect sacraments leading him to glory face to face. But he who is dishonest, even what he hears of parables, this is taken away from him. His hearing would be a pretext for his judgment instead of being the mystery of glory to him. The Lord Jesus clarified this in the parable of the talents; the owner of the five talents traded will and gained. He was therefore given five cities. But he who has one talent, hid it in the ground, and made no trade with it; therefore even this one talent was taken away from him and was given to him who traded and profited! Our life with Jesus Christ is a constant outgoing from one glory to the other. There is constant interaction with God's Holy Spirit, who never ceases to declare to us the truth, and reminds us of all what the Lord

said. He takes of what is Christ's and gives to us! It is a dynamic life that never comes to a stop. But as for the passive many, who is sufficed with the knowledge and welfare he has, thinking within himself he is rich and needs nothing, even what he has will be taken away, and he will fall headlong from one weakness to the other, and from one deprivation to the other, he will finally fall to ignorance that darkens his mind and hardens his heart. This is just as the Lord said to the angel of the church in Laodiced (Rev 3:17) "Because you say, 'I am rich and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked."

This is what happened to the Jewish people that lived in passiveness, relying on the fact they are the circumcised people, of Abraham's descent, and the owners of the promises their fathers and prophets prophesied with. Out of this passiveness the Messiah the Savior came, and they saw him incarnate without the Spirit. They touched him outwardly without realizing the reality. This is why the Lord says about them (Matt 13:13-16) "... Because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled which says, 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive. For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.'" They saw the Lord and heard him; but due to the hardness of their heart their inward man did not hear, and neither did their inward vision see. His voice and his picture have become not a mystery of salvation to them, but rather a pretext for more thickness of their heart. Their cruelty has increased, so did their blandness, and their evil. As St. Paul the apostle said, (2 Cor 2:15,16) "For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life."

The coming of the Lord Jesus and his deeds added to the cruelty of the evil ones, because of their love to evil as well as their haughtiness; whereas it opened the spiritual vision of the simple ones so as to be aware of his tremendous mysteries and to enjoy what the prophets were so zealous to see. The Lord Jesus said to his disciples (Matt 13:16,17) "But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear and did not hear it."

St. John Chrysostom says, "What do the word mean 'to see and yet not see? They are able to see how the demons get out, and say there is a demon in him. They are able also to see those risen from the dead, and yet not worship him, they rather plot how to kill him.'"

They could see, since they had the prophecy clear about the Messiah the Savior. Some of them even guided Herod and the magi to the place of the Lord's birth. Despite this, they remained inwardly visionless, and did not encounter him for their souls' salvation, and being blessed with the new life. They have seen he whom the prophets spoke of. They were eager to see him and hear his voice and be blessed with his deeds in them. But unfortunately, they were not blessed by him in their life, they rather resisted him.

What wonderful blessings have become ours in our Lord Jesus Christ; for we have obtained what the angels are eager to witness and be blessed with. But, are we living by it day to day?

3. Interpretation of Parables:

(We have tackled this in our speaking of the parable itself)

4. The Parable of the Tares:

In the previous parable the Lord Jesus declared the divine work in establishing his kingdom in us. The sower himself went out and sowed the fiery word, and awaited the fruit. But here he declares the presence of a resistant adversary, that is, Satan, the ruler of the dark kingdom who cannot sand the kingdom of light.

(Matt 13:24-26) “Another parable he put forth to them, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared.’”

The Lord did not say, ‘While the sower was asleep, his adversary came and planted tares!’ He rather said, ‘while men slept,’ it is as if God is watchful over his vineyard and takes care of it. But when the vinedressers were asleep, the enemy crept into the vineyard. He respects the human will power and trusts it. When he hands over the vineyard to the vinedressers, he asks for their watchfulness. He words constantly in them, and the enemy can never be able to sow the tares. But if they fall asleep, even for a moment, the enemy creeps in.

The Lord did not say ‘their enemy cam,’ but ‘his enemy came! The enemy does not mean the vinedressers, but rather the owner of the vineyard. The real factor against the vineyard is Satan, God’s enemy. Even when Satan acts against us he means God himself and his evil angels, those who resist the work of God in us.’

Sleep here does not mean the natural physical sleep. It rather means carelessness and negligence, or forgetting God in the shepherding work, as well as in the spiritual struggle. The shepherd falls asleep when he exerted all his effort in shepherding through his ‘ego’ his ‘I’. He regards himself the most responsible one for the vineyard. God then disappears so the human self is declared. St. Jerome thinks sleep signifies the mind’s negligence in clinging to the groom, for he says, “Do not allow the enemy to sow the tares in the midst of the wheat, where the sower is asleep, that is, when the mind that clings to God is unguarded. Say continuously with the bride of the song of songs (Song of Sol. 3:1; 1:7) “By night on my bed I sought the one I love; I sought him, but I did not find him. Tell me, O you whom I love where you feed your flock, where you make it rest at noon.”” This is appropriate to every believer – whether he be a priest or one of the congregations – not to sleep spiritually, but to be continually watchful and clinging to God. The Lord then guards his vineyard from the enemy, so he would not sow the tares in the midst of the church, or in the believer’s heart being a member in it.

What are the tares?

Firstly: The tares point to the heresy that creeps secretly into the church, particularly when the shepherds take a spiritual naptime. St. Jerome says, "I wish the bishop of the church would not fall asleep, lest in his carelessness, a human enemy comes to sow tares, that is, the education of heresy."

Secondly: The tares also signify the iniquity that creeps into the mind and heart in the believer's spiritual lapse. Father Isidorus Balbalsam speaks of the evil thought saying, (Matt 15:19,20) "These are the things which defile a man, that proceed from the heart." Undoubtedly because the workers are asleep, whereas they had to be watchful to take care of the good seeds so they grow. If we had not become weakened during our watchfulness because of greed, negligence and defiling God's image, that is, corrupting the good seed; there would have been no change for the sower of the tares to find a means of creeping in and throwing the tares that should be thrown away in the fire."

Thirdly: this signifies in general, the evil ones that harvest time:

(Matt 13:26-30) "But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares? He said to them 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.'""

In such a way the Lord advises us not to be preoccupied by taking away the tares, but to leave it till harvest time. Then the Lord will send his angels as reapers, to gather it and burn it up. But as for the wheat, they will gather it to his kingdom. On one hand the Lord wished to confirm taking care of the positive side, and therefore to work on account of his kingdom instead of condemning the wicked ones; since this is not our job. On the other hand, as long as there is still time, we should never despair, but keep struggling, nothing uprooting the tares, but rather in working to transform the tares into wheat.

Father Isidorus Balbalsam says, the angels ask to uproot the tares, which is to punish the evil ones. But they are forbidden to do so, for then to have a change for repentance, and that the righteous would not be harmed. God did not uproot Esau the evil one, so that Jacob the righteous from whose descent the Lord came, would not perish with him. Also Levi the tax collector was not killed so he would not be lost as a preacher of the Gospel. The Lord moreover, did not take revenge on Simon Peter's denial of him, for Peter wept bitterly in repentance. Furthermore, Saul of tarsus was not put to death, so as not to lose St. Paul the apostle who preached salvation to the farthest parts of the world.

+ God allowed time for the sake of repentance. He warns us here lest we uproot a brother ahead of the suitable time. He who is blighted with poisonous teachings today could come to his senses tomorrow, and would become full of defence to that which is right.

St. Jerome.

+ Many, at the beginning, are tares. But after that, they are turned into wheat. If we are not patient with them while they are inners, they would not be able to achieve this change that is worthy of all respect.

St. Augustine.

+ Be at peace, for this is not the time of harvest. The time will come when, maybe, he will find the tares have changed into wheat why aren't you patient enough to bear the mixing of the wicked ones with the righteous? They are with you in the field, but the situation could be different in the barn.

+ You find the wheat and the tares among the foremost portions, as well as among the laymen. Let the righteous tolerate the evil ones, and let the evil ones correct themselves, following the example of righteous.

St. Augustine.

St. Jerome thinks the words of the judge so as to leave the tares till harvest time; this carries compassion for sinners so they repent. He calls upon him saying, "Indeed, the people and angels are regarded hard hearted if compared to you; you alone are the absolute compassionate king. We ask you to be the judge, for you are compassionate to all the people."

St. John Chrysostom thinks this example a living image for the actual church. For, as much as the seeds of truth are sowed as much as the adversary exerts all his effort to sow the tares in its midst. He says, "After the prophets, there are other false prophets. And after the apostles, there come other false apostles, and after Christ there comes the anti-Christ."

Should the tares, or Corruption, be left?

Should the tares be left in the midst of believers, or inside the believer's heart? Has the apostle not said (1 Cor 5:6,7) "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For, indeed, Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us."

The Lord did not mean to leave sin and wrongdoing. He wished to stress an important principle, which is, to uproot evil is God's work himself, and not man. The church, when facing evil, does not need any philosophical resistance or discursions, as much as it needs sanctification. I do not deny our commitment as shepherds and those shepherded in rejecting iniquity and wrongdoing. But we have primarily to be equipped with the positive aspect, which is the sanctified and pious life. We therefore carry the Lord Jesus himself in us. He is the absolute judge, able to expel darkness by shining upon us as the sun of righteousness. I do not lessen the level of the heroes of faith who faced heresies, and the saints who shot arrows against iniquity. These were hidden in Christ Jesus himself, the real rock who wrecks every evasive of doubt. Those saints, by means of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them were aiming 'the Lord Jesus' himself as a fiery arrow to kill iniquity and evil.

Indeed, the Lord asked us not to uproot the tares. As St. John Chrysostom says, it is not permissible for the church to command the killing of a heretic, for this is not her job. I rather resist him in concepts. St. Augustine makes clear the church

attitude regarding the heretics, or the tares, saying, “If one Christian, who is firm in the church, has been caught in a kind of sin deserving deprivation of the church, let this be done: avoid any dissention, and tackle the issue in love, and correct rather than uproot. If he does not come to know his mistake, and does not repent, then he is to be expelled. He is to be cut off out of his own self-will from the church assembly, because the Lord’s words ‘Let them both grow together’ has the cause, added to it, which is ‘lest you uproot the wheat with the tares.’ Here he has given us a clear explanation. But at this point the reason is not to be found. By cutting it off there is no concern for the good of the wheat when his crime is clear. He appears to each one he has no one to defend him, or at least, he has no people to defend him and cause a division or dissension.”

5. The Parable of the Mustard Seed:

(Matt 13:31,32) “ Another parable he put forth to them saying, the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”

St. John Chrysostom says, “The Lord has spoken to us that three kinds of seeds perish (in parable of the sower 1-9) and the last kind was saved. Even those who are saved, some perish because of the tares that are sowed in their midst. So, lest anyone should say ‘who then can be saved? And how can there be many? This is why he presented to us the parable of the mustard seed, to keep away from them this worry.’”

In truth, in the first parable he speaks to us of God’s work in his kingdom, for he is the Sower who offers himself as live seed inside the heart. In the second parable he speaks of our commitment to being watchful of the adversary who sows the tares secretly, so the enemy overrules the heart instead of the Messiah the Savior. But as for this parable, he presents to us the possibilities of the live kingdom that works in the heart, and that extends to the entire world inspite of the devil’s resistance. It is similar to a small mustard seed that has been sowed in a field in the earth, surrounded on every side by darkness. The soil presses on it, but ‘life’ that is dormant in it shoots up through the earth, so as to become a tree, attracting birds to nestle in it.

For real, the believer as a member in the heavenly kingdom besieges the enemy from every side in his darkness, and makes him lose his spiritual enlightenment, and deprives him of enjoying the sun of righteousness, and being uplifted from all that is worldly. He presses heavily on him with the soil. He uses the bodily bust made of dust to choke his spiritual brathing. But the fiery Holy Spirit in his heart soars with him through this struggle as a live giant. He not only lives in sanctity for the Lord, but he also attracts others towards him, and supports them in the holy life. He is like a tree harboring many birds that dance happily on its branches binging in sanctified humans of praise. They build nests, and bring little ones to learn how to fly towards that which is heavenly.

The Mustard Seed and the Suffering Christ:

The heavenly kingdom declared in us, is a declaration of the Lord’s presence inside us. We accept him crucified in us, and risen from the dead. We share his

suffering in us, so as to be blessed with the strength of his resurrection, and we copy his death. The mustard seed therefore, which is buried in the field, is the suffering Christ buried in us, and raises a tree of life in our heart.

The fathers think the small mustard seed has a value that does not appear unless it is buried, and then a huge tree appears where the birds of the sky find shelter in it. Also the beasts of the wilderness find shade under it. By grinding it, it is turned into useful food 'mustard.' Likewise is God's incarnation, where God the word appeared very small, for he has become a slave. But with his burial, he rose, giving us the mystery of life. We harbor in the branches of his church like birds in the sky. We take shelter under him as the hymn goes (Song of Sol 2:3) "I sat down in his shade with great delight." By being crushed, he offered us his body as spiritual food, a true sacrifice, granting us sanctification.

+ The Lord compares himself to a mustard seed, which is the most bitter and smallest of seeds, and that manifest its usefulness by means of it's being grinded or crushed.

St. Hillary, Bishop of Poitier.

+ It is only a mustard seed that has grown in the graveyard; and has become a huge tree. He was only a seed when he died, and has become a tree when he rose. He was a seed in the modesty of his body and a tree in the strength of his greatness!

In these branches the birds find their rest, because the pure soul soars up with the wings of his grace, and they find their ease from the worldly cares, and comfort from the fluctuations of the present life.

Father Gregory the great.

The Mustard Seed and Christ's gospel:

The Mustard seed represents the suffering of the Lord Jesus. It also represents his gospel, and its preaching. It is the faith in the crucified Messiah. It carries power inside itself, which is able to attract many to the kingdom, even though its preachers are simple and of the Gentiles.

+ The seed of the gospel is the smallest of all other seeds. Likewise are the disciples who were more timid than many others, yet they had tremendous power inside them. Therefore their preaching reached the farthest end of the world.

St. John Chrysostom

+ When the teachings of philosophers develop, they declare nothing that is perfectly mature or vital, but rather all that is old and withered. These teachings are abundant in branches and states, which soon wither and perish. But as for the gospel, when it is first preached, may seem incomprehensible, yet once it is sowed inside the believer's soul, it spreads in the entire world. It does not rise as a small tree, but rather as trees, a big enough for the birds of the sky to nestle in its branches. That is to say, the believers' souls or the consecrated hosts for God's service.

It becomes a tree; and as I believe the branches of the tree in the Biblical sense, which grow from the mustard seed, these are the variable sanctified teachings, about which is said the birds find their rest in it. I wish we could have a pigeons'

wings, and fly high so as to swell in the branches of this tree. We there by make nests for ourselves out of its teachings, and leave behind us earthly issues, and hastily head for what is heavenly.

St. Jerome.

The Mustard Seed and the Faith in the suffering Messiah:

St. Ambrosios says, “If the kingdom of heaven is similar to a mustard seed, faith too, is similar to the mustard seed (Matt 17:19). Therefore, the faith in truth is the heavenly kingdom, and the heavenly kingdom is the faith. This means he who has the faith has the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is inside us (Luke 17:21) and faith, too, is inside us.”

At this point, let us draw a comparison as to the nature of the mustard seed:

Indeed, the mustard seed is so simple and is of very little value. But if grinded or squeezed its strength is manifested. Likewise, faith appears to be very simple, but if crushed by means of the enemy, its strength is proved. It fills others, whether they be listener or readers about faith, with sweet fragrance. Our martyrs Falix, Napor and Victor were blessed with the sweet fragrance of faith. Yet during their lifetime they were in mystery, until persecution befell them. They thus yielded their arms, and bowed their necks, and they were struck by the sword. In this way, the grace of their martyrdom has spread to the farthest places on earth. In truth it was said, (Psalm 18:6) “He heard my voice from his temple, and my cry came before him.”

So, faith is at times grinded, at other times it is squashed or planted, which means buried. The Lord himself is the mustard seed. Without suffering, the congregation would not have known him or noticed him as the mustard seed. He chose to be crushed, but we say, (2 Cor. 2:15) “For we are to God the fragrance of Christ.” He chose to be pressed down and squeezed, for St. Peter said, (Luke 8:45) “Master, the multitudes throng and press you.” He also chose to be planted in the earth as a seed taken by a man and sowed in his garden. In the garden he ‘sprouted’ in a garden, where he rose from the dead and become a tree. As written (Songs of Sol 2:3) “Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons.”

In this way let Christ be planted in your garden. For the garden is the place full of variable flowers and fruits. Let virtue grow forth out of your struggle, and sweet fragrance of all his variable virtues fill the atmosphere.

Where the fruit is, you will find Christ. Plant, therefore, the Lord Jesus. He is only a seed when taken up by man, and he is a tree when he rises. He is the tree that given shade to the world.

He is only a seed when buried in the grave, and he is a tree when he ascends to the heavens.

Press on him by drawing yourself very close to him, and sow the seeds of faith. We follow him closely, and we saw faith when we worship the crucified Christ. St. Paul drew himself close to him in faith when he said (1 Cor. 2:1,2) “And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom

declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

We sow the faith when we believe in the Lord’s suffering by means of the prophetic and the apostolic documents. Thus we sow the seeds of faith as if we are burying him in the soil of the sweet and tender body of the Lord. Faith, therefore, by embracing the holy body, and feeling his warmth, is spread outwardly. He who believes that God’s only begotten Son has become man, likewise believes he has died for our sake, and has also risen. Therefore, sow the faith when you plant it in the Lord’s grave.

Do you wish to know Christ the seed? Christ the planted One? (John 12:24) “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.”

Do not disregard this small mustard seed, for (Matt 13:32) “Which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree.” If Christ is the mustard seed, in what aspect is he the smallest of all the seeds? And how does he grow? For real, he does not grow in his nature, but outwardly, in the body! Do you wish to see him smaller than all others? We can see him, but (Is 53:2) “He has no form or comeliness.” Look at him as greater than all (Ps 45:2) “You are fairer than the sons of men.” He, who has no beauty, and no form, becomes more beautiful than the angels and the glory of the prophets.

Christ is the seed, because he is of Abraham’s descent. (Gal 3:16) “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘and to seeds’ as of many, but as of one, ‘and to your seed’ who is Christ.” He is not of the wisdom of this world, but all of a sudden, he has been revealed as the sublime soaring tree for his abilities. We can say, (Song of Sol 2:3) “I sat down in his shade with great delight.” There the angels and heavenly hosts, and all those worthy of the deeds of the Spirit find rest, and fly up to him. There, John found rest when he learned on Christ’s chest (John 13:25; 21; 20).

From the trunk of the tree, these stems forth branches. St. Peter is one branch, and also St. Paul is another. For, (Phil 3:13) “forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to close things which are ahead.” Also (Eph 2:13) “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” We have been brought from among the Gentiles, we who were in the disturbance of the evil spirit and the worries of this world. We were cast out for a very long time; but now we have obtained the wings of sanctity, and hastily fly to be sheltered in the shades of the saints from the heat of the world. We therefore dwell joyfully and peacefully in that sure harbor. Our souls were previously as the woman mentioned in the gospel who was burdened with iniquity. She got rid of her iniquity and was saved like a bird from the snare of hunter (Ps 123:7). This bird soared up to the mountains onto the branches of the lord (Ps 10:1).

St. Ambrosios

6. The Parable of the Leaven:

After the Lord Jesus had revealed the divine role in the kingdom of heaven, and how the devil resists him, and the possibilities of the kingdom, the Lord then speaks to us of the practical role of the church in manifesting the heavenly kingdom through the life of partnership. He says, (Matt 13:33) "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was leavened."

The Lord likened the church to a woman holding with her hands leaven, that she hid in three measures of flour so that it is transformed into bread, offered for the Holy Trinity. The flour without the hands of this woman, working and carrying the leaven, is fit for nothing except it be given to animals. But with the leaven in the woman's hands, it becomes holy bread that pleases the Holy Trinity.

Who is the workingwoman here? What is the leaven? What are the three measures of flour?

Firstly: The woman represents the mother-church. Its mission is focusing on presenting the Lord Jesus 'the leaven granting life' to the flour till it is leavened, and hence carries the qualities of Christ in it. The leaven is basically, taken from the flour, but it embodies 'the power of leavening.' This refers to the Lord Jesus who took his body from us, and has become like one of us, not foreign to us, but he is the life. As for the amount of the flour, being three measures, St. Jerome says that the measures are a standard of measurement in Palestine, around three gallons. At any rate, the flour amount is three measures, since this represents the unity between the Spirit, the soul and the body. The church only presents the Lord Jesus as the mystery of man's entire sanctification, be it in the spirit, in the soul or in the body.

Secondly: St. Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers, thinks the woman mentioned here is the Jewish synagogue that judged the Lord Jesus 'the leaven' by being buried. The Lord granted the flour to be leavened, that is to say, 'the risen life.' As for number three here, this refers to the old law, the prophets and the gospel. In Christ Jesus our Lord, the three are revealed as one dough. The objective of the old law is Christ. The aim of the prophecies is to declare him. As for the gospel it is the preaching of the Lord Jesus. In him the unity of the Holy Book in its entirety is manifested, including Moses' law, the prophecies, and the joyful news. In the transfiguration, St. Peter wished to build three tabernacles; one for Moses, standing for the old law, another for Elijah, standing for the Gospel. But God did not send three tabernacles, but rather one cloud in reference to this unity in Christ Jesus!

The number 3 also refers to the Gentiles and the peoples that came forth from Shem, Ham and Seth, the three sons of Noah. It is as if the mother church offers Jesus Christ to these nations that are so divided, and they would leaven together in the unity of the spirit and the mind. These all carry the qualities of the one Christ.

Thirdly: St. Augustine thinks this parable is a live image of the Lord's kingdom, since it is the kingdom of living love, working in mankind. This is by means of love's entrance, which is that of Christ in mankind's life, to make it sanctified to God. "The leaven means 'love', which creates and kindles jealousy. The woman means wisdom, and the three measures of flour, or food, refer to the three issues in man, which concern the love of God; "with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt 22:37). Or, the three degrees of fruits (Matt 13:8,23) "a hundred fold,

some sixty and some sixty and some thirty.” Also it could mean the three kinds of men (Ezek 14:14) “Noah, Daniel and job.””

Fourthly: St. John Chrysostom sees an active picture of the kingdom of heaven. The flour can never be leavened unless the leaven is buried in it, or is imprisoned in it. The Lord did not say the woman put the leaven in the flour, but rather ‘she hid it.’ Likewise, if the believer does not encounter his adversaries, and be imprisoned among them, and tolerate the hardships joyfully, then the believer’s life will not be leavened. As the saint says, “When you are one with those who attach you, and be blended with them, you will overcome them by love and faith. Just as the leaven is hidden in the dough and does not get destroyed, but rather it changes the nature of the whole dough, likewise is the preaching of the gospel. Therefore, do not fear when I tell you about the forthcoming hardships, because your light cannot be dimmed by anyone, but it will over come all men.”

7. The Interpretation of the Parable of the Tares:

(Matt 13:36) “Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the tares in the field.” The Lord sent the multitude away, and came to the house so as to take his disciples to his heavenly church and be alone with them. He declared to them the mysteries of the kingdom; but he did not present the interpretation except after they came to ask him. For, he does not grant his divine mysteries, and free heavenly gifts to those who are negligent and careless. Indeed, in earthly matters he grants to all, even the evil ones, without their asking. For (Matt 5:45) “He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” But as for the spiritual blessings and the heavenly glory, despite his promise “It has been given you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” yet he asks them to constantly ask, as a sign of real eagerness and persistence to obtain the blessings. God gives and prevents, not because of any partiality, but as much as man opens his mouth, he fills him accordingly. But if he shuts his mouth before him, and turns his back, and does not face him, God then is not obligated to donate him anything he prevents this, because man has deprived himself from the gifts and also from him who donates them.

+ If someone comes forward and is zealous, then God willingly gives him everything. But he who has not been busy with these matters, and does not contribute anything on his part, then God’s gifts will not be granted him.

St. John Chrysostom.

(Matt 13:43) “Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

St. Gregory, Bishop of Nisus, says, “When man departs from the love this dim world, he becomes pure and clear by means of the Spirit, and by his clinging to true purity. The spirit then shines brightly and it becomes light as the Lord promised.”

St. Ambrosios says, “It is out of the goodness of him who raised up the earth to heaven, and reflected his glory in heaven, and on brightly lit planets... he has made

the hosts of apostles, martyrs and priests to shine like stars that give glory and shine to the world.”

8. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure:

(Matt 13:44) “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”

In the previous parable the Lord Jesus presented to us a live picture of the church role, as a sanctified woman that offers the person, the Lord Jesus, as the mystery of the real kingdom to everyone until the dough is entirely leavened, and thereby everyone shares in the partnership of the Savior’s nature. Now he presents to us the parable of the hidden treasure, where we witness the role of the believer, and his continuous struggle to discover Christ, ‘The hidden treasure in the field.’

This field is no other than the Holy Book, both testaments, which includes in it the mystery of Christ as a hidden treasure. It is only the persistent ones that are blessed with it, those who constantly probe more and more in the Book. It is therefore appropriate for the behavior to sell everything so as to possess this field which contains the treasure. This is to be blessed with the treasure and hide it in his heart, just as the church hides her Christ amidst humanity. For real, no one can possess the Holy Book in his heart, and react with it, unless he sells everything whole-heartedly, and concentrates on God’s word, having the aim in mind to encounter the incarnate word of God. It would not have been possible for Joseph to be in charge of the barns and storage of Egypt, if he had left his cloak in the hands of his Egyptian lady, and he ran away naked. Likewise, it would not be possible for our inward Joseph to understand God’s word, and be blessed with the storage of spiritual knowledge, if he did not leave his cloak in the hands of the world, and dart forth naked, accepting to be imprisoned for Christ’s sake. He would then be uplifted to the real riches, not to be satisfied solely by himself from the knowledgeable source, but also to open his hands and donate the riches, so sublime, in Christ’s knowledge.

+ Surely, I believe the field according to the words of the Holy Book, is planted what was apparent in history, the old law, the prophets and all other concepts. The sprouts and plants are the words of the Holy Book that are so great and variable. But as for the hidden treasure in the field, these are the sealed and hidden thoughts behind the visible matters (Col 2:3) “Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

Another person might say that the field is God’s Christ that in truth is filled. But as for the hidden treasure in it, these are the matters about which St. Paul said they are hidden in Christ “Where there is stored all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” the heavenly matters. Thus, even the heavenly kingdom was mentioned in the Holy Books, as a symbol.

The Scholar Oreganus

Father Gregory the Great thinks the hidden treasure is the will-power of the believer, that is being sanctified, as well as his invisible good intention, only seen by

God alone, and he rewards us for it. The believer, when he is hallowed by the Holy Spirit, carries Christ's will in him, and the hidden thoughts of Christ. This is his visible treasure that the Father sees in us, and he is pleased and rejoices for us. Father Gregory says, "The treasure that was found, was hidden to be preserved. In the current life, we are going forward in our behavior, as on a road that leads us to our country. On the way there are cunning enemies that attack us as thieves. This is why he who carries a treasure openly on his way, is exposed to robbery. This does not mean our relative would not see our deeds, for it is written, (Matt 5:16) "So they see your good words and glorify your Father who is in heaven." But we should not ask for any praise as to what we are doing before others. Our apparent deeds have to be done in such a way that our intention be a hidden and covered one. In this way our deeds become an example to our close ones, whereas our intention that is pleasing to God remains unknown. The treasure upon which the heavenly wishes are, and the field in which the treasure is hidden, safer to the inward behavior by means of which we reach there wishes. This field is bought by him who sold all that he had, who disregards the physical pleasures, and has control over his earthly wishes. He also keeps all the divine teachings, and does not thrill over anything that pleases the body, he neither abstains himself from practicing all that deadens the physical life."

9. The Parable of the Precious Pearl:

(Matt 13:45,46) "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

The Lord has previously revealed our continuous straggle through God's word to know the Lord Jesus more closely and embrace him, and hide him in our heart. Now he presents to us the cost of this kingdom; actually no one could possess the Lord Jesus, the priceless pearl, unless he sells all that he has from the bottom of his heart, and make Jesus alone to rule over it.

St. Jerome asked Furia not to read useless books, but to sell them all so as to possess 'the priceless pearl' through the Holy Book and the fathers' books. He said, "After you read the Holy Books, read the books of those known for their great faith. Do not go to the trash to search for gold. You leave a lot of jewels, go buy the one pearl instead of them." For real, the appropriate behavior for the believer is not only to give up the cheap books entirely, and to provide the opportunity for the word of God to declare Christ shining in his life, but also the other books should not divert him from his faith! St. Clemendos the Alexandrian was a philosopher, and he did not take off the cloak of philosophy even after receiving the Christian school of Alexandria. But philosophy was not an obstacle to his faith; he rather saw it a way by means of which he declares his faith among philosophers. Therefore, to sell is not as apparent technical operation, but it is rather the heart's withdrawal towards God, so as to possess the heavenly kingdom as the mystery of their life. Many do to read anything except the Holy Book and the religious books, and yet their hearts do not encounter 'Christ.' Whereas others see him in all their life and readings.

The scholar Oreganus speaks of this priceless pearl is this way:

What are you asking for? I will be bold enough to say the pearl for whose sake man leaves all what he possesses, and considers this as trash. (Phil. 3:8) "Yet

indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.”

The lantern is priceless to anyone when it is dark. There is great need of it till the sun shines. The glorious face of Moses and the prophets too, through which we entered to witness Christ’s glory, about which the Father said (Matt 3:17) “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” (2 Cor 3:10) “For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. (1 Cor 13:9,10) “For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.” We are in need primarily of the glory that disappears until we obtain the excellent glory.”

Therefore, every soul comes first to childhood, and develops till it matures. It needs teachers and counselors and guardians. (Gal 4:1,2) “Now I say that the child, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all. But is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.” When mature, it is blessed with the perfect and priceless pearl. By this nativity, what is partial disappears, when man is able to reach (Phil 3:8) “The excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.” This is after it had been trained in the forms of knowledge which is surpassed by the knowledge of Christ. Father Gregory the great speaks of the priceless pearl saying, “He who asks for the knowledge of the absolute heavenly life as much as could be, he deserts all what he previously loved, and he will be in overwhelming joy! If this sweetness which has become his, is compared to anything of value, he finds it incomparable. It empties his soul from all that it had possessed, and squanders all that it had collected. He becomes kindled with the love of heaven, and is not more concerned about anything worldly. What it had previously shines in it the sublime pearl that is so invaluable. About this love Solomon says, (Song of Sol 1:6) “Love is as strong as death.” Just as death deprives the body of life, similarly the love of eternity kills the love of temporary things. He who achieves this absolute love becomes like someone who has no feelings to earthly possessions.”

St. Jerome believes the pearls sold by man, are the various ways we depart from so as to begin the one way which is Christ. Jeremiah the prophet had declared (Jer 6:16) “Thus says the Lord; ‘Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls.’” Therefore, through the fathers and the prophets we are able to reach Christ, the righteous way, in which alone the soul could find its eternal rest. As St. Jerome says, “Through the many ways, we find the one way.” Moreover he says, “What do we understand by the many pearls, and the many ways, and the many aisles, so as to possess the one pearl, the one way, and the one aisle? Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua son of Nun, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the twelve prophets... all these are the aisles we first enter so as to reach the find one; the aisle of the gospels, and there you will find Christ.”

10. The Parable of the Dragnet Cast into the Sea:

(Matt 13:47-50) “Again the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind. Which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away.

So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

In this parable the Lord Jesus offers us an essential quality for the kingdom of heaven, which is ‘the dynamic life,’ that is to say ‘the incessant working.’ The kingdom of heaven is similar to a dragnet cast out into the world, just as in a rough sea, and it gathers of every kind and species. It is not brought to the shore except it be filled with all the chosen ones. (Matt 13:48)

What is this dragnet other than the person of Jesus Christ himself? He has cast himself into the world through our human nature so as to attract all souls to him. The entire church gathers in his Holy Body, embracing people of all nations and tongues, sanctified members for him. He then ascends with them above the world to his heavens to be blessed by him. It is true that some infiltrate into the dragnet, those wicked ones who still carry the name of Christ, and are blessed with the spiritual church membership, but since they are not firm in Christ, they are cast out.

We can also understand the dragnet as being the church, ‘the mysterious body of Christ.’ This dragnet descends into the world to serve it and gather the fish in it, that is the believers. There are some bad fishes that creep in, but at the end of age, there will be selected and cast out of the uplifted church, up to the heavens. The Lord allows them to enter the church as long as it is in the water, for they may repent and become good fish. But there will come a time when it will be taken away from them. They are like the tares that the Lord has left with the wheat, and he has not allowed the labors to uproot them till harvest time (Matt 13:29). On more than one occasion we saw the first church regarding the believers as small fish, following the example of the Lord Jesus, the big fish.

The dragnet, furthermore, signifies the Holy Book, that encompasses the human soul, and catches it from the midst of the world, so as to take it to the heavenly kingdom. Oreganus, the scholar, says, “The kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet of variable textile, which refers to the Holy Book; the old and the new testaments. It is woven of thoughts of all kinds, absolutely of great variation. As for the fish that fell into the dragnet, some are of this or that side, but all are gathered in the site where the fishing took place, that is, into the one same dragnet, some are of this or that side, but all are gathered in the site where the fishing took place, that is, into the one same dragnet. Some got into the dragnet of the Holy Book through the prophetic aspect, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah or Daniel. Others got in through the dragnet of the Gospel, and still others more through the dragnet of the apostolic writings. For, when a person is besieged by means of the word, he is like a prisoner who takes a specific place in the whole net.”

Father Gregory the great explains this parable saying, “The holy church is compared to a dragnet; it is handed over to fishermen, and by means of which we were pulled from the waves of this world, and have been brought to the heavenly kingdom, so as not to be swallowed up by the deep eternal death. It comprised all kinds of fish, for the forgiveness of sins was offered to the wise and to the ignorant, to the free and to the slaves, to the rich and to the poor, to the strong and to the weak. For this, the psalmist says to God (Psalm 6 5:4) ‘To you comes every body.’” This

dragnet will be totally full when it embraces all human races. It will then be pulled out, and the fishermen close by on the shore. If time is referred to as the sea, the shore is referred to as the end of times, where the good fish will be separated and preserved, whereas the corrupted fish will be cast out. The good ones will be handed over to eternal rest, but as for the wicked ones, these have lost the inward light of the kingdom, and will be cast out into the outer darkness. At the present time, we are mixed together, the good and the bad, just as the fish in the dragnet. But the shore will tell us what has been in the dragnet, that is, in the holy church. When the fish is brought to the shore, it will have no change of any change. But as for now, when we are in the dragnet, we have the opportunity if we are wicked, to change and become good ones. Therefore, brethren, let us think well, for the fishing is still available, lest the shore scorn us later on.

11. The Educated Scribe:

(Matt 13:51-53) “Jesus said to them, ‘Have you understood all these things?’ They said to him, ‘Yes, Lord! Then he said to them,’ ‘Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.’ Now it came to pass when Jesus had finished these parables, that he departed from there.”

The Lord changed his words from the parables about the kingdom of heaven, to speaking about the instructed scribe in this kingdom. He does not stop enjoying constantly the old renewed treasures.

The Lord wished to draw a comparison between the Jewish scribes who were technically at a standstill, and between the scribes of the kingdom of heaven. Indeed, the Jewish scribes were careful about copying the Holy Book on paper when they were purified. Their pens whenever they wished to write the name ‘God’. They revised every line accurately lest they crossed out or added anything. But when stopped at this point, they changed the word ‘God’ to a solid written word because of their hard heartedness and literal thinking. But he who enters the kingdom of heaven, he carries his Christ in his heart. He carries ‘the real treasure’ that makes the scribe ‘Lord of the house.’ He is a king carrying in his heart the king of kings, untouched by literacy and not killed by stubbornness. By the Lord Jesus the inner treasure, and real scribe enjoy what is new and what is old. That is, he enjoys the mysteries of the holy Book including both testaments, the old and the new, as active and live mysteries that never end.

The new scribe writes with the pen of the Holy Spirit that dwells in him, the word of God old or new. It is an old word, but continuously new, active in us for our renewal.

+ It is appropriate for us to struggle in every way, so as to gather in our heart (1 Tim 4:13) “give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” and (Psalm 1:2) “But his delight is in the law of the Lord.” It is not only through the new words that are the gospel’s, the apostles and their declaration, but also the old sayings of the law which are (Heb 10:1) “For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come,” and also to the prophets that have prophesied all in accordance with each other. Let us collect all these together when we read then, and come to know them, and remember them. Let

us compare the spiritualities together, so that by one witness or three witness of the Holy Book, every word of God is reserved.

+ The householder could be Jesus himself who gets out of his treasure what is new. That is, the spiritual issues that are constantly renewed by his means, which are made active in the inward man of those who are righteous and are renewed daily, (2 Cor 4:16) "Day by day." The very ancient, too, comes out, that is, the issues engraved on rocks (2 Cor 3:7) that is on the stony hearts of the old man. By comparing the letters, by the declaration of the Spirit, the scribe follows the examples of his laboratory.

The Lord Jesus is also interpreted as the householder in a simpler way. He gets out of his treasure new things, that is, the gospel teachings. Also old things, which are the sayings, taken from the old law and the prophets, to find a place in the gospels.

Regarding the new and the old, let us also listen to the spiritual law that says in (Leviticus 26:10,11) "You shall eat the old harvest, and clear out the old because of the new. I will set my tabernacle among you." With blessing we eat the old, which is the prophetic word, and the old is the 'preserved' words of the old law. When the new comes, which are the gospel words, we live according to the gospel. Thereby the old matters get out, which are of the letters from a new face. He will have his tabernacle in us, fulfilling the promise he said, "I will set my tabernacle among you."

The scholar Oreganus

Father Gregory the great offers a symbolic interpretation to the concept of the old and the new. He thinks being drawn towards the heavens new ones, and the fear of torment in hell, this is old. He says, "The educated preacher in our church, is he who is able to speak of the new matters concerning the curriculum of the heavenly kingdom. He also mentions the old matters regarding the fear of punishment. The latter at least is able to scare those not attracted by the reward. I wish every man, therefore, listen carefully to the matters concerning the kingdom of heaven."

12. The Attitude of His Countrymen:

The disciples went into the house with the Lord, and came forth to ask him. They therefore obtained the mysteries of his knowledge which will uplift them to 'the kingdom of heaven.' But as for those left outside, these listened to him, and saw his amazing deeds, and were obstructed in him. The evangelist says, (Matt 13:54-57) "They were astonished and said, 'Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? And his brothers James, Joses, Simon and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?' So they were offended at him."

The soul that is not concerned about its salvation can be offended even in the Lord Jesus. Indeed, they could be amazed at his words, but as yet they do not accept them as the mystery for their salvation and their life. They could see his miracles, but instead of yielding up themselves in his hands, so he works in his authority to build it up, they only stand and watch. They ask about issues out of their life and away from their eternity. Such a soul obstructs God's work due to lack of faith.

What is heart breaking is that those deprived of his deeds, offended in him, were those of his own folks. The evangelist says, (Matt 13:57-58) “But Jesus said to them ‘A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.’ Now he did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.”

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Chapter XIV (Page 416)

The Satisfying King

The evangelist presents to us the personality of the Lord Jesus as the king who satisfies the soul and the body, and who nurtures us spiritually, emotionally and physically. As a contrast, he presents to us Herod the king as a hungry man, overruled by his fear of losing peace, and his greed in losing purity. He wished to satisfy a young girl's heart, a dancer, by giving her his kingdom, yet he failed. As a hungry man, he could not satisfy others.

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1. The Hungry Herod:

(Matt 14:1,2) "At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about Jesus, and said to his servants 'This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him.'"

Herod had killed St. John the Baptist, the voice to be feared, who declared the truth by rejecting Herod's marriage to Herodia, his brother Philip's wife. According to the law it was not possible for anyone to get married to his brother's wife (Liv 18:16) unless his brother had died, and that his wife had borne him no sons. In that case the brother could marry her, not out of love to her, but to establish an issue for his dead brother. Herod's mistake was that he wished to marry his brother's wife who was assumed his voice; but the voice did not cease and it rather increased more loudly in Herod's mind. This is why when Herod heard of Jesus Christ he instantly thought he must be John the Baptist risen from dead and does those miraculous powers. He killed John so as to clam down his conscience and he feels restful. But h=fear did not let him alone; for Herod the king was hungry, having no peace whatever, but rather fear, since sin makes man lose his inward satisfaction.

The evangelist narrates to us the story of St. John the Baptist's martyrdom at the hands of Herod. He revealed by means of details the hunger of king Herod. He says, (Matt 14:3,4) "For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. Because John had said to him 'It is not lawful for you to have her.'"

Herod, who had great authority, thought he could suppress the voice of truth by imprisoning St. John. He wished to kill him, and erase the voice altogether. But being bound in prison made the voice even stronger, and death sealed the voice with the seal of eternity. This has become the issue for preaching for generations to come. St. John Chrysostom says, "John's voice was heard more loudly after these matters." The devil wanted to get rid someday of the word of God through the cross. But the

cross came to engrave in love, the divine word on stony hearts, and make them an altar for the Lord. The Jews' alliance with the Gentiles against the church so as to wipe it out, and as much as it was persecuted, yet God's voice through the church, was declared more clearly in the midst of the world!

The scholar Oreganus believes the imprisonment and killing of the prophet, is only a signal of what the Jewish nation did when they tried to suppress the prophecies, and they thought they could prevent the fulfillment of these prophecies by the Messiah's death. For he says, "He bound the prophetic word and imprisoned it, and forbade its continuation in declaring the truth in freedom as previously."

Herod wished to kill him, but due to his fear of the people he restrained himself, maybe for a while. By so doing he was restless for just a little while, and he threw an official celebration to satisfy himself with no pricking of conscience, for the evangelist says, (Matt 14:6,7) "But when Herod's birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. Therefore he promised with an oath, to give her whatever she might ask." The hungry Herod threw a party to satisfy his pride and passion. When Herodias' daughter danced, and it pleased him, he wished to give her something to satisfy her! If Herodias stands for sin which was coveted by Herod, then sin begets other sin, able to bind his empty heart. He was eager to offer all his life as a price for one single dance. St. John Chrysostom says, "He was bound by means of his passions, to the extent that he offered his kingdom a price for one dance." He moreover says, "He was supposed to have thanked God for bringing him to this day of light, his birthday, but instead of doing so, he was bold and foolish enough to commit those evil deeds. He was supposed to have set free those in bondage, but he added death to those bonds."

ON Herod's birthday St. John the Baptist was killed. He thought he would not be able to enjoy a happy life, and satisfy his physical passions by means of his love to his brother's wife, and her daughter's dancing, unless he suppressed St. John the Baptist breath. But Herod died, and St. John's voice remained immortal forever. Herod was tied to temporary passions, and he was wiped away with time. John was tied to the truth, and so he entered the no-death state with truth itself. We, too, if we wish to enter into the no-death state, let us get tied to our Jesus "The truth that never dies." Let us go in with him, and in him, to his Father's embrace, where death can never come close to us!

Our days are limited and vanishing, if tied to vain matters, such as the love of the world and the physical passions. Our days are immortal if they disappear in our Lord Jesus Christ, for death was unable to reach him, and neither could the grave encompass him, nor did the gates of hell stand to face him.

Some may ask: if Herod had made a mistake by his promise to Herodias' daughter by making an oath as to give her what she asked for, was it possible for him, after she had asked for St. John's head, to withdraw his oath?

St. Ambrosius answers: "Sometimes to fulfill a promise of an oath does not agree with the duty, as did Herod when he made an oath to give Herodias' daughter what she asked for. This led to St. John's death, so the king would not withdraw that oath. Such a similar situation happened Japheth, who offered his daughter a sacrifice

for she was the first one he encountered on his return victoriously from the battlefield to his home. He therefore had to fulfil his oath. It would have been preferable not to make an oath of a vow rather than fulfill his oath with the death of his own daughter.” It is wrongful for man to make an oath, and what is worse, is to fulfill it, if it is contrary to God’s commandment.

This is concerning Herod; but we should not disregard St. John’s attitude, who could have been saved from death if he had been silent. But he preferred to witness for the truth at the example of the physical death rather than disregarding the truth with the physical rest and safety for a while. As St. Ambrosios says, “John could not tolerate the unit with evil, even if it were in a royal situation. He could have been silent. He knew well he would die if he is contrary to the king. But he preferred virtue to security. What is more appropriate to the saint than pain which begets glory.”

2. Christ the Attraction One:

(Matt 14:13) “When Jesus heard it, he departed from there by boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the multitudes heard it, they followed him on foot from the cities.”

When the Lord Jesus heard what Herod did to St. John the Baptist, he went to a deserted place, that is to say, the wilderness. It was as if he declared he was going to the Gentiled that have become a wilderness and a village, so as to make out of it a paradise for him after he had been rejected by the Jewish nation, represented by Herod, the killer of John the Baptist.

On the other hand, the departure of the Lord Jesus in a boat affirms the principle he offered to humanity, which I to escape evil and not to attack it. He has left the site where Herod killed St. John, just as previously in his childhood, he escaped with his mother and St. Joseph from the face of Herod the elder one. He put into effect what he had told his disciples when he called them to the service, asking them to flee from those who attacked them.

+ (Matt 10:23) “When they persecute you in this city, flee to another.” When an ordeal befalls you, if we are enable to avoid it, we have to tolerate it very bravely and heroically. But if we are able to avoid it, and do not do so, then we are considered reckless.

Oregancess the Scholar

Herod represented the one to lose the right, and even that resists the right. It is appropriate for us to leave him by being united with Christ, the truth, and to head forward to the boat of the cross, and be carried to a deserted place. In it we meet God, praising and talking to him, and where he would also listen to us! How badly in need are we to run away from evil and not to resist it, specially those ones who are full of wrath, so as not to provoke their anger, and as a result their evil increases.

Let us flee from the wrathful spirit just as from Herod the killer, and let us enter the life of the crucifixion boat, and go forward to the unity with God.

The Lord departed not out of fear, but out of wisdom, as a representative to us. His departure and fleeing to a deserted spot was to meet his Father, who is united with him. The multitudes realized he was the source of satisfaction, and therefore they came to him from the cities and followed him on foot. The flight to the real wilderness, and being alone with God, attracts the souls, and develops the service for the account of the heavenly kingdom.

3. Christ the One to Satisfy Us:

(Matt 14:14) “And when Jesus went out he saw a great multitude; and he was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick.”

The multitudes left their cities on foot to meet the Lord Jesus who had going all alone to a deserted spot. The Lord in his turn ‘went out’ to meet them, providing a new concept for solitude. It is not an isolation from making and not a shutting up of the heart, but it is rather an opening of the heart towards God and people. The soul is alone with God not in a closed up solitude, but it is rather alone with him carrying before him the entire church, and even the whole world in love. This is why people are attracted to the church as she goes out to them in tenderness and compassion, eager to heal every soul. This is why he says, “He had compassion on them and healed those who were sick.”

The scholar Oreganus noticed the Lord had compassion on the sick and he healed them before offering them the blessed bread. He says, “He healed the sick so that when they are whole, they can share in the blessed bread. But so long as they all sick, they were unable to take of Jesus; blessed bread.” This may imply an allegory to our commitment in our repentance mystery, and our confession, for the sake of healing the soul from its spiritual illness, before it enters the Lord’s altar, and receives from the Lord’s hands not only blessed bread but rather his Holy Body.

The multitudes spent the entire day with the Lord, hearing his voice, was evening, his disciples came to him saying, ‘This is a deserted place and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food.’

The disciples saw with their own eyes the miraculous deeds of the Lord, and despite this, when it was even tide, they were confused asking the multitudes be dispersed to the villages to buy themselves food. Indeed, quite often we are disturbed in matters of service and those to whom the service is rendered, in human calculations, even though the Lord, present in our midst, is able to donate and grant above all normal measures. If we are in a poor village, and quite late in the hour, yet the Lord who dwells in us, he is able to satisfy. As St. John Chrysostom says, “Despite the poor site, yet he who provides for the whole world, he is present in it. Even if the time is late, yet he who yields not to time, he speaks to them.”

The evangelist stressed the fact, when writing about the feeling of the multitudes, that it was in the eventide, and that the site was a poor one. He presented to us the actuality we live in nowadays. The Lord Jesus has come to the world, just as at the eleventh hour, in the evening. As St. John says, “the Last hour” (John 2:18). The days have ended and the time has come where the prophecies have come to a

standstill hundreds of years ago. The world has become in severe spiritual poverty, having no food to eat. The disciples were desperate and they wanted the multitudes to leave when hungry. But the Lord, present and dwelling in them, came to offer himself new food to satisfy the hungry souls.

We resume the miracle and find the Lord Jesus answering the disciples, (Matt 14:16-18), “‘they do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.’ And they said to him, ‘we have here only five loaves and two fish!’ He said, ‘Bring them here to me.’”

Why has the Lord asked the disciples to give the multitudes to eat?

Firstly: The Lord may have wished, due to his love to his disciples who had lived with him a long time, and have heard his words, and have come to touch his overwhelming deeds, to perform this deed. He longed for them to have faith to satisfy the multitudes, particularly when the Donor of blessings is there among them in their midst.

Secondly: By asking them this, he wished to uncover their possibilities, so they kindle up their talents, and present what they possess, however little this may appear to be, and insufficient to satisfy their hunger. Even though it is him who provides for his people, yet he asks the people to offer what they have, even if all what they have is only five loaves and two fishes. He asks of us not to be stingy even if we have very little, but to offer it, and hence satisfy the hunger of many. Not only that, but there will be extra food, more than what we have offered. Twelve full baskets were left over!

Thirdly: The disciples represented the church that God uses to feed his children, despite the apparent poverty and need of the church. It is God, who provides, and it is he who blesses, and it is he who sanctifies. He works through his body sanctified, that is, the church as an example, in the mystery of the baptism, the church offers the water, the oil, and the cross accompanied by prayers, as if they are the two fishes and the five loaves. The groom receives them to grant those asking for baptism, becoming children to God, and becoming members of his holy body. He grants him the new man who is in his image. Similarly, in all the mysteries, and the liturgies, God receives from the church very simple matters, by means of which he grants his gifts freely, that are so priceless.

Fourthly: St. John Chrysostom thinks the Lord wished his disciples to offer him that which is little, so as to obtain from his hands what they will offer to the multitudes. They will then be witnesses, with their own hands, of his blessed works.

Between the two miracles of feeding the multitudes:

The evangelist narrates to us the two miracles of feeding the multitudes. One of these is the present one, and the other is mentioned in chapter xv, 32-38. St. John Chrysostom thinks the Lord Jesus who performed numberless miracles, has not fed the multitudes except twice. He says, “He has not done this miracle constantly, just twice, so they learn they would not be slaves to their tummy. They rather have to cling to spiritualities. Let us, too, cling to what is spiritual, and ask for the heavenly bread, and in this way we can wipe out all earthly concerns. There people have left their homes, towns and close ones, they left everything behind and they stayed in the

wilderness. Even though they felt hungry, they still didn't go back. It is also appropriate for us to have self-control in a greater way, so we could draw near this table. We have to care more about spiritualities, regarding all tangible matters as secondary when compared to it."

The Lord has not repeated this miracle many times, so that our relation to him would not be through physical matters, and so we do not ask, in our own life with him, to satisfy our physical needs in a miraculous way. He thus left his hungry disciples to pick the grain ears on the Sabbath and eat (Matt 12:1), without feeding them by means of a miracle. The Lord also allowed his apostle St. Paul (2 Cor 11:23) "In labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in death often, in hunger and thirst...in cold and nakedness." This is to make St. Paul share his sufferings, this is he who later on those who were sick used to take little bandages from his sick body to touch and thereby be healed. The Lord wants us to follow him for the sake of himself, not for the sake of material gifts or temporary blessings.

Why did the Lord not think it enough to perform one miracle only?

The Lord fed the multitudes twice to declare he has come to satisfy the believers of Jewish origin, as well as those of a Gentile origin. The miracle we are speaking of shows his care for the Jews. But the other one (Matt 15:32-38) shows how much he cared for the Gentiles. This is revealed through the symbolic interpretation and the circumstances for each miracle, among these:

Firstly: the Lord used here five loaves and two fishes, whereas in the following miracle he used seven loaves and a few small fishes (Matt 15:34). The real satisfying food is the person of Jesus himself. He offered himself to the Jews through the five loaves which are the five books of Moses which contains the law that has Christ as its aim (Rom 10:4). The scholar Oreganus thinks the five loaves signify the senses. God the word has offered himself for the Jews, by his incarnation and becoming like one of them. They could come to meet him through the senses. They have seen him, heard him, touched him, and tasted of his sweetness, and smelt his fragrant scent, so they would meet him, the only begotten Son of God who satisfies their souls and quenches their thirst.

In the following miracle we find that instead of the five loaves there are seven loaves. The Gentiles have not been blessed with the five books of Moses, and neither have they seen the Lord Jesus physically, in their midst, and they have not touched him with their five senses. They have only been blessed with him through the Holy Spirit's preaching that Isaiah the prophet declared concerning his seven gifts: (Is. 11:2) "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." It is the Holy Spirit who offers to the Gentiles 'Our Christ' who feeds us.

As for the fish the Lord used two fishes in the first miracle. As Father Maximous of the fifteenth century Bishop of Torino, says, "These refer to the old testament, and to the message of St. John the Baptist. St. John came to preach clearly about the Messiah and pointed him out."

The Old Testament head previously declared in the law and prophecies as well as all the incidents revealing his deeds of salvation and his personality. But as for us, I believe the two fish that fed the holy church congregation, these are the Old and New Testaments. Through them, we are blessed with the Lord Jesus. As for the Gentiles, he offered them satisfaction by means of a few little fishes, since they do not have the Old Testament, and neither do they have the preaching of St. John the Baptist. The preaching message has been offered through the simple disciples, the small fold. The Lord has fed those little ones with Jesus Christ, the subject of their preaching.

Secondly: In the first miracle (Matt 14:20) "And they took twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained." But in the following miracle (Matt 15:37) "And they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left."

The church of the Old Testament was referred to by number 12, since they were of twelve tribes. The Lord has fed all of the tribes, for he filled them all with the Holy Spirit. The disciples took up these baskets, referring to the Jews who were taken up in their belief in Christ, from the earthly materialistic thoughts so as to experience the heavenly life, as St. Paul the apostle says, 'He made us sit with him in the heavens.'

St. Jerome thinks the twelve baskets signify the twelve disciples that have come to occupy the place of the twelve tribes. He says, "He fed his people with his bread, and what remained was gathered in twelve baskets, that is, in the twelve apostles. What was missing in the twelve tribes was saved in the twelve disciples."

But as for the Gentile church that was lifted up by the hands of the disciples, these are referred to by the seven baskets. The book of Revelation declared them as the seven churches (Rev 1:4,20) symbolized by seven lighthouses, referring to the Spirit's work in it for lighting it up, and making it to shine to the world.

Thirdly: In this miracle (Matt 14:19) "He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass," whereas in the second miracle (Matt 15:35) "He commanded the multitudes to sit on the ground." The Jews lived a long time relying on the body such as circumcision, being of Abraham's descent, physical purification etc. It was not possible for them to be blessed with the special blessing of the evangelical life. It was not possible for them to receive the Lord Jesus as their spiritual satisfying food, unless they put those things under them, that is, to sit on them just as on the grass, because the grass refers to the body (Is 40:6, Rom 8:6). We, likewise, cannot encounter the Lord Jesus, and neither can we receive the divine gift, through the disciples, which is the church as long as we live according to the body. Let us yield our body to our souls by the Holy Spirit, and sit on it. Hence it will be an obedient servant working in harmony with the Spirit, not in resistance to him. At this point, we shall be blessed with the spiritualities.

But as for the Gentiles, they sat on the ground, for the Gentiles have become as the ground, worshipping false Gods, and they have become idolaters. Their life and thoughts have become debased to the ground. Therefore, these will not be blessed with the heavenly food, if they do not sit on the ground to make it under them, and not to be enslaved by it.

Fourthly: In this miracle he fed around 5,000 men, other than the women and children. In the following miracle they were around 4,000 men, other than the women and the children. When studying the book of numbers, we have seen elaborately that God did not count the women and children, but only the meant alone. This is not in scorn of the woman and child; it is only a symbol of the rejection of the soft-papared soul of the woman's who is as immature as a child. He wishes every believer to be mature and struggling by the Spirit, fighting sin for the account of the kingdom of light. We think it enough here to pick some expressions from the words of St. Augustine: "The number did not include the children and women, for those who are pampered and without much knowledge are out of the count. They were allowed to eat...the children were to eat to grow and would be no more children. The papared let them eat as well, so they correct themselves and become sanctified. We distribute the food to all, and gladly serve them"

As for the numbers, the first miracle fed 5,000 men. This refers to the five books of Moses, and has implied the heavenly spiritual concept of 1,000. that is, those living in the old law have been fed, but they were released from the literacy, and went straight to the Spirit or the heavenly thoughts. The number 5,000 refers to the Christian person who is satisfied with the spiritual food. His five sensed are sanctified so as to possess a heavenly nature, (1,000).

But as for the second miracle, the Lord has fed 4,000 men, referring to the feeding of the world, in its four corners, and these have possessed the heavenly nature (1,000 x 4). We can feel this is our life, for, through the spiritual food our earthly bodies are sanctified, having number 4 for its symbol, and so as to carry heavenly thoughts in it as well (1,000).

Briefly speaking, we can say that the Lord Jesus is the mystery of satisfaction in food. He holds the two fishes and the five loaves to feed the Jews. He also holds the few fishes and the seven loaves of bread to feed the Gentiles. He feeds everyone through his disciples, and no one coming up to him will return hungry. He is the only one who is able to grant us satisfaction by mean as of his church that is his disciples. This is by means of the spiritual law (the five loaves), and the revealing of the mysteries in the two Testaments (the two fishes, as well as the preaching word the few fishes) and the work of the Holy Spirit (the seven loaves.) The Lord feeds the thoughts, the leads the body, the spirit the talents, and kindles them in us. He leads the body, the spirit and the soul, all together in one spirit towards the heavens.

4. Jesus, the One Who Grants Peace:

Despite all his kingdom, Herod the king was not satisfied; and he was passionate to see the young girl dance, and to offer her anything himself to enrich all those who believe in him, when he went into the wilderness, the multitudes were attracted to him (Matt 14:13). Some as a spiritual king he healed their sick (Matt 14:14). He satisfied them spiritually and also physically, to the extent that twelve baskets of fragments were full (Matt 14:20). Now, the Lord commands his disciples to get into the boat, to tell them of his inward spiritual work in them.

The evangelist says, (Matt 14:22,23) “Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up on a mountain by himself to pray. Now when evening came, he was alone there.”

This is quite strange; he has commanded his disciples to get into the boat, and sent the multitudes away, but as for himself, he went up the mountain.

Regarding the disciples, he commanded them to get into the boat, so he would command the tempest, or to allow the tempest to rage. Our Lord Jesus respects the human willpower, and he sanctifies it. But when man throws himself in his divine hands, all willingly, the Lord asks him to act the way he wants. This is what we come to know from the words of the evangelist; that he commands his disciples to get into the boat, since they have yielded their life in his hands, all voluntarily. He took them to the middle of the sea, so they could test his presence, as the mystery of their peace, when a storm is waged against them. He knows what is for their own good. He leads them to the rough way, and the narrow door, not to be pleased for their suffering, but rather so as to meet him in the midst of their suffering, and find him a source of comfort to them.

On the other hand, the Lord commanded them to cross, as if he is pushing them to walk in the midst of the world currents. They are carried by the cross, or the boat, so as to reach the heavenly harbor on the other bank. As the scholar Oreganus says, “This is the work of Jesus’ disciples, I mean, to go to the other shore bank. They will cross all visible and materialistic matters which are temporary, and are released to the invisible eternity.”

As for the multitudes, they were filled with the materialistic food, and have stopped at this point. They were not to be blessed by entering the boat and crossing to the heavenly shore.

As for the Lord Jesus, he went up to the mountain all by himself. It is as if he has been uplifted to heaven so as to encounter the father for the sake of his disciples. He prays, which is, he talks to his Father offering his precious blood, interceding for them, to forgive them their sins. This is the deposit by which the disciples live in the middle of the ordeal, when the tempest rages. Also, the real help was there for them to cross over the eternity. By his going up the mountain, they, too, go up with him and by him and in him; so as to meet the heavenly Father who supports them in hardship and grants them the natural heavenly life.

The Lord’s going up the mountain, all by himself, to pray, does not mean or escape from the service. It is an assurance of the meditative life of service, and the service of the multitudes, by being in a secret meeting with the Father. Indeed, we are badly in need of the mountain or the wilderness to support us in our spiritual and shepherding struggle. As St. John Chrysostom says, “The wilderness is the mother of silence. It is peaceful, and he herbor that saves us from all the toil.” As St. Isaac the Sgrian says, “Just to look at the wilderness gives the soul a lot of peace, and it kills the physical passions in us.”

The wilderness is not a place for an escape from the service, or from the world. It is actually a spiritual battlefield against Satan himself. In it the spirit is revealed, and its depth is discovered if it is firm in the Lord. It is struggling in the spiritual path, or it is weak and quiet. The wilderness polishes men, and increases their maturity spiritually, it also reveals the negligent ones and pronounces their carelessness or their evil.

(Matt 14:24-27) “But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, ‘The Sailor commanded the disciples to get into the boat of ordeals, and to go before him to cross to the other bank. But when they reached the middle of the sea, the turmoil waves of ordeals, and the opposite winds facing them to go to the shore, these made them helpless. They struggled as if they had no Christ, they could not overcome the high waves and the contradicting spirits to reach the other side. When they spent all their effort to reach the shore the word had compassion on them, and he came walking on the sea. It is he whom no waves or winds can obstruct.

What occurred here shows us a live image of the entire story for salvation. Humanity entered to the midst of the sea in the first trumpet, when our first forefathers fell in paradise, and their life was subjected to everlasting death when fighting back the contradicting winds, which are Satan’s deception. In the second trumpet sound, out of paradise, the entire humanity submitted as well, when under the natural law of eternal death, and there was none to be saved. In the third trumpet sound, God offered the law of Moses, that has been unable to save man from death, and from crossing with him to the life of safety on the other bank. But in the fullness of time, in the fourth trumpet, in the middle of pitch darkness, the Lord Jesus has come, shining on those sitting in the dark, to save them from the devastating waves. He is the only one who can come forward to humanity, walk in on the water, and the opposing winds could not confront him. Those who had come previously, none of them was able to walk on the waters of the world or could face the opposing winds without getting drowned. Humanity as a whole, was heavy with the burden of sin, as if it were lead (Zech 5:7), and therefore it was in the deep water (Ex 15:10). But as for the word of God, he alone is sinless, he alone is able to be lifted on the waters without being swallowed up by the waves!

Indeed, the Lord came forward finding a way for himself on the waters, that is on the world without being swallowed up by the world, as happened with the rest of mankind. He was heading towards the boat just as it were the cross, or to his church, carrying his disciples with him to enter it, so they be with him, and he with them. He would be in them, and they in him, crossing to the eternal harbor in peace.

He came forward to them in the midst of the rough waves, so as to declare to his disciples the ordeals are the times in which the Lord shines brightly in the midst of his children. He does not take away the sufferings, but he rather shines before their eyes, declaring his fatherhood, his care, before he calms down the waves.

+ He did not take away the dark, and neither did he declare himself on the spot, but as I have already said before, he always trained them to tolerate these fears, and to be ready for any trials and sufferings.

+ The Lord did not declare himself before they cried out to him; the more they were scared, the more they welcomed his coming to them.

St. John Chrysostom

The Lord came to humanity in the fourth trumpet, the last one. It was all pitch dark when he came waling on the waves. They thought he was only a shadow, and they didn't know the reality of his coming, and neither could they understand the mysteries of his salvation deed. They were unable to encounter him, and realize his presence as a Savior in their life. Some doubted his humanity, such as the Genosites who thought his body was only an illusion or imagination. Some denied his divinity, such as the Ariosites. But the divine word, the incarnate one declared assuring them (Matt 14:27) "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." It is as if he is confirming the reality of his being a human person, and being in our midst as a mystery of spiritual power and peace, talking away all fear from us.

God still allows every believer to enter the boat midst the waves, so he would realize the truth of his existence inside him. His power is so overwhelming, for he is able to calm down the outer and inner waves. He grants us awesome peace by declaring his divine presence in him.

Peter on the Water:

(Matt 14:28-33) "And Peter answered him and said, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' So he said, 'Come.' And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, 'Lord, save me!' and immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him, and said to him 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?' And when they got in to the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped him saying, 'truly you are the son of God.'"

In our study of book of Exodus, we heard Moses the prophet and his people praising God for the sake of their salvation, and the destruction of Pharaoh and his people, saying, (Ex 15:5) "They sank to the bottom like a stone." Iniquity is like a stone or lead that sinks in the deep water to the very bottom. But as for virtue, which is light, this floats on the water. Those walking in righteousness fly like the clouds, or the pigeons with their tiny wings (Is 9:8).

The scholar Oreganus says, "Our Lord and Savior has walked on the water; He is the one who truly knows no sin. His disciple St. Peter also walked, but he was a little afraid, for his heart was not entirely pure, because he carried some lead inside it. This is why the Lord told him 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?' He, who is saved, is saved as if with fire (1 Cor) 3:15). Even if there is any lead in him, it is melted as in a furnace."

St. Peter has seen the Lord Jesus walking on the water, and he was eager to meet him there. When he asked the Lord, he commanded him to come to him. But

Peter was afraid when he saw the boisterous wind. This is humanity's image before the incarnation; but when it believed in God who is able to walk on the water of the world, it went out to meet him. But it was quite unable to do so, and forgave us our sins. By him, we have had the ability to walk with him, and in him, on the water without getting drowned. Through him we have entered the New Testament boat, just as St. Peter entered it with the Lord, so he would take us up to the higher Jerusalem.

What is amazing is that the Lord did not calm down the waves so that Peter would walk on the water, but he said to Peter 'Come.' He pacified the inner waves of his heart, so in faith he would walk on the waves, and would not drown. For real, the mystery in our getting drowned is not the outer waves, but rather the losing of the heart's peace and its faith.

5. Christ, the One who Heals:

The Lord Jesus granted peace to the disturbed souls because of the opposing winds. He entered with those souls to the boat of his holy church so they could live in perfect peace. He crossed with them to the land of Genesaret. There, the people came to know him. They therefore brought to him all those who were sick, and they just wanted to touch the hem of his garment, for all those who touched him were healed.

His garment refers to his church that clings to him. All those who accepted him wished to be as the hem of his garment, that is, to occupy the last rows in his church, so that in humanity they would obtain the healing for their souls as well as their bodies.

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Chapter XV (Page 438)

Those who have lost the king, and those who have asked for him

The scribes and the Pharisees who were entrusted with the word of God, so as to keep it and interpret it, these rejected ‘the incarnate word’, whereas those deprived of the word, the Gentiles, pursued the incarnate word, and asked for their salvation. The former ones were busy criticizing, and arguing about the personality of the Lord, whereas the others followed him and asked for his work in them. This does not mean that all the Jews rejected the Lord, but only those who thought themselves to be wise. But as for the simple hearted people, these came to him to find the mystery for their healing and satisfaction

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1. The Overruling of the Chiefs’ Traditions:

(Matt 15:1,2) “Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus saying, ‘why do you disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.’”

The multitudes were eager to touch the hem of his garment so they would be healed (Matt 14:36), whereas the scribes and the Pharisees were unable to stand his kingly words, and neither could they tolerate his divine love to humanity. They therefore adopted the attitude of criticism and experienced people. The scribes were entrusted with the word of god so they write it accurately, and the Pharisees so they interpret it to the people, so that when the word of God would come incarnate, they would rejoice reign over their hearts, and they would respond to him with all their life. It was more appropriate for the scribes and the Pharisees to have the leadership of the people, yielding before the word of the living God, the Messiah the king. But their hearts turned away from serving the word to serving their own. They have rejected the divine word and resisted him. It was as if he came to withdraw the chairs from under them, or to usurp their positions.

Indeed, the Messiah has come to overrule the heart. But Herod resisted him when he was only a child, for fear having the throne usurped. When he began his service, Satan could do nothing but declare openly the war, for fear of having his dark kingdom destroyed. During the service, Hose people of power and authority rushed to resist him lest they collapse before the people’s eyes. The Lord was constantly rejected until he was hung on the cross. The authorities united together to pull down his kingdom, but this

attitude became part and parcel of the declaration of his kingdom, secretly hidden in the hearts of so many. Those people who resisted him thought that by the cross they would put things to an end. But they discovered it was the cross itself that was the only means to declare his kingdom and attract the gentiles to his free salvation. The resistance for what is right, this does not destroy it; it rather opens the way to declare it more strongly and more vastly.

The Lord of glory remains resisted in his person, his cross his gospel throughout so many generations. Unfortunately, it is so done by even those who sometimes have his name, and by those who seem to be of his won kingdom. But, the more he is resisted the more he is transfigured clearly amidst his kingdom, and his glory shines on those sitting in darkness. It is amazing what St. Augustine said, he who has resisted the Lord so much before accepting the faith. This was through his philosophy and his filthy life; but when he came to know the Lord, he devoted all his potentials for the king's account. He thinks those resisting the book, and the heretics, that these urge us all the more to know the mysteries if we live righteously. He says, "You sanctified brethren, notice the usefulness of the heretics, that with God's provision, he uses even the evil ones in a good and useful way. For, whereas their plans regress on them, the good does not regress to them, that which God takes out of them."

The Chiefs' Tradition:

The Lord was accused of his disciples' overriding the chiefs' tradition when they did not wash their hands when eating bread. The Lord's answer to them was (Matt 15:3-6) "He answered and said to them, 'Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded saying 'Honor your father and your mother' and 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'whoever says to his father or mother 'whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God.' Then he need not honor his father or mother. Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.'"

In our study of 'traditions', we could distinguish clearly two different kinds:

Firstly: the tradition of commandments for the people, which contradicts God's commandment for one reason or the other. This is like the parable presented by the Lord Jesus. For personal profit, the Jewish leaders set a commandment that had to the apparent donation semblance, and yet it hid the breaking of God's law. This is such as the son could deprive his parents from their rights. He would not, for instance, support them and would have the pretext saying what he pays them is only an offering to God. He thereby breaks the commandment of honoring the parents. It is as if he has insulted them with his deeds, which is way worse than insulting them verbally, for he deprives them of the right of a honorable life to be let. They would therefore have to live under a tight standard of living, covered by the belief of donating to the temple. As the scholar Oreganus says, "When the parents hear what is given to them has become of the offering children, even if they are badly in need of it." In (Luke 6:14) "The Pharisees were money

lovers,” therefore they pretended to collect it, to give the poor, and they deprived the parents of their children’s gifts.

On the other hand, they included in their tradition some details and appearances in their worship and behavior, that was of no purpose other than the love of ostentation under the pretence of religion. This had no inward spirituality appertaining to the living God.

Secondly: a live tradition which preserved the books of the old testament, and offered an interpretation to its excerpts. It also declared to us the life with God in our worship and behavior, in addition to preserving the information verbally or documentarily. This is not rejected by the New Testament, because it does not contradict the divine commandment, it rather serves it. It has been applied in the New Testament itself. As an example:

- A) According to the Jewish tradition, St. Paul the apostle knew the names of the two sorcerers who rejected Moses the prophet (2 Tim 3:8).
- B) By means of it, Jude the apostle mentioned the discard and enmity of the archangel Michael to Satan, arguing about the body of Moses in a humble spirit and in honesty (Jude 1:9).
- C) The New Testament mentioned what was written in the Jewish tradition, that the receiving of the law was by the hands of angels.
- D) In more than one situation, St. Paul the apostle confirmed the necessity of tradition, or to yield (1 Cor 11:34; 2 Tim 1:5; 2 Thes 3:6).

Let us return to the Lord’s words rebuking the scribes and the Pharisees, who criticized the Lord Jesus based on the literacy and wording and appearances that ruined the concept of the divine law of God.

(Matt 15:6-9) “Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you saying: ‘These people draw near to me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me and in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrine the commandments of men.’”

He calls them hypocrites because they seem as if they defend the truth, whereas they were breaking it. They appear as if they are zealous about the glory of God, whereas they care more about what they possess. They come forward as if they are teachers, whereas they are blind and are in need of someone to teach them. As St. John Chrysostom says, “It is considered a serious matter if the blind has no guide, so how much more if this blind wants to lead or guide someone else?”

The scribes and the Pharisees occupied the foremost front seats among the worshipers, but as for their heart it had no place at all, but it was rather far away from God. They worship God not out of love, but rather to fulfill personal human goals. Therefore their teachings became ‘commandments for men.’

St. Gregory Bishops of Nicus comments on the Lord's words, saying that God is concerned with the heart itself more than with the words of worship or apparent deeds. "What does this mean? That the correct trend for the soul towards righteousness is of far greater value in God's eye than any worshiping. For God hears the signing of the heart which could not be uttered." That is, God desires the inward purity of heart when worshiping, and not the outward appearance. Father John of Kronstodt says, "Our prayer should be deep, sincere, wise and fruitful, and it has to change our heart and direct our will towards righteousness, and pulls us away from what is evil."

2. The Unwashed Hands:

The Lord Jesus called on the multitudes tenderly saying, (Matt 15:10) "Hear and understand." He is the wise physician who knows when the patient needs surgery to uproot any corruption. He also knows when he needs the soothing ointment to relieve the pain, when to cut and when to bandage. It was not possible to hear the hypocrites and teachers with kind words, for this would cover up their inward evil and hence corrupt the whole body. But as for the meek multitudes, these could not tolerate a cruel word lest they be wrecked with despair. They rather needed gentle words to support them and lift them up in hope. In this way the Lord reigns over the hearts, using the hard words and the gentle ones so the heart is opened to him. In such a way the Lord called the multitudes to explain to them the issue of unwashed hands. He said so, not to defend his disciples but rather to spiritually build them up, and so they would not be kindred because of the doubts aroused by the scribes and the Pharisees.

(Matt 15:11) "Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man."

The Lord wished to take the multitudes by his hand and to take them to the inward life, so as to realize that the mystery of life and of sanctification is not focused on the apparent outward deeds but in the inward life. He did not totally disregard what enters the mouth, but it is not this which defiles, it is rather what is inside man, and what is declared when going out of the mouth.

When our first forefather's hearts were defiled, they did not pay attention to healing the inward defects, but they thought of how to outwardly cover their bodies. It is similar to someone decorating his collapsed house instead of treating its foundation. Similarly, the Jewish leaders paid attention to washing the hands before eating so they are not defiled. But they paid no attention to what comes out of their hearts, such as defiling word filled with hypocrisy and judgment.

(Matt 15:12-14) "Then his disciples came and said to him, 'do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?' But he answered and said, 'every plant which my heavenly father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into the ditch.'"

The Pharisees were enable to hear the Lord's words. For they the surgeon cuts to get out the rottenness, and reveal the diseased part, something that the hypocrite could not stand. They were just as their fathers who accepted the false prophets in the days of Jeremiah. These said soft and sweet words, 'Peace, peace,' whereas there was no peace. When Jeremiah the prophet warned them, and he asked them to repent, they threw him in the den, and was put in jail, and they scorned him and tormented him. But as for the Lord Jesus, he establishes the real kingdom like a paradise, where the father plants his trees, and supports them with the holy blood of Christ, and waters them with the spring of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus was not shaken with the rejection of the Pharisees to his words. He does not get concerned about how many surround him, but rather of what kind they are. He is concerned about coming to righteousness, and not about the appearance. For the sake of one real plant, the Lord has offered his precious pure blood, and his life as a price in return. But the Lord does not ask for artificial trees, having no fruits of the Spirit. This is why he said to leave them alone. To be left here does not imply the Lord's wish to give them up. He only wished to deprive them of the multitudes that showed overwhelming respect to them, and hence they lost their humility, and their hearts were stricken with spiritual blindness. They needed to be left alone, so as to come to themselves, and realize they were blind who stole the spiritual leadership positions. Therefore they have led the blind with their hearts, and all would fall together in the ditch of ignorance and darkness.

3. The Encounter of the Canaanite:

The men of the Holy Book, those scribes and Pharisees, have turned away in the blindness of their hearts, from the incarnate word of god. They have become resistant, and struggles against his spiritual kingdom instead of being blessed with it and of their preaching it. The evangelist therefore says, "Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon." It is as if he is declaring his leaving of the Jewish people, those rejecting the faith, and his searching for his children from among the gentiles. By his departure he is snatching away the authentic branches, due to their pride and lack of faith, and this is to feed the wild branches, so as to be blessed with the fruits of his Holy Spirit.

The Jews and their leaders were absorbed in the detailed words of their law and the unspiritual appearances of their traditions. They therefore kept looking for any error to be made by the Messiah, the savior. All of a sudden the Gentile church, represented by this Canaanite woman, comes foreword to him asking him for her needs.

The evangelist says (Matt 15:22) "And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to him saying, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon possessed.'"

All her lifetime she has been deprived of hearing God's word, and she did not receive the law, neither did she witness any prophets; she rather lived her life worshipping idols. But by ear, she came to know a little of the Messiah 'Son of David.' She therefore left her village, her unfaithfulness, her idol worshipping, so as to encounter him. Those

who had the lists of descents, and were in possession of the symbols and prophecies that should have discerned his personality all the symbolism and prophecies that should have discerned his personality, all have rejected him, whereas this woman of a forgiven descent, came to him. She did not argue stupidly and stubbornly, but rather to usurp his divine love and his mercies, so he would save her very lunatic daughter. She has accepted him as her own savior, for she was desperately in need of him, as much as her own very mad daughter who has lost her mind and wisdom.

When the Lord heeded for the regions of Tyre and Sidon behold, the woman came out to meet him. It is as if the Lord, the lover of mankind, has gone to them, but he does not meet them inside the region of idol worshiping, but rather outside it. By doing so, she has fulfilled what was declared by David the prophet (Ps 45:10,11) "Listen, O daughter, consider and incline your ears; forget your own people also, and your father's house; so they king will greatly desire your beauty; because he is your Lord, worship him." She has fulfilled the commandment; she left her people, her father's house to ask for the real king.

The evangelist says (Matt 15:23) "But he answered her not a word." Why so?

Firstly: His not answering her at the beginning is only a declaration of his salvation work. He has come amidst the children of Israel, and focused most of his deeds and miracles on these people, who had been blessed with the promises, the prophecies and the doctrines; so that if they reject him, he would have had his full of them. It is at this point that the Lord would reject these people and open, very widely, the door for the Gentiles. The Lord has focused from the very beginning on these people so they would be a holy leaven to ferment the entire dough through preaching the good news. We do not deny, that though he was rejected by the Jews, yet a few of them received him, among them were the disciples and the apostles who preached to the whole world.

Secondly: The silence of the Lord was for a little while, so as to urge the disciples to come forward for her sake. He wished to show them their mission, to be concerned about the suffering world of idolatry that lacked in spiritual awareness and its own salvation.

Thirdly: The Lord seemed to be silent in appearance only, but his invisible hand was supporting her heart and her faith. His eyes were happy to observe her great humility. In his silence he did not disregard her, but she was rather praising her before all. St. Augustine says, "She was so eager to obtain mercy that she cried out, and in boldness she kept knocking, and he seemed to her as not to hear it. Mercy did not reject her to the end, but what happened was only to kindle her desire, and to reveal her humility. She cried out as if Christ did not hear her, whereas he was providing for the matter in peace." The saint moreover says, "She kept crying out, and kept knocking. It is as if she has previously heard the words (Matt 7:7) "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.""

(Matt 15:23,24) "And his disciples came and urged him saying, 'Send her away, for she cries, out after us.'" But he answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

How could it be he was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; whereas it was he who said to Nicodemus (John 3:16) "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in his name would not perish, but have everlasting life." Moreover, it has previously been witnessed by the prophets in the Old Testament about the Messiah's coming for the whole world, both Jews and Gentiles together.

St. Augustine answers, "We understand from this it was appropriate for him to declare his presence in the body, his birth, his miracle working, the power of his resurrection amidst those people. It was so provided for from the very beginning. What has been prophesied previously has been fulfilled by the coming of Jesus Christ for the Jewish people so he would be killed. But he would gain those he had previously known. He did not condemn the whole nation, but he examined them and found among them a lot of chaff, as well as hidden wheat. Among them was what should be burned, and others that could fill up the barns, for, from where did the apostles come?" He furthermore says, "For he did not go himself to the Gentiles, he sent his disciples, and therefore the words of the prophet have been fulfilled (Psalm 18:43) 'A people I have not known shall serve me.' Look how the prophecy has been revealed and fulfilled! It said clearly 'A people I have not known.' How so? He continues saying (Ps. 18:44) 'As soon as they hear of me they obey me.' That is, they believe not through the vision, but through the hearing. This is why the Gentiles obtained a great deal of praise. The Jews saw him and so they killed him, whereas the gentiles heard of him and believed in him."

The Lord continued his words saying (Matt 15:26) "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."

Why did the Lord say these words? Did he scorn the Gentiles and so-called them dogs? For sure the Lord does not scorn his creation. He might have said so as to repeat what the Jews said continuously, so as to praise those whom the Jews thought were dogs. He thereby declared they have become of greater faith than the children themselves. This is on one hand, on the other one the gentiles denied their faith in God, and did a lot of evil, to the extent that many of them set their children on fire, and offered their own as sacrifices to the idols. They did what insensible creatures would not do. The Lord does not mean to distinguish the Jews from the Gentiles; he only reveals the impact of sin in us. He moreover uncovered the depths of the Canaanite woman's heart, who had previously proved by her amazing humility, how the children of the kingdom are. She said, (Matt 15:27) "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

St. Augustine says, "She did not rebel or get upset by being called as a dog, when she was asking for blessing and mercy. But she said 'Yes, Lord, you have called me a dog, and in truth, I am as such, for I know my name! You say what is true. But I should not be deprived of blessing because of this.... Forever the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their masters' table. What I wish for is the blessing of a reasonable amount. I am not overcrowding the table, I am only looking for the crumbs.' Look, brethren, the great

humility set before us! She knew herself and therefore the Lord said immediately (Matt 15:28) "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be as you desire." You said about yourself you were 'a dog', but I know you as 'a human'. You have asked me, and sought me, and knocked; and therefore you were given, and you found, and it has been opened to you." Look, brethren, how this Canaanite woman became an example or a symbol to the church! She has presented before us the gift of humility in an amazing way! What the Jews, the owners of the promises, have been deprived of due to their pride, the Gentiles have obtained, those people deprived of the knowledge, by means of their humility. Those who assumed themselves to be the children deprived themselves of the kingdom table through their ingratitude. Whereas those who were evil and defiled as the gods, have become in truth, children worthy of entering their heavenly Father's feat.

This woman, coming out of the villages of Tyre, has fulfilled what was declared by the prophet about her (Psalm 45:12) "And the daughter of Tyre will come with a gift; the rich among the people will seek your favor." What gift will this daughter of Tyre offer other than the declaration of her great faith during the silence of the Lord, and his pretending not to give her at the beginning. He granted her the opportunity to give the greatest gift the Lord wishes for. He says, (Matt 15:28) "Let it be to you as you desire." With this gift, she opened the Lord's treasures so as to obtain whatever she desired, whereas the Jewish leaders shut the doors of God's mercies for themselves. The Lord accepted her overwhelming warm heart's gift. He rewarded her this gift with what was more awesome, for, he praised her before all. He opened the doors of his love before her. He established her as the symbol of the Gentile church that has usurped the Lord himself by means of the faith.

4. The Attraction of Simple Ones to Him:

For another time, the Lord goes up the mountain to stay there. The meek multitudes go after him, carrying to him the lame, the blind, the dumb.... etc. They put them before him, and he heals them. The leaders, in their hypocrisy, were heart-blinded, and were unable to see the sun of righteousness. But the strangers, the Gentiles, personalized by the Canaanite woman, were able to encounter him by means of their feelings, and how much they were in need of him. Similarly, those who were simple Jews realized in their simple-heartedness, that Jesus Christ was their Savior and king. This was it, which the leaders have been deprived of.

5. His Compassion on Those Asked for Him:

When the multitudes gathered round him and stayed with him for three days, the disciples did not ask him to dismiss them so they go to the villages and buy some food, as happened previously, (Matt 14:15). He rather called them, to offer the people, by means of the, their needs even the physical ones. This may have been because the people this time did not feel hungry, for they were listening all the time to his satisfying words. It could also have been because the disciples have experienced previously how he had fed them, as we have spoken of in the feeding of the multitudes, (Matt 14).

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Chapter XVI (Page 453)

The Children of the Messiah's Kingdom

For the Messiah's kingdom to be established as a huge structure that could rise up to the heavens, there must be deep foundation to pull down the kingdom of darkness, so as to erect new concepts. In other words, the old man has to be pulled down first, so that the new man could be built up by means of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ and his resurrection. The evangelist stressed at this point the destruction of 'hypocrisy', for its being the foundation in the new man. The cost for this work is the crucifixion.

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1. The Agreement of the Pharisees and the Sadducees against Him:

(Matt 16:1) "Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing him asked that he would show them a sign from heaven."

Those of controversial beliefs agreed together against the Lord Jesus, since the kingdom of darkness cannot accept light. What is false cannot tolerate what is right, even if what is false is not in accord together. They agreed together to test him, asking him to show them a sign from heaven. They asked for an apparent natural phenomenon, and they did not realize that these signs or phenomena are prior to his last coming for judgment. This is a sign for the world eradication, and the forces of darkness before him so as to establish the new world, that is, his everlasting kingdom. But, now, he has come to save and not to condemn. He has come to tell of his signs and miracles in people's lives for their repentance, and to change their inward life. He has come to declare his compassion on humanity, and his patience with us, and not to show off his power and his authority.

When dealing with Pharaoh to condemn him, he presented to him these signs concerning nature so as to scare him; but with friends there was no need of such things. He has offered them the salvation that has been symbolically fulfilled in Jonah the prophet. He answered those trying to test him saying, (Matt 16:2-4) "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the prophet Jonah. And he left them and departed."

The Lord gave man a mind to think with, and to discern matters. He would then be able to know the weather according to the apparent signs in the sky. But unfortunately, the Pharisees and the Sadducees did not make use of this divine gift for the account of god's kingdom, even though they had, quite handy to the, the prophecies of the prophets declaring clearly the Lord Jesus and his salvation deeds. They say the evening is a good one for the sky is red. The evening of the world has come, the fullness of time, for the Lord to shed his blood for our salvation, and yet they refused him. They did not say the weather was a good one, that is, it is the acceptable time for their return to him and obtaining his salvation work. They eternal morning has drawn near, and yet they did not realize they were in the winter cold of the spirit. They were losing the heavenly crown and the partnership of God's glory. They were able to discern the material face of the sky, and yet were unable to be aware of the mysteries of the spiritual kingdom. Therefore Jonah the prophet and other prophets will be rightful witnesses against them.

2. The Destruction of Hypocrisy, the Destroyer of the Kingdom:

The Lord Jesus establishes his heavenly kingdom in us. This evangelical structure needs primarily the pulling down of the wrong concepts so as to set up a new spiritual foundation. Without destroying the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the Sadducees we can never be blessed with the living faith which pertains to the kingdom. Without destroying the old man it is impossible to establish the new man.

The evangelist narrates to us the encounter of the Lord Jesus with his disciples. We can say it is like a church assembly, gathering the shepherds, with the Lord in their midst declaring to them the mysteries of his kingdom; the details of which are as follows:

(Matt 16:5) "Now when his disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread."

The disciples were attracted to the Lord Jesus; they therefore went to the other side, as if to the other life so as to live in heavenly thoughts. They left everything behind, even the basic necessities, for they had forgotten to take bread with them.

(Matt 16:6-12) "Then Jesus said to the, 'Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.' And they reasoned among themselves saying 'It is because we have taken no bread.' But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, 'O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread? Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets you took up? How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.' Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

Wherever the shepherds gather together in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord himself leads them and guides them, from the negative and positive aspects. He therefore warns them of hypocrisy, and he also reveal to them the mysteries of the Father (Matt 16:17).

From the negative aspect, he asked them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Unfortunately they thought of the 'leaven' or the material bread we eat. They seemed to have got confused because there was no food. The Lord therefore rebuked them, and reminded them of the tow miracles of feeding the multitudes by so saying the Lord tackled another new weakness in their life which getting disturbed about materialistic matters and temporary needs.

Briefly speaking, we can say that the Lord treated the negative aspect from two points: the first one is the running away from hypocrisy 'the Pharisees' leaven'. The second one is not to get confused or disturbed about material provision, particularly when they meet their fellow shepherds in the personality of the Lord Jesus. These two diseases, unfortunately, strike so many in the assemblies of the church shepherds.

The Lord warned them of the sin of hypocrisy, for it is the most dangerous enemy to the kingdom. The apparent sin could be realized and repented. But as for hypocrisy, it creeps in to the life of the spiritual leaders, the servants and the worshipers. This is not to keep them away from the service and worship with out encountering the Lord Jesus himself. Hence, man is uplifted to his ego and lies selfishness under the cover of religion and service. The structure then appears a sky rise without any foundation and it falls down in a total collapse.

St. John Chrysostom thinks hypocrisy as a thief that secretly sneaks in to the rows of worshipers, shepherds and those shepherded. It steals their hearts secretly without being detected. St. Ambrosios says, "Our Lord presents to us a strong reassurance about keeping the simplicity with the zeal of faith. We should not be like the unbelieving Jews, who practice a certain matter, and pretend to be zealous in their words."

As for hypocrisy to be similar to a leaven, St. Gregory the Nazinzy says, "When the leaven is praised it is because it concerns the bread of life. When it is blamed, it is because it refers to bitter cunningness that gets stabilized for those who get accustomed to it."

This is regarding hypocrisy. But as for the other negative aspect, it is his warning them of getting disturbed about material provision and preparation during the shepherds' meetings. This is instead of heaving Christ himself as the main goal. The disciples got disturbed about the bread, and they did not realize that the one dwelling in their midst is Christ, the living bread that satisfies everyone!

The disciples left the table service to the deacons (Acts 7). These were filled with the Holy Spirit, and were witnesses to the truth, so that the disciples would be free for the word service. There is no due to between the preaching word, and the deeds of love and serving those in need, and providing for the church matters. But for the sake of having

every church member free for the appropriate job for him, the spiritual shepherds should not be preoccupied with the table service. This is not due to any scorn of these tables, but it is just for the sake of having special services. For, just as the eye looks for the account of the entire body, yet it cannot hear by itself, but through the ear. Likewise is the church work, it represents a unified totality all together, as many members in the same body, all-working in unity, each in its special field.

Let us go back to the Lord's words with his disciples. We notice he wished to warn them, but he did not do so before the multitudes, so as not to hurt their feelings. He rather talked to them privately, offering them a live example of the spiritual fatherhood which is so gentle, even in time of warning.

3. The Rising of Faith as the Foundation for the Kingdom:

After the Lord Jesus had declared the obligation of the disciples to pull down hypocrisy, and not to get disturbed about material temporary matters, he presented to them the positive aspect. Upon this aspect is based the evangelical doctrine or the establishment of the kingdom, which is 'faith'. This was by means of a new encounter with his disciples, as if it were a new assembly for shepherds. In this meeting he asked his disciples (Matt 16:13) "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

By asking this question the Lord wished to bring up an important aspect if our faith in him, by calling him 'Son of Man', as an assurance of his humanity. If the father has declared to St. Peter the apostle he is the son of the living God, thereby confirming his divinity, then the Son himself confirms his humanity at this point. It is as if our faith in him is based on his 'humanity'. By means of the incarnation of God, the Son of God has come forth as head of the church, God's kingdom on earth. Through our unity with God's Son, the Incarnate, we enter through the baptism water, into the membership of this new spiritual kingdom. We are then blessed with the Creator's image, and we enjoy his life in us. We therefore carry him inside us as the mystery of eternal life.

The Lord asked them (Matt 16:13) "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" Since they were of the people, they could not of themselves realize the mystery of his divinity. They were amazed at his deeds (Matt 16:14) "So they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.'" Yes, for sure, we are in need of God himself to declare to us Christ's mystery.

The Lord once more asked them (Matt 16:15) "But who do you say that I am?" St. Jerome thinks of the Lord's words "But who do you... after his asking "Who do people say..." he thinks the disciples are no longer of the people, but that by him, they have become Gods. He said, "It is as if he is telling them as they are humans, they have thought of human matters, whereas they, as Gods, who do you say I am?"

The Lord's question to his disciples was not for information, neither was it to know what was in their hearts, but rather to give them the chance to snatch away the

human wrong thoughts, and to accept the divine declaration. As St. Cyril the great says, “He was preparing his disciples for his sufferings so they would not be doubtful of him.”

When the Lord posed for them the question (Matt 16:16,17) “Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘blessed are you, Simon Barjonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My father who is in heaven.’” Our faith in the Messiah the King, Son of the living God, is not a philosophical concept we love, and he is not the outcome of mental faith that we accept of flesh and blood. It is God’s declaration shining on us by the father by means of his Holy Spirit on all his people through the apostles and the disciples. The church has received him as God’s apostolic declaration. It is an earnest offered from one generation to the next. It is not a human handing over; it is rather God’s tradition that he shines with in the hearts of believers. It is a divine word inside the heart, able to link the soul to its king, and hence, we live the life of the heavenly kingdom. What happened to St. Peter the apostle is fulfilled with every member in Christ’s sanctified church, even if it is performed in different ways. It could be by means of a priest, or a word of preaching, or a written word. But the hidden declarer is God himself who works in the heart to proclaim the faith in it.

What follows are some comments by the fathers on this statement:

+ What was unable to be declared by flesh and blood, is declared by the grace of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, Simon Peter accepted a name which means he has accepted a declaration from the Holy Spirit. The name ‘Barjonah’ in our tongue means ‘son of the dove’, but some understand it as simply to mean Simon Peter is ‘Son of John’. They consider the name ‘Son of Jona’ as to mean ‘Joanaa’. The word ‘John’ means ‘the grace of God’. Therefore the name is interpreted secretly as ‘the dove’ that is ‘the Holy Spirit’ or ‘the grace of God’ which is the gift of the Spirit.

St. Jerome.

+ Blessed is he who is praised for his awareness and understanding, which is greater than the vision of human eyes. He does not look upon what is of the flesh and body, but he rather looks upon God’s Son through the declaration of the heavenly father. He has become worthy of becoming the first one to declare Christ’s godliness.

St. Hillary, Bishop of Portier.

+ Look how the father declares the son, and how the son declares the father. We do not learn of the son except through the father. Here he declares to us that the son is one with the father and is equal to him, worshiped to him with the father.

St. John Chrysostom.

+ Therefore, believe in him just as St. Peter, so you be blessed and be worthy to hear words ‘It is not flesh and blood that have declared this to you, but my father who is in heaven. “For flesh and blood do not accept anything unless it is of the world; also as a contrast, he who speaks of the sacraments by the Spirit, does not depend on the flesh and blood teachings, but rather on the proclamation of the divine. Do not rely on flesh and

blood to take your orders from them, and thence you, too, become flesh and blood. But he who clings to the Spirit is one Spirit (1 Cor 6:17).”

St. Ambrosios.

The Lord continues his words with St. Peter (Matt 16:18) “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”

The word ‘Peter’ is derived from the Greek ‘Petra’ which is ‘the rock.’ The Lord has established his church, which is his kingdom, on the rock, the faith in Christ the Lord that is declared to St. Peter. The faith in the Messiah is the basis on which is established the kingdom’s structure, that is so high, it reaches the very heavens. By means of God’s incarnation, the Son of the living God has come forth as the cornerstone that supports the entire structure, and therefore no tempests could destroy it, and neither could they strong winds shake one single rock of it.

+ He did not tell him ‘you are a rock’ ‘tu es Petra’, but he rather said ‘tu es Petrus’ for the rock was Christ (1 Cor 10:4). This is it which Simon confessed, just as the entire church would have confessed. This is why he is called ‘Peter’.

St. Augustine.

+ By saying so he meant, ‘on this faith, and on this confession I build my church. He showed by this that many others believe in what St. Peter believed in. Moreover, the Lord has raised up his spirit and has made him a shepherd.’

St. John Chrysostom.

+ Furthermore, he is the light, and he has granted his disciples to be called ‘the light of the world’. They also obtained the other titles from the Lord.

Simon, who has believed in Christ the rock, he has been granted to be called Peter ‘the rock.’

St. Jerome.

+ He who follows Christ, and sets him as his example to follow, is a rock.

The scholar Oreganus.

+ Great is Christ’s love, who has given all of his titles to his disciples, for he says, ‘I am the light of the world’ (John 8:12). And yet he gives of his own nature to his disciples saying, (Matt 5:14) “You are the light of the world.” Her moreover says, (John 6:31) “I am the living bread” and (1 Cor 10:17) “We are all one bread.”

He says (John 15:1) “I am the true vineyard.” And he tells you, (Jer 2:21) “Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality.”

Christ is the rock (1 Cor 10:4) “For they drank of that spiritual rock that followed the, and that rock was Christ.” His disciples is not deprived of that title, for he too is a rock, for you will be as solid as a rock that is firm and stable in the faith.

Work hard so you too would be a rock. Then they would not search for the rock outside you, but in yourself.

Your rock is your work, and it is your spirit. On it you will build your house no tempests of the evil spirit will be able to ruin it.

Your rock is your faith, which is the foundation of the church. If you are a rock, you will be a church. And if you are in the church, not even the gates of Hades will be able to overcome you. These are they which are the gates of hell.

St. Ambrosios.

(Matt 16:19) “And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

The kingdom of heaven is God’s work declared by the father in our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit in his son. He has therefore offered the kingdom’s keys into the church hands, not to show authority and to rule, but to serve humanity. It has been handed the authority not to work of itself, but by means of the Holy Spirit that dwells in it. The bride therefore shares in the making of the groom himself. This is to obtain the honor of the partnership with him so as to fulfill his divine will in her behaviour.

The kingdom keys, actually, is in the possession of the Son of David himself. It is he who opens and no one else shuts it he also shuts and no one opens. If the Lord has granted his church this godly key, this is because he entrusts the church with it. It is he who works secretly inside it. He knows who is worthy, and he opens to him through it, and he who is left outside, is shut out.

+ If this were told to Peter alone, he would not have embodied any foundation for a particular work to the church.

St. Augustine.

+ Therefore, in the change of time that followed, the priesthood regime follows accordingly in the church provision, by means of the authority given to them.

St. Kaprianos.

+ I wish he who binds or loosens another person would himself be blameless, and hence would be found worthy to bind or loosen in heaven.

Who is able to shut the gates of hell. With his virtues he will be given as a reward the keys of the heavenly kingdom. When man begins to train himself in every kind of virtue, he will be as someone who opens for himself the doors of heaven; for it is the

Lord himself who opens them. Therefore virtue itself will be the door of heaven and its key. Every virtue is nothing else but the heavenly kingdom.

The scholar Oreganus.

+ The bishops and the priest who do not comprehend this matter, and they judge indiscriminately, they adopt the same attitude of pride that pertains to the Pharisees. They believe they are able to judge the innocent, and forgive the criminals. But God does not look upon the judgment of the priest; he rather looks upon those who are being judged.

St. Jerome.

4. The Crucifixion as the Cost for the Kingdom:

(Matt 16:21) “From that time Jesus began to show to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.”

The Lord spoke of his kingdom as being destroyed and constructed, a matter of uprooting and implanting. In it the old man, with all of its deeds, is destroyed, so the new man be raised instead. The price for this kingdom is ‘the crucifixion’. The Lord has begun to speak openly with his disciples about his commitment, so full of divine love, to go to Jerusalem to be kept these as a true Passover offered in place of the entire humanity. He will destroy the kingdom of iniquity, and establish his own kingdom by means of his resurrection with his cross he condemned sin in his own body. He who is sinless has become sinful for our sake, so he would destroy its kingdom and scatter its authority. We shall then rise in him sanctified through his blood, and be members of his sacred body, children of the new kingdom.

St. John Chrysostom comments on this, proclaiming the capabilities of the sign of the cross in establishing the kingdom. He says, “It has destroyed the gates of hell, and opened the gates of heaven, and offered a new entrance to paradise, and has pulled down the fortresses of the devils. It is no surprise it has also overcome the poisonous matters and the fierce beasts, and so forth.”

It was not possible at that time for St. Peter to realize the inward kingdom, and subsequently to understand ‘the mystery of the cross.’ This is why the evangelist says, (Matt 16:22,23) “then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord; this shall not happen to you!” But he returned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are an offense to me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.’” St. Peter the apostle thought that when he takes the Lord apart, and would rebuke him, he would then manifest his love to him, and would reject his being scorned and his suffering. But he was surprised to see the Lord rebuking him. ‘Get behind me, Satan.’ St. Peter the apostle had accepted the father’s declaration about the godliness of the son; and therefore his faith because as strong as the rock on which the church is establishes. He has become worthy of obtaining with the other disciples, the keys of the kingdom. But despite when St. Peter refused the cross the Lord called

him 'Satan', and an offense to me, as well as 'for you are not mindful of the things of god, but the things of men.' The Lord has come to establish his kingdom through the cross; therefore he who rejects the cross, rejects the godly thinking, and would become an offense, concerned about the apparent matters that rejoices people's hearts, not God's.

Therefore, the cross is God's deed that has occupied God's thinking since the beginning of the times, for the sake of our salvation; without which, it is an obstruction to enter God's kingdom, and hence the kingdom of God would be changed to a human kingdom.

5. Our Positive Role in the Kingdom:

If the Lord had paid the price of the kingdom on the cross, then we shall not be blessed with this kingdom, and neither shall we grow in it, unless we share positively in it by carrying the cross with the crucified heavenly groom. This is why the Lord continues his words with his disciples about his crucifixion by their commitment to carrying the cross. For the evangelist says, (Matt 16:24) "Then Jesus said to his disciples 'If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.'" St. John Chrysostom says the Lord Jesus in this way has rebuked St. Peter who had rebuked him for carrying the cross. "It is as if he is telling St. Peter 'You are rebuking me because I wish to suffer, but I am telling you it is not only wrong that you forbid me to suffer, and I tell you, you will not be able to be saved unless you too die.'" If the kingdom of heaven means to follow the Messiah the king, then no one will be able to accept this following unless he is in the cross cycle, and carries the qualities of the king himself, that is to say, the crucifixion. He has to deny himself, and hate himself, and to denounce it altogether. He would crucify himself on the cross, not to live in weakness and hardship, with no sensitivity or embrowns or will-power. When he goes to the Lord's cross, by means of the Holy Spirit, he dies to himself, and carries the Lord himself inside him.

The weak human will-power disappears, not that he would live with no will-power, but that Christ's wise and able will-power works in him. He is not to live insensitively and emotionless, but rather when he dies regarding all these, he accepts them a new from the father's hands by means of the Holy Spirit. It is then that he will have the feelings of the Lord Jesus himself, his tenderness, his humility and his compassion. He will live embodying Christ's qualities transfigured in him. This is the concept of the cross; he carries a loss, but actually it is gain; the Christina sells all that he possesses and gains what is far greater. This is why the Lord says, (Matt 16:25,26) "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his own soul? This is the real kingly way in which all toil, even perishing his won temporary life, only to find himself blessed joyfully with what surpasses life. When he leaves the world, he possesses what is far more overwhelming. It is constant taking during the departure and giving things up. This is why St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote in his letter to the people of Rome saying, "Of what use to me are the pleasures of the world? What do I have to do with the world's

attractions? I would rather die with Christ than possess all the corners of the world. I only ask for Christ who has died for our sake, and also rose for our sake. The hour for my birth has drawn near. Forgive me my brethren, let me live, leave me to die. I wish to be with God. Do not leave me in the world, do not leave me among the pleasures of the world. Let me reach the pure light.””

What does it mean for man to deny himself?

+ Man denied himself when he does not care what happens to his body when he is stricken, or submits to similar suffering, but he rather tolerates all this patiently.

St. John Chrysostom.

+ When someone loves God, he hates himself, that is his physical man. Inwardly, in our thoughts, our hearts, our will power, there is an unusual force constantly working every day, every moment so as to with draw us from God. This force suggests to us thoughts, desires, concerns, intentions, preoccupations, words, false deeds --- all of which motivate in us the passions, and urge them violently in us. I mean this is the cunningness, envy, covetousness, pride, vain glory, slothfulness, disobedience, stubbornness, deceit and wrath.

Father John of Kronstadt.

6. The Everlasting Kingdom:

The Lord concludes his words about the construction of the heavenly kingdom as an inward life which we live here. He declares it as the everlasting kingdom. Actually it is not any different than the inward kingdom, but it is rather an extension to it. What we live in now in Christ Jesus through the faith, we enjoy it in full glory through the eternal resurrection. For he says, (Matt 16:27) “For the son of man will come in the glory of his father with his angels, and then he will reward each according to his works.”

The heavenly life that we live here, and are blessed with, is only an earnest for the eternal life, extended above all timely measure when the Lord Jesus the king comes with his angels. He will reward each one according to his deeds. If the faith is the foundation of the kingdom, yet it has to be ‘scientific’ so that the Lord offers us the rewarding eternal crowns ‘each one according to his deeds.’

The Lord wished to takes his disciples to this kingdom in a tangible way; he allowed three of his disciples to witness and be blessed with his transfiguration, so as to experience some moments of the eternal heavenly life. For he says, (Matt 16:28) “Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the son of man coming in his kingdom.” St. Ambrosios thinks it is appropriate for the believer to be blessed with this heavenly life as an earnest when he is still on earth. He says, “It is not only Enoch who is alive. He was not taken all by himself up to heaven, also St. Paul was uplifted above to encounter Christ.” It is appropriate for us to have our souls blessed by being uplifted above, so as to live with the heavenly Lord Jesus, and death would never be able to overcome us.

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Chapter XVII (Page 471)

An Eternal Actual Kingdom

When the Lord promised his disciples that some of them would see the son of man coming in his kingdom he took three of his disciples and went with them into his eternal kingdom, where he was transfigured on Mount Tabor. He then went down with them, so we live this kingdom through our actual life on earth, heading towards the cross.

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1. The Transfiguration:

The transfiguration means making the soul taste the eternal life, so it would be able to see its groom coming in his kingdom. He would then manifest his godly glory as much as the soul could bear when it is still in the physical body. This work of God that has been fulfilled in a tangible way on Mount Tabor has been shown to three of the disciples, and two of the Old Testament prophets. This divine work is fulfilled one way or the other inside the heart from time to time, so the soul would be able to withdraw towards the eternal wedding, eager to be liberated towards the eternal life. It therefore carries a spiritual powerful push that supports man in his carrying of the cross and becoming a witness to the Lord Jesus. The transfiguration is the manifestation of the 'heavenly kingdom', which extends above all time limits. It is offered to the human soul that has accepted to be positive in him by carrying the cross of the groom, the king, and going with him to death everyday so as to be blessed joyfully with the power of his resurrection. It represents a strong push granted by the Messiah, the king to his spiritual soldiers for continuous struggle against Satan and his deeds. This is to strengthen them passionately towards the eternal reward, and be blessed with sharing the heavenly gloried.

Therefore, this transfiguration which has occurred once in the life of three of the disciples, has become a credit offered by the Lord for the account of the entire church; the more you withdraw from it everyday, the more it increases. When you ask for it, you find it a daily experience that give strength the believer lives by a God's sacred mountains, which are his commandments. This be done through the church, whether it be in group, or family or personal worshipping. He also tastes of it during his work time and even in his night timer as well as in his dealings with both the righteous and the evildoers. It is a continuous encounter with our Lord Jesus Christ forever, and he

discovers the new glories every moment in our lives till we encounter him face to face in his final coming.

The Link between the Transfiguration and the Crucifixion Events:

The transfiguration has been linked to the events of the crucifixion and resurrection. It is impossible for the believer to ascend to the transfiguration mount to see the brightness of God, unless he accepts his cross, and goes with the Lord in his sufferings and experience his power of the resurrection in him, and at this point the Lord declares his glory in him. On the other hand it was impossible for the disciples to accept his sufferings and realize the mystery of his resurrection if he had not prepared them through those three disciples for his transfiguration.

+ The Lord spoke a good deal about the risks awaiting him, his suffering and his death, as well as the disciples' death and the cruel hardships they would encounter in their life. He moreover spoke of the many good things they hope for and aspire, which for its sake they will lose their life so they would find it. He also told them of his coming in the glory of his father, and grants us the reward. For this reason he wished to reveal to them how his glory would be like in his manifestation. They will then see with their own eyes, and understand as much as they can. This is why he showed them this in the present life, by means of his transfiguration.

St. John Chrysostom.

+ The people about whom he said they would not taste of death until they see his coming and his symbols, are these three disciples whom he took to the mount. There he declared to them how he would come in the last day in his godly glory and in the humility of the body.

He took them up to a high mountain to manifest to them the glory of his godliness, so they would not stumble when they see his sufferance that he accepted so willingly, and which he tolerated physically for our sake.

He took them up a high mountain to manifest and show them his kingdom before they see his suffering and his death. They would see his glory before seeing his shame, so that when they would see him imprisoned and condemned by the Jews, they would then understand he was not crucified by them for his inability, but it was for his being happy, in all his righteousness, to suffer for the sake of the world salvation.

He took them up to the mountain to show them that before his resurrection, his overwhelming godly glory, so that when he rises from the dead, they would realize he did not accept this glory as a reward for his deeds, as if this glory was not his. He rather had all this glory from the very beginning of the time together with the father and the Holy Spirit. He had previously said when he willingly went to all the suffering (John 17:5) "And now, O Father, glorify me with yourself, with the glory which I had with you before the world was."

St. Aoraan the Syrian

The Six Days;

Our teacher St. Mathew records saying the event of the transfiguration was after six days of the Lord's promise to his disciples that some of them would not taste death, until they see the son of man coming in his kingdom (Matt 16:28), whereas St. Luke records it as on the eight day after this promise.

This is not any contradiction, but rather an agreement and an amazing spiritual mystery. Our teacher St. Luke the evangelist counted the day on which the Lord declared his promise and the day of his transfiguration. As for our teacher St. Mathew he herald revealed a fact St. Luke the herald completed. The transfiguration therefore is the declaration of the Messiah the Savior's eternal kingdom. This will be fulfilled after the times, that is, it will be fulfilled on the eighth day, which refers to eternity, since it is the day which follows the end of the week, #7. In many previous situations we referred to #8 as a symbol of the resurrected eternal life. As for #6, mentioned here by our teacher St. Mathew, this implies a number of meanings:

Firstly: We know that #6 refers to incompleteness. This is why the name of the beast has the numbers 666, that means, incomplete till the end. At the same time it refers to the completion of man's work on earth, since he works for six days, and is still incomplete till he rests on the seventh day, the Sabbath. This human perfection or completion, however much it may be, is still regarded as incomplete, for if we do all righteousness we say we are idle slaves. It is as if those glimpses of overjoyful transfiguration are only granted to the struggling soul in the Lord. This is soul carries the cross all the six days, it is considered perfect and complete in its struggle, yet lacking in its own eyes. When man begins the life of lawful struggle by the Holy Spirit, man admits his drawbacks; but as for God, he can see him as righteous, and coming to him brightly, in secret transfiguration of the heart, as a godly gift that supports him and kindles him to a greater struggle. He is eager to obtain transfiguration not on mount Tabor, but in the heavens on God's Throne.

Secondly: The scholar Oreganus thinks the believer is not able to be uplifted with the Lord on mount Tabor to enjoy and be blessed with the transfiguration unless he passes through the six days for work, and the creation of the apparent world is left behind. That is, he overcomes the visible things and flees away from the love of the world. For, he says, "The world was created in six days, that is, the complete number for work. This is why I think that he who overcomes the world's entire matters, without looking at all what is visible, for it is all temporary, and he looks ahead at the invisible alone since it is eternal, in him the words are fulfilled "After six days, the Lord took..." Certain people. He who wishes to be taken by Jesus and ascends with him a high mount, and be ready to witness his transfiguration all by himself, he has to pass through the six days. He would not see what is visible, neither would he love the world or the things in it (1 John 2:15).

He would not wish for its passions, which are that of the body, and neither would he ask for the body's riches and glory. These matters divert the mind in confusion, and draws it away from the righteous matters of God, and slips him down to the very bottom. He is deceived by the issues in life such as riches, glory and relaxation in the passions which are all alien to the truth. He, who crosses the six days as we have said, keeps

preserved a new Sabbath. He is happy up on the high mount when he witnesses Jesus transfigured before him, for the word has variable forms and shapes. He appears to each one as much as he could stand. He does not declare himself more than the ability of the viewer could be able to bear.”

Thirdly: St. Ambrosios sees this as a reference to the end of ages, for he says, “We can say that after six thousand years, because a thousand years with the Lord are as one day (Ps. 89:4) for he has created the world in six days. By so doing, he reveals to us the resurrection that will occur at the end of the world age. In other words, he who rises above the world, above the time age, and is firm in the heavenliest, he aspires the eternal fruits that are of the ascertained resurrection. Therefore, let us disregard the deeds of life so we could be able to see God face to face.”

The Three Disciples:

The Lord Jesus chose three of his disciples to witness the transfiguration these were Peter, James and John. Peter, who means ‘the rock’, refers to the faith. James was well known for his struggle and his righteous life. John was known as John ‘the beloved.’ It is as if the soul would not be high on Mount Tabor to be blessed by witnessing its Groom in his eternal kingdom unless it embodies inside the faith working in love. St. Hillary, Bishop of Poitiers, thinks the three men refer to the entire humanity, all nations that have come forth as descents to Shem, Ham and Japheth. These have the right to go up with Christ to be blessed with his transfiguration.

The High Mount:

What is this high mount that we climb, which declares to us the word of God himself other than the word of God himself and his godly commandment? The scholar Oreganus says the Lord declared his godliness to those who mounted this high mount. But as for those at the bottom, he appeared to them in the form of a slave. He asks him who is eager to know the reality of the Lord, and be transfigured before him, to go up to Jesus through the Holy Gospel on the mount of wisdom by means of works and words. The same meaning is said by St. Ambrosios, “Let us go up the mount and entreat the word of God to reveal himself to us in his glory and beauty.”

Man cannot go to the kingdom to see the godly glory through the written word of God, and the incarnate word of God. The Lord Jesus Christ incarnate carries us through the written word, and takes us in him and with him to rise up with us to the high peaks all by ourselves. At this point the world is so belittled in our eyes, and we get rid of every confusion and worries. Moreover, the world loses its enticing powerful pleasures, and our hearts are absolutely withdrawn towards heaven. Then we see the Lord’s kingdom manifested before us and in us.

The Change of his Form:

(Matt 17:2) “And he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as the light.”

This change actually is a revelation of a hidden reality and glories that have been covered by God behind the physical body, so he would come close to our weak nature, and we likewise, could come close to him without getting burnt! He is declaring his godliness as much as we could bear. He would support us till at the last day in which we could be able to obtain his absolute glory.

This transfiguration, moreover, in some way or other was for our own account. Just as his unique godly childhood was declared in the baptism water, we too have come to possess the birth right in him to the Father. By means of the transfiguration we have come to obtain joyfully the right of the glorious new nature based on his sacred image. By taking off the corrupted old man, and by embodying the new one which is renewed daily in Christ Jesus through his Holy Spirit; it is then that we rise from one glory to the other, and we are uplifted from one mount to the next. He has granted us the wings of a dove flying to its groom, to nestle in his embrace, and there to remain with him in the everlasting heavens between his hands.

The Lord's face shines like the sun, and hence our life is in reflection enlightened by him as the moon does. We shall stay in his eternal light, and the darkness of age cannot come close to us. There will be no place for its ruler in us, neither in the spirit nor in the body. We shall shine and twinkle like real believers on the transfiguration mount with the light of Christ our Lord, as bright shares full of splendor. Our souls shall be enlightened by the fruits of the Holy Spirit and of fire. Our bodies will be sanctified in all its members, its feelings, its gifts and emotions. Man at this point is transformed to a bright angel, attracted towards the light unhesitatingly and incessantly.

+ He appeared to his disciple just as he would in the final judgment. But no one is to think that he took off his earthy form and outer appearance, or that he has got rid of his physical reality.

The evangelist described how his appearance has got to be changed, saying, "His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light," (or as snow).

When the evangelist speaks of the shining of his face and the whitening of his clothes, the Lord did not hide his appearance, but it has been changed by his glory. Undoubtedly it has changed according to his glory which is his in his kingdom. He has dyed his appearance in loftiness and sublimity, yet he has not taken off his outer appearance.

St. Jerome.

+ His face shone not as the face of Moses did, only outwardly. But his godly glory shone from his face, and despite this his glories remained in him. Out of himself his light shone, and his light remained in him. This light did not come from outside so as to adorn him! He does not accept it to be used for only a while! He did not reveal to them the depths of his godliness which is inconceivable, but he rather uncovered to them as much as their eyes could accept and discern.

St. Avram the Syrian

+ his face shines as the sun so as to declare himself to the children of the light, these are they who have got rid of the deeds of darkness, and have put on the armor of light (Rom 13:12). They are no longer children of the darkness or sons of the night; for they have become sons of daylight, acting in integrity just as in the daylight (Rom 13:13; Thes. 5:5).

By revealing himself, he shines on them not by little sunlight, but because he is the sun of righteousness.

The scholar Oreganus.

As for the white clothes this refers to Christ's church attached to him as if he is wrapped with it. It has become as white as light because its Groom is dwelling in it. This is the sun of righteousness that shines in it, and therefore it has become as white as the light, embodying the nature of light. We have previously seen that this robe refers to the eternal wedding where the bride also comes forward in a robe down to her feet (Rev 19:8). She would be in procession to her groom in the presence of the twenty four priests.

+ If you see someone not only having a deep knowledge of Christ's godliness, but he can also interpret every evangelical expression, then do not hesitate to say that the Lord's clothes have become as white as snow.

The scholar Oreganus.

+ His clothes are the church, because he who wears them unless he holds them, they fall. In these clothes St. Paul was like only their edge, for he said about himself (1 Cor 15:9) "I am the least of all the apostles." The edge or the hem of the robe is the last and least of it all. This is why the woman who was suffering from blood infirmity, once she touched the hem of Christ's robe, she was healed. Similarly, the church that came from all the Gentiles became whole through the teachings of St. Paul the apostle. It is not surprising that the church is referred to as the white clothes, for Isaiah the prophet has said, (Is 1:18) "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

St. Augustine.

The scholar Oreganus comments on the evangelist's words, "And he was transfigured before them;" he stressed on the words 'before them.' For, the Lord Jesus is the same, and does not ever change. But he who looks upon him through the holy gospel without going up the mountain of holy wisdom, this person can never be able to see his glory, or realize his mysteries. But he, who climbs up this mountain, will be blessed with the transfiguration.

The Appearance of Moses and Elijah:

(Matt 17:3) "And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with him."

It is no surprise that God who has declared at this point his kingdom through his people, amidst his church in which he was hidden, it is no surprise that he declares to us his eternal beauty, not in isolation from us. His saints were surrounding him, being blessed in talking to him as a Father, an elder Brother, a Groom and a Friend. He is happy with mankind, and deals with them not on a temporary basis, but in eternal endless dealings. The choosing of Moses and Elijah was not aimless, but it could be interpreted as follows:

Firstly: Moses was the man spoken of by God himself that he was the most affable man on earth. He has led those 'stiff necked' people for forty days amidst incessant grumbling and complaints. He interceded for them to God. The Lord showed his wrath and said, (Ex 32:10) "Now therefore, let me above, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation." But as for Moses, he interceded and entreated the Lord for them, separating the people from himself, saying, (Ex 32:32) "Yet now, if you will forgive their sin – but if not, I pray, blot me out of your book which have written." Elijah was a fiery man kindled in zeal, who stood before Ahab the king and Jezebel, and killed the bull's priests, asking for fire to burn the king's messengers. It was as if the kingdom of Christ was that of meekness but not without zeal. It is the kingdom of love, but not by begging; it is the wide kingdom for the forgiveness of sins, and the forgiveness of drawbacks, in being worthy of the blood, but not in negligence or recklessness. For, the Lord Jesus, by being transfigured, he reveals his kingdom which is his church. This carries the spirit of love and patience, and has compassion on the sinners through the scared cross. But this should not be in carelessness of what is righteous, or have any compromise with sin.

The Lord may have brought up Moses and Elijah as two examples to the disciples, so as to have a good change and impact on them. He wanted them to have the humility of Moses, and the zeal of Elijah, all for God's glory.

Secondly: Moses the prophet came to the presence of the Messiah, the king, representing the members sleeping in the Lord. These are the souls reposed, those who departed from us physically, but yet linked to us, all around the one Christ who reigns over everyone. As for Elijah the prophet, he came to represent the struggling members, since Elijah did not die. It is as if all have come together, alive in the Lord.

St. John Chrysostom says, "In this way he is informing them he has authority over death and life. He is the one to provide for above and for below. This is why he created him who has died, and him who has not dies."

Thirdly: If Moses has been handed the old law, and Elijah represents the prophets, then the Lord's transfiguration between them refers to the fact he is the aim of the old law and the focus of the prophecies.

+ The fact that Moses and Elijah alone of all the other saints were present, this means that Christ in his kingdom stands between Moses and the prophets.

St. Hillary, Bishop of Poitiers.

+ He who sees the glory of Moses, and is aware spiritually of the law, and how it is in harmony with Jesus, and could see the hidden wisdom of the prophets in a secretive way (1 Cor 2:7) he can only see Moses and Elijah when they are with Jesus.

The scholar Oreganus.

+ Of what use are Moses and Elijah, that is, the law and the prophecy, other than the speaking with the Lord? This is made evident by those who read the law and the prophecy about the Lord. Notice how the apostle expresses this briefly (Rom 3:20,21) "... for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the law and the prophets." He looks upon the sun which was witnessed by the law and the prophets.

St. Augustine.

Fourthly: Moses and Elijah represent the men of the Old Testament, whereas Peter, James and John represent the men of the New Testament. It is as if the Lord Jesus is the center of the Holy Book in its two testaments. It is the mystery of salvation to all, and the aspiration of all. St. Avram the Syrian believes that Moses and Elijah came in representation of the men of the Old Testament, sharing the men of the New Testament their joy in being blessed with the Messiah, the Savior. He has been for so long awaited for by all mankind, for he says, "Thus was their conversation with him. They offered him their thanks, for he has fulfilled what they and all the other prophets have said. The prophets as well as the disciples were overjoyed by going up the mountain. The prophets rejoiced for they saw his incarnation. They disciples were overwhelmed for they saw his godly glory which they had not known before."

Fifthly: St. John Chrysostom thinks the multitudes have previously said about the Lord he is Elijah or one of the prophets (Matt 16:14). This is why he came with the heads of the prophets to manifest to his disciples the difference between the slaves and the Lord, and that Peter was right in confessing he is the son of the living God.

Sixthly: The Lord Jesus, on his way to being judged, was accused of being an evil doer, that is, acting against the law, and also a blasphemer for attributing to himself the Father's glory. Therefore the Lord presented a previous testimony of a very high level of Moses, as the one handed the law. He testified that the Lord is the preserver of the law and not contradicting it. Also Elijah the zealous one for the Lord's glory, he declared the glory of Jesus. It is as if Moses came to testify for Christ, that he is not an evildoer, and Elijah came to testify he was not a blasphemer.

Seventhly: Moses and Elijah proclaimed the real triumph of the Lord Jesus over Satan. Moses has faced Pharaoh and he won and overcame him. Moreover Elijah faced Ahab and he overcame him as well. But as for Jesus, he faces Satan to overcome him for the sake of all humanity, and in its name.

Eighthly: when Moses went up mount Sinai, he received the holy covenant amidst thick clouds. As for Elijah, when he was on top of the mountain, he asked of God to send fire

to burn the commanders of the fifty and their soldiers. All this has been perfectly fulfilled in our Lord Jesus who is the word of God, offered to us through his incarnation. He was hidden as in a cloud, and no one could all by himself see him. He is the burning fire who burned the hypocrisy of the Jews, and the atheism of the Gentiles, so as to sanctify all of humanity.

Ninthly: St. Jerome presents to us a justification for the appearance of Moses and Elijah by saying, "We notice that the Lord has refused presenting a miracle from heaven to the scribes and the Pharisees who asked this of him. But now he is giving a sign from heaven so the disciples' faith would increase. Elijah descended from where he climbed, and Moses would rise from among the dead."

Tenthly: In the transfiguration Moses and Elijah appeared in the presence of Peter, James and John. So the Lord was on the mount among five of the two testament men. It is as if the Lord wants us to be uplifted with his Holy Spirit to mount Tabor, and then he would be transfigured by means of the five sanctified senses. Indeed, whenever the senses are sanctified, the Lord declares his glory in us, and his splendor is manifested beautifully in our lives.

Eleventh: Moses and Elijah, the men of the Old Testament, were concerned about the sanctification of the body. But Peter, James and John, they men of the New Testament were concerned about the sanctification of the spirit. It is as if the Lord Jesus' transfiguration is fulfilled by the sanctification of both the body and the spirit together.

Lord, it is good for us to be her:

(Matt 17:4) "Then Peter answered and said to Jesus 'Lord, it is good for us to be her; if you wish, let us make here three tabernacles one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.'"

For sure, when the Lord is transfigured before the human soul, and inside it, you cannot ask for anything except to be with him forever. Man forgets all his needs, even the necessary ones, as well as all his relations, so as to stay joyfully with the groom, the eternal one, transfigured before him. But the Lord, who has denied himself for the sake of our salvation, after he has presented to us the mystery of his transfiguration in us, he asks us to come down to our brethren, and testify to them what we have seen and been blessed with, all the while carrying the cross of the service joyfully.

The scholar Oreganus thinks what St. Peter the apostle said, out of his eagerness to stay in this site, only meant the Lord would stay there and not come down. He was only afraid for the Lord, for he had heard he had to go up to Jerusalem. He dared not repeat to him the words 'Have mercy on yourself and do not go up.' He therefore used another means to carry out what he had in mind; he saw in that secluded and peaceful place a suitable site to stay in. If he wished to stay in it permanently, as a place to dwell in, St. Peter asked to build three tabernacles. By so suggesting, he thought the Lord would not go up to Jerusalem, and consequently he would not be endangered to death. Because St. Peter knew the scribes were observing him, he thought Elijah was with them,

and it was he who brought down fire on the mountain (2 Kings 1). Moreover, it was Moses who went in to the cloud and spoke with God (Ex 24:33). Therefore, this mountain was a suitable place for hiding, where no persecutors' could come and reach him."

The Three Tabernacles:

God commanded Moses the prophet to build an assembly tent, or a tabernacle to dwell in it as a sign of his presence amidst his people and his care of them. But our teacher St. Peter the apostle was not yet aware of the mystery of unity between the old law, the prophets and the gospel ... he did not ask for one tabernacles including the three of them as a sign of God's presence, he rather asked for three of them.

We do not have to overlook the attitude of St. Peter that was so full of love. He did not ask for a tabernacle to be built for himself, because 'Love does not ask what is for itself.' The Lord also answered in love, and he did not accept a tabernacle to be built for himself, so he would not settle on the mount, away from the suffering path. He therefore sent a bright cloud overshadowing g him, so that when he fulfils his declaration, he would go down to the cross ... for he did not ask what is for himself. By his descending the mount, there went with the saints Peter, James and John, so they would carry with him the cross for preaching, and to walk with him the way of sufferance. They were asking what is for others, and not what is for themselves. St. Peter was eager to remain on the mount, but the Lord obliged him to come down to practice the active love.

+ St. Peter and the sons of Zebedee were taken on the mountain of the doctrine of righteousness, and there they saw the transfiguration of Jesus, as well as the appearance of Moses and Elijah with him in glory. They desired to build in themselves tabernacles for the word of God, who was claimed to dwell inside them, and for his law which they saw in glory (Luke 9:31) "Who appeared in glory and spoke of his decease which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem."

Peter was a man who loved a life of meditation, and preferred to enjoy it rather than a life among multitudes with all its noise. Peter spoke on behalf of those who love meditation 'it is good for us to be her.' Since 'love does not ask what is for itself' (1 Cor 13:5) Jesus did not carry out what St. Peter thought to be a good thing. Jesus rather came down the mount, to those unable to ascend it, and to be blessed with his transfiguration, to see him as much as they cold take in. It is appropriate for a righteous man, who has the love that does not ask what is for itself (1 Cor 9:19) "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more."

The scholar Oreganus.

+ St. Peter was a wearied of the multitudes, and he was found alone on the mount with Jesus, the bread of the Spirit. But he found it appropriate to return once more to work, tolerating the pain, and winning the sanctified love for the sake of God.

St. Augustine.

+ You wish to stay up on the mount, St. Peter! But come down, (2 Tim 4:2) “Preach the word¹ be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, and exhort, with all long suffering and teaching.” Be tolerant, and struggle, till you obtain what is meant by the white clothes of Jesus, for they are so beautiful and glorious through the correct work of love. Whenever the apostle is read, we hear him praising ‘love’, saying, (1 Cor 13:5) “Does not seek its own.” At another place he asks the members of Christ, that is to say, the believers for this foundation of love (1 Cor 10:24) “Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being.” He speaks about himself (1 Cor 10:33) “Not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.” This is what was not understood by St. Peter when he wished for life with Christ on the mountain. This was preserved for you St. Peter to be your after death, and being blessed with the splendor of Christ. But as for now you have to go to work on the ground so you could serve on it. Jesus, ‘the life,’ has come down to earth so he would be rejected, crucified and slaughtered. The bread has come down so he would hunger; he went down the road so he would weary, the spring has come down so he would thirst. So, do you reused this job? Do not seek your own, but let love be yours. Preach in truth; at this point you will be released to eternity to bring forth the fruits of peace and security.

St. Augustine.

The Bright Cloud:

(Matt 17:5) “While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear him!””

The cloud refers to God’s presence. This was it that filled the mount of Sinai when the Lord gave Moses the law (Ex 24:15). It filled the assembly tent when God was talking to Moses. The Lord Jesus will come in his final coming riding a cloud. The cloud here is ‘bright’ to declare the work of transfiguration in the life of believers. The soul, when it encounters the Lord, and comes to know his mysteries as much as it could take in, it is brightened more and more through inward heavenly signs. The soul would hear the Father’s voice. “This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased; hear him!” This is the most awesome declaration man receives from God in the depths of his heart. Man realizes Christ’s natural offspring to God, and how he is the pleasure of his father. Man’s soul melts inside him in their unity with the only begotten son, and he feels the warmth of God’s love. The soul also entreates the pleasure of God the father to it in the son, and his joy in that. The soul would hear the father’s voice, and yields to Christ’s work in it, for he is the heard! The Christian does not ask for touchable signs to be proud of. But this is the essence of the father’s declaration to him; the real touch of the father with the only begotten son, to be the focus of the father’s pleasure through his obedience in total absolute love and humility.

St. May was blessed with the bright cloud at its very best. It was a unique experience when the Holy Spirit came upon her to overshadow her with tremendous godly power ‘the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the highest will overshadow you.’ This bright cloud, or the fiery Holy Spirit grants believers an inward enlightenment of vision to see the splendor of God to his only begotten son. The Holy

Spirit opens the ears to hear the father's voice, and it is he who uncovers to us 'Christ's mystery' that has become in us through the baptism. We have to be careful, by means of the Spirit, to remain in a constant state of repentance and obedience so as to be blessed with the father's pleasure, and to hear his fatherly voice.

+ God made the cloud as a godly tent. It was bright since it is the symbol of the confirmed resurrection. This cloud overshadows the righteous who found shelter in it, and were enlightened by it.

But what is this bright cloud that overshadows the righteous?

Is it the Fatherly power from which the Father's voice comes witnessing to the Song he is the beloved one is whom God is well pleased? Does the cloud urge those under its shadow to listen to him and to no other? Just as he spoke in the old days he continues to speak voluntarily.

The bright cloud only means the Holy Spirit that overshadows the righteous ones, and also presents the prophecies concerning God's issues.

I shall be bold enough to say the bright cloud is furthermore the Savior.

The bright cloud belongs to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It overshadows the real disciples of Jesus. It also overshadows the Gospel, the law and the prophets for it shines to those who are able to see its light in the Holy Book.

The scholar Oreganus.

+ The source of this shadow or shade is God's Spirit that never dines people's hearts, for he rather reveals to them what is hidden. We find this at another instance where the angel says, "The power of the highest will overshadow you."

The cloud was not there due to the humidity of the smoky mountains (Ps 103:32). It was not due to the thick vapor either. It did not overcast the sky in fearful darkness; but it was rather a bright cloud that does not damper us with rainfall or floods that overcome us. It was called upon by the word of God that overflows the human hearts in faith.

St. Ambrosios.

+ When the Lord threatens to put to discipline, he comes in the dark cloud as in Sinai (Ex 19). But as for her, he wished to edify and teach, not to put to discipline, and therefore it was a bright cloud.

St. John Chrysotom.

One Cloud!

St. Peter the apostle asked to build three tabernacles, and he did not realize the need was for one cloud only, because Moses (the law) and Elijah (the prophets) are hidden in the Holy Bible. This is also because when the Father spoke he said, "This is my beloved Son" and he did not say, "These are my beloved children." The covenant

spoke loud in God's voice so it could take us to the only begotten Son. The voice of prophecy declared to us God's mysteries so as to take us to the Lord Jesus in whom there lied all the mysteries. As St. Jerome says, "The voice of the Father in heaven was heard in advance as a witness of the Son, and correcting St. Peter's error, showing him the truth. This is why he continued to say;

This is My beloved Son.

For his sake build a tabernacle!

Hear ye Him!

He is My Son and these are My slaves!

With you, they likewise have to prepare for the Lord a home in the bottom of their hearts!"

The Disciples' Fear:

(Matt 17:7) "And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, 'Arise, and do not be afraid.'"

The transfiguration is linked to the crucifixion and the resurrection. Our teacher St. Luke the herold made it clear that the Lord Jesus ultimately to take place, which are his sufferings. As for St. Mathew the herold, he declared the disciples falling on their faces in great fear. Then the Lord stretched out his hand and touched them; he who is risen from the dead, and thus they rise from their fall, and he take s away their fear.

The falling of the disciples on their faces speaks of the fall of all humanity and their absolute inability to rise and encounter God. Their faces have fallen to the dust unable to look upon the heavenly glories. Their great fear refers to the loss of real peace. Therefore Jesus came, referring to his coming to us, and he stretched out his hand to confirm his incarnation. His touching them is the sign for his dwelling among us, as one of us, able to stretch it out to us and we thus accept it. Finally, in this authority he raised them and took away their fear. For real, the story was revealed of man's downfall and his rise through god's work of salvation on the transfiguration mount. It is as if the mystery of the transfiguration is only the mystery of God's constant manifestation in us, since he is God's incarnate Son, the crucified and the resurrected from the dead. For our sake he came down to raise us and we be overjoyed for his work in us.

+ When they were fallen on the ground, unable to rise, he spoke to them in modesty and he touched them. By his touch their fear departed, and their scared trembling joints grew strong. Just as he healed them with the touch of his hand, he also cured them with his promise and command "Rise and do not be afraid." He took away the fear in the first place, so he could offer his teachings.

St. Jerome.

Jesus Alone:

(Matt 17:8,9) "When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them saying, 'Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead!'"

The believer, when he experiences the power of the Lord's resurrection, he raises his eye by the Holy Spirit, and he sees no one in his heart other than the Lord Jesus alone filling all his life. By means of the resurrection he entered their soul so that he alone is the mystery of their real peace and their joy, for he satisfies all their needs.

As for his commanding them to remain silent, this was because he wanted them to spend some in contemplation as to what has happened, so they might see the transfiguration events in their hearts, and not in outer events. They followed the example of St. Mary who kept all these things in her heart, and pondered over them (St. Luke 2:19). Maybe he wanted them to be silent so they themselves may experience the resurrection, and the loud world be transfigured in their inner life, and at this point they would preach and manifest the transfiguration. As St. Hillary, Bishop of Poitiers says, "He commanded them to keep silent about what they had seen, so they might be filled with the Holy Spirit, and they might preach the spiritualities."

2. The Need of Elijah:

(Matt 17:10-12) "And his disciples asked him, saying, 'why then do the scribes say Elijah must come first?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'Indeed Elijah coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.'"

The scribes had a theoretical piece of knowledge: they understood from the prophecies that Elijah preceded the Messiah's coming. He came but they did not know him, neither did they accept him. They did whatever they wanted with him.

Who is Elijah other John the Baptist; for (Matt 17:13) "Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them of John the Baptist." John came in the spirit of Elijah. This does not mean he embodied his spirit, but he just had his fiery thoughts and kindled zeal for God's glory. Also his life of solitude in the wilderness, for he was paving the way for repentance in the preparation for the Messiah, the Savior.

Even if the Lord has come in tenderness and excessive gentleness, eager for our salvation, yet Elijah the zealous has to come into our life, to prepare our hearts for the Savior by calling for repentance. If the transfiguration is the declaration of God's heavenly kingdom in us, then there is no way for this transfiguration in us without Elijah, that is, repentance.

3. The Destruction of Satan's Kingdom:

As much as the Messiah's kingdom is declared in us by his transfiguration in our life, as much as Satan's kingdom is destroyed, and there would be no place for him in our

life. This is why the evangelist mentioned after the transfiguration – that is, by declaring Christ’s kingdom – casting out Satan from a man; for the evangelist says, (Matt 17:14,15) “And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to him, kneeling down to him and say, ‘Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water.’”

These are the signs of being enslaved to Satan, and the admission into his kingdom. Man loses his stability and inward peace. He is in a state of epilepsy, and he loses all real peace. He thus lives in violent inward suffering. Satan throws him in controversial conflict, at times he is burnt by the fire of anger, in violence he burns all what is around him, and he even burns himself in unquenchable fire. At other times he throws himself in the waters of physical passions and love of the world. He cares about nothing else, other than temporary pleasures. In bitterness we say that man, in his submission to sin, and his bound to the dark kingdom, he loses his peace of mind, his body and his soul. He is thus unable to think correctly, and he loses his spiritual life, and even his body, this likewise suffers in pain.

The man complained saying, (Matt 17:16,17) “‘so I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him.’ Then Jesus answered and said, ‘O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to me.’”

The ‘lack of faith’ is the obstacle that has deprived even the disciples from the ability of casting out the devil. As St. Augustine says, “The Lord rebuked the unbelievers, even his own disciples as mentioned in the gospel just read. Because, when they said to him, ‘why couldn’t we cast him out?’” He answered them saying, ‘For you lack of faith.’ If the disciples are unbelievers, then who is? What could we, the lambs do, if the bulls are shaken? But God, in his mercy, did not scorn them for their unbelief, he rather rebuked them and supported them; he made them perfect. They felt their own weakness, for they said on another occasion (Luke 17:5) “Increase our faith.” To know and realize their own weakness was a great blessing, for they knew who to ask. They headed forward wholeheartedly to the source and knocked so the door would be opened and thus they would be filled. The Lord wished mankind would come and knock on him. St. Augustine moreover says, “Let us pray, and rely on God, and so live. Let us call on him as the disciples did, saying to the Lord, “Increase our faith.””

The disciples were unable to cast out the devil due to their lack of faith (Matt 17:20). This is why the Lord advised them to fast and pray to support them in casting the devil out, through their faith. He says, (Matt 17:20,21) “Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.” In this way the Lord Jesus binds faith to fasting and prayers. If we hide, through faith, in Jesus Christ our Lord who swells in us, to cast away the enemy from us who is never able to face God, then this our faith would never be active without the struggle through fasting and prayer.

What is this mountain that the disciples were unable to move from its place at this time, other than what Jeremiah the prophet wrote about (Jer 13:16) "Give glory to the Lord your God before he cusses darkness, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains." It is the dark mountain of sin that Satan pushes all creation to it, so they lose their birthright to God, and hence Satan would conquer them as children of the dark. This is the mountain we move in our faith through the fasting and prayer as our Lord has taught us. As St. Augustine says, "He was urging them to pray, and he ended his words by saying that this kind does not go out except by fasting and prayer. If it is appropriate for man to pray so as to cast out Satan from someone else, how much more is it appropriate for him to pray to cast out his greed, his drunkenness, his pleasures and his defilement." How many things are so deeply voted in man, if they remain in him, he will not be accepted in the heavenly kingdom?"

4. The Need of the Cross:

(Matt 17:22,23) "Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said them, 'the son of man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men. And they will kill him, and the third day he will be raised up. And they were exceedingly sorrowful.

The height of the transfiguration mount filled the disciples with overwhelming joy; but it is appropriate for them to come down to the life of struggle to listen to the Lord from time to time. The Lord confirmed the necessity of yielding himself to people's hands to be killed, and then he will rise. The transfiguration was only a road to support the disciples in a stage of thin life with the Lord Jesus, the crucified, and hence they would be blessed by his resurrection, and begin the thrill and joy of constant transfiguration.

5. Fulfillment of the Taxes:

The Lord Jesus submitted with his disciples in fulfilling the custom dues, or the taxes. He wished to assure us of an important principle in our life of faith: our heavenly binding grants us obedience and submission to the kings of this world, or to the leaders. We are therefore committed to offering our national duties. The Christian, when carrying the Lord Jesus as a heavenly king inside his heart, is only carrying the spirit of modesty and that of submission in love to the country, and obedience to those in authority.

St. Peter the apostle was called to absolute consecration, and to full service for the sake of the heavenly kingdom, yet without disregarding the actual life. This is why he went to the sea, just as to the world. He found that God had prepared the money in the mouth of the fish, so as to pay the dues for the Lord and for himself as well. God has sanctified work; yet man should not be disturbed by it, or begin to become covetous in spirit; it is only for the basic necessities.

What St. Peter did may have represented the believers' commitment as the church in its entirety. But after the coming down of the Holy Spirit, the apostles were committed to the absolute service, and disregarding the normal daily labour, so as not to be preoccupied by it.

St. Cyril the great speaks of the Lord Jesus' action here, saying, "The only begotten Son, the word of God, has become like any of us, and therefore he carried the standards of human nature; yet he yielded to the yoke of slavery. He willingly paid to the Jewish tax collector the titles according to the Law of Moses. But this did not obstruct the glorious nature in him." It is as if our submission for every regime, in a spirit of contentment and joy, only means sharing the Lord Jesus his modesty and submission, so as to be blessed in sharing his inward glory.

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Chapter XVIII (Page 502)

The Kingly Road

The Lord presents to us the live humility filled with love and tenderness, since it is the most important feature for the road to the heavenly kingdom.

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1. The Kingdom and the Humility of Children:

(Matt 18:1-4) “At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ Then Jesus called a little child to him, set him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Assuredly I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.’”

The words of the Lord Jesus and his actions enkindled the hearts of the disciples towards obtaining the kingdom of heaven. But they were still unable to get rid of the materialistic concepts they were used to and have inherited them after their forefathers. They thought it was a temporary kingdom of an earthly authority. This is why each of them was eager to obtain a share in it, or to occupy a position greater than the others. This eagerness, even though it is of human frailties, that is, the love of grandeur, fame and prominent positions, yet all wished to fill up this gap with vain human thinking. At any rate, St. Cyril the great says, “What happened among the disciples, and was recorded, is only for our own good. Even though they were saints yet this is the weakness or sickness for our humility. The Lord dealt with the disease as a smart surgeon, and he amputated the pain springing in us, by means of his kindled commandment that reaches the very depths.”

It was amazing for them to see the Lord calling a child, and putting him in their midst as a living example of obtaining the admission into the heavenly kingdom. The Romans disregarded childhood, and a child had no rights whatsoever. The parents could do anything to their children with none to supervise. Childhood, with the Greeks, was exposed to many hardships. As for the Jews they did not count the children and women when counting the people. But the Lord was raising humanity to a mature life, and here he comes was a child as an example of a mature life, spiritual and able to usurp the kingdom. It was as if the Lord was transferring them from the physical maturity which relied on the years spent by man, to an inner maturity of the soul, unbounded to a certain specific time.

The Lord assures those asking for the kingdom, to return and become as little children, and thus would be able to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is not a backward retreat, but rather a growth towards the humble and simple childhood. Man, through his experiences on earth, is very much puffed up, and is unable to enter the narrow gate. It is therefore appropriate for him to decline all pride, so his self would be belittled, and become absolutely crucified. He would then cross, through the crucified Lord, from the narrow gate. This is the royal gate and the only entrance to the heavenly kingdom.

Without humility, man remains outside. However much he worships and renounces, he is unable to get in. A proud heart can never unite with the modest Son of God, so he would cross with him and in him to his Father's embrace. This is why the Lord goes on to say, (Matt 18:4) "Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." If pride has expelled man from paradise, then there is no way to get in other than the way of modesty.

St. John Chrysostom speaks to us of the role of modesty in obtaining the heavenly kingdom in this world and the next one. He says, "To obtain rest here and in the life to come, we have to struggle in planting the mother of all goodness, which is that of humility in our souls. In this way we are able to cross the sea of this world with no waves, and we conclude our journey to this peaceful harbour." He moreover says, "Nothing is acceptable to God more than when man considers himself to be last of all. This is the foremost principle for practical wisdom. He who is modest and wounded in his heart will never like vain glory, or someone wrathful, or envious of his neighbour, or someone who resorts to any lust or passion." St. Basil the great says, "We receive God's kingdom as a child (Luke 18:17). If we look up to God's teachings as a child under probation and edification, with no objection or urging with his teachers, then he accepts this education in his mind in eagerness to be educated."

St. Ambrosius says, "He does not mean here his preference of one age to the other, otherwise to become mature and growing up is a destructive process. I was not desirous of growing up since this will usurp me of the kingdom of heaven. But God allowed growth that develops vice and not virtue, otherwise God would not have chosen his disciples mature men, he would have chosen them children God actually does not refer to 'childhood' as a matter of age but rather to love that embodies the simplicity of children. Virtue is not an inability to perform sin; it is rather a rejection of and persistence in returning to our first nature and childhood." He moreover says, "If children so quickly fight together yet they return to be together in full harmony at the same quick speed, for they do not know any cunningness or deceit."

St. Cyril the great says, "Let own sublimity be in our humility, and our glory in not loving any of it. Let our eagerness aim at what is pleasing to God, bearing in mind what the wise one says, (Sirach 3:18) "When you become great, be more modest, and hence you will find grace with God." God scorns the haughty ones, and he considers the proud just as his enemies. But he crowns the modest ones, and the humble in mind with honorable blessings."

Childhood in Christ:

The Lord is eager to have his disciples blessed by a return to childhood. They would then have the spirit of humility, for this is a royal quality that supports the soul when crossing over to the heavenly life. When the Lord speaks of children, he presents them as the ones to carry his name, for he says, (Matt 18:5) "Whoever receives one little child like this in my name receive me."

Let no one grudge the return to the modesty of children, for the Lord is transfigured in the life of children, and he considers those who accept them in his name, only accept him. This is how the Lord uplifts childhood that is disregarded by people in every race and tongue. The Lord has honored man by means of his incarnation, and he has honored the poor by considering them his younger brothers, and whatever is done to them is offered for his account. Here he is honoring childhood; he, who accepts a child in his name, accepts him. I wonder who would not be eager enough to embody the nature of 'modest childhood' carrying the name of the Messiah, the king? Indeed, the Lord has sanctified childhood for he himself has become a child. He still does sanctify it, for his name is carried by the little children.

St. Ambrosios says, "Who is this child whose example is to be followed by Jesus' disciples other than the one about whom Isaiah said, (Is 9:6) "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given..." It is he who said, "Carry your cross and follow me" (Matt 16:24). Also it is he (1 Peter 2:23) "Who, when he was reviled, did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten." Here you find absolute righteousness in childhood, where it has the old and honorable matters, and where old age has the innocence of children."

2. Love and the Obstruction of Children:

(Matt 18:6) "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a mill-stone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depths of the sea."

The believer either accepts entering into 'childhood' that is so modest and simple, and would go into the gate of the heavenly kingdom, or, he stands as an obstruction at the gate; he does not go in himself and neither does he let even the believing children to get in. There is no middle way in the life with God. Man either crosses to eternity or he obstructs others from crossing over the secret behind of this obstruction lied in two points:

Firstly: the hardening of the heart; for he knows no love to God or to people. He is unable to forgive him who hurt him, or to rebuke him. This is why it is better for him to tie a millstone around his neck, rather than have this stony hard nature, and the stiff cruel neck.

Secondly: to indulge in earthly matters. He cannot see anything else other than what is temporary. This is why it is better for him to be thrown into the depth of the sea, and not throw his heart in the seas of worry and pleasure of this life.

It is as if the Lord Jesus by saying, “It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depths of the sea”, that the Lord is not condemning or judging the soul that obstructs others’ he does not wish it to perish, he rather wishes to sow its real situation, and the extent it reached inwardly by means of this analogy. This soul has become hardened and has drowned in the sea of the love of this world. This situation is way worse than physical drowning in the sea, by man tying a millstone round his neck.

It seems that the Jews in the old times used to punish criminals of major crimes by tying a millstone round their neck, and throwing them in the depths of the sea.

St. John Chrysostom comments on this punishment by saying, “By this punishment that man deserves for obstructing others, we learn the reward awaiting those who save others. If the salvation of one soul had not been so great to Christ, he would not have threatened a punishment as such for him who obstructs anyone.”

But as for the safe way against any obstruction, it is the word of God, or his commandments as the psalmist says, (Ps 119:165) “Great peace have those who love your law, and nothing causes them to stumble.” St. Augustine also says, “When you heard, ‘Woe to the world of stumbling blocks,’ you thought of how to avoid the world so you are not exposed to those obstructions. Therefore let us avoid those stumbling blocks. How can we overcome the world other than to escape to him who has created it? How can we release ourselves to the creator of world unless we do his law that he preaches at every place? To listen to this is a simple matter if we love it, because the Holy Book which armors you against any obstruction did not say, “Great peace have those who hear your law” but said, “To those who love your law.” St. Augustine shows us a practical example which is that of Job’s wife who was a stumbling block. She came to pull her husband’s heart to blasphemy, but his heart had a lot of love for God’s law, and he was not obstructed. She was an obstruction, yes, but not for him.”

(Matt 18:7) “Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!”

The Lord has opened the royal way, eager that all humanity would enter it, those who are deprived of it. The adversary does not cease working for the account of his kingdom also. Wherever the Lord Jesus is found to work in us, Satan also struggles for the account of his darkness through the stumbling blocks. He recruits all those who belong to him so as to destroy the simple and meek souls. This is what the Lord warns us of, not only lest others obstruct us, but also lest we too turn like them to be stumbling blocks to others. But because we carry our Christ in us, he who has overcome the world, and we are blessed with his commandment, so we fear no obstacles. As St. Augustine

says, “When you hear ‘woe to the world of offenses’ do not fear, just love God’s law and there will be no offense for you.”

(Matt 18:8,9) “If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast in to hell fire.”

Is it possible for the believer to amputate every member in his body that obstructs him or obstructs others? In the church history there are unique stories of people who have done so such as Simon the tamer, and the girl so devout that she punched her eye with the awl so as to offer it to someone who tried his best to meet her because of her beautiful eyes. In the fathers’ opinion the Lord’s words here imply a spiritual symbolical meaning: the hand is nothing other than the man who supports me, and works for my account. If this is changed to an offense to me, making me lose my faith or chastity, I amputate it to usurp the kingdom without it, though I am eager to save it. Joseph the adamant, stretched out his hands with all his might and valour so as to amputate them when he left his clothes in the hands of his mistress, and he escaped. He preferred to cut off the relation with her who provided for his living, and be humiliated in jail just like someone with no hands, and be deprived of the bodily freedom for the sake of being blessed with the devout paradise life. The bread for living was unable to imprison Joseph in iniquity and offense. He preferred to live amputated rather than be thrown in the destructive fire of passion, and yet have two hands. What is amazing is that God did not leave Joseph having no hands. He himself became his own hands, for, wherever he went the work was blessed and multiplied, whether inside the jail or in Pharaoh’s place. With the kindled Holy Spirit we know how to offer our hands of offense to the cross of the Lord Jesus, and hence they are amputated. We are not without any hands, but the Lord Jesus himself becomes our working hands with us, and through us and in us. In every chose we do, the Lord himself comes ahead of us, and he dwells with his blessings in us. We even disappear in him so he would be the One to work! Every amputation to the source of the offense, in the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, is not a loss but rather gain, for you take and not give away.

What I say about the hands, I repeat regarding the feet. If someone is representing the feet without him, we become like crippled and unable to move around. But if there feet become a stumbling block, we offer them through the Holy Spirit for the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ to be amputated. We then clothe ourselves with the Lord himself, who has the brass feet. With those feet you trample on any obstruction in the way, until we cross over to the Father’s embrace in spiritual safety and overpowering peace.

St. Augustine says, “Your wife may come up to you and advises you about something wicked. You love her, for she is your wife you have to love and she is a member in you. But if your eye, or your hand or foot obstructs you, as you have heard in the Gospel, cut it off and throw it away. However much this person is dear to you, and however much you hold respect for him, yet do not allow him or her to be an offense to you if you are advised to act wickedly.” He moreover says, “If someone who has

authority wishes to cover up his injustice and wrong doings, and he asks you to do an act of service to him by bearing false witness; do not accept this. Reject the false witness lest you deny him who is right and true. He will be wrathful and has authority to pressure you. What can this one who has authority do to me or how could he bother you? He can kill you physically in his wrath and authority. Let the body be killed, for the body will die even if it is not killed. But as for the soul, he cannot kill it. If him whom I upset with the truth will bother my body with hardship, then I shall listen to my Lord who says, (Matt 10:28) “Do not fear those who kill the body.””

Lest anyone thinks the amputation of a physical member is an easy thing, be it a hand, a foot or an eye, he said, (Matt 18:10) “Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my father who is in heaven.”

It is as if before the process of amputating one of our members with the cross of the Lord, we cut off our relation to it, and look for its salvation, as one of these little ones whom God is eager to save. Even though their angels are sorrowful for their diversion, yet these angels stand before the heavenly father all the time, and they intercede for them so as to be saved. The wise soul exerts its utmost not to escape the service, but even for those by whom offenses come, they would not lose their salvation and eternity. At the same time those by whom offenses come would not be lost if possible, for their salvation is longed for, in response to their angels and even their Lord himself (Matt 18:11) “For the song of man has come to save that which was lost.”

Even though the process of amputation is sometimes urgent, yet it is performed on a narrow scale, after all the effort has been made, in every way, so as to urge those who offend to accept the salvation offered them by the song of man himself.

Maybe the Lord wished to say by these words that ‘childhood’ is not to be disregarded or thought lightly of. Every person however small he may be, has his angel who stands in the presence of the father for his sake. The son of man himself is concerned about his salvation.

Therefore, to scorn the human soul and to disregard its salvation, whether it be a child or a nature person, an important man or a poor one, or when man scorns himself and is careless about any obstruction, all this is actually scorning the work of Christ’s salvation. As St. John Chrysostom says, “Do not say this is an enslaved runaway, or this one is a thief or killer, or someone burdened with endless iniquity, or a beggar or someone to be scorned. Just contemplate that for his sake Christ has died. Is this not enough to be a basis to give him all the attention?”

The Lord made clear the far reaching importance of every person’s salvation, and how not to be an offense to anyone. He says, (Matt 18:12-14) “What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did

not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”

In this way the Lord reveals his outlook on man, that he is not just an individual among numberless others, but God is concerned about him personally and who he is by his name. The Lord gives him all his concern more than all the group kept in his pastures on the holy mountains, so as to win him over and makes him become a member in this group. God is not concerned about how many, but about what kind; he is concerned about every member, for he is a son to him.

In this fatherly spirit, St. John Chrysostom looked upon his people. He was not concerned about the overcrowded worshipers in the cathedral, and he did not rejoice over those tied to the church. But he groaned in sorrow over one person in town who was not blessed with eternal life. In his concern about each member he said, “Each and every one of you in my eyes is equal to the whole town. No one tells me that many have carried out the commandment, for this is not what I am eager for. I rather wish all to be doing like this. I am unable to take my breath till I see this has come to take place. If some one has committed adultery among the Corinthians, St. Paul used to sigh as if the whole town had been lost.”

3. Love and Blaming People:

Modesty that is full of love is the gate to the heavenly kingdom. This modesty is founded on a candid, clear and open spirit. If a believer feels his brother in the faith has wronged him, let him go to him in sincere love to talk to him all by himself, so that when he hears him, he gains his brother. (Matt 18:15) “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.”

This behaviour the Lord commanded us to do, is not only an act of politeness the believer is committed to doing, but in its essence it is a hiding in the person of the Lord Jesus. The believer does not see his brother as wronging him, but he sees him as wronging his own self, and in his obtaining eternity. Therefore he goes to him to tell him his fault, not to ascertain his making a mistake or that he expects him to apologize to him. He rather goes to him carrying the thoughts of Jesus so as to win him over in love to Jesus, as a live member in his body. He tries to save him from the error, and gain him as a member with him in the same body.

He goes to him all by himself, so that talking to him would not be changed to scandalizing him, and to give him the chance to reconsider what he did in no stubbornness. He goes to him to help him repent to God, and not to apologize to himself. By so doing, the believer asks for peace in his brother's life, and not for any punishment. This is why the Lord says in this way you gain your brother. As St. John Chrysostom says, “He did not say you will gain sufficient revenge, but rather, you will gain your brother. The Lord shows there will be a common loss shared between you and him

because of this hard feeling, for, he did not say ‘to gain himself’ but ‘you gain himself.’ He shows the loss has reached prior to this, both of them. One has lost his brother, and the other lost his salvation.”

St. Augustine say, “To be able to fulfill what we were commanded with today, as the evangelical excerpt said, we have before anything else, not to hoard any hatred in our hearts. When there is no piece of wood in your eye you will be able to see well what is in your brother’s eye. You will be uncomfortable until you remove from your brother’s eye what you dislike. The light that is in you does not allow you to neglect the light of your own brother. But if you endorse any hatred in yourself, and you wish to put him right, how could you possibly correct his light whereas you have none of it? For the Holy Book says, (1 John 2:9) “He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now.” Therefore hatred is darkness, he who hates others, harms himself primarily, corrupting himself inwardly.” The Lord actually wished to show his disciples the life of absolute forgiveness, away from the spirit of revenge and hatred which blocks the heavenly kingdom from us. St. John Chrysostom comments on this, saying, “When you think of taking revenge, remember you are taking revenge on yourself, not on others, for you are tying the sins not of your brother, but your own sins. There is nothing else of greater danger than being revengeful, for this takes away from you God’s greatest gift.” The same saint believes that he who wrongs us, causes a lot of good to us, if we tolerate it lovingly, for he says, “Do not say he has insulted you, and wronged you untruthfully, and did you endless evil. As much as these things happened from him, know will it is for your own good. He is offering you the opportunity to wash your sins. As much as the harm done to you, this will be the pretext for which you will obtain great forgiveness of sins.” He also says, “We are only punishing ourselves by hating others, just as we profit by loving them.”

Why do you go to the wrongdoer, and not wait for him to come?

St. John Chrysostom answers, “It is not an easy thing for someone who committed the error to go and apologize to his brother, for this would be too embarrassing and shameful. The Lord asks him who has been wronged; not only to go to his brother, but to correct what has happened as well. He did not tell him. Go to accuse him or to argue with him, but only to tell him his error gently.” This is only to remind him as to how he wronged him. Tell him what happened to you due to this, in an appropriate way as if you are providing for him the excuse, and in zeal for a reconciliation.”

Our going to the wrongdoer all by ourself to tell him his fault so as to gain him, is actually following the example of the Lord Jesus himself. He has come to us from the highest to talk to us in love, and to motivate us with his work for salvation so as to repent. This is to win us over as members in his holy body. He did not wait for us to go to him, but he came to us. The commandment which the Lord offered us, we can never really fulfill unless we carry him in us, and do as he did, and we carry his thoughts in us.

St. Augustine says, “If your brother has secretly wronged you, search for him so you correct him secretly. If you wish to blame him before all, you will not correct him, but you will scandalize his secret. If he has wronged you, and you alone know of this,

then he has only wronged you alone. But if he has wronged you before many, then he has wronged them as well, by their seeing his wrong doing to you. Therefore he has to be blamed before all those who have witnessed his wrong doing.”

But if the wrongdoer does not listen to us, what do we do?

(Matt 18:16,17) “But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you as a heather and a tax collector.”

When we take with us one or two people, the aim of this should not be to ascertain his error, and to witness against him, but rather to convince him. In that case we shall be as the physician who sees the disease increasing, and he has to offer a medication bitterer and more effective. This is not for the sake of bitterness, but rather for his recovery. If this is ineffective, then we have to inform the church, not as an accusation before the court, but only to inform and so they would be concerned, and treat the situation in wisdom. David the prophet was a devout prophet, spoken will of by God himself. He was moreover wise; for when he committed an error, he did not realize it, until the church knew of it in the person of Nathan the prophet. He made him reconsider his vision that was corrupted by the iniquity, and to regain his thoughts and his wisdom.

St. John Chrysostom says, “Do you not see how he does this not for the sake of fair penalty, but rather with the aim of correction? This is why he was not advised from the beginning to take with him two people, but after he would fail when alone. He did not send to him a few ones to act against him, but to send one or tow for him. If he scorned this, then at this point, he would bring him to the church.”

Finally, if he does not listen to the church, and rejects its mother-hood, then he would in that case reject the fatherhood of God himself, and would be considered a heather or a tax collector. He obliges us to disregard him, as St. John Chrysostom says, “For his sickness has no recovery.”

So, by rejecting the church, man deprives himself of being a member in Christ’s body. It is the right of the church to bind him, for the Lord continues to say, (Matt 18:18) “Assuredly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” He is binding himself by himself for rejecting the church concepts. The church is then obliged to bind him not for serving him right, but rather to preserve the other members from his corruption lest he infiltrates to them. This is just like the rather leaven is separated from the entire dough, or a corrupt member to be amputated. But this issue is not to be performed recklessly or hastily. It is not easy for any man to accept the amputation of a member of his body, except it be after all measures and means of treatment. When he finds all of his body is endangered, then he gives in to amputation. I say it is terribly hard for the church to see someone throwing himself out and forces the church to bind him. It keeps waiting from day to day his return so as to loosen him, and he finds the church door open. This is why the Lord mentions first the binded for a solution. It is also to enkindle the heart of the church to

loosen those binded, and it would not be negligent regarding their salvation, even though they have thrown themselves out of the church doors.

The Lord speaks of the binding of a person who rejects the church, and of loosening him when he returns to it in repentance. He says, (Matt 18:20) “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them. Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by my father in heaven,” (Matt 18:19) “It is as if the Lord Jesus is asking his church to keep praying for the sake of those tied, even if the members of this local church are two or three on earth. For, if they pray together in the agreement of one heart, the Lord Jesus himself comes to them. This is ‘love’ in their midst, and their prayers are heard, better than the prayers of many done individually.”

The Lord says, “If two agree on earth,” because in their agreement together in the spirit of love, there unites with them some departed members of the church, as well as some of the heavenly hosts, so God is pleased with this group partnership prayers.

Some think about the two or three gathered in his name, is that it refers to the house church where the two spouses gather together in the Lord, in a spirit of real love and with them are the children. So, the Lord comes to dwell in the midst of that house and becomes a leader to them.

Many fathers think the Lord’s words are an assurance of the importance of a collective partnership life, based on love in the Lord. It is also a warning against the life of solitude, for the Book says that two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For, if one falls his mate would help him get up. Woe to him who is all by himself, for if he falls there is no one to help him get up ... the soiled thread does not get cut quickly.

+ If two have the same thinking, and are able to do this, so how much more would it be like when there is a collective agreement among so many?

St. Kaprianos.

+ If the Lord says when two agree together on earth about anything they ask for, this will be given them. So how much more would it be like if the entire group come together in the Lord’s name?

St. Ambrosios.

+ Believe that the Lord Jesus is present when the priest asks for him, for he says, “When two or three are gathered in my name, these am I in their midst,” so how much more would it be like when the church assembles, and the sacraments are performed; he will surely grant us his presence.

St. Ambrosios.

+ The group prayers are answered quickly, and bring forth a lot of fruit, when those prayers are in unity and agreement of thoughts.

Father John of Rronstadt.

+ The agreement was set first, and he made the peace agreement of foremost importance, teaching us it is appropriate for us to come to an agreement in stability and faith. But how could there be an agreement with someone who disagrees with the church-body itself, and the collective brethren? How can two or three gather together in Christ's name, whereas they are separated from Christ and his Gospel? We have not been separated from the, but they from us, and as a result the divisions and heresies appeared. They have also established for themselves different places of worship, and they left the head of the truth and its source.

St. Kaprianos.

4. The Forgiving Love:

(Matt 18:21,22) "Then Peter came to him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times? " Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.'"

The church is committed to purifying its members, paying great concern in every way to correct the wrongdoers, however evil they may become. So, how much more should the member be towards his brother who has wronged him? How many times should the personal sin be forgiven?

St. Peter the apostle spoke of number '7' as pointing to perfection among the Jews. It is as if he spoke of forgiveness to the brother as endlessly due to his love to him. But as for the Lord, he assured us up to seventy times seven. As St. John Chrysostom says, "The Lord here does not speak of a certain number ($70 \times 7 = 490$), it is rather immeasurable and constant forever. There is no number for forgiveness, but he asks it to be continuous and forever."

St. Ambrosios thinks number '7' refers to the eternal Sabbath, or the rest. It is as if when the believer forgives his brother he goes to eternal rest. Endless forgiveness, as long as he asks for endless rest!

St. Augustine thinks the Lord Jesus asks of us to forgive our brothers 77 times a day. This does not mean not to forgive the 78th time, but because number 10 refers to the law, and the commandment is not to break it, and it includes number 11. That is, when your brother sins, breaking all the commandments (11) endlessly (7) forgive him so as to win him in love to the sanctified life in the Lord.

St. Jerome answers the question "If my brother asks for forgiveness only with his lips and not with his heart, what should I do?" He says, "If he sins seventy times seven times every day, and he asked you for forgiveness, then forgive him, and do not say he is not asking for forgiveness from his heart, but that he is buying. Leave to God the judging! Since he asked me for forgiveness, if he is not saying the truth, it is God who

knows best. It is I the heat. I accept what I hear, and Christ accepts if he is lying, and you have accepted his lying as if it were true, this will be for you a salvation, but as for him this will mean death.”

St. John El Dergy thinks the Lord’s commandment is only a gate opening for us so as to have hope in the Lord himself. He says, “In time of despair, do not stop remembering the Lord’s commandment to St. Peter, to forgive the sinner seventy times seven times. The Lord who has given us this commandment, makes what is so much greater towards us. But when we are puffed up, let us remember the words, “He who has observed all the law and has been offended in only one, that is, has fallen in to the sin of pride, he has become a sinner in them all!””

5. The Parable of the Forgiving King and the Wicked Slave:

The Lord wished to say a parable about being kind to others, saying (Matt 18:23-27) “Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who had owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all. Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgive him the debt.’”

In this parable the human king is a symbol of the Judge before whom man stands indebted by ten thousand talents; whereas man declares his absolute inability to fulfill the debt.

In this Parable we notice:

Firstly: He is comparing the heavenly kingdom to a human king. The Scholar Oreganus says, “This kingdom of heaven is the son of God when he has become in the form of the sinful body, yet united with his divinity, and therefore has become a human king.”

Secondly: The ten thousand talents that man has borrowed, is only the breaking of the divine commandments. Number 10 refers to the Ten Commandments, and he who breaks one commandment breaks them all. But as for number 1000 this refers to eternity, and as for number 10,000 this means man is guilty of breaking the Ten Commandments. This is an eternal debt that he can never pay in his entire earthly life.

St. Augustine says, “We have to confirm that just as the law was given in Ten Commandments, the ten thousand talents mean all the sins committed in the name of the law.” The man was unable to pay the divine debt of God. Therefore the order was issued for him to be sold, he and his wife and children, and all that he had; this might help him in paying it. The breaking of God’s commandment has pushed man to lose everything. He loses himself that is his inward spirit stricken by eternal death, and is now deprived of God, the source of man’s life. He moreover loses his wife, that is, his body linked to

himself as a wife does. He has to nurture and support his body, but now the wholesome body has become defiled. It is heavy, with the corrupt and deadly passions that burden the spirit and corrupts the thoughts and senses. As for the children, these refer to the numerous gifts that have been changed through sin from being righteous devices to God, to a device for sin working for Satan's account. As for all his money, this means his possessions such as gold, silver and man's corruption; they have become an offense to him.

St. Jerome here sees the wife as 'silliness'. Just as wisdom is the righteous man's wife as the book says, (Prov. 7:4,5) "Say to wisdom 'You are my sister' and call understanding you nearest kin, that they may keep you from the immoral woman, from the seductress who flatters with her words."

The evil one's wife is 'silliness'. The righteous unites with wisdom and begets sanctified thoughts and good behaviour in the Lord. He begets children to wisdom, which pleases the Lord, likewise is evil when tied to stupidity, it beget children that are evil thoughts and defiled actions.

St. Augustine thinks the wife is 'the evil desire' that clings to the evil one and begets children that are his evil deeds. It is as if man in his evil, offers the judge an account of his wife, that is, his desire or evil will, and also an account of his children, that is, his wicked deeds.

The king had compassion on the indebted one; he not only had patience and was slow to react as the man wanted (verse 26) but he also gave him more than what he asked for, and more than he could understand; for, he set him free, he and forgave him his debt. This poor man asked for some more time, thinking he would be able to pay the debt. He was unaware he would be absolutely unable in fulfilling this matter, however much time he was given. This is why the Lord set him free through the cross. He pardoned him all the debt through his free grace, as well as the gift of freedom of the soul and body. He sanctified his talents and all that he possessed, so he would become all in all sanctified to him.

This slave could have lived in the freedom granted to him, as if with no debt, and would have everything sanctified. But the only obstruction that hindered those blessings and stripped him of them, and drove him to a far worse state than what he had previously experienced, was that his heart was shut against his brother. This brother was indebted to him for the amount of one hundred denarii's, that is, it was a trivial human debt, because the number 100 refers to the 'group' in this world.

This man is really miserable; he was released from ten thousand talents, and yet would not relinquish for his brother a hundred denarii's, and was very cruel to him. It is at this point that his old debt returns to him and he is unable to pay it. However much our brothers harm us, unless we forget about the debt, we shall not be blessed with the forgiveness of the debt that we have to pay for God. (Matt 5:15) "Unless you forgive people their sins, your father also will not forgive your sins."

St. John Chrysostom says, “The voice of forgiveness did not ring in his ears, and he forgot all about the patient love of his master! Look how good it is to remember your sins! If this man had kept them clearly in his memory, he would not have been so cruel and violent. This is why I repeat the words: to remember our sins is very useful indeed and essential. Nothing makes the soul truly wise, modest and patient as much as to remember continuously our own sins. This is why St. Paul remembered the sins he committed, not only after purification, but those sins he committed before his baptism, although all of these were forgiven on the spot, and wiped away.” This saddened the hearts of his friends the other slaves, for the Lord says, “When the slaves, his friends saw what happened, they were very sorry for it. They came to tell their master what happened. Then his master called him and said to him, “You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?””

That poor servant, who was put in jail by his friend, did not open his mouth to complain of him; but it was the voice of the others that cried out inwardly in great grief. God hears the secret human sighing, because of people’s cruelty to each other, and their unforgiveness to each other. Therefore God measures to them in the same way they measure to their brothers.

This is the human condition that groans, because man does not decline the sins of others, or forget the wrong doings done against them. How much more would the church heart grieve when it sees its children so unforgiving in stupidity they lose what they have gained, as God’s gifts and free blessings. This is what grieves the hearts of those in heaven, even the heart of God himself, who wishes to find his image and his example in us.

The Lord has confirmed we have to forgive, so as to be forgiven (Matt 18:35) “So my heavenly father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.” St. John Chrysostom comments on this divine statement, “He did not say, ‘Your father’, but, ‘My father’; for it is not appropriate God to be called ‘father’ to an evil and envious person such as this one.”

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Chapter XX (Page 548)

Those Worthy of the Kingdom

After he had spoken of those invited to the kingdom, the evangelist gives us a new concept for those worthy of the Messiah's kingdom.

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1. The Parable of the Labourers for the Kingdom account:

The Lord draws the similarity between the kingdom of heaven and a landowner who went out to hire labourers for his vineyard. He agreed with them in the morning to pay them a denarius a day, and he sent them to his vineyard. He also went out at the third hour to hire others who were idle in the market, and he sent them to his vineyard as well. He did likewise about the sixth hour, and also about the ninth hour. The same thing was done about the eleventh hour. He asked those standing idle all day why they were there. They answered 'No one has hired us.' In the evening, the landlord called his steward to pay the wages, from the last to the first. He gave the labourers of the eleventh hour a denarius. As they were being paid, they grumbled at the landlord.

In this parable we notice the following:

First: the Lord says, (Matt 20:1) "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard." Who is this landowner who hires the laborers other than 'the word of the living God,' who is the Lord of heaven and earth? He sees in his creation, the heavenly and the earthly one, his own home that he takes care of, and is concerned about. As for his vineyard, it is the heart in which his kingdom is established, as he says, "the kingdom of heaven is inside you." He plants his righteousness in us, with his Holy Spirit, and he declares himself in us. His kingdom is his transfiguration in us.

Secondly: how beautiful the Lord's expression is about the kingdom of heaven, that it is compared to a landowner, going out from hour to hour throughout the entire day hiring laborers from the market so as to work in his vineyard. He goes out the five hours according to the Jewish custom 'morning, the third hour, the sixth hour, the ninth hour, the eleventh hour.' These are the working hours all day long for his laborers in his vineyard.

What are these hours other than the stages in man's entire life? The morning refers to childhood, the third refers to boyhood, the sixth which is noontide refers to

youth, and the ninth refers to manhood, and the eleventh hour refers to old age, which is the last hour in our life. This is how our father calls us to work since our early childhood. He is eager to make our entire life dedicated to his kingdom's account he keeps calling us, in open arms full of love to us till the last moments of our life, for he never gives up hope. He longs for us to answer his call, and work for his account. The vineyard is open for us, and God's voice does not cease as long as it is still the day, and we still have life even if it is the last moment. This is why St. Paul the apostle says, (Heb 3:13) "but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'today' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

In this way the Lord comes out to us calling us for work. He shines on us with his light, to make our entire day full of light with no nighttime. Let us work incessantly, for he says, (John 9:4,5) "I must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." He comes out to call us not by words, but by deeds. He works in us his father's deeds to attract us to him, since it is still daylight and his light shines in us, lest we are found insistent on not accepting him and hence end our life in dim darkness where no one could work.

If God has promised every one a denarius, this does not mean that man postpones his repentance and obedience to work in the Lord's vineyard. As St. Augustine says, "Are those who were hired in the vineyard, when the landowner came to them at the third hour, for instance, said to him, 'wait, we shall not come till the sixth hour?' Or those whom he found at the sixth hour, did they say 'we are not going till the ninth hour?' if we shall be equal in the wages, why go and toil more than necessary? He would not have given them if they had not gone. He rather answers them, 'Do you not wish to work now, you who do not know if you will live till you are older in age or not?' you have been called at the sixth hour, come. Indeed the landowner promises you a denarius if you come at the eleventh hour. But he did not promise you, you will live till the seventh hour; I do not say till the eleventh hour, but not even till the seventh hour. Therefore, do not delay, for he who has called you, confirms to you the reward, but he days are uncertain." St. Augustine says moreover that in this parable the Lord has opened the door to all, and no one should despair. He repeats the invitation for everyone to be accepted. But let us begin, lest we get broken down in false hope during the delay he says, "Do not postpone, do not shut the door that is open to you now. Here is the door of forgiveness having the door open before you, so why do you postpone it? Rejoice, the door is open even though you have not knocked, but will it stay open forever to those who knock and stay outside? You do not know what will happen tomorrow."

Thirdly: the Lord's call to us for working in the vineyard, is not only a practical and constant one throughout man's life from infancy till old age, but it is also an invitation to humanity across the entire ages, from the cradle to the ends of the earth. Father Gregory the Great says, "There is no age in which the Lord has stopped sending laborers to work in his vineyard, that is, teaching his people."

God comes down to us throughout the entire history, from one age to the next, from one generation to the other. It is as if from one hour to the next, he is asking for laborers to hire from the market to take them to his divine vineyard, to give them the eternal reward in the evening of our timely life.

He has come down to us in the early morning, for all of humanity, when the history of mankind began with the creation of Adam whom he put to work in paradise. God had hoped Adam would permanently be in his image and likeness, having authority over the wild beasts, the birds of the air and the fish in the seas (Gen 1:28). But he too soon left paradise bending his back to disobedience. He lost his power over his thoughts and feelings and all of his body! But the Lord did not leave him so weak, hidden behind the fig leaves that would dry up and uncover him. The Lord rather gave him the skin clothes to cover his body with, and to fulfill the promise of a sanctified sacrifice to cover his inward life.

About the third hour, the history of mankind began once more; Noah's ark and his baptism with God's flood. The Lord came down asking for laborers to work in his vineyard, and he made a covenant with Noah and his descent (Gen 9:8).

At about the sixth hour, the believing humanity began a new history through the father of all believers Abraham. The Lord came down for a covenant with mankind in the person of Abraham, to make him a father of the Gentiles (Gen 17:4-8). The Lord put a sign of the covenant in the body of every male of his descent during the circumcision. This has been manifested in the remarkable fathers as Isaac and Jacob.

At about the ninth hour also, when the believing people received the written law by God's finger, on mount Sinai by Moses' hands, God asked for laborers for him. These are the prophets of the Old Testament who worked for the account of his kingdom.

Finally, at the eleventh hour, that is the last hour (1 John 1:28) in the fullness of time, the Lord came down incarnate, so he would gather us. We who were idle all day long, we were embraced by him, from among the gentiles who did not know God all its days. They were not hired either from the market at any time before. He took us to his divine vineyard to work by his Holy Spirit for the account of his heavenly account.

These are the five hours for the daylight of the entire time of mankind. Now, the end of ages has come, and we are awaiting his last coming, and are ready to receive the reward given by his hands, with all our laboring loved ones who were prior to us in the labor.

+ What wonderful blessings these are, that are indescribable! Abraham the believer, has not yet entered paradise, whereas the thief went in. Moses and the prophets did not enter it, yet this thief went in despite breaking the law.

This is what St. Paul the apostle says in amazement (Rom 5:20) "But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more." Those who laboured under the sun, have not yet

entered, but the one of the eleventh hour entered it. No one is to complain to the landowner for he will tell him, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?"
St. Cyril El Orshilimy.

Fourthly: the scholar Organus has a symbolic interpretation for these five hours. In addition to the fact that they refer to the five above mentioned phases___ Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and the Lord Jesus ___ yet they also refer to God's call for us through the five senses, so he would come into our hearts and establish his kingdom in us.

The first stage that begins with Adam represents God's call to us through the sense of touch, for Eve told the serpent (Gen 3:3) "God has said, 'you shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die!' So god commanded them not to touch the fruit of the tree so they do not fall. With the Holy Spirit God uses the sense of touch as a means of eating the fruit of the tree of life and enjoying the inward kingdom. The bleeding woman touched the hem of Christ's robe, so she obtained power coming out of him (Luke 8:46)". The Lord said, "Somebody touched me, for I perceive power going out from me."

So Eve has lost the kingdom by the sense of touch, whereas the Gentiles, in the person of the bleeding woman have obtained the kingdom by means of this sense of touch.

The second stage begins with Noah, which symbolizes obtaining the heavenly kingdom through the sanctification of the sense of smell. When Noah offered the sacrifice of thanksgiving after the renewing of the creation by means of the flood, (Gen 8:21) "And the Lord smelled a soothing aroma." In this way God swells the scent of contentment through the sacrifice of Christ on our part. We likewise, smell through him the perfume of his tremendous love, and consequently we are attracted towards him, and are unified with him in the only begotten Son.

The third stage begins with the father of all fathers, Abraham. He is the one who hosted God and two of his angels offering them a table of food, and therefore he has become a symbol for the sense taste.

The fourth stage is referred to by Moses the prophet. He went up on mount Sinai to hear God's voice sound loud on its top, when he received the law. Therefore he has become the symbol of the sanctification of the sense of hearing.

The last stage is referred to by the coming of the Son of God incarnate. We therefore saw him with our own eyes (1 John 1:1) and our sense of vision has become sanctified. In this way the inward kingdom of God that surpasses every sense, is released in us so as to work for his account by means of sanctifying our senses by the Holy Spirit.

Fifthly: In this parable the Lord joins the laborers of the sixth hour with those of the ninth hour, for he says (Matt 20:5) "Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise." The laborers of these two hours represent the call for the Jewish people to

work. The sixth represents the age of forefathers beginning with Abraham, then Jacob, then Isaac. The ninth hour represents the age of the prophet beginning with Moses until before the coming of the Lord Jesus. But the call was not life this in every stage. In the first stage the whole of humanity was called to work in the person of Adam. The second stage also was in the person of Noah. In the last stage the message was released to the Gentiles by means of the New Testament church. In both hours, the sixth and the ninth he has delivered to us his promises, his covenants, his law, his children through the fathers and the prophets to the Jewish people. When the last hour came he found other idle workers still there (Matt 20:6). He asked them why they were there all day long, idle and doing no work. These are the Gentiles who have lived all their mornings in an idle state, with no spiritual work for them. They have wasted all their life in idol worshiping that is false, and have become as idle as their gods. But in humility and broken heartedness they accepted the call of the Lord Jesus, and have confessed their situation (Matt 20:7) saying that no one came to hire them. They longed for the call and work, and hence they found the call in the cross, and the power for labor in the Holy Spirit.

Sixthly: The Lord, in this parable, repeats the words 'went out' in verses 1,3,5,6. Again this has been repeated by our teacher St. Matthew a number of times when he spoke of God's deeds with humanity. It is as if he wished to assure us of a certain important point: that God, in his love to humanity, did not expect humanity to rise up to him, for it is unable to do so. Neither did the Lord want humanity to apologize for its iniquity. It is always he who comes out to humanity in some way or other. He went out to it on every hour of the day. It is as if his one and only job was to save man and get reconciled to him. He came out to us with his deeds of love through his creation of everything for our sake. He came out to us by delivering to us his divine law. He moreover came out to us by sending to us his prophets, and finally he came out to us himself. He came to us through declining his glories, and went out to us in the Golgotha to encounter us on the cross. He then carried us away from the abyss of darkness.

Seventhly: The denarius offered by the Lord Jesus for the laborers in the vineyard, according to the thinking of the scholar Oregnces, is the salvation. This salvation was granted to those of the eleventh hour, and it was also a blessing to all the previous laborers.

St. Augustine thinks the denarius given to the laborers means the eternal life. He says, "In this wage, we are all made equal. The first is like the last, and the last first, because this denarius is the eternal life, where we are all equal. Despite the difference in level as to what the saints have reached, and how some shine more than others, yet the gift of eternal life is equal to all. It is not long for one and short for the other. It is a life of eternity for everyone."

St. Jerome thinks the denarius has the Kings picture; so, when the first ones complained as they were receiving the wages he rebuked them and said they were only receiving what he had promised them. This means that it had his image and semblance, so what more were they asking for? Finally, we can say that the reward means enjoying and being blessed with the Lord himself in us.

Does the one who obtain the reward, that is the salvation, or following the expel of the Lord Jesus himself and being blessed with him inwardly, does she grumble and complain?

What the Lord spoke about was only an example to reveal certain aspects or a certain concept. What the Lord meant was getting rid of the Jewish selfishness, for they assumed salvation was for them alone, and that the Messiah was coming for them alone. If they had known what they were enjoying, that they could not obtain what is more (verse 10) they would not have grumbled for the salvation door to be opened to the Gentiles, and the Messiah offering his life to all. But in heaven there is no envy or jealousy, it is rather 'the kingdom of love.'

Eighthly: The Lord was extremely gentle in his rebuke, despite the harsh words he heard from those who complained saying (Matt 20:12) "These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day." They called their brethren 'these last men', as answers one of them 'friend'. It is as if he is talking with him as a friend, discussing something, and not as a master commanding his slave. From another aspect they complained of having borne the burden of the day, and the heat all day long though their deeds are vain when compared to the eternal reward awaiting them.

Ninthly: The secret behind complaints is the envy. They have taken what was their due, what the Lord has agreed upon, but what grieved them was that their brethren took like they did. Their grief was not based upon being deprived of anything, but it was based on the good the others have received. This is why the Lord rebuked them (Matt 20:13-15) "friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or in your eye evil because I am good? So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called but few chosen."

Tenthly: The Lord ends up his words saying, (Matt 20:16) "So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called but few are chosen."

2. The Kingdom and the Cross:

The Lord was drawing close to Jerusalem to offer himself a lamb for the Passover, and he was making promises the concept of the heavenly kingdom, and the call to it and the merits for it. This was by means of his deeds for salvation through the crucifixion, his death and his resurrection. For there is no kingdom without the cross, and there is no right for us to enjoy it and to work for its account away from the blood of the Lord Jesus who forgives the sins. This is why after the evangelist had narrated the previous parable concerning those called to the kingdom throughout the human history, whether that of the Jews or gentiles, he said, (Matt 20:17-19) "Now Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples aside on the road and said to them, 'behold, we are

going up to Jerusalem, and the son of man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day he will rise again.”

He has taken his disciples all by themselves to tell them of the mysteries concerning the kingdom. This was quite impossible for the Jewish multitudes to accept at that time. Even the disciples were unaware of it. It was apparently obvious that the entire city came out to welcome him as a king. But as for him he was looking intently at the cross for it was the only way for the kingdom. It was as if the Lord was pointing to them that he was coming to the cross willingly, doing what he had come for. In this way he encouraged them to carry the cross with him.

+ The Lord has spoken ahead of the due time to his disciples about his sufferings, so they be watchful in expectation and be ready for it.

St. John Chrysostom.

+ hence, they learnt ahead of time of his sufferings to come, and that he could have easily avoided them, but he willingly encountered it all. He informed the disciples that all these things he spoke of have been declared by the saintly prophets and that God had planned for it all. He told them these things so no one would be offended when they happen.

St. Cyril the Great.

+ because he loved mankind, he welcomed death, without which the entire world would have perished in its sin.

St. Cyril El Orshilimy.

3. The Kingdom and the mother of Zebedee's sons:

As the Lord was heading towards Jerusalem to offer his life a ransom for mankind, so all would obtain the heavenly kingdom, the mother of Zebedee's sons came up to him. She realized how the hearts of so many wished the Lord Jesus be king. She therefore was eager to have her two sons sit one on his right and the other on his left in the kingdom. The mother of Zebedee's sons represented the Jewish way of thinking, asking that her sons have earthly kingdom in a touchable materialistic way. This implied authority and glamour. She did not know that the kingdom is hidden in the cross that carried the power of the resurrection.

At this point the Lord addressed her sons, to reveal to them the way for true greatness. He said, (Matt 20:22,23) “you do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” They said to him, ‘we are able. So he said to them,’ ‘you will indeed drink my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by my father’.”

The Lord has directed their thoughts to the cup of the cross, and the painful dye of the sufferings. They would drink of his cup, and be buried with him in his baptism dye, so they rise with him. Because they thought they could do this, he did not discourage them, but attributed this to the father. It is he who prepares the crown for each one. It is as if he wished to tell them ‘you assume you are able to drink my cup, and to come with me to the baptism of my death but you need strength from able to be worthy of God’s glory. You will drink my cup, and be buried with me. But this is not of your own work; it is rather the divine work of God that is freely given to you.’

St. Ambrosios says, “We can understand the words ‘it is not mine to give’ in another sense. It could mean I have come to teach humility. I have not come to manifest justice, but to offer tenderness, that is, it is not yet the time to offer the crown.”

I wish we could come forth in to the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ like the mother of Zebedee’s sons, and each one would offer his soul and body as two sons to him. This is not to ask for earthly rest, or temporary vain honour, but so that we obtain through them his Holy Spirit and drink of his cup, and be blessed by being buried with him, and rise, carrying the qualities of the resurrected from the dead as the mystery of their glory. It is then that man awaits the eternal crown.

The Scholar Oreganus comments on the words of the Lord to the mother of Zebedee’s sons, saying, “He who drinks the cup the Lord Jesus has drink will sit, and reign, and judge next to the king of kings. This is the cup of salvation, and he who drinks it calls on the name of the Lord. And he who calls on the name of the Lord, will be saved (Joel 2:32, Acts 2:21, Rom 10:13).”

St Jerome encourages us to struggle so as to obtain greater glory in the eternal life through humility, saying, “If we were all equal in heaven, it is of no use to be modest here, so as to become great there.”

Finally, St. Ambrosios sees two aspects to how this mother acted. First, she made a mistake in her request. Second, he forgave her this mistake, for she had a mother’s heart, filled with love, and she did not think about herself, but rather about her two sons.

There is no way for the eternal glory away from the crucifixion with him and the burial too. As St. John Chrysostom says, “In this way, it is appropriate for us to go the same way, so we share him the glory and honor. How glorious are the sufferings! With them we resemble his death.” But we cannot go this way all by ourselves, and this is why the Lord assures us that it was he who has chosen us (John 15:16). As St. John Chrysostom says, “All the honor here goes to the host who has made the invitation, and those invited have nothing more to do than to except it in obedience. We cannot run in God’s way, except we be carried on the wings of the Spirit. Those who are punished are for justice to be accomplished, but those who are crowned are for the sake of grace. If they make all the righteous deeds, they are blessed with heaven and the kingdom in return

for these small deeds that are made for the sake of free grace, and they are exalted to what is immeasurable.”

What pleases God, and is given to us bountifully, is our humility, for the evangelist says (Matt 20:24-28) “And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased against the two brothers. But Jesus called them to himself and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave ____ Just as the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.’”

It was not easy for the disciples till this moment to understand the mystery of the heavenly kingdom. This is why they were furious at the two brothers, instead of rejoicing for every soul that encounters the king so as to reign with him. The kingdom, up till this time, was a race towards the earthly glory and the love of power. But the Lord drew their attention to himself, for he has come not to be served by others, but to serve others and give his life a ransom for many. He did not come to reign even though he is the Lord; he rather came as a slave to stretch out his hand and wash the dirty feet. The kingdom in its essence is the unity with God in his son Jesus Christ, and with his Spirit we enter a race towards occupying the last rows as slaves serving other. With the Holy Spirit we raise them from the slavery of sin to the glory of God’s children, by being united with god’s only begotten Son! St. Paul the apostle expressed himself beautifully by saying he has enslaved himself to many. It was impossible for him to accept this, neither could he have executed it, unless he had been united in the only son who has made himself a slave for us! As much as you crucify your ‘ego’, and reject all the honor as much as you liberate yourself by the Holy Spirit towards the glory of the heavenly kingdom. It is then that you enjoy the fruits also here on earth as an inward glory and unthinkable divine blessings to be obtained in your life. St. Augustine comments on the Lord’s words concerning serving others and giving up yourself for their sake; he says “Every single one is a servant to Jesus in the same method by which Christ was also a servant. He who serves Christ in this way, is greatly honored by his father, for he makes his son with him, and he is in need of nothing more in the joyful eternity.” The saint continues his words on the service and the servants saying, “Do not only think of the good bishops and priests, but you too, be servants to Christ in your own way, in your righteous life, in giving charity, preaching and teaching in his name as best as you can. Every father to a family knows through this title the feelings he has as a father to this family. Let him warn the members of his family, and let him teach them, advise them, and connect their ways for Christ’s sake, and the sake of eternal life. In this way the house is filled with the church function, and the father performs the job of a bishop, a servant to Christ so he would be with him forever. So many people of you category have served the very sublime sufferings, many youths and young virgins, men and women, fathers and mothers. They are neither bishops nor are they priests, and yet they gave up their life for martyrdom for his sake. The father therefore has honored them, and they received increasing crowns of glory”

4. The Kingdom and Enlightenment:

We have seen how the Lord himself is the father of house, and how it is he who has chosen us for his kingdom, and called us as laborers for his vineyard. He made it clear for us that it is impossible for us to obtain the kingdom away from the cross. He confirmed we are committed to the cross with him as a divine gift, and we have to carry the cross of our Lord, in the spirit of service, in absolute humility. The evangelist concludes the words of the chapter by the miracle of opening the eyes of the two blind men, who were sitting on the road at Jericho, just before Jesus' going to Jerusalem to be crucified.

This may have been the last explicit miracle made by confirming the need of humanity ____ the Jews and the Gentiles ____ for this inward vision as a gift of divine healing, so they may see the heavenly kingdom. The Jews have been living a long time as Abraham's issue according to the body. They learnt the law and recorded the prophecies, and despite this, their inward vision was stricken with spiritual blindness because of their bteral materialistic thinking. The Gentiles as well spent their life in idol worshipping that burdened their souls with darkness, and they asked for nothing other than the physical pleasure and the worldly honor. All have stood on the road, whether Jews or gentiles as blind men who have not gone yet into Jerusalem. They were unable to witness the glory, until the son of David came forth, the Messiah the king, that all mankind have been waiting for, he asked them (Matt 20:32) "What do you want me to do for you?"

St. Matthew the evangelist declare the opening of the blind men's eyes, which refers to the enlightenment of the believer's vision, whether it be for the Jews or the Gentiles. But the two evangelists St. Mark and St. Luke mentioned only one blind man, who represents the entire humanity in accepting the faith, as one church, making no distinction between Jew or the Gentile. St. Augustine says, "Who are these two blindmen sitting on the road? These are the two peoples that Christ came to heal! They are the Jews and the Gentiles. He has fulfilled what Abraham was promised, (Gen 22:18) "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed." This is why also the apostle went, after the Lord's resurrection and ascension, to the Gentiles when they were scorned by the Jews. This is why also the Lord was called 'the corner stone' (1 Thes 2:20) "that made the two into one" (Eph 2:14). This is because the cornerstone joins two walls of different directions. Any difference, such as that which was between the circumcised and the uncircumcised, has erected a wall of Jews and the other of the Gentiles. They are all put together the cornerstone. In (Psalm 118:22) "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone." Therefore, the two blindmen crying out to the Lord, were actually the two walls in this example."

Father Gregory the great thinks this miracle was mentioned before the Lord's entrance into Jerusalem to be crucified "Because the disciples were as yet of the body, they were unable to understand these words of mystery, and this is why the miracle was

fulfilled. He has opened the eyes of the blindmen to prove their faith by means of signs from heaven.”

If we return to the one or two blindmen, they would not have had their eyes opened unless they realized at first their need for the light, and their awareness of Christ’s power, the healer of the soul and the body.

Pope Cyril the great says, “There were many people surrounding Christ. But the blindman realized his presence, and he held on to him in his heart, even though his physical eyes could not behold him.” As for the secret behind his healing, it was the voice of Christ, the giver of light. St. John Chrysostom says, “the voice of Christ now was light to the blindmen, for he is the true word of light.”

When healed, the evangelist says, (Matt 20:32) “So Jesus stood still and called them.” When they drew near to him with their hearts in faith, they were also blessed by drawing near with their body, and hearing his voice. Faith brings us to the Lord Jesus so as to be worthy of staying with him and hearing his voice.

The two blindmen cries out saying, (Matt 20:30) “Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David.” And yet he asked them, “What do you want me to do for you?” He has made holy the will power of mankind with which he crowned us. As St. John Chrysostom says, “God does not tie our wishes and will power with his gifts. But as soon as we show our readiness, we find him offering us many opportunities for salvation.”

As for the cries we have to present to the Lord as he is crossing, these are the cries of active faith. St. Augustine says, “Due to the love of this light, I wish to motivate you, dear brethren, you have to cry out by means of your good works when Jesus passes by. He would then hear the voice of your faith, and Christ would stand still, he who never changes, and he opens your eyes.”

+ The love of Christ!
Ask for the light, who is Christ!

If the blindman loves the physical light, how much more should we be eager for the light of the soul? Let us cry out to him, not by words, but by a righteous life.

The multitude rebuked the blindman so he would not cry out! There are quite a few Christians who wish to hinder our life. These are like the multitude walking with Christ and hindered the one crying out to him. The blindman was hungry for the light coming from Christ’s tenderness.

There are Christians such as these, to be overcome so we live in righteousness, and then our life will be the voice crying out to Jesus. Let us live the righteous life! In this way, we are crying out to him!

St. Augustine.

+ Our brethren, our entire work in this life is to heal the eyes of the heart by which we see God. This is the goal of celebrating the Holy Sacraments, and the aim of preaching the words of God!

+ Is God giving you the eye by which you can see the seen he has created, and will he not grant you that eye by which you can see him, its Creator? For he has created you in his likeness and image. He has given you this as well! He has given you both; but due to your love of those outer eyes more than the inner eye, and your scorn of the other one, then you have become sick and wounded.”

St. Augustine.

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Chapter XXI (Page 569)

The King entering Jerusalem

The last eight chapters offer us a live picture of the last week in the life of the Lord Jesus on earth. He has given us himself a Passover to cross with us from the dark kingdom to his eternal one. The evangelists were careful to record to us a detailed record of this week which has transformed the flow of the stream of mankind.

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1. His Entering Jerusalem:

(Matt 21:1-3) "Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethanage at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to me. And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them.'"

Jerusalem was overcrowded by the millions at that time. They had come to buy sheep to offer as a Passover for them. But the Lord Jesus ___ the Lamb of God ___ came forward himself towards Jerusalem to offer himself willingly a Passover for all mankind. He is not as the other sheep, slaughtered so as to be eaten and consumed up. He rather offers his body a sacrifice of love, able to raise from the dead, and grant eternal life to be who wishes to be blessed with it. He is the priest and the sacrifice at the same time. He comes forth to the cross and to the altar simultaneously, to exalt the believing humanity to the new life in him, and hence carry them to his heavens.

They 'have come to Bethanage', which is a small village on the east of Mount Olives, where the priests lived to be close to the temple in Jerusalem. Some think 'Bethanage' in Hebrew means the 'house of the figs.' We have previously seen how the fig tree is a symbol of the church regarding its unity, since it contains a lot of seeds inside the cover of the sweet Holy Spirit, by means of which a sweet taste makes it delicious food, and without which the seeds are valueless and can never be eaten. This is the one church filled with sweetness by means of which the Lord sends his disciples to

loosen those who are bonded, and can enter the higher Jerusalem with their hearts, that is, to see peace.

The Scholar Oreganus thinks Bethanage as to mean 'the house of the one cheek.' It reminds us of the right cheek beaten upon by the real believer, and he turns the other cheek to the one who strikes it, offering him love so as to break down his wickedness. It also reminds us of the cheek by which Samson struck the enemies and he destroyed them, and it flowed with water that refreshed him in his thirst (Judges 15:19). Therefore, we cannot encounter the Messiah the saviour as the one to open our inward Jerusalem, unless we offer our right cheek, and also our left one, in love to those who oppress us. We are to bear their evil in real tolerance and patience.

This is the door to obtain our Christ, our true Passover, who has overflowed us with the spring of the living water just as with Samson. He is the source of his Holy Spirit who quenches the heart to transform the barren wilderness into God's fruitful paradise.

The evangelist says, "Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethanage, at the Mount of Olives! What is this Mount of Olives that the Lord came to before entering Jerusalem, and that was full of olive trees, other than the Lord Jesus himself? For he is the 'way', the beginning and the end gift by this way he comes to us and he dwells in it! As St. Ambrosios says, "The Lord Jesus himself could be the mount. What is this mount except it be that which produces fruitful olive fruits. These are not like the trees that bend with their weight, but they are clustered with the Gentiles through the perfect Spirit. It is he, who through him we climb and we reach the top. He is the door and the way. It is he who is opened for us, and it is he who opens.""

St. Ambrosios moreover says, "He has come to the mount of Olives to plant the small olives with his heavenly power he is the heavenly Sower, and every plant he sows in God's house declares, (Psalm 52:8) "But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God, I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever.""

When at the Mount Olives, the Lord sent two of his disciples, and said to them, "Go into the village that is opposite you." He sent his two disciples so as to get the donkey and the colt that were tied, and he asked them to loosen them and bring them to him, so he would use them in entering Jerusalem. The church forefathers saw in every word mentioned regarding this event, it implied a meaning that concerned the salvation of humanity. We mention some of these as follows:

First: the donkey and the colt symbolically represent at that time the Jews and the Gentiles. The Lord is in need of all humanity, even if debased in their thoughts to the level of a donkey or a colt, with reference to their knowledge of God and their spiritual behavior. As the psalmist says, (Ps. 73:22,23) "I was like a beast before you. Nevertheless I am continually with you." In humility, man feels incapable of comprehending God's mysteries, and he sees himself as a beast, incapable of thinking. But he has the world of God inside him, and he himself becomes as the inward Jerusalem. He accepts the Lord's work in his life, as did the disciples by untying the first bindings by

means of the Holy Spirit. They then offer them as a divine animal to ride, going freely towards the higher Jerusalem (Gal 4:26) instead of his first village and the deeds of object slavery.

St. John Chrysostom says, “He symbolized humanity to those two beasts since there is some similarity between them. For, the donkey according to the law, is a defiled animal, and the most stupid animal that is loaded with weight; it is dumb, weak, defiled and burdened with weight. This was the situation of humanity before coming of Christ.

They were defiled with every passion and insensibility. Their words were harsh, and were stupid because they disregarded God. There is nothing more stupid than when man scorns the Creator, and worships the works of his hands, as if these have created him. They were weak in the spirit, gluttonous, and they forgot their heavenly roots, and have become slaves to lust and the devils. They were heavily burdened, groaning under the weight of dark idolatry and its superstition.”

St. Cyril the great says, about this, “The God of all has created man on earth with a mind that discerns in wisdom. He has the power to comprehend, but Satan has deceived him. Even though he is created in God’s image, he was misled. He no longer knew the Creator, the making of all. Satan sloped down with the people of the earth to the basest degree of stupidity and ignorance. The righteous king David knew this, and cried bitterly, saying, (Ps 49:12) “Nevertheless man, though in horror, does not remain; he is like the beasts that perish.” It is possible that the donkey, of older years, symbolizes the Jewish assembly for it has become beastly. They paid no attention, except what is very little, to the law. They cared less about the prophets and the saints. Moreover, they disobeyed Christ, who called them to the faith, and the opening of their eyes, saying, (John 8:12) “I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” The darkness about which he speaks of here, undoubtedly, concerns the mind; and it means ignorance, blindness, and absolute unreasoning. As for the colt, that was not yet used for riding, this symbolizes the new people that was called from among the atheists.”

This, too, was deprived of reason by nature. They were headlong in wrongdoing, but Christ has become their wisdom (Co 2:3) “In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” This is why the colt was brought by means of the two disciples sent by Jesus for this purpose. What does this mean? It means that Christ called the atheists by shinning the light of Truth on them. This is served in two ways; the prophets and the apostles. The atheists were won over to the faith by the apostles’ preaching, who used words from the law and the prophets. One of them says to those called to the faith, so as to know about Christ’s coming; (2 Peter 1:19) “And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heard as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” When the daylight dawned by the shine of the truthful light, the prophetic word was no longer a small lantern, but has rather become equal to the beams of the morning star.

The colt was brought from the village, which refers to uncivilized thoughts of the atheists. These were unlike those educated in the city, for they lived in a rough and tough rival method. Theses do not continue in this situation regarding the uncivilized mind. They are rather changed to a peaceful and wise condition, by their submission to Christ, the teacher of these mothers. Therefore, the colt was disregarded, for Christ did not ride it, although it was previously used to be ridden and was submissive to its riders. He used the donkey which was untrained and unused by anyone. As I said previously the Jewish syndicate was rejected, which was previously over-ridden by the law, and he accepted the donkey, the people taken from the Gentiles.

This symbolic meaning said by St. Cyril the great was taken from the scholar Oreganness who said, "The old Jewish syndicate was symbolized by the donkey, for it was tied by its iniquities. The colt too was blinded, as a symbol of the newborn people of the Gentiles. Because the Savior drew near, and the way to the heavenly Jerusalem became open, he commanded it be loosened through the teachings of his disciples to whom he gave the Holy Spirit, saying, (John 20:22,23) "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." He moreover says, "His need was as such, that when he sits on them they will be freed of their burden, he connected what he sat upon, not that he was the one to rest by their means.""

St. John Chrysostom says, "The colt meant the church and the new congregation that was previously not devout, but now it has become pure, for Jesus was there upon it." Second: St. Jerome speaks of the two disciples that the Lord has sent, saying, "He sent his two disciples, one of them for the circumcised people and the other for the Gentiles." But St. Hillary, bishop of Poitier thinks the two disciples were sent to the Gentiles, one to Samaria, that had some knowledge of God, and the other one to the rest of the Gentiles. He said, "The donkey and the colt refer to the call of the doubled Gentiles. The Samaritans worshiped God through their rituals, and they were referred to by the donkey. As for the Gentiles, they were referred to by the colt, for they were not yet used to carrying loads."

In this way the Lord sent two to set free those who were under the bonds of superstition. Samaria believed by means of Philip, and Carnelians believed in Christ as the prime of the Gentiles, by means of St. Peter.

St. Jerome noticed in the gospel of St. Luke that the colt had many friends. It is as if those people were subjected not to one iniquity or to one devil, but to many. There are they who yielded by means of the apostles' preaching, and have left all to the real Master, Jesus Christ.

Third: St. Ambrosios speaks of the divine authority given to the two disciples to untie the donkey and the colt, saying; "It was not possible to loosen them except at the Lord's command. For, the hand of the apostles, sent by the Lord could loosen them." The scholar Oregances says, "This donkey was primarily carrying Balaam (Numbers 22), but now it is carrying Christ, this is it which was loosened by the disciples. It has been freed

from the bonds that tied her down. This is because the Son of God sat on it, and entered with it the Holy city of the heavenly Jerusalem.”

St. Jerome says, “Just as the Lord has sent his disciples to loosen the donkey and the colt so he rides on it, he likewise sends them to you, to loosen you from the bonds of worldly concerns, and to leave the milk and the straw of Egypt, and hence follow him for he is the real Moses. You will then enter the promised land through the wilderness.”

Four: The Lord asked the disciples to tell the owner of the donkey and the colt “The Lord is in need of them.” Indeed, he is looking upon the entire humanity, not as he is above it, but as if he is in need of everyone.

He asks for our hearts to be a dwelling place for him, and our life to be a heavenly ship to carry him.

St. John Chrysostom noticed the Lord did not ask them to say, “Your Lord needs them” neither “Our Lord needs them” is Lord of the entire humanity. Even the sinners feel grateful to him, although they very freely belonged to Satan.

What is surprising is that the owner of the donkey and the colt did not argue with them, but he gave what he owned to the Lord. As St. John Chrysostom says, “If he who did not know Christ gave in and yielded, so how much more is it appropriate for his disciples to offer him everything.”

Five: St. Mathew the evangelist declares that what was happening was prophesied previously by Zachary the prophet (Matt 21:4) “All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, ‘Tell the daughter of Zion ‘behold, your king is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey!’”

St. John Chrysostom moreover says, “The prophet Zechariah was known, and the Jews’ envy and their rejection of Christ was clear when he went into the temple; he therefore warned them ahead and gave them this sign so they may know him.”

The Lord Jesus spoke of his love to his bride, and he belittled himself before her so he would serve her. When entering Jerusalem to stretch out his hand to humanity as a groom to her, he did not go on horseback with men running to him, as Absalom, son of David did when he went to his father’s city (2 Sam 5:1). Neither did he use chariots and horses as Adonis did (1 Kings 1:5). He did not sound the trumpet and flute as happened with Solomon (1 Kings 1:38-40). He who sits on the throne of heavens has previously sent to Elijah a fiery Chariot. But as for the Lord, he rode a donkey and a colt, foal of a donkey, even though it was he who was seen by Isaiah, sitting on his high throne, on the Cherubim’s’ Chariots, on a majestically throne and the tails filling up the altar (Is 6:1). St. Jacob El Serougy sings Chantingly:

“You love made you descend from the chariot to an ordinary donkey, instead of the indescribable cherubim hosts, what the mercies have brought you done from among the bull, the faces, and the wings of fire, so that the foal of a donkey gives you the praise. In the chariot the heavenly hosts shout loud your glory. But as for here the scorned debased colt carries you to the heavenly hosts.”

The flying cherubims of fire bless you, and here the children praise you with their hymns. The angels of light, with the brushes of light pave his way, and the disciples here put their clothes before him.

The mighty had come down from his father to visit our place. With his will he reached the limits of humility. He got on the donkey in modesty to visit his people.

Zechariah the prophet carried the violin of the Spirit, and hurried before him chanting joyfully his prophecy. He touched his chords and began to sing saying, (Zech 9:9) “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem behold, your king is coming to you; he is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

St. John Chrysostom comments on the Lord using a donkey and a colt, saying, “Even though the prophet has lived long before the Lord’s coming, yet he says ‘Behold!’ This is to show that he about whom he is speaking is their king even before his birth. Whenever you see him do not say ‘we have no king but Caesar. He has come to save you, if you understand him, but, if you don’t, he will be against you. He came ‘lowly’ so you would not fear his greatness, but you would rather love his gentleness. He will not come riding a gold chariot, and neither will he be clothed in silk, nor riding a horse of fire like those ready to fight in animosity. But he will come on a donkey, a friend to peace and serenity.’”

Six: (Matt 21:6,7) “So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set him on them. And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road.”

We have said previously, to offer clothes to someone refers to his becoming a ruler (Is 3:6). At this point the disciples came forth representing the church, proclaiming their acceptance of the Groom as head and ruler.

They threw their old robes so as to enjoy the Lord Jesus himself as the robe of righteousness in which they are wrapped with and hide in. They took off the jail clothes with Gehoiachin (Jer. 52:33) so they could sit with the Groom, the king of kings. They will then hear his sweet words (Song of Sol 4:11) “How fair is your love, my sister, my spouse...and the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.” In their turn they will answer, (Is 61:10) “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”

St. Jerome speaks of these clothes, saying, “The clothes of these two disciples they had put on the animal, refer to the teaching of righteousness, or to the interpretation of the Holy Book, and to the truth of the Church. Unless the soul is adorned with these things and wrapped in them, it will not be worthy of carrying the Lord.”

Seven: (Matt 21:8) “Others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road.” These were branches of palm trees and olive branches which they used. In (John 12:13) “They took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him.”

The multitudes declared the joy of the church, in its triumph of the Lord. The palm branches were mixed with the olive ones; it was as if the spirit of triumph was blended with the Spirit of peace. The Lion has been laid in the grave, and so death was terrified, and the doors of Hades were exploded. This offered great peace for the soul, for it was exalted above death, and entered to the father’s embrace in everlasting reconciliation. St. Augustine says, “The palm branches are a motto of praise, which means victory! For, the Lord was coming for victory over death by means death. Also, with his triumphant cross he has overcome Satan, the ruler of death.”

The branches of the trees here, may have referred to the prophecies of the Old Testament, which we cut so as to spread the way for us, for the Messiah the Saviour’s coming in to our hearts. It was quite impossible for the world to accept our Lord Jesus, for being the Messiah the Saviour if those prophecies had not been spread before him in our minds and hearts, declaring his person.

Eight: (Matt 21:9) “Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest.”

The multitudes welcomed him joyfully and exalted him as ‘a king’ the Son of David, for it is only he who could save them, and exalt them to the highest. But what do those multitudes before, and those following, stand for? St. Jerome says, “The multitudes who believed in the Lord before the gospel came before him, and those who believed in him after the gospel, followed him. All of them in unity praised him in one voice and witnessed of him.” This symbolic interpretation St. Jerome copied from the scholar Oreganus who said, “We can say that those who came before are the saintly prophets who lived before his coming. But as for those who followed, these are the apostles who were close to him, after the coming of the word of God. They all declared in uniformity, in one voice, that the Saviour has become incarnate and human.” St. John Chrysostom says, “those prior ones declared prophetically of the Lord’s coming, and those that followed praised and declared that his coming has been fulfilled.”

In this way the multitudes welcomed him. Before him, came those shouting joyfully, representing the men of the Old Testament, who saw him with the eyes of faith through the prophecies. Those who followed him from behind praised him, representing, the men of the New Testament who were blessed with what the prophets had longed for.

Their praise was concentrated on proclaiming the salvation, saying ‘Hosanna’ or ‘Hoshanna’. Which is a Hebrew word that has been left the same in most of the translation. This is why St. Augustine things it an exclamation make revealing a state of mind, more than it does a particular meaning. Even though most of the fathers and scholars think it means ‘Save us’. St. Jerome says, “It means that the coming of Christ is the salvation of the world.”

The words ‘Hosanna to the Son of David...Hosanna in the highest’ as the scholar Oreganus says, “They praised his humanity by crying out ‘Hosanna to the Son of David.’ They praised his absolute correction to the house of God by crying out ‘Hosanna in the highest’.” St. Jerome says, “This means that salvation is in the highest, pointing clearly that the coming of Christ means the salvation that does not touch mankind alone, but the entire universe as well. He therefore linked the worldly issues with the heavenly ones (Phil 2:10).” St. Augustine comments on the words, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’ saying, “We understand from his words ‘in the name of the Lord’ more so by the words ‘in the name of God the Father. It could also be understood that it is in his own name, since he is the Lord. He himself said, (John 5:43) “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.” The real teacher of modesty in Christ who gave himself up and was obedient till death, the death of the cross (Phil 2:8). But he did not lose his godliness by his teaching of humility. On one hand he is equal to the Father, and on the other hand he is similar to us. Being equal to God the father, he brought about our existence, and in being similar to us, he has saved us from perishing.”

Nine: (Matt21: 10,11) “And when he had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying ‘Who is this?’ So the multitudes said, ‘this is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee!’” In this way, when our Jesus enters into our inner Jerusalem to establish his kingdom in us by the cross, all the heart shakes offering all his feelings and emotions and love to the new king. It is then that man regains his peace, and gets reconciled to heaven, and he even becomes a new heaven.

2. The Purifying the Temple:

When the Lord enters our inner Jerusalem, he goes into a holy place. He himself cleans it, and he makes a whip to expel the sellers of pigeons, and twins the tables of the tax-collectors, saying, (Matt 21: 13) “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of thieves.”

What is this whip other than the Holy Spirit, sent by the Son from the Father to prick the conscience for iniquity?

The Holy Spirit grants the inward repentance, and gives absolution from sin through the church.

By means of the planning Holy Spirit, the Lord brings back to his holy place in us his sanctification that it had lost, by converting our inner life from ‘the life of prayer’ to a commercial work even in the spiritual matters. Instead of having the heart a divine treasure, where the Lord Jesus himself is inside, a heavenly treasure that never perishes, the heart gets confused with the accounts of money changes and the selling of doves. The immense peace of God is taken away, and it gets occupied with temporary disturbance that chokes the soul.

St. Jerome thinks the Jewish priests used to make the most from the Passover feast, in which the Jews from all over the world used to come to offer sacrifices. They therefore changed the temple to a commercial center. They set the tables of the money changes, to offer loans to the people so as to buy the sacrifices. They offered them not by the interest money, for this is forbidden by the law, but by actual gifts, which in reality are covered interest money.

This is a painful picture in which the Lord’s temple has diverted from its goal. The priests have lost their spiritual work, and have changed their mission to collecting money. As the scholar Oreganus says, “Let everyone be expelled of those people who sell in the temple, particularly if doves are sold. That is, if this man sells for money what the Holy Spirit has revealed to him, the doves, and he does not teach of him for free. He is selling the work of the Spirit, and is expelled from the Lord’s altar.” The shepherds lose their spiritual work, and convert the Word of God, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit to trading. As St. Jerome says, “The Lord Jesus enters every day into his father’s temple, and he expels from his church all over the world, bishops, priests, deacons and congregation, and he addresses them with the same accusation, that they are sellers and buyers. What I am saying about the church, is applied by each one to himself, for the apostle says that we are God’s temple, and the Spirit of God dwells in us. Let our hearts be free of any trading, or a market for buyers and sellers, and free of any desire to receive gifts. Otherwise the Lord will enter in fury and will cleanse his temple without any lenience, in another way, other than that of the whip. He will raise from the thieves’ den and the house of commerce, a house of prayers.”

St. Jerome comments on driving out the sellers of doves, and overturning the tables of the tax collectors, saying, “Most People think that his greatest miracle is that of raising up Lazarus from the dead, or that of opening the eyes of him who was born blind. In my opinion I believe the most amazing miracle is that one person, despised and dishonored, having no remarkable religious position, who has come to be crucified, could have struck with only one single whip, amidst the scribes and Pharisees. These were rebellions against him, and could see with their own eyes the ruin done to their money gains. He drove out the big number of people, and overturned their money tables, and broke their seats; for there was fiery flame kindled from his eyes. The greatness of his divinity shone on his face; therefore none of the priests could lay head on him.

At any rate, according to human calculations, the temple lost, in the eyes of the religious leaders, a great deal at that time; for he drove out the buyers and sellers and overturned the tables of the money changers, and the seats of dove sellers. But, with the

logic of faith the temple obtained its sanctity for the Lord's coming in his own person in it, which did not matter to them at all. Instead of the worldly commerce there came the heavenly treasure himself filling the temple up with peace and glory. He gave vision to the blind, and healed the crippled and could make them walk (Matt 21:14) "Then the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them." St. Jerome also says, "If he had not upturned the tables of the money changers, and the chairs of the dove sellers, the blind and the lame would not have been worthy of regaining their vision, and, of walling quickly."

When the Lord dwells in the heart, he destroys all evil, and anything linked to this evil and the blessing of the Lord dwells in it. Instead of the spiritual blindness, our inward eyes are opened to witness what is heavenly. Our inward feet are healed, and our souls are released in the power of the Spirit towards eternity, after it had stopped walking for a long time, in the kingly way.

3. The Children's Praise: (Matt 21:15-17)

As the children's tongues and infants were opened in praise (Matt 21:16) the chief priests and the scribes were angry.

The little children have not read the prophecies, and neither have they seen any of the miracles. But their meek hearts got opened to the king, and their helpless tongues uttered in inward joy and glory. The chief priests and the scribes had been entrusted with the prophecies, and interpreted them. The wise men also confirmed them, and they have witnessed the miracles. But despite all of this, their stony hearts were shut before the king, and were filled with misery instead of giving praise. They cried out in anger (Matt 21:16) "Do you hear what these are saying?" For real, the children have declared the joyful kingdom of God, whereas the chief priests revealed their wrath about the evil kingdom that has no peace whatsoever. Father Moses says, "Wherever the kingdom of heaven is found, for sure the joyful eternal life is there. And wherever the kingdom of Satan is found, no doubt there is death and the grave. He who is in Satan's kingdom will not be able to thank God, for the prophet says (Psalm 115:17,18) "The dead do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down into silence. But the living (who live to God and not to sin or to the world, we praise the Lord from now to the end of ages. Alleluia)""

4. In the House of Bethany:

(Matt 21:17) "Then he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and he lodged there."

If we go back to the look of Ezekiel, we find God was concerned about those whom he called 'the rest'. These were of a few number who obeyed the Lord and listened to him. God pays attention to them, even in the midst of strict discipline which was observed subisucrsively by the people, priests and leaders.

Here too, even though Jerusalem rebelled against the Lord, by means of the scribes, the Pharisees and the Sadducees with the priests and chief priests, yet he found a place of rest in a village close by 'Bethany.' He was eager to go to this house, which is belonged to Lazarus, Mary and Martha, so he would rest there.

'Bethany' means 'the house of suffering and pain.' The world runs after earthly luxury and pleasures, but the Lord finds his rest in no other place than in the heart that becomes 'Bethany', a heart that bears the suffering for the sake of the kingdom. People want out by the thousands to welcome the Lord in Jerusalem. But he has found no open warm hearts to receive him like those of this house.

St. Jerome comments on the Lord's going to Bethany, saying, "He was poor indeed, and far from being a person who loves to show off. He therefore could not find in the big city Jerusalem a sheltering place or a home but he rather stayed at Lazarus and his sisters, very small home at Bethany."

5. The Withered Fig Tree:

The Lord's kingdom could not be established except by the destruction of the kingdom of darkness. This is why, because he wished to plant his holy vineyard, he had to destroy the unfruitful fig tree. Indeed, the fig tree had attractive leaves, to which the hungry person comes thinking he would find some fruit to eat, but he returns still hungry. In this same way the Jews had their green leaves, such as their knowledge of God, and their learning of the law, also keeping record of the prophecies. But despite this, they had no inner life that produced any fruits. They were tied to appearances that seemed outwardly bright, but they were cut off from live depths. They paid attention to literal things, but not to the spirit. Therefore what the Lord did was to destroy literal observance so as to establish the spirit, the donor of life.

The Lord stood before the barren fig tree, and so it withered by one word of his mouth. As St. Jerome says, "The night darkness disappeared with the beams of morning light."

St. Augustine comments on condemning the fig tree, saying, "The Lord Jesus realized that a particular tree deserved to become withered, for it had the leaves, yet no fruits. This tree is the Jewish assembly. They had all the writing of the prophets, which were only leaves, and Christ was hungry asking for fruit and could find nothing on it. Christ could not find himself among the fruit; for he who does not have Christ, has no fruit. He who does not cling to the unity of Christ, does not have Christ in him; moreover, he who has no love...listen to the apostle when he says, (Gat 5:22) "But the fruit of the spirit is love." The apostle shows the greatness of this cluster by means of this fruit."

We find the fig tree condemned because it has leaves yet with no fruits. In the beginning of humanity, when Adam and the sinned, they made for themselves covering of the leaves of fig trees (Gen 3:7). This refers to iniquity. Nathaniel, too, was under the fig tree as if he were under the shade of death. The Lord saw him, and he takes care of those about whom is said, (Is 9:2) “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.”

When the tree withered, the disciples were amazed; so the Lord told them (Matt 21:21) “Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea’ it will be done.” As St. Augustine says, “The fig tree of the Jews has withered, because it has rejected to carry Christ in it as a living fruit. This is why the Lord says, (Is 5:6) “I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it.” But in faith, the Lord Jesus went out, the real mountain, and was cast into the Gentile sea, so the prophetic words would be fulfilled (Is 49:6) “I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be my salvation to the ends of the earth.””

If we have the faith in Christ Jesus our Lord, he not only dries up our old fig tree that has a holy place in our hearts, but also he himself enters in us, as the mountain in cast in to the sea, so that he becomes the mystery of salvation for us. With faith we are blessed by everything in Christ Jesus, so long as we obtain him in us. St. Felixinos says, “Faith gives an a divine power in him, since he believes that everything he wants he does.”

6. The Rulers Argue with Him:

Because the Lord has given a blow to the kingdom of sin, particularly to hypocrisy, and thereby establishing the kingdom of righteousness, the chief priests and the elders of the people rebelled. It was as if they were defending the darkness, and asked him (Matt 21:23) “By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority?” This question was not to obtain the blessing of spiritual knowledge for their own construction, but it was rather to seize the chance to attack him. This is why he did not answer them, but he rather asked them another question as a response, (Matt 21:24,25) “I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: the baptism of John --- where was it from? From heaven or from men?”

They asked him in cunningness ‘by what authority do you do these things?’ St. Cyril the great says, they thought they would hurt his feelings as a breaker of the Mosaic law, for he was not of the Levi tribe, but from the tribe of Judah. He had thereby no right to teach or interpret the law...etc. They did not relies he was the one who had set the law.

The Lord answered them wisely, and he subdued their cunningness by his question about St. John the Baptist, (Matt 21:26) “And they reasoned among themselves

saying, 'If we say 'from heaven he will say to us, 'why then did you not believe him?' But if we say 'from men', we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet.'"

As much as we come forth to the Lord in a lowly heart, as much as we enter into his mysteries. He rejoices for us, and he leads us in his holy spirit to know his immeasurable mysteries. But he who uses the worldly smartness can never go in to him. He will rather stay outside, and be deprived of knowing him. The Pharisees, the priests and the elders of the multitudes have lost their lowliness, and they asked for their personal glory. They were therefore afraid of the people and could not come to the truth. As St. Cyril the great says, "Notice the acute cunningness of the Pharisees, for they ran away from the truth, and have rejected the light. They did not fear committing iniquity.

7. The Parable of the Two Sons and the Vineyard:

When the Lord destroys iniquity, he offers a justification for his action. At this point he was entering Jerusalem, and the religious leaders were rebellions against him. He therefore made it clear it was necessary to cast them out from the vineyard, and to place others, able to shepherd with a new concept, appropriate to his kingdom.

The parable we have in hand, the Lord of glory is manifested as a landlord asking his two sons to work in his vineyard, which is, his church for the account of the heavenly kingdom. The first one represents the Gentiles who began their life by rejecting to work. But they repented later, and went to work in the vineyard. The second one refers to the Jews, who said, (Matt 21:30) "I go sin," but they did not go. Truly the Jews accepted the work in the kingdom, but it was a wordy acceptance with no work at all. They therefore cast themselves out from the vineyard, to leave their place for the Gentiles who did not listen to God at the beginning, but then they obeyed him. It is really difficult for those entrusted people over God's word to leave their positions, for not believing in the truth, and leave them to the tax collectors and prostitutes who went ahead of them to God's kingdom through their faith.

8. The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers:

the Lord summarized the entire history of salvation in this parable for he showed clearly God's tender love. "He planted a vineyard and set hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country." He entrusted them over the vineyard after he had provided for them in every way for the work. But when he sent his servants asking for the fruit, the vinedressers beat some of them, killed others, and stoned them. The same thing was done for another time, and finally, (Matt 21:37-39) "Then last of all he sent his son to them saying, 'they will respect my son.' But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'this is the heir. Come let us kill him and seize his inheritance'. So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him."

In the previous parable the Jews manifested themselves as speakers with no work or deeds. They therefore have lost their position, and were replaced in their work by those who repented over their pas. Here the Lord reveals to them that throughout history they were not only idle, but they have also persecuted God's men most cruelly. Even the son of God himself, when he came as the only heir, they cast him out of Jerusalem so as to kill him.

He pronounced the verdict on them from their own mouths, for he asked them (Matt 21:40-44) "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?" they said to him, 'He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.' Jesus said to them 'Have you never read in the Scriptures 'the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?' therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken, but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.'

In this way the Lord showed them the result, which is the necessity to pull down the old building, so the kingdom of God would be established on a new foundation.

What is this rejected cornerstone? It is said that when Solomon's temple was being built, the builders found a very huge stone, and they thought it is of no use, and so disregarded it. But when they needed a rock for the cornerstone, they found nothing better than this rejected rock. This was a symbol of the Lord Jesus who was rejected by the Jewish religious people. They did not know that which connects the two walls in the new temple, binds the Jews as well as the Gentiles in him, so all would become members in the new kingdom.

St. Cyril the great explained this parable more in detail, for he said, "If anyone investigates intelligently what is meant here by those words, he will find the entire history of the children of Israel briefly spoken of in these words, who is her who has planted the vineyard? What is understood by the planted vineyard is made clear by the palmist when he speaks of the Israelites (Ps 80:8,9) "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 devout prophet Isaiah declares the same issue, saying (Is 5:1) "My will-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill." He also speaks more strongly more clearly what was said in a mysterious way (Is 5:7) "For the vineyard and traveled for a long time. If God fills everyone and is not absent from any existing creature, then how can the landowner travel for a long time? This means that after they had seen him as a burning fire when he came down on Mount Sinai to speak with Moses about the covenant, Moses was the mediator between God and the people; since that time he did not manifest himself visibly. He rather used the analogies taken from human deeds. Therefore his relation with them was as someone who has traveled away from them to a far off place.'"

Hence, as I have mentioned though he traveled, yet he was very much concerned about his vineyard. He sent to them honest servants in three different stages to ask for the harvest or the fruits from the barns of his vineyard. He has not left any period of lapse between these stages in which he did not send prophets or righteous ones to advise Israel, and urge them to offer fruits, according to the law, for the glory of life. But they were wicked, disobedient and hard hearted. Their hearts were so cruel that they would not listen to any advice, even if it was for their own good. We can see Isaiah the prophet, who was a person that went through so much toil and hardship but yet it was in vain. He said, (Is 53:1) "Who has believed our report?" They disregarded the messengers sent to them (Luke 20:10) "and sent them away empty-handed" for they had nothing good to offer to God who sent them. Jeremiah, too, rebuked the Jewish people and their rulers because of their arrogance. He warned them saying, (Jer 6:10) "To whom shall I speak and give warning that they may hear? Indeed, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot give heed. Behold, the word of the Lord is a reproach to them, and they have no delight in it." At another place he talks to Jerusalem in this way (Jer 51:9) "We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed. Forsake her, and let us go everyone to his own country; for her judgment reached to heaven and is lifted up to the skies." As I said, he calls Jerusalem Babylon; for it is not any different than Persia, with Babylon as the capital city, for it was disobedient and stubborn. They did not submit to the holy law, and maybe also because it has become scorned for not knowing God. It has chosen to worship the creation and not the Creator. It also worshiped its handcrafts; for Israel was wrong in leaving the faith and worshiping idols. This is the way by which they cast out the messengers most shamefully.

The landlord of the vineyard thought within himself "What shall I do?" (Luke 20:13). It is appropriate for us to investigate in details the meaning of these words, is the landlord using these words because he no longer has other servants? Certainly not. God is not in need of any servants to fulfill his sanctified will. But as a physician he says to the patient, 'what shall I do?' We understand by this that the physician has used every source of medical technique but all in vain. This is why we confirm that the landlord of the vineyard has been very gentle and caring with the vinedressers. But the vineyard has not benefited anything. This is why he says, 'what shall I do?' and what is the result? He wished to fulfill a greater goal, for he said 'I shall send my beloved son, they might fear him when they see him.' After he had sent the servants, he sent the son like one not to be counted among the servants, for he is the Lord and the real son. If he has chosen to take the form of a slave for the sake of provision, yet he is God, the Son of God the father himself, he has a natural authority. Have there given any honor to the one who came, being the Son, the Lord, the Omnipotent, for he is the heir to all what belongs and concerns the father? No, they have rather killed him outside the vineyard, and plotted together for a crime full of evil stupidity and ignorance, saying, "Let us kill him so we take the inheritance." But tell me, how can we accept this? Are you the Son of God the Father? Will you naturally have the inheritance? If you cast away the heir from the way, how can you be a lord who covets the inheritance. How can this not be ludicrous and silly? For the Lord, being the Son, and as the real heir to him, he has the authority with the Father. He has become man, and has called those who believe in him to come and share his kingdom, and he would be an owner with them. But as for these, they

wished to obtain the kingdom all by themselves, without him, usurping for themselves the inheritance of the Lord. This aim was impossible, and full of ignorance. This is why the devout King David said about them in the psalm (Ps 2:4) "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision." This is why the Lord cast out the Jewish assembly due to their resistance of God's will, and asked them to hand over the vineyard they were entrusted with, and that produced no fruits. God has said at another place (Jer 12:10) "Many rulers have destroyed my vineyard, they have trodden (defiled) my portion underfoot; they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness." Isaiah also said (Is 3:13,14) "The Lord stand up to plead, and stands to judge the people. The Lord will enter into judgment with the elders of his people and his princes: 'For you have eaten up the vineyard.' They have therefore returned the land without any fruit, as evil men, and hence in all fairness they will fall under hard ordeals because of their negligence and their killing to the Lord."

'He will give the vineyard to others'; Who are these others? These are the saintly apostles, and the preachers of the evangelical commandments, as well as they servants of the New Testament. These know how to discipline people in an appropriate way, without any blame. They are able to lead the people in every way that pleased God in a wonderful way. This is what you learn from the Lord's words to Isaiah to the Jewish mother which is their assembly (Is 1:25) "I will turn my hand against you, and thoroughly purge away your dross, and take away all your counselors as at the beginning." As I have said, he is referring with these words to the New Testament preachers, about whom was said at another place in Isaiah (Is 61:6) "But you shall be named the priests of the Lord, and they shall call you the servants of our God." But as for the vineyard being given to other vinedressers, not only to the saintly apostles, but also to those who followed them, though they were not of Israelite blood. This was declared by the God of all as said by Isaiah, about the Gentile church and the rest of Israel (Is. 61:5) "Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the foreigner shall be your plowmen, and your vinedressers." In truth, many of the Gentiles are counted as saints, and have become teachers and trainers. Up till today, there are men of Gentile origin who occupy remarkable positions in the churches. They sow the seeds of righteousness, which belong to Christ in the believers' hearts. They are returning the Gentiles who were entrusted, as beautiful vineyards in God's eyes."

St. Cyril also comments on the Lord's words about himself as being the rejected corner stone in this way, "The savior is the chosen stone, and he was rejected by those who were supposed to build the Jewish assembly, and he has become the cornerstone. The Holy Book draws the similarity between him and the cornerstone because he gathers both nations together: Israel and the Gentiles in one faith and one love (Eph 2:15)"

9. The Rulers Perceive his Parables:

(Matt 21:45,46) "Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitudes, because they took him for a prophet."

The chief priests and the Pharisees perceived the Lord's words with their minds, but they did not accept them in a spirit of love and construction. Instead of repenting for what they committed, they thought of plotting against him.

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Chapter XXII (Page 600)

Resisting the Kingdom

The days were drawing very close for the Lord to be glorified on the cross, declaring his inward heavenly kingdom. The adversary was resisting ferociously, concentrating every effort to work against the kingdom.

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1. The Apologizing Guests:

The Lord Jesus offers us the kingdom of heaven as a wedding a king makes for his son. Despite this the wedding was unwelcomed by the guests who did not wish to attend it (Matt 22:3). They were not invited to come and share as if they were strangers, or onlooker, or merely as friends; but they were invited as bride will unite on an eternal level with the groom, the Son. It is an invitation to enter the constant wedding, of no intermittence. But the soul, due to its inner misery, it rejects the wedding, so as to live in depression springing out of no outward circumstances, but out of shut and enclosed heart, that does not wish to be opened to the Lord, the Giver of peace and joy.

This parable as presented to us by the Lord Jesus applies to the Jews, particularly the chiefs who have rejected the Messiah's heavenly kingdom. This applies in some way or other to every soul that rejects the real kingdom inside it.

The Royal Wedding:

The evangelist says, (Matt 22:1-3) "And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said, 'The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding and they were not willing to come.'"

What is this heavenly kingdom other than the church, which is reality, is a permanent wedding? The father has made it for his son to be blessed with, and she likewise would be blessed with his coming in her midst. The church can lean on his chest, and receive from him the mysteries of his father, and be blessed with his divine capabilities, until she rises with him, and in him to the father's embrace, and share in his glories.

This is the wedding eagerly desired by the fathers and the prophets to be blessed with. They had seen it from a far through the symbols and the prophecies, until the Saint Virgin Mary bent her head in obedience and submission to God, before the angel Gabriel. She said, (Luke 1:38) "Let it be to me according to your word." She accepted the wedding inside her. Father Gregory the great says, "We can say clearly and confidently that the Father made for his Son the King the wedding by means of the mystery of incarnation. This is when the sanctified church bonded to him, and the Virgin's womb was the place to be for the wedding. This is why the psalmist says, (Ps. 18:6) "that his shade was the sun, as the groom gets out of his house. He is like the groom coming out, because God the incarnate is coming out of the Virgin's womb, the undefiled, so as to unite with the church.""

Indeed, the Holy Father sent his Spirit to the Virgin's womb to fulfill the divine incarnation by the coming of God the Word in her. He has offered to humanity the real Groom, the aim of all the people, he who was rejected by the Jews. He wishes to make of every believer a heavenly kingdom by the Groom's dwelling inside each one. He would make a spiritual wedding, and a heavenly celebration in him that could never be taken away by the world! The Lord has started his service by going to the wedding at Canaan of Galilee to sanctify it. He was proclaiming his mission began by his coming into us, to make our inward wedding, coming forth as the eternal Groom. He alone, is able to unite with us, and sanctify us, and uncover to us his immeasurable divine mysteries. For real, his invitation to us is actually to receive him as an eternal Groom who satisfies our souls.

Sending the Servants:

It is not possible for any groom to win the bride's heart unless she is willing. Even if he is able to, he will not rest unless her love to him does not spring from her heart out of her own self will. Likewise, the Lord does not wish to usurp the hearts of his people unless it is out of their own self-will. He finds it enough to repeat the invitation, and declare his profound practical love towards them by offering them his everlasting promises. He leaves them the full freedom either to accept or reject him.

The Lord says that he sent his servants, but they rejected. Once again he sent other servants (Matt 22:4) so they took them, cursed them and killed them (Matt 22:6). Regarding the Jews, the first servants were the forefathers such as Abraham Isaac and Jacob. These have obtained the promise, and have set the features of the royal road, for the Lord said, (John 8:56) "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad." But the Jews did not heed them, and did not follow in their way, for the Lord scourges them (John 8:39) "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham." Instead of rejoicing as their father did at the day of his coming, they rejected and resisted his divine work. As for the other servants, these were the prophets who very clearly, drew through the prophecies all that concerned the Messiah the king, in full detail. But the killers of the prophets (Matt 23:27) there rejected accepting the prophecies in actuality. Just as their fathers have killed the prophets, they too wish to kill them who prophesied of him.

St. Hillary, bishop of Poitiers thinks the first servants were the apostles who came to declare the Jews the wedding about which their prophets spoke of. But they rejected it, and his disciples followed them offering the very same invitation.

What the Lord did with the Jews, he does with us all. He does not get tired of sending servants to call us to this wedding in all different ways, so we accept him work in us. He calls us by means of servants, his gospel, and the surrounding events, as well as he talks to us by his Spirit that is in us. He is standing at the door, knocking, waiting for us to let him in to our hearts, as if it were his own paradise, and then we are blessed in being with him.

The Invitation:

It has always been and still is, that his call to us in by means of his servants (Matt 22:4) “See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.”

It is a divine invitation ‘Come to the wedding.’ It implies power and authority, which could entice the heart to the groom to unite with him, and be one with him, but yet with no obligation or enforcement. The groom paid the price of the invitation, by saying, ‘I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and father cattle are killed, and all the things are ready.’ The cost for the invitation is his own life, which he shed for reconciling us to his Father, the host to invite. He offers us his sanctified body and blood, spiritual food and drink, a feast for the new kingdom. It has all been prepared, waiting for us to enter the sanctified banquet, which in its essence is to rise up to the heavenly life. He has sent us his Holy Spirit in his church. His work is to release every soul from one glory to the other so as to go in with it to the divine temple. The soul will then share the angels in their liturgies and their praises, and it opens its mouth to accept stops. In this way the Holy Trinity is busy with this wedding; for the Father is the One to invite, and the Son is the Groom who pays the cost of the wedding, and the Holy Spirit is he who works in us to prepare us for the wedding.

What is this banquet that has been prepared other than the fulfillment of offering the Lord Jesus’ work of salvation through the cross. He is a sacrifice of joy and contentment to the father, and satisfaction to the human soul. This is why he says, “My oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready.” The table has been prepared, satisfying to God and people.

The scholar Oreganus thinks this divine table of God, is the Work of God. The oxen that were slaughtered are only the wonderful blessings of God prepared for us as spiritual food. The ‘fatted cattle’ are his sweet words that are so delicious. It is as if by the coming of the incarnate word, and his rising on the cross, he took us in to the mystery of the word so as to discover its greatness and its richness.

St. Hillary, Bishop of Portier, sees the oxen as referring to the glorified martyrs who have witnessed to the Lord, and have offered their lives as chosen prime sacrifice. The ‘fatted cattle’ refer to the spirituals who are nourished by the heavenly bread, so as to

soar up as birds. Then they offer to others, so as to satisfy them, the richness which they have eaten from. It is as if when we are blessed with the kingdom of heaven through our real partnership to the holy church, we then enter the banquet that will give us satisfaction. This is it for which the martyrs have offered their lives, as a price for their testimony, and for the spiritual people for their rich struggle, as a price for their love for him who redeemed them. Indeed, the blood of the martyrs, and the struggle of the spiritual ones, these are not lost, they rather remain as a deposits on which the generations survive. This will not end, but that they add to it new deposits through their martyrdom and lawful struggle. For this reason the church chants at the end of the theotokis the words, 'the martyrs come, carrying their tortures, and the righteous come carrying their virtues, and the Son of God come in his glory and in his father's glory.'

Those who accepted the Invitation and those who rejected it:

This celebration, as revealed to us by the divine inspiration in the book of Proverbs, is presented not to the wise ones who rely on their understanding, but rather to those in the streets and in the alleys, who are hungry for the divine wisdom and are thirsty for it. To such people is the banquet offered; they therefore eat of the sanctified sacrifice and are blessed with the eternal joyful wine. It is then that wisdom builds its house in them; and they themselves become the house of wisdom. This is where the Lord Jesus dwells, and wisdom itself, in them. In the book of Proverbs it is written (Prov 9:1-6) "Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her meat, she has mixed her wine, she has also furnished her table. She has sent out her maidens, she cries out from the highest places of the city, 'Whoever is simple, let him turn in here.' As for him who lacks understanding she says to him, 'Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Forsake foolishness and live, and go in the way of understanding.'"

It is an invitation to the those thirsty for wisdom. He who thinks within himself he is in a state of satisfaction, will be deprived of it. It is an invitation to the repentant sinners, with which they are blessed, more than they who think within themselves they are righteous. The banquet was held for the prodigal son, as the loving father requested (Luke 15:22-24) "Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry." But as for the elder son, even though he did not commit what his brother had done, yet he stood outside sadly, because of the banquet held, and the merriment that filled his father's house.

In the parable that the Lord spoke, the guests are shown as people disregarding the banquet, such as the elder son mentioned. He says, (Matt 22:5,6) "But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them." They are actually the elder son, for they are the Jewish people who were ahead of the Gentiles in knowing God. They did not make evil as the younger son, that is, the Gentiles. But they did not enjoy the banquet offered to the younger son. They took it 'lightly', relying on being the offspring of Abraham, and their obtaining the law, the promises, and being blessed with

the prophecies. One went to his field, and the other to his business. The people returned to their field, that is, being preoccupied with worldly affairs. The priest also returned to the temple, practicing 'trading with religion' instead of the spiritual worshiping. In this way they left Christ, Groom and his heavenly banquet, to get preoccupied with earthly issues.

These are miserable people who think lightly of the banquet. One gets deprived because of his field, or his ego that weighs him down. He is tied to his field which he thinks will last forever. He is connected to the earth, and can not raise above it, to the heavens. The ego ties him down to his surroundings, and he can not free himself to rise above it, and let his heart widen above its limitation. Another is deprived from the banquet because of his commerce, and worshiping is changed to buying and selling for the 'ego' sake, just as in the temple in the days of the Lord Jesus. His heart will be focused on the human deeds for the account of worldly gain, and temporary praise instead of eternal glory, and the constant divine wedding. As for the third, he is deprived of the wedding because of his love of evil. He meets the messenger servants sent to him to invite him to the banquet by crying, insulting and even killing them. It was as if they were coming to harm him. The evil heart is suchlike, through the dark vision he sees even the invitation to the wedding, as an evil thing, and he faces it wickedly.

What an amazing thing! When God invites the people the eternal wedding, they grumble and refuse to come. What is worse is that they curse his servants by scourging them and killing them. And when they are asked to weep in repentance, they rejoice and are thrilled according to the whims of their wicked hearts. Isaiah the prophet says, (Is 22:12,13) "And in that day the Lord God of hosts called for weeping and for mourning, for mourning, for baldness and for girding with sackcloth. But instead, joy and gladness slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating meat and drinking wine: 'Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die!'" This is why the Lord God says, (Matt 11:16,17) "But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places and calling to their companions, and saying 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance, we mourned to you, and you did not lament!'" He invited them to the wedding, but they refused to come, and he asks them to lament for their sins but they refuse. This is why the Lord proclaims his wrath against those people who reject the invitation, and said about them they were worse than the Gentiles, for he says, (Matt 22:7-9) "But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go to the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.'"

The king got wrathful for those who resisted the kingdom, who were supposed to be happy with the invitation, and to testify of it. But they rejected it, and even persecuted those who came to invite them. They obligated the Messiah the king to reject them, and hence open the wedding doors to the Gentiles. There are similar to the Queen of the South who heard of king Solomon for the glory of the Lord (1 Kings 10:1) and she hastened to him to hear his wisdom. The inspiration says, (1 Kings 10:2,3) "She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels that bore spices, very much gold, and

precious stones; and when she came to Solomon, she spoke with him about all that was in her heart. So Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing so difficult for the king that he could not explain it to her.” The Gentile came to Jerusalem that killed the prophets, and she rose with her heart towards the city of the great king, towards heaven itself. She came in a very great procession, under the guidance of God’s Holy Spirit, so as to meet the real Solomon, the giver of wisdom, and the revealer of the hearts, where nothing could be hidden from him. She came to represent the Gentiles church, that approached with the camels loaded with good stuff, and very much gold, and precious stones. What are these spices other than the feelings of love which were previously absolutely such up in passions. But now it has become laden with the sweet fragrance of Christ. The gold which was used in the making of idols and atheist gods, has become a symbol of the new heavenly life, and the accepting of Christ’s kingdom in us. He precious stones which were used ornament the idol temples, and the atheist priests’ clothes have now become a symbol for Christ himself the ‘Priceless Pearl’ (Matt 13:46) and for the doors of the higher Jerusalem and its foundation (21:19,21).

The Gentiles used to lead a life of luxury, full of defilement. Wealth was a barrier to them for knowing God, Just as the camel that cannot pass through a needle’s eye (Matt 19:24). But once they accepted the gospel message, the camel was able to go through the narrow gate, which is the needle’s eye, so as to present the Gentiles’ emotions and their wealth with all their gold and precious stones to serve the new wedding.

The Gentiles church saw the real Solomon, the source of wisdom, and the source of wisdom, and the house he built (1 king 10:4) that is, the church as a royal house for God. They also saw the food at his table and his servants’ assembly (1 king 10:5) so as to sit and eat of the prepared table: the oxen and the fatted cattle. The church eats of the sacrifice for the mystery of its life and its people. The church has entered into the wedding mysteries (1 king 10:5) “There was no more spirit in her.”

Such was the opening of the gate to the Gentiles, and the call has become to all humanity, for the Lord says, (Matt 22:9) “Go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.” The scholar Oreganus speaks of those servants sent by the Lord to the highways, as the apostles or the angels. These were entrusted to the calling of the Gentiles, for the wedding in truth is prepared. The roads refer to the world, and the highways refer, as St. Hillary, bishop of Poitiers says, to the call for the forgiveness of all their past sins in which humanity has fallen. It is an invitation to everyone, and a forgiveness of all the past.

The Wedding Robe:

The door of salvation has become wide open so all would go to the banquet. But they have to be clothed in the wedding robe, for the Lord says, (Matt 22:11-14) “But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man to him; friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Indeed, the invitation is for all, for God (1 Tim 2:4) “Desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” But not everyone accepts the grace of God that sanctifies him, actually, they are few who receive it and respond to it. It is then that they receive the garment of ‘the sanctified life’, appropriate for the divine wedding. Zephaniah the prophet says, (Zeph 1:7,8) “for the Lord has prepared a sacrifice, he has invited his guests. And it shall be in the day of the Lord’s sacrifice, that I will punish the princes and the king’s children, and all such as are clothed with foreign apparel.” The invitation has actually been addressed to the Gentiles who were in the highways, and the have become rulers and the kings children, but yet, because they did not have the sanctified garment in the Lord, they were cast out. As St. John Chrysostom says, “They will be as those people who are concerned about their outer garment, all embroidered in gold, but yet their inward soul is dressed in rags. Or, he is like someone who lives in a grand castle decorated with gold curtains, whereas he remains naked in rags.” The wedding garment for him is the inward sanctified life manifested through the practical actions. Actually, those ones who had rejected the invitation. For, the others have thought lightly of the invitation host, and hence have rejected it. But the former ones have scourged him by entering into the banquet in a defiled life, and with defiled underwear, unfit and inappropriate for the honor of the banquet owner.

Some think the wedding garment is only the new man we are blessed with in the baptism water, in the image of his Creator. The believer is committed to preserve it and keep it growing by means of God’s Holy Spirit in a life of continuous practical repentance and lawful spiritual struggle. St. Hillary, bishop of Poitiers says, “The wedding garment is the grace of the Holy Spirit, and the brightness that shines the heavenly state, which he accepts by the good confession of the faith, and so, the believer becomes with no defilement or drawback in the assembly of the heavenly kingdom.” The wedding garment is just like the new life which has become ours, as the gift of the Holy Spirit that we accept in real faith, through the baptism water, and in being blessed with the new man. But to everyone who is baptized keeps the wedding garment on....he is obliged through his faith to behave according to the gospel commandment by means of the Holy Spirit who dwells in him. For this reason St. Jerome says, “The wedding garment is the Lord’s commandments, and the deeds that fulfill the law and the gospel, and these become the garments of the new man. If anyone is found in the judgment day, having the name of a ‘Christian’ and yet he has not this garment on, he is condemned.”

St. Augustine defines the garment in one commandment the Christian is to conform to, which is that of ‘love’. Indeed, all those entering the church, which is the kingdom of heaven, obtain the baptism, and they also may fast and pray. But the quality of real love is the bright garment, without which, no one will be blessed with the banquet. The saint specifies in particular the love of enemies, for this is the real proof that uncovers our love to God and the close ones. The Lord has declared his love to enemies when on the cross, and asked for forgiveness to them. The martyr St. Stephen had the same spirit when he was being stoned, and declared he was wearing the eternal wedding garment. In loving the enemies, all the commandments are fulfilled and the new man is declared, that which we obtained in the baptism water. The power of the Holy Spirit

working in us, is then manifested. In other words, what St. Augustine says, only completes what the other fathers have said.

What follows are Rome brief excerpts from St. Augustine's words concerning this subject:

+ The wedding garment, is it the baptism? No doubt, without the baptism no one could go in to God. But, not everyone who obtains the baptism, comes to him. Therefore we cannot regard baptism as the wedding garment.

Here is the wedding garment...(1 Tim1:5) "Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith." This is the wedding garment, but it is not just any kind of love.

+ The wedding garment is worn in honor of the wedding, that is, to honor the bride and the bridegroom. Therefore, let us honor the groom and the bridegroom, and be a son to then.

+ Have the faith that works in love, for this is the wedding garment. You who love Christ, love one another, love your friends and your enemies, let not this be a burden on you.

+ To love your wife and children is to enough for a wedding garment.

Believe in God! Love God first, and let your love to him extend farther, by loving everyone who belongs to him. Do you have an enemy? Win him in love to God. Do you have a wife a child, a servant? Bring them to God. Is there a stranger? Win him over to God, bring your enemy, he will then be no more an enemy to you.

Let the love in us be absolute. Let it be refreshed and so be perfect. In this way we can wear the wedding garment.

St. Augustine.

+ In truth, love is called to be the wedding garment. Our Creator has been clothed in it when he comes to his wedding with the church. By means of God's love alone the only begotten son has unified the chosen souls of mankind together with him. This is why St. John says, (John 3:16) "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son." Therefore he who comes to the wedding banquet without having on the wedding garment, is like him who has faith yet no love.

Father Gregory the great.

St. John Chrysostom speaks of love saying it is the royal robe which a person wears, and he becomes as a queen going to the throne to meet the heavenly king, and none of the courtiers could stop her way.

Father Gregory the great thinks this kingly robe for the wedding is woven between two panels, which are the love of God and the love of a neighbour. Love is in the nature of anyone's soul; you cannot separate God's love from the love to a neighbour, or vice versa. We have spoken of this in our study of the book of Zechariah chapter 2.

The Position of those not wearing the garment:

The Lord says, (Matt 22:1,2) "Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment? And he was speechless." The time is over when it was possible to weave the wedding gown. This is why those who have no gown are silent, for they have no excuse, neither have they any capability for work.

+ At this moment there is no opportunity to come forward, or apologize, this is why all the angels and the world itself witness to his sins.

St. Jerome.

+ He who commits iniquity, and is not reborn, neither has he worn the Lord Jesus Christ, this person is unexcused; this is why it is said 'He was speechless.'

The Scholar Oreganus.

The outer Darkness:

(Matt 22:13) "Then the king said to the servants' bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The man who rejected the love in putting on the wedding garment, and obtain the release from sin, entangling himself with his sins for his lack of love, this man is handed over by Christ the king, to the servants so they bind him. He will then be deprived of the freedom of the spirit and also the freedom of the body. He cannot move his feet or his hands, for he does not know where to go, or what to do. He has chosen to stay in the inward darkness, for, his inward vision has been dimmed in enjoying the new life, and in knowing the mysteries of his Christ. For this reason he also obtains the outward darkness. This is only an extension teeth, this refers to, as St. Jerome says, to the rising of the body to share with the soul the bitterness of outer darkness.

Many are Called but few are Chosen:

When the Lord Jesus spoke of the kingdom of heaven, he differentiated between two banquets; the first is the wedding banquet which we are speaking of here. This represents the current church that carries the Groom inside her, and it is where the believers assemble as members in Christ's body. They are dressed in wedding garments, though some sneak in amongst them not dressed in such garments. As for the other banquet (Matt 8:11), it is an extension to the current banquet, where you find no one except those dressed in wedding garments.

The Lord describes the wedding feast we live in now, and he says that many are called but few are chosen. The father comment on these divine words as follows:

+ Many are those who come to the wedding, but few are those who sit at the table.
The Scholar Oreganus.

+ The good ones are many, but when compared to the evil ones we find them only a few.

The wheat seeds are many, but when compared to the chaff, they are counted only a few

St. Augustine.

Father Gregory the Great looks upon the church and sees the seeds have disappeared amidst the chaff. Many evil ones and sinners have appeared, and only a few of the righteous ones. This is why he compares it to Noah's ark, when it is wide at the bottom, where the beasts and reptiles are. As for man and birds, they are in the narrow upper place. Those that are of the body fill the ark at the bottom, but as for the spirituals, these are only a few and are at the top. Indeed, the Lord looks upon the church to find the righteous ones as the lily that is clothed in the wedding garment says, (Job 30:29) "I am a brother of jackals, and a companion of ostriches." This is the church; it contains saints, but the wicked ones are like jackals, and the careless ones are like ostriches sneaking in it.

2. Questioning Him about the Taxes:

The Lord has uncovered the Jewish religious leaders by his parables for the sake of their repentance. Instead of correcting themselves, and stopping their stubbornness, they actually increased in their cruelty. They joined themselves together so as to resist him in every way.

(Matt 22:16,17) "Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent to him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that you are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do you care about anyone, for you do not regard the person of men. Tell us therefore, what do you think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?'"

We may expect the Herodians to pose this question; for they were the ones to collect taxes. They would give part of it to Caesar, and take the rest for their personal account. But what is surprising is that the ones to pose the question were the Pharisees who were asking for their freedom from the Roman occupancy. They thought these taxes were a sign of slavery and humiliation. They looked upon the Herodians as traitors against their nation and their law. But for the sake of getting rid of Christ, and for the resistance of his deeds, they worked with the Herodians, disregarding their concept towards them which they were used to for a long time.

But Jesus knew their wiles, and said, “Why do you test me, you hypocrites? So they brought him a denary. And he said to them, ‘Whose image and inscription is this?’ ‘They said to him, ‘Caesar’s’.’ And he said to them, ‘render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the thing that are God’s.’ When they heard these words, they marveled, and left him and went their way.”

This incident was an opportunity for the Lord to declare a spiritual principle for the disciples to conform to. This was to ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s! What is surprising is that he gave to Caesar his right before giving God his rights. The Christian attitude of obedience to Caesar or to the rulers, and giving the nation’s rights such as taxes and other obligations whether they be social or financial, this is a true testimony for the account of God himself. St. Paul says, (Rom 13:1-7) “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good words, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same...Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due taxes to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.”

St. Ambrosios says, “You must yield to him as to the Lord, and the sign of this yielding is to pay the taxes. The apostle stresses that we pay not only the money but also the honor and fear.”

Therefore, there is no duality here between giving to Caesar his right, and giving God his rights. They both spring from the one heart that believes in testifying of God, through the honest obligation towards others and towards God, through the honest obligation towards others and towards God.

In this principle, moreover, there is the church’s reverence to Caesar. The church gives him his dues in providing for the affairs, and it does not interfere in politics, but is rather committed to the spiritual work. For, the church is not a state within a state, and neither is it isolated from Caesar, it rather loved and honors him, and gives him his dues. In this way the church pays his dues, but to at the expense of God’s dues, and the testimony of God.

Some fathers see in this divine statement a symbolic meaning; if Caesar represents the body, then God represents the soul. As the scholar Oreganus says, “Let us give the body some of the necessities such as Caesar’s taxes. But as for the matters that concern the nature of our souls, and that lead us to righteousness, these we have to give to God.” St. Hillary, bishop of Poitiers says, “Let us give God what is God’s, that is, to present to him the body, the soul and the will power. Caesar’s currency is of gold, and on it his image is sealed, also God’s currency has his image on it. Let us give the money to Caesar, and keep the conscience that is unblemished to God.”

We are so much in need of opening our hearts by the Holy Spirit to the Lord Jesus, and he would become absolutely his. At this point we shall not be in need of any effort or offering our life to him, giving to Christ what is Christ's. If all the senses get sanctified, and its doors are opened to accept what belongs to Christ, then it gives to Christ all of our life. But if the doors of the senses are opened to the pleasures and passions of the world, then we shall not have what is Christ's to offer to him.

We shall rather at this point offer to the world what is the world's. Concerning this St. Hillary says, "If Caesar has nothing in us that is his, then we are not obliged to render him anything. But if we rely on him, and enjoy the privileges of his rule, then we have to render his money back." I wish therefore we would not be indebted to anyone with anything, not to Satan or to sin, so we are not obliged to render it doubled. But rather let us be indebted to God for all his free gift and his love, and hence we offer our life and our love.

In another way of expression, St. Augustine says, "Just as Caesar asks for his image on the currency, likewise God asks for his image in us." This means that he who finds his image in us, possesses us and enslaves us. If God sees his image in us, it becomes his right to possess us as much as we possess him. Likewise, if Satan sees his image in us, we cannot escape from him, but he rather has the right to possess us and enslave us. If the world, too, sees its image in us, then it enslaves us, and humiliates us under its feet.

We can interpret this denarii's the Lord held, having the seal of Caesar and his writing, is only the human soul that had God's image and likeness. Even after its downfall, the Holy Spirit, once more, seal it all a new so it carries the king's image and documented on it his word. Let us be committed to presenting to the heavenly king his spiritual currency, carrying his image and his writing. Just as the currency, if neglected for a long time, needs polishing for the picture and the handwriting to appear all a new, likewise by constant repentance the Creator's image appears in our life all transfigured and bright.

The scholar Oreganus offers us a symbolic interpretation, other than the previous one for the Lord's words, saying, "Many carries two pictures; the first was handed to him by God in the creation, as the book of Genesis says, (Gen 1:27) "In the image of God he created him." The other picture is that of the man of dust (1 Cor 15:49) "Which he had taken because of his disobedience and sin, when cast out of paradise and he was enticed by (John 12:31) "The ruler of this world." Moreover, the currency or the denarii's has the image of the world's authority. This is how the deeds of the ruler of darkness are fulfilled (Eph 6:12) and they carry his image. This is why Jesus commands to return this image and to detach it from us, so we receive the original image in which we were created in the likeness of God. In this way we render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. In the very same meaning St. Paul says, (1 Cor 15:49) "And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man. So, the words, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's

only mean! Leave the image of dust! Throw away the earthly image so as to be blessed with the image of the heavenly Man. At this pint you are rendering to God the things that are God's.'""

3. A Question Concerning the Resurrection:

As the Lord was speaking of the heavenly kingdom as an eternal kingdom, one of the Sadducees came forward who was ruled by the materialistic way of thinking, particularly in the interpretation of the Holy Book, all done in a literal way. They were unable to accept the concept of the physical return of the body after its decomposition. They therefore denied the resurrection, and were shocked by Jesus' words.

They then asked him, (Matt 22:24-28) "Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after her lad married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. Last of all, the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her."

The scholar Oreganus says, "The Sadducees made the mistake of not understanding the words of the prophets, such as reading in Isaiah (Is. 65:23) "They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble, for they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them." Also in the chapter of blessings in (Deuteronomy 7:13) "He will also bless the fruit of your womb." They would then believe that this is fulfilled at the resurrection, without their understanding that he is prophesying of the spiritual blessing. Paul 'the chosen vessel' (Acts 9:15) is well aware of the blessings mentioned in the old law, does not mean the physical aspect, but he interprets it in a spiritual sense. He tells the Ephesians (Eph 1:3) "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." The Sadducees fall into the same error when they read the Psalms in literacy (Psalm 128:3-5) "Your wife shall be life a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house your children like olive plants all around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord." Whereas, those who understand the phrase about the spiritual Jerusalem, are aware that (Gal 4:26) "The Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all." They believe that in it is fulfilled these blessings mentioned in the psalm."

They told the Lord Jesus the above mentioned story, thinking it is a puzzle that cannot be solved. But the Lord, as usual, uses even the resistance as an opportunity to present the correct concepts of faith. The Lord seized this opportunity to tell us of the assured heavenly life concept, confirming it is not based on earthly concepts. The members are not linked together in physical ties, for he says, (Matt 22:29-32) "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. 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."

The Lord answered their question from two aspects from the logical aspect the eternal life is a sublime one, on the level of angels, and from the writing aspect, God is the God of Abraham the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. He is the God not of the dead but of the living.

In the eternal life we live an angelic life where there is no marriage. At this point St. John Chrysostom draws our attention "It is not because they are unmarried that they are angels, but rather because they are angels that they do not marry."

This is why our aim even concerning the monks, is to be blessed with the angelic life, and not in essence no marriage.

St. Cyril the great says the Sadducees in their wickedness dream near the Lord Jesus the Saviour of all, who is the Resurrection and the life (John 11). They sought to deny the resurrection so as to make the world lose all hope. It was possible for the Lord Jesus to confirm to them that the resurrection is from the prophets' documents (Hos 13:14, Is. 36:19, Ps.: 104:29) but he did not want to wade into wordy discussions, but he rather offered them a new taste of the resurrection. He kindled the believers' hearts towards it so as to be blessed with the exalted life of the angels.

We might ask 'In heaven, do we disregard the physical relations?'

St. Augustine answers, "In the kingdom of heaven there are no earthly relations of that sort (Gal 3:28) ""There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus," (Col 3:11) "But Christ is all and in all". If we ask a good Christian who has a wife, and he may have children from her, if he wishes to have a physical relation with her in the kingdom of heaven. He is concerned about this life in which the corrupt will be clothed with the incorruptible, and the dead with the undeadly. If I ask him one more time if he wishes to have his wife with him there after the resurrection, so she would have this angelic change that the Lord has promised his saints to have. He will absolutely affirm this positively, as much as he rejected in the first situation. This applies likewise to fatherhood, motherhood, and all other physical relations. There, you do not tell anyone 'my father'. We do not tell anyone 'my mother' but we all speak of the heavenly Jerusalem as 'Our Mother'. We do not tell anyone 'my brother', but each one calls the other 'Our brother'. Indeed, there will be a marriage on our part, for we shall come forth as one wife to him who has saved us from the filth of this world by the shedding of his blood"

St. Jerome answers, saying, "When it is said they do not marry nor do they get married, it is apparent there is not sex difference any more. In truth, they will be glorified and will be blessed with the angelic exaltation, but they will still be human; for St. Paul the apostle will still be St. Paul, and St. Mary will still be St. Mary." Once again, in his words against the followers of Jovnianus he says, "If the promise for us was to be like

angels, and there is no two sexes among the angels, then we will have no sex differentiation as the angels. At any rate, when we are raised from the dead, we carry the kind of sex we have, but we do not practice the sex function.”

St. Cyril the great says, “When every physical passion is taken away, and there is no place for any physical pleasure, then they are like angels. They present spiritual service, unmaterialistic, and they become as sanctified souls. At the same time they are counted worthy to the glory that appertains only to that of the angels.”

If we reflect on the story said by the Sadducees, it could speak of the entire church history. The woman about whom they spoke, is no other than the church that got bonded to her eternal Groom who fills her heart. But through the actuality of time, this is referred to by the seven men, because time is referred to by number 7, for the days of the week are seven, which is linked to the deeds of the law, as a man to it. The Jews therefore thought they were righteous, yet they had to accept the eternal Groom, if they die of their personal righteousness or the human personal earthly deeds. This church when it rises to her eternal Groom it will carry the angelic nature, and death can not overcome it, and hence it will need no physical marriages at the end of ages.

We in the world, need marriages because of the physical death. But when we become as angels, sin cannot reach us, and we do not fall under death, and therefore we need no marriages to beget other generations instead of the present one.

4. Asking Him About the Greatest Commandment.:

(Matt 22:34-40) “But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer asked him a question, testing him and saying, ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’ Jesus said to him, ‘you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your should, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it ‘you shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these tow commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

The Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees. The scholar Oreganus differentiated between the state of dumbness, and the state of sanctified silence. The Sadducees were struck with dumbness as a sign of their failure. They found not a word to utter against the truth. As for the sanctified silence, this is a state of willful stopping for any speech with the people, so that the soul could speak in private with God. Silence is not a sign of failure and inability; it is rather a release for the soul towards God, talking together sweetly.

+ The brightness of truth silences perpetually the voice of falsehood which is bitter and harmful.

+ The righteous keeps silent; for he knows that for silence there is a time, and for speech there is another (Eccles 3:7) but he does not become dumb. This is particular quality that concerns the Sadducees, and all who teach falsehood, for they become dumb and not silent. Even though they are dumb to the truth, yet they are not silent. This is what the Lord said to the sea, and not to man, to be dumb, for he rebuked it when it was tempestuous

The Scholar Oreganus.

When the Pharisees heard that he had made the Sadducees dumb, the assembled together. They realized the reverence of the Lord Jesus, and they feared encountering him in singleness, so they came forward as a group. Then a Pharisee of the old law came forth in cunningness testing him in the law itself, asking him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" the Pharisee may have thought the Lord to differentiate between the Mosaic commandments, and in that case he would be scorning the law. Or, they may have heard his sermon on the mount in which he completed the law, and they assumed he would admit the old law to be incomplete, and that he had come to complete it himself. In that case they would find a pretext to accuse him of. But the Lord answered wisely and truthfully, declaring the foremost commandment and the greatest, is to love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. The Second commandment to follow was not any less, but of the same importance, which is to love you neighbour as yourself.

In this brief answer the Lord showed us the commandment concept through the Christian outlook: that the commandments are all unified in one, undivided one from the other. If our love to God is boundless and is the greatest of all the commandments, our love to our brothers is not any less in importance. For, we cannot love God, who is invisible, away from our love to our brothers who are visible. By our love to God and to man we make perfect all the commandments and the prophets. This is on one hand, on the other hand the Lord wished to assure us of an important fact, which is that the commandments, it is rather a life of love lived and put into effect by man.

+ These alone are the ones to accept the greatness and the priority of love in their lives. Not only do they love the Lord, but they attempt within themselves to fulfill this through three conditions that is, with all their heart they inwardly cling to the perfection of this love, its thoughts and deeds. Also with all their souls, they have to be ready to sacrifice themselves for the service of God's sake. It is he who has created everything, and when it is needed for serving his word, let this sacrifice be made. For God loves all of the soul, when he does not find any part of the souls that is away from the faith; and he find they love him with all their thoughts, and they think or speak of nothing but of godliness alone."

The Scholar Oreganus.

+ My brother is just like me, made in the image of God, it is appropriate for me to love him as much as I love myself. It is necessary that I care about him as much as of my own flesh and blood. I have to deal with him in love, in gentleness and tenderness,

forgiving him his thoughts as much as I forgive my own thinking, and as much as I desire the forgiveness of others for my own mistakes.

Father John of Kroustadt.

How do the law and the prophets depend on those two commandments?

+ He who fulfills all what is written concerning God's love and the neighbourly love, is worthy of receiving God's highest gifts. The first of these is the word of wisdom by means of the Holy Spirit, through which comes the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit (1 Cor 12:8), "For to one is given the word of wisdom through the spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit." When he is well equipped with all of these gifts, he rejoices in God's wisdom, and his heart is filled with the love to God. His soul is enlightened with the light of knowledge, and his mind with the Word of God.

+ He who has love, will not rejoice in injustice, he will rather rejoice constantly with the truth.

+ He who has love tolerates patiently all kinds of ordeals. He does not have partial faith, but rather full faith in everything. His hope is not partial either, but he rather hopes in everything. There is nothing not tolerated by love.

The Scholar Oreganus.

5. The Lord Asks Then About Himself:

The thoughts of the Jewish rulers were resisting the kingdom in every possible way. But the Lord put them to shame by uncovering who he is as the Lord to David the king. For, he asked the Pharisees, (Matt 22:42-46) "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is he? They said to him, 'The Son of David.' He said to them, 'How then does David in the Spirit call him 'Lord', saying 'The Lord said to my Lord,' 'Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool?'" If David then calls him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question him anymore."

No one could answer him for he has revealed to them that the Messiah, the Son of David is his Lord, and those who resist him submit to him at his feet. It was as if the Lord was warning them of the resistance, for he came to save and not to condemn. He opens the door to receive them, so they would not be found in the great day of the Lord as resistant enemies.

+ Christ is the Son of David and his Lord. He is David's Lord continuously and his song according to time. He is David's Lord, born of the father. He is also David's Son, born a son to the virgin Mary, and conceived through her by the Holy Spirit. Let us hold on strongly to both of them.

If our Lord Jesus Christ had not granted them that he becomes man, then
humanity would have perished.

St. Augustine.

+ The Word is with us for he is God. He has taken our image, and did not scorn our
lowly humanity so that those under the sky would be saved.

St. Cyril the Great.

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Chapter XXIII

The woes Befalling those who Resist the Kingdom.

In the previous chapters the evangelist our teacher St. Matthew uncovered the role played by the Pharisees, the scribes and the seduces, together with the herodians in resisting the heavenly kingdom. The Lord diverted their resistance into an opportunity to teach them, with the other people, the new concepts of His kingdom. But when they resisted Him and persisted on doing so, they fell under the woes, not because He was angry at them, but as a normal outcome to this resistance. What the Lord declared as misfortunes and woes befalling them is a normal fruit to the evil life they accepted to lead so willingly. The Lord in His speech, pointed out the fruits of their deeds, giving them a chance to reconsider. At the same time he warned his disciples lest they fall in what those resistance fell in.

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1-Teaching Without any Work:

(Matt. 23:1-3) “Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to his disciples, Saying ‘The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat. Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do. But do not do according to there works; for they say and do not do’”. The Lord had to declare the woes before the multitudes and the disciples, not to scandalize the scribes and the Pharisees, but so as to warn his people lest these by their actions, be an offense to them. What is more important, lest his people fall in what the others have fallen in. What is surprising is that the scribes and Pharisees as eager as they were to attack the lord, yet He in all compassion and gentleness said to them ‘Whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do!’ It was as if he urged the multitudes to submit to them not because of their attitude, but because they sat on Moses’ seat.

The scribes and the Pharisees have sat in Moses’ seat, that is, they were handed his law so as to record it, read it and interpret it. What they spoke of was not of their own, and neither was it the fruit of their wicked hearts, but it was the fruit of the seat they sat on. As for their deeds, these were bitter and fatal sermons that carried the fruits of their defiled hearts. This is why the Lord encouraged the multitudes to listen to them regarding what springs from the chair, and not what springs from their hearts.

This is the same case with each haughty servant who offers to others the word of God, not from his own, but from the Holy Book without profiting himself from it. As St. Augustine says “The haughty servant is counted with Satan, but as for the gift of Christ, the sermon word, this does not corrupt, but it rather overflows in purity through him. It flows as water to a fertile land, and hence the servant will be as a canal of rock, unable to offer fruits by the rocky canal of water to the flower basins in the garden.” One may ask:

How do we observe what those wicked ones are saying, whereas the Lord says on another occasion (Matt 12:34,35) “An evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things....Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things?”.

St. Augustine answers saying, “The evil one gets out evil from his heart, because his heart is wicked. The Lord Jesus does not ask us to obey evil ones, because what they get out of the treasure of their wicked hearts is different than what they speak of when they are in Moses’ seat. As an example of this: at the court, the guard speaks out what the judge says. What he says is not attributed to him as long as he speaks out in the presence of the judge. What the guard says at his home is different than what he says when he is at the court room. For, he only speaks out what he has heard of the judge. The guard speaks out the penalty, whether he wants it or not, even if it is to be addressed against a friend of his. He also speaks out the innocence of so and so, whether he wants it or not, even if it is for the good of his enemy. If the guard speaks out according to his heart’s will, he would give an innocent verdict to his friend and would punish his enemy. But since he speaks out from the judgment seat, he could punish his friend and release his enemy. Such is the case with the scribes as well. If they were to speak out according to their hearts’ will, you would hear them say (Is 22:13) “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” But if they speak from Moses’ seat, they would say ‘Do not kill, do not make adultery, do not steal’ Therefore, let us act according to what the official seat declares, according to the mouth of the church, and not as your heart speaks out. Hence, do not be disturbed when you hear the Lord’s words (Luke 6:44, Matt 7:16) “ For every tree is known by its own fruit, For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush”. But sometimes the grape clusters get entangled between the branches. Therefore, when you hear ‘the thorns’ do not disregard to think of the grapes, but search and you will find the roots of the thorns. You have to be able to discern them from among the grape roots. Know well that one of them points to the heart of the scribes and the Pharisees and the other points to the seat of Moses.

For real, let us accept the servants’ words, and not follow their weaknesses and their wickedness, as well as not judge their actions. This is for our part; but as for the servants’ part, it is appropriate for them that their actions be in accordance with their words, so that their sermons and guidance be not changed to ‘theoretical philosophy’. This is why St. John Chrysostom says, “There is nothing worse than to be philosophers in words and not in deeds”.

The Lord says, (Matt 23:4) “For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers”. The commandment in itself is not impossible or tedious to perform, but when it springs from teachers who do not struggle for it, the multitudes find it too difficult to bear. The teachers have bind it not to carry it with the people, but to burden others with it. But as for them, they do not even think of moving it with their finger. As a contrast, the same commandment if provided by struggling and experienced teachers, the people are happy with it, and they are only too ready to carry it with them. This is what the Lord Jesus Himself did; when He saw the people racing after the positions, and they bind for their brothers heavy burdens which they themselves do not wish to move with one of their fingers, the Lord then leaves His glorious seat to descend to his people, carrying our burdens, and fulfilling the law instead of us. Hence, the burden is easy and light to carry.

2. Asking for the foremost positions:

Those hypocrites have left God’s commandments to others, whereas their own hands stretched out not to carry out the commandment, but rather in outer appearance by

means of which they would be seen by people. As the Lord says, (Matt 23:5) “But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments”.

What are these broad phylacteries that cover their heads, and the borders of their expensive garments that cover up their legs, other than paying attention to their appearances from the top of their head to the tips of their toes? They labor after their expensive outer appearance which covers up a hollow inward life, and a soul that lost its life.

The hypocrite is busy with his beautiful broad phylactery that covers his head and mind, and hence he does not think about his inner life affairs, and neither does he think about the salvation of his soul. He is unable to be exalted in his mind to what is heavenly, but he remains worrying about the earthly short-lived beauty and the vain praise. As for the expensive golden hems, these paralyze the movement of his feet, and so he stands stiff for onlookers to stare at him. He is unable to walk on the road which is difficult, but leading to the kingdom. He is worried about the hem of his garments on the road to the heavenly kingdom.

St. Jerome says, “Everyone who behaves in such a way so people look upon him is only a scribe and Pharisee. Woe to us we miserable ones, heirs to the vice of the Pharisees. When God gave Moses His covenant, He commanded (Deut. 6:8) “you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.” This is what those words mean: “Let my teachings on your hands be completed day and night.” But the Pharisees interpreted this commandment literally. They used to write the commandments on small leather strips, twist them, and bind them on their heads, to carry them everyday before people. We see this custom nowadays with the Indians and the Babylonians, who carry this crown to walk with before people. These bandages were called ‘Phylacteries’, derived from a Greek word meaning protection. According to their thinking, he who has this on, has special kind of protection. So, the Pharisees did not understand that they had to carry the commandments in the heart and not on the body. Moreover, their treasuries and their boxes were full of books, but as yet they had no knowledge of God.

Hypocrisy did not only concern their clothes but it concerned all their life. They asked for human honor wherever they may be, as guests at banquets, or leaders in assemblies, or even in the market place, for the Lord says, (Matt. 23:5-7) ‘They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the market places, and to be called by men “Rabbi, Rabbi”’.

Hypocrisy pulls the heart of the Rabbi from its inner depths to preoccupied with the turban he covers his head with, and also to keep him thinking of the hem of his garments. His inner life therefore is absolutely vacant; for he cannot ask about what concerns his life or the life of his brothers, he only asks what is for his vain glory. If he is invited to a banquet, instead of sharing others their joy or their grief in practical inward love, he races to the foremost seat. If he is in an assembly, he is not concerned about offering what is constructive, he is rather asking for the foremost place. If he goes to the market place, he does not consider himself like the other people, he rather asks for greetings and titles, and listen to them calling him ‘Rabbi, Rabbi’. All of this made the greatest teacher, our Lord Jesus Christ to begin His service with a wedding banquet in which He sat in the last seat so as to serve them. He offered them His overwhelming wine of His love instead of the water pots of their cold hearts. In assemblies too, He did not sit in the front seat, but in His humility He pulled the multitudes to obtaining the blessing of the truth. He humbly went to the market place to be among the people as one of them,

carrying them on His shoulders for being His sheep, that can talk but are still sick. He embraced them in love and released them to the heavens.

The Lord Jesus goes on speaking about the rejection of earthly honors ,saying (Matt. 23:8-12) “But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’, for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father , He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Does the Lord Jesus want us merely to cancel the titles ‘teacher, father, rabbi’ regarding the spiritual people?.

The Lord Jesus says not to call ourselves a father on earth. It is as if He wanted us to cancel our outlook on spiritual leaders considering them as fathers on earth, that is, according to the body of dust. The Lord Jesus, when He came down on earth in our human nature, He wished our vision to be open towards heaven and not earth. Also our relation with everyone, particularly the spiritual leaders, is not linked to the earth but to heaven, and be blessed with them in Christ Jesus our Lord. We therefore are not to know for us any earthy physical rulers or fathers or teachers away from Christ, but we should rather know them as spiritualists in Him.

Although the Lord said not to call anyone on earth ‘father’, yet the apostle says (1Cor. 4:15) “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.” He is proud of being their father, because in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel! One more time, the apostle is not considered a breaker of the divine law when he is proud to call Onesimus a spiritual son to him, for he says, (Phil. 10:12) “I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains...my own heart.” In the power of the Spirit St. John calls his people ‘My children’, (1 John 2:1, 3; John 3:4). When away from Christ, the priest loses his spiritual fatherhood, and his call would become inauthentic. But when in Christ, he carries God’s fatherhood to His children, He is hidden behind God himself, and he offers his people what is God’s, and not what is for himself.

What we said about fatherhood, we say it again regarding the naming of the spiritual leaders as ‘teachers’, for One is your Teacher, the Christ, so as not to understand these words literally, but rather so as not to accept from man his personal teachings. We do not call him a direct teacher to us, but to accept him when he comes to us hidden in the teachings of Christ the Truth, He does not teach from himself, but he rather declares the word of Christ, His gospel, His testimony and His life. This is why the Lord Himself tells His disciples (Matte 28:20) “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” The Lord gave them the right to teach by saying, ‘teach them’. They are called ‘teachers’ but they do not teach away from Christ, but rather ‘teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you’. This is by means of ‘I am with you always’. They are real teachers as long as they teach for the account of the Lord, and in His name. It is not for their own account or of their own invention.

It is not considered breaking the law, that the apostles confirm the existence of teachers in the church as long as they are hidden in the Lord. The apostle says (Rom. 12:7)

“He who teaches , in teaching”, and he calls himself a teacher (2 Tim 1:11) “To which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.”

Likewise is it concerning the calling of others ‘my lord.’

There are people, due to category differences, at that time, the apostles set in the spiritual spirit of the gospel and in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have set commandments for the lords and the slaves. This is not to confirm the differences, but rather to testify of the truth, and to proclaim the spirit of brotherhood with the lords towards the slaves. Also the spirit of submission from the slaves towards their lords ,but yet, in the Lord. In all of this, every body acts trough the view of the Lord Jesus (Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22; 1Pet. 2:18). By means of the Spirit, it was possible for the humanity to break down slavery, and for people to accept each other as brothers, members as one to the other. As for the spiritual leaders, the Lord Jesus did not wish them to have authority over the people, unless it is in the Lord through the Holy Spirit. The apostle St. Paul writes to St. Philimon saying to him in authority but yet in the Lord (Phil. 8,9,19) “Therefore , though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting , yet for love’s sake I rather appeal to you....not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides.” He is the Lord to give order, but He asks it in love.

The two apostles St. Paul and St. Sila were not embarrassed when the jailer at Philippi told them (Acts 16:30) “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” This title was not a title to flatter them with, but it was because he realized their power in the Lord. As for the apostles, they did not care about the title, but they were rather concerned about the man’s salvation and his own household. When the spirit of the ‘kindled spiritual life’ is prevalent, titles are fearless in the shepherd’s life. His eagerness for saving every soul fills his heart, and hence there is no hypocrisy or pride in him.

In brief, we say that the Lord Jesus did not mean the wiping out of titles in a literal fatal sense, but He rather wished us to meet the spiritual leaders through Him personally. They would accept Him as spiritual ones in heaven, and not to get related to them through hypocrisy and sweetly coated words. This is why He goes on (Matt. 23:12) “And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and who humbles himself will be exalted.” What is dangerous is that the leaders seek leadership instead of service. They exalt themselves so as to fall. But as for the humble leader, titles do not increase or exalt him; but he rather increases in his feeling of meekness, and a sense of responsibility and more love in his heart so as to serve everyone for the Lord ‘s sake and not for people.

St. Jerome says, “There is a great difference in calling someone naturally a father or a teacher, and in it being for flattery alone. When we call someone a father, this is in reverence and respect to his age. And when we call him teacher, it is only because he shares the real Teacher.”

3. Wronging Others yet practicing Worship:

Hypocrisy extends not only to attract the servant to the vain worldly glory, but also it wrongs the widows and needy ones so as to satisfy himself. His actions are covered in these appearances of worshipping and prolonging prayers..

The Lord says (Matt. 23:13,14) “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.”

In this way when the ‘ego’ is increased, the shepherd does not only ask for honor, but he also goes after materialism on the account of his congregation, and hence he becomes filled with it. He is unable to enter the hingely road, the narrow and hard one. He rather stands outside, blocking the way to others, and as result is obstructed, as well as

obstructing others. As the prophet said (Hos. 6:9) “As bands of robbers lie in wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way to Sheehem; surely they commit lewdness.”

St. Jerome says, “At any rate the teacher who stands in offense to his disciples through his wicked actions, he shuts the heavenly kingdom before them.”

4. Being an offense to others:

(Matt 23:15) “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.”

The hypocrite exerts much effort in traveling and hardship so as to win one single proselyte. But when he wins him to the faith, the proselyte discovers in him a lot of hypocrisy, so his trust in the Pharisee or scribe becomes shattered. He comes to be aware of the false appearance of his teacher, and he is no longer attracted to his words. He rather focuses his attention on the hidden and evil deeds of this Pharisee, and he decides to leave him with no return whatsoever. He no longer opens his heart to any other preacher of the faith, even if the latter is a good man, for the first experience has destroyed the proselyte. This proselyte may go another way: even if he does not leave the faith openly, yet in his practical behavior this is implied, for he has been influenced by his hypocrite teacher and hence he follows spiritually this example. He could become even worse, and as a result the hypocrite shepherd could push the proselyte to the fire of eternal darkness.

St. John Chrysostom connects on the previous statement, saying, “The accusation here springs from two aspects. The first one is your uselessness in saving others, for they require a lot of money to save one person. The second aspect is their carelessness about keeping safely this one they have won over. They are not only known for negligence, but also for betrayal, as they offend him by means of their evil life. They could even make him, by means of their wicked life, worse than themselves. The proselyte does not stop at the evil of his teacher, but if he sees his teacher a good person he either follows him as his example, or if he sees him as a wicked one, he then overrides him in wickedness, due to the evil tendencies of man towards evil.”

As St. Jerome says, “They struggled to make one proselyte out of the honest people, and boeing him to God’s congregation. But if this proselyte looks upon his teachers, and he realizes their deeds destroy their teachings and go contrary to them, the proselyte goes back to the first state he was in. By returning to the Gentile state, he is considered ungrateful, and he therefore deserves a worse punishment than the state he was in before his acceptance of the faith.”

5. The materialistic outlook in worshipping:

Hypocrisy destroys the vision of the teachers. Instead of judging spiritually, even in the materialistic matters, they judge from a materialistic point of view even in the spiritualities. They see the temple gold better than the temple itself, and the oblation of more value than the altar itself. He who swears by the gold of the temple or the oblation is committed to the vow, or, he who swears by the temple itself or the altar itself is of no importance. In this way when the inner vision is dimmed, it becomes blind, and the soul is attracted to the holies and it asks for what is materialistic only.

St. Jerome sees they behave not in the fear of God but in their desire for riches. He who swears by the gold or the oblation is committed to paying the gold and the oblation, which is of profit to the priests. But he who swears by the temple or the altar, and is too miserly to be committed to the vow, this means nothing to them in their hearts.

6. Being literal in the commandment, and spiritless:

They appear when carrying out the commandment, to be extremely meticulous “For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy and faith.” The former things are planted in very small quantities in homes for individual usage only, but they leave out the weightier matters of the law. For the sake of appearances, they fulfill the trivial matters under the cover of being meticulous, but as for the hidden commandment essence, this is untended. They have hatred in their hearts, jealousy and envy, and they leave out truth and faith. But as yet, they appear as lovers of the truth, and its defenders, as if they are pure doing no one any injustice and are pious. As the Lord says (Matt 23:24) “Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.”

St. Jeremy thinks this is greed in the part of the Jewish leaders. They care about the tithes concerning the vegetables of little value because they get them into their homes. But as for the commandments concerning mercy towards the poor, the widows and the orphans, and the love of God, these are disregarded. As St. Cyril the great says, “They are meticulous in the commandment that serves their material purpose, and their greed, and they are careless in the commandments that concerns their relationship with God, and their spiritual life. This is despite the fact that breaking any commandment is breaking breaking the entire law. For it is said (James 2:10) ‘For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all, for he makes it with no law.’” If any of these important commandments is disregarded, what words will he find will enable him to get rid of the punishment he deserves? This is what the Pharisees deserved as cruel remarks of shame, for the Lord has judged them (Luke 11:42) “But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herb, and pass by justice and the love of God.” They are more covetous than others, and are eager for ugly gain, and so they commanded the necessity of observing the law of the tithes very accurately and literally, so they would not cancel from their accounts the least of these matters, and the seeds that are of no value, whereas they disregard what had to be observed as the important commandments by Moses. This is such as the truth that implies justice in the verdict and the love of God. The Spirit has rebuked them in the voice of king David (Ps. 82:1) “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?” He also accused them as said by Isaiah, who asked how the honest city Zion has become a prostitute, totally blame-worthy. “Justice used to dwell there, but now murderers; its silver is now cheated, and its traders mix wine with water. The rulers of the city are rebellious and partners of thieves. Each of them loves robbery and follows donations. They do not side the orphan, and the call of the widow does not reach them. Judging unrighteously is not the work of the lovers of brothers.”

St. Ambrosius comments on speaking of the Pharisees as ‘blind’! He explains they are inexcusable. They have seen the Lord Jesus but it was according to the physical blind spiritual vision, for the literal worshipping has dimmed their hearts. He said, “The Jews did not see Him although they saw Him.” But the men of faith who became before them have not seen the Lord physically, but they have witnessed Him spiritually, for these had the enlightened vision. This is why the Book says that the congregation witnessed the voice of God (Ex.2:18). The saint comments saying, “It is evident the voice is heard and not seen, for the sound is nothing but waves the ear hears and the eye does not see. This is a deep concept that urged Moses to confirm that man sees the voice of the Lord. He can see it in the heart where the inward eyes can perceive Him. Abraham had seen Him, as it

is written (John 8: 56) “Abraham rejoiced to see My day.” He saw the Lord although he did not see Him physically. Those who cried out “Crucify Him, crucify Him “ these have not seen Him, because if they had known He was the King of glory, they would not have crucified Him {1Cor.2;8 }.

7. Appearances in worshipping, yet with no life.

For people’s sake, they appear as being meticulous, not only in carrying out the commandment, but also in the rituals. They were very concerned about the cleanliness of the cup and the plate from the outside, yet they did not care what they carried inside for it was unseen. Then therefore seemed like beautiful white graves from the outside, but from the inside they were full of rottenness and every defilement.

Indeed, it is very dangerous for man to be concerned about the outer appearances in worshipping, without encountering the Lord Jesus Himself, the essence of our worship and mystery of our life. In this case worshipping will not be a cup for salvation, but it will rather carry death for the soul and hardship for the body. Man’s life will be transformed to a beautiful grave from the outside, described by people as spiritually beautiful and pure, for it is painted, where as in its inside it contains a dead and defiled soul, where Christ cannot find a dwelling for Himself in. As St. Jerome says, “Just as the saint is God’s temple, likewise is the sinner who makes of himself a grave.”

8. Those Resisting the Truth under the Cover of Religion:

The scribes and the Pharisees were concerned about building the graves of the prophets, and decorate the graves of the righteous people. But by doing so they testify what their forefathers have done to the prophets and the righteous, for they have killed them. Here, too, they were going on in their fathers’ measurements, plotting to kill the Lord Jesus Himself St. Jerome speaks to them according to Christ’s own words, “In your turn fill up the measurement of your forefathers, for, what they were unable to fulfill, you continue. They have killed the servants, and here now you are crucifying the Teacher. They have killed the prophets, and you are crucifying Him who was prophesied of by the prophets”.

In this way hypocrisy drives man to commit one evil deed to the next until he finally resists the truth totally. They offer the blood of the innocent a cheap price in their eyes. He warns them of this detrimental disease which is hypocrisy that has driven them to the whirlwind of vain appearances and earthy temporary honor. This led them to usurping the rights of the widows, and covering themselves behind the preaching motto, and hence they make the proselytes enter hell fire. Behind the curtain of the commandment they provide what is apparent, and break the essence of the matter. In this way, they are wrapped with the appearances of worshipping, and truly they condemn themselves of death, in their body coverage. Finally, here they are plotting to kill the only begotten Son of God as a price for keeping their position and authority and honor under the cover of defending God’s glory, the law and the prophets.

The Lord continues His words to them (Matt.23:33-35) “Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore indeed, I send you prophets, wise men and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city . That on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth , from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zachariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar”.

Who is Zachariah son of Berachiah ?

St. Jerome thinks that in his time there were three options:

- 1- The prophet Zachariah was one of the minor prophets, even though his father's name is in the accordance with the Lord's words. But the Book did not mention anything about the shedding of his blood between the temple and the altar, particularly because the temple at his time was merely in ruins.
- 2- Some others think he is Zachariah John the Baptist's father, who has been killed because of his prophecy about the Saviors' coming. But St. Jerome does not accept this suggestion.
- 3- He is Zachariah killed by Joach king of Judea as mentioned in (II Chronicles 24:21). But his father's name is mentioned in the Holy Book was Jehoiada. St. Jerome thinks Berachia means 'blessing' or 'blessed from the Lord', and Jehoiada means 'holiness', and that the man had two names. This is why St. Jerome supports this opinion.

9. The Judgement of Eternal Destruction :

They pretended to be zealous for the Lord's glory, the temple, the old law and the prophets, and they regarded the Lord as One resisting all of this. They pushed themselves in with the multitudes to the eternal destruction by their distortion of the truth. They therefore carry the fruit of their deeds, as well as their fathers' deeds.

The Lord says (Matt.23:36-39) “ Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say : ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord !’.

The Lord wept over Jerusalem when He drew near to it, and He said (Luke 19:42-44) “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation”. The Lord Jesus still weeps over every soul that receives Him as Jerusalem, and has become the temple for Him, then it returned to be defiled and resist Him. The scholar Oreganus says, “Actually, we are the Jerusalem that Jesus wept over it. After we came to know the mysteries of the Truth, and the Gospel words, and the church edification, and after we have seen the Lord's mysteries, we still commit sins ! The Lord wept over our Jerusalem due to its sin, for the enemies besiege it, and ruin its buildings in it, and they leave no stone one on top of the other. This is what is happening now; for, after a man lives an absolute monastic life for long years, he is defeated before the physical attraction and is unable to tolerate the necessary things for purity. Then, man becomes defiled, and leads an undefiled life, and it is as if he does not leave one stone on top of the other. At another place we read (Ex.18 :14) that all his righteous deeds are disregarded, but he would die because of his betrayal and the sin he has committed. This is the Jerusalem that should be wept over.

St. Cyril the great says, “Here you can see that for real, He often asks them to grant them His mercy, but they rejected His help. Therefore God's holy law has condemned them and has detached them of the membership in His spiritual home.”

St. Jerome says, “I came as a hen to protect them, but they received Me in hatred and betrayal, I came as a mother, and they assumed I came to kill them, so they killed Me.”

St. Augustine thinks the Lord drew the similarity between Him and the hen, because when it embraces its eggs, or little ones, her body is greatly weakened, and its feathers drop off, due to her care of her little ones. It is as if this is a symbol to the work of the Lord Jesus, who came down for us, carrying our frailties in His love and divine care.

Chapter XXIV

The Signs of the Kingdom's Coming.

The Lord Jesus' words about the coming of the heavenly kingdom preoccupies the minds of many, for it is a prophetic message that announces the eternal kingdom, and His coming in the church of the New Covenant. This is merged with the coming inside the soul.

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1- The Pulling Down of the Old Temple:

(Matt. 24:1,2) "Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, ' Do you not see all these things? Assuredly I say to you, not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down".

The Jews regarded the temple as the sign of their King. It is the only place where God declares His glory, and where He accepts from the hands of the believers, the sacrifices and offerings. Wherever the believer may be ,when he is confronted with an ordeal, he looks towards the temple and is blessed with God's help. The temple huge buildings was a sign of the greatness of their kingdom. This is why the disciples wished to show the Lord Jesus these buildings. But the Lord answered them " not one stone shall be left here upon another that shall not be thrown down". What did the Lord mean by these words ?.

The temple, in all its holiness, has been transformed in the life of the Jews due to their hypocrisy and materialistic thinking into an obstruction stone before the spiritual worshipping. They were preoccupied with the greatness of the outer temple skeleton, rather than the sanctity of the inward heart temple. Throughout the ages, they were concerned about repairing the building and not the heart. This issue was tackled by most of the prophets in their life so as to correct this concept, particularly by Jeremiah the prophet. Some of his famous words were (Jer.7:4) "Do not trust in their lying words, saying 'The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord". Ezekiel the prophet followed

him announcing to them (Ezek.10:18,19) “Then the glory of the Lord departed from the threshold of the temple, and even the entire city” (Ezek.11:22,23)

What the Lord said has been exactly fulfilled in the year 70 AD This was when the Roman soldiers, under the leadership of Titus, insisted on destroying the entire temple. This was a declaration of establishing the new temple of the New Covenant Church, in new concepts.

At any rate, this is the work of the Holy Spirit in the baptism water: to destroy our old person, where no stone will be left on top of the other because of his wicked deeds in us. A new temple will be established, not of the making of our own hands, which is the new man in the image of our Creator. This work is the beginning of the kingdom’s coming in us, and an earnest of obtaining the eternal kingdom. Through this, we await joyfully the Lord’s coming as the Groom for our souls.

2-The Appearance of the False Christs:

(Matt.24:4,5) “Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately saying “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’ And Jesus answered and said to them “Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ’, and will deceive many’.”

God, in establishing the kingdom, He declares Himself in us considering us His holy temple. But the adversary does not face this in silence, but he rather increases his war against us. Just as Jesus establishes His kingdom in us, likewise does Satan send deceivers who claim they are christs, so as to establish Satan’s kingdom inside man.

The disciples asked about the Lord’s final coming, they showed what goes on in the human minds at all ages, which shows their concern about knowing the future and defining the times. But the Lord did not define any of the times, He thought it is sufficient to provide them with the signs, not to know the times but so as not to be deceived by the misleading christs, who only appear to resist the Truth under the cover of religion itself.

Many religious writers, and current students of the Holy Book, are busy in setting a definite time for Christ’s coming. Some sects, who are basically non Christians, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, these change the Word of God, from the Word for salvation and obtaining the kingdom of heaven, present inside the heart, into stiff arguments of concepts that pull us away to hot discussions of defining the exact timing, the thing absolutely rejected by the Lord.

The Lord has made clear the aim of His words, about the signs of the coming at the end of the chapter, which is, the constant watchfulness, and the constant awaiting of the kingdom. That is, preparing the soul as so to encounter the Groom eternal, to join Him in sharing His glories.

3-The Uprising of Wars and Disasters:

(Matt.24:6-8) “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilence, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows”.

It is not surprising that the signs for the Lord's coming in its totality, represent various aspects of sorrows, sufferings and disasters. For, this is the way, prepared for His coming. How so? Whenever the adversary, that is, Satan, realizes the kingdom of Christ is coming at the door, his wars are increased against the believers, so as to win over as many as he can as members in his kingdom, resisting Christ's kingdom. All of this increases the watchful believers in their strength and stability and are thus exalted. It is as if through these hardships, Satan's evil cup is filled up to the brim, and the cup of those who struggle is filled with blessings. The end, therefore, draws nearer so that Satan and hosts obtain the fruits of their evil, whereas the real strugglers obtain the crown.

The beginning of these sufferings aroused by the adversary is to prepare the soul for a choking atmosphere of wars and rumors of wars, and divisions on the level of nations and kingdoms. Also there will be pestilence, and earthquakes that occur, Satan wishes to destroy the people's emotions, so they see their brothers as evil ones divided, and arousing wars. They therefore live in the fear of wars, and those who are untouched by wars, these are exposed to pestilence and diseases, and get disturbed in their own life. And if they escape diseases, they are chased by earthquakes which happen all of a sudden. The adversary has the aim of making the believers be far from the joy of Christ's coming. Satan preoccupies them with human problems such as wars and with health and problems of nature such as earthquakes. It is as if the entire world has become dimmed in the believer's eyes, with no one to help or for him to find any support.

If we put aside the literal meaning, so as to contemplate the kingdom of God inside us, we notice that as soon the believer draws near with the Holy Spirit towards his Christ, he finds the evil one preoccupying him with many problems that concern others, or may be his own body, or the visible materialistic world, all of which make him forget about the salvation of his soul and thoughts in the King, Jesus Christ.

4-The Hardships to be Faced:

(Matt.24:9,10) "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another."

When man accepts God's kingdom inside him, he is transferred from the general hardships, that is the outer circumstances around by the enemy against the kingdom. This is to confirm the believes and make them forget about Christ, and Satan then takes them to personal hardships that concern them alone. The enemy arouses others to act against them to give them a hard time, and kill them, not of any guilt they committed, but rather of the name of Christ's sake, and this is their crime.

Hardships are one of the features of the basic way for the kingdom; for, the heart gets filled inwardly with the joy of Jesus Christ who dwells in him, whereas it is crushed outwardly in hardships.

5 - The Appearance of False Prophets:

(Matt.24:11-14) "Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as the witness to all the nations, and the end will come"

This is the third arrow, the adversary aims against the children of the kingdom. The first arrow is creating a general depressive atmosphere for man, thereby pulling him away from his inward life. The second arrow is to focus on the depression that is his personally for the sake of Jesus. The third arrow, and the most dangerous one is shoot the arrow against the faith, so he would be far diverted from the kingdom path. From the historical aspect, there have been many false prophets deceiving many. This also take various shapes, as the appearance of new philosophers, may be hidden behind the religious faith.

Its aim is to provide bright philosophical and moral concept, far away from the life with our Savior, and to experience the work of the fiery Holy Spirit in us. They are clothed with the robe of offsprings or religion, but yet they are deceivers who lead the soul far away from the mystery of its real life.

The fruits of those false prophets appear practically, for the love of many grows cold. Therefore religion becomes hollow words, and a mental knowledge, and philosophy that has no spirit. Man loves his heart, and is unable to love God and people, and he remains a lifeless creature.

If Satan's work is to pump up spiritual coldness in people's life particularly through the false prophets, then it is only God's work alone that detaches this coldness. As St. Jerome says "If God is fire, He is fire so as to pull us away from the devil's cold. I wish God grant us that the cold would not creep to our hearts, for we do not commit sin except after the love becomes cold".

At this point the Lord gives us a promise to arouse hope in us, which is this: as much as the misleading are spread, and many lose the life of love as much as the Spirit of God works in preaching in full strength, among the people all over the world. It is a struggle between light and darkness that ends in the victory of light. The resistance of falsehood to the truth ends in the victory of truth and its nurture in us.

6- The Abomination of Desolation in the temple:

In the previous statements, the Lord spoke of the end of the temple, and the destruction of Jerusalem in a hidden manner. But here, He is speaking openly, for He says (Matt.24:15). "Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation spoken by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand).

In this way, the Lord Jesus calls on them to read the book of Daniel (9:27) to confirm the fact of the desolation of the Jewish temple.

What is this 'abomination of desolation'?

Firstly: St. John Chrysostom says, "It means the army by which Jerusalem became desolate and destroyed. This is derived from the Lord's words Himself (Luke 21:20) "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near". The Gentiles have entered the temple, and have defiled it, and even absolutely ruined it. This was the sign of the kingdom's end, literally speaking, and the establishment of the spiritual kingdom.

Secondly: St. Jerome says, "We can understand that Caesar's statue, set up by Pilate in the temple, or the statue of Hedrian, the knight, which was set up in the holiest of the Holies; in the Old Testament the statue was called 'the abomination', the word

‘desolation’ was added, because the statue was placed in the middle of the deserted temple. “St. John Chrysostom supported this suggestion too”.

Thirdly: St. Hillary, bishop of Poitier thinks this ‘abomination’ point to what will happen in the days of the anti-Christ, for he says, “God gave a complete sign of His last coming, for He speaks of the days of the anti-Christ, the days against Christ. He calls it ‘abomination’ for he comes against God, attributing God’s honor to himself. It is an ‘abomination of desolation’ because he destroys the earth with wars and killings. The Jews receive him, and he claims the sanctification attitude. Also in the place where the saintly prayers take place, they accept the betrayer as if he is worthy of God’s honor. This error is spread out among the Jews, they even deny the Truth and accept what is false, and for this reason God asks His people to depart from Judea to the mountains so his followers do not hinder them nor affect them”.

7-The Commandments for Entering the Kingdom:

(Matt.24: 6-20) “Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days. And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath”.

From the historical aspect, when the Christians in Jerusalem saw the Romans besieging it, they realized the disaster that would befall it, as the Lord had said, and so they hastily fled away. This is what will happen in the coming of the anti-Christ as we have seen in the above words of St. Hillary, for the church will see he has set himself up as a god in the Lord’s temple (2nd Thes.1-4). They flee to the wilderness (Rev.12:6)” Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her one thousand two hundred and sixty days”.

In our spiritual life, when we see the literal temple falling down inside us, we have to flee from Judea to the mountains; that is, from the Jewish literacy in understanding the commandment, to the flying up in release of the Spirit, that will enter the heavenly comprehension. As the scholar Oreganus says, “I wish those who witness this to flee from the literacy of Judea to the mountains of truth, so high up. If anyone climbs to the top of the world, and stood at its peak, he will not go down to ask for anything from his home. If he is in the field where the treasure is hidden, he will not go back, but he rather runs for the fear of the deceiving false word (the anti-Christ). This is, in particular, whenever he takes off the old robe, he does not go back to put it on for a second time”.

The mountains, as St. Augustine says, refer to the high souls, of the saints, where the small souls, the hills lean on them. The Lord Jesus’ call to flee at this point, is only a call to cling to the saints and have partnership with them.

The Lord commends those who have been uplifted by the Holy Spirit from one floor to the next, as from one glory to the next, until they have reached the rooftop and see the heavens before their eyes, all open and clear. It is unobstructed by the clay roofs, which are the earthly temporary matters. They do not come down again, and their life is in an upscale state, always climbing up with no descent. They stay on the top of the roof awaiting Christ’s coming on the clouds, and they ask no more for any earthly and temporary matters that are below.

✂ The rooftop is the highest part of the house, it is the perfect peak of it. This is why anyone who stands on it has to have a perfect heart, renewed, high in the spirit, careful lest he falls to the worldly matters, and is eager to have the earthly possessions.

St. Hillary, bishop of Poitiers

✂ Let us be careful in time of trouble, lest we descend from the spiritual heights, and get linked to the physical life. He who is advanced, should not look backward, and ask for the former things, and hesitate, thereby returning to what is below.

St. Augustine.

✂ He who has Christ's robe does not come down from the rooftop to bring another robe.

✂ Do not come down from the virtuous rooftop to ask for the clothes you used to wear in the old times, and do not go back from the field to the house.

St. Jerome.

✂ If anyone is on the rooftop, that is, he is up at the peak where the greatest virtues are, let him not go back to the earth's depths, and this world. On the roof, Rahab the prostitute stood, the symbol of the church, and she got united with the partnership of the sacraments, representing the other Gentiles. She hid the live spies sent by Joshua (Josh.2:1). If they had gone down to the house they would have been killed by those sent to arrest them. Therefore, the rooftop is the peak of the spirit, where men is armored against the weak body, too frail and has no strength. At this point, I recall the paralytic who was carried by four men and brought down from the roof. Let us follow St. Peter who, when he felt hungry, he went up to the rooftop (Acts 10:9). There, he came to know the secret behind the church's beginning, and he should not have judged the Gentiles as being defiled, for faith is able to purify it of all defilement. If St. Peter had been unable to realize this mystery when he was down, how could you possibly understand it? (unless you go to the roof). St. Peter realized this for he ascended so as to preach the Lord (Is.40:9).

St. Ambrosios

✂ He who is in God's field, working for the account of the Lord Jesus, he should not look back in confusion. He has to forget even the necessities of life such as food, drink and clothes; he has to forget all what he has left behind, and look forward to what is ahead, with his eyes on God's power that comes from above. The soul that has got rid of the clothes of the old man, and has released itself to work in the field of Jesus' account, this soul does not regress and does not look backward so as to wear these old clothes again. It rather has to follow the example of Joseph, son of Jacob, for St. Jerome says, "I wish you would rather if possible to follow the example of Joseph, and leave your robe in the hands of your Egyptian mistress, and follow your Lord and Savior, even in your nakedness."

✂ He who is in the field should not go backwards. What is this field? Jesus spoke of it saying 'That he who puts his hands on the plough and looks backwards, is not fit for the kingdom of God'. You have to take care of your field if you wish to reach God's kingdom (Ps.127:3) "Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward". Your children will be like olive trees round your table. Let the Lord enter the field (Song of Sol.7:11) "Come, my beloved, let us go forth to the field". So he says (Song of Sol.5:1) "I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey". Is there any harvest better than the harvest of faith that

brings forth good deeds, quenched with the eternal joyful spring?.

If he has forbidden you for looking backwards, then it is all the more necessary that He forbids you from going back to get your clothes. He who wishes to become your enemy, and takes your tunic, let him have your cloak as well (Matt.5:4). It is appropriate for you not only to leave your sins, but also to wipe out every memory of your previous deeds. St.Paul used to forget all is behind (Phil.3:13), he got rid of the sin, and did not leave repentance.

St. Ambrosios.

In this live struggle, in which we escape from the Judea of literacy to the freedom in the sanctified mountains, we go up the rooftop to the uncovered heavens. We are occupied with nothing other than the last coming of Christ. We work in the field, looking ahead of us with no regression whatsoever for the sake of entering eternity The Lord declares the misfortunes befalling those expecting children in their pregnancy, and those who are nursing. Who are these pregnant other than those souls who, ever though they know the Lord Jesus, yet the fruit of the Spirit has not yet been manifested in them. Those nursing ones are those who have their fruits as little and nursing ones Those who are practically fruitless or who have little fruit are unable to face the hard times, particularly the time of the anti-Christ, before the coming of Christ.

✠ The soul that has become pregnant and has given birth to the fruit of the World falls under these woes. For, it loses pregnancy and becomes empty of its hope in the deeds of the Truth. Also, if it has given birth but its young ones are not fully nurtured.

The scholar Oreganus.

Some fathers think that pregnancy here means clinging to iniquity, and hence man carries inside himself its bitter fruit. As for the nursing ones, these are the souls that sin has given fruit in them, but these are bitter fruits. All of these cannot be saved from the anti -Christ.

✠ This is not be understood as a warning of the burden in pregnancy, but it rather shows the soul burdened with the weight of sin which is unable to flee from the rooftop, or the field where God's wrath falls. Also, woe to those who are nursing, for this shows the weakness of those too late in knowing God, as if they are still nursing milk. Woe to them, for they will be too weak to flee from the anti-Christ. They will be quite unable to face him, for they have not ceased to commit iniquity, and neither have they had any of the bread of life.

St. Hillary, bishop of Poitier.

Those who are pregnant means to covet what is not theirs. Those who are nursing are they who have actually obtained what they had coveted. They will fall into the woes in the judgment day.

St. Augustine.

The Lord asks us to pray so our flight would not be in the winter or on a Sabbath day. This means our life would not be stricken with the fatal cold of the spirit, just as happens in wintertime, and neither would it be on an idle restful day as the Sabbath. The soul that is cold and idle falls under the deception of the anti-Christ, and is unable to encounter the Lord of glory Jesus.

✠ He said so lest we be in the cold of iniquity, or careless in our good deeds, and thus be stricken with the terrible penalty.

St. Hillary, bishop of Poitier.

✂ When the anti-Christ deceives the earthly ones who are in the winter cold, they are attracted to him. For, he who is pleased with the worldly stuff does not hesitate to yield to him.

Father Gregory the great.

8- The Great Tribulation:

(Matt.24:21,22) “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened”.

It is the great tribulation that will befall the church in the days of the deceiver or the anti-Christ, (Rev.13:16) “He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name”. In this way, the believers are deprived of the daily dealings for they refuse to have this mark on them. They will be forced to flee into the wilderness to escape the hardships, of the anti-Christ.

9-The Appearance of False-Christ:

The secret behind this great tribulation is the appearance of the anti-christ and his followers. As St. John Chrysostom says “At this point, He speaks of the anti-christ and those who are called false prophets and false christs. These were found on a large scale even in the days of the apostles, and will also be more fervent before the second coming of Christ.

(Matt.24:23-24) “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ !’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand”

St. John Chrysostom says “The Lord has concluded His words about Jerusalem, and continued His words about His coming and the signs that accompany this. He said so, not only to guide them, but also to guide us and those who follow us as well”.

The deceiving christ and his followers will use all means by which they would deceive us. They will make miracles and wonders that are of the deeds of the adversary. This is why the righteous life in the Lord, and not the miracles, is it that discerns who are those who belong to Christ and who are the others of the anti-Christ. As St. Augustine says, “The Lord warns us that even the wicked ones are able to perform certain miracles that even the saints are unable to make. But it is not due to this, they are counted greater than them in God’s eyes”.

The anti-Christ has the deceiving thoughts, not only through his miracles that are so misleading, but also through the appearance of virtue and monasticism without their power. He appears in the wilderness, and gets surrounded by many, and he secretly creeps in our hearts, announcing to us his interest in us personally. This is why the Lord says (Matt.24:26) “Therefore, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the desert !’ Do not go out; or ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms’, do not believe it”.

What does the wilderness also signify other than barren faith, and the departure

from the apostolic faith of the church. As for the inner rooms, this signifies the darkness away from the true light. As St. Hillary, bishop of Poitiers, says “Because of the false prophets about whom He speaks, these will say that Christ is in the wilderness so they mislead people away by means of heresy. And in the secretive inner places, the inner rooms they will be imprisoned by the strength of the anti-Christ. But as for Christ He will not be hidden in a particular place, and will not be confined to a few people, but He will rather be present in all places and witnessed by everyone”. This is why, the Lord compares His coming to open lightning. (Matt. 24:27,28) For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of the Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.

The last coming of the Son of Man will not be followed by wonders or miracles, and He will not be manifested in the wilderness, or in a hidden place. He will rather come from on high, all of a sudden, on the clouds, just as lightning, brightening the entire earth. He will carry us from the four corners and raise us to His heavens. As St. John Chrysostom says, “Just as He has first declared the way the anti-Christ comes, likewise does not need to be announced or foretold, but it is rather seen in a second by the world; even to those sitting in their homes will the Son of Man come, and will be witnessed by all, at one moment, due to His splendid glory”.

St. Jerome sees ‘the east and the west’ a sign to the apostolic church where the Lord constantly shines in it, in His glory and beauty as the lightning does. He says, “If someone tells you that Christ is in the wilderness of the pagans, or is in the tents of philosophers, or in the secretive assemblies of the heretics (the inner-rooms), and that He is providing the knowledge the God’s Sacraments, do not believe any of this. But believe only in the faith of the apostolic church, that lightens up from the east to the west”.

The scholar Oreganus sees the east and the west as referring to the prophecies that conveyed to us the light of the Truth. These have also provided us Christ’s life from the eastward place of His birth till the westward point of His suffering and His resurrection. If we wish to encounter the real Christ, we can search for Him in the prophecies pertaining to Him.

What does He mean by the words, ‘For whenever the carcass is there the eagles will be gathered together’.

Because the Lord Jesus has offered His body a sacrifice of love on the cross, the believers come as strong eagles, hovering in the heavens, and do not stop except round the cross. They gather together to be satisfied with the Lord’s sacrifice, the Giver of life. As a contrast, whenever the carcass of the anti-Christ is found as a dead body, the wicked ones gather as eagles asking for what is appropriate to its nature. The Holy One is surrounded by the saints, whereas the evil one is surrounded by the wicked.

Let us learn about Christ by means of the natural example that we see everyday. It is said about eagles and hawks that they see the carcass from behind the seas, and they gather so as to feed on it. If the birds by their natural instincts could see where the small carcass is, how much more will the believers hasten to Him whose coming will be like the lightning, appearing from the east to the west ?. By the carcass, He is hinting at His suffering and death to come.

✠ They are called eagles, for their youth is renewed (Ps.103:5), and they have wings to come to Christ's sufferings.

St. Jerome.

✠ He speaks of the sanctified eagles, due to the spiritual flying of their bodies, showing how the angels gather them together to the site of His sufferings. In an appropriate way, we can see His glorious coming. To us, the Lord has reigned in eternal glory through the modesty of his physical sufferings.

St. Hillary, bishop of Poitier

10-The Tribulation of Nature:

(Matt.24:29) "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will not fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken".

These things will come true literally, no doubt about it, before the last coming of the Lord Jesus. This is not surprising; for we know today about the falling of some stars, and of the sun's explosions at other times. This will be greatly increased at the time before the anti-Christ and during it, just as a sign of warning.

This indeed is a must, for the eternal kingdom of Christ to come in perfect glory, the present world collapses. He has said (Matt.24:35) "heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away". The Lord will reign on us and in us forever, just as in a new land and a new heaven (Rev.21:1). We shall not be in need of any sun, for the Lord Himself will be its sunshine, before whom every sun will lose its splendor. There will be no need of any moon, for the Church's splendor will be declared as the moon, and the believers will be counted as bright planets.

✠ Now is the end of fleeting life. As the apostle says, the outer shape of this world will pass away, to be followed by another world. Instead of the visible stars and planets, the Lord Jesus Himself will shine, for He is the Sun of the new creation, and its King. The power of this new sun is so tremendous, and its splendor is so overwhelming, that the sun that shines now, and the moon and the other stars are dimmed when compared to that great light.

Yousapios El Kaissari.

✠ Just as the moon and the stars get quickly diminished before the bright sun, likewise does the sun get dimmed, and the moon does not shine and the stars fall from the sky before the manifestation of Christ. All of these lose their splendor that was previously theirs, so as to get clothed with the robe of great Light.

St. John Chrysostom.

✠ These occurrences are not fulfilled by the dimming of the present light, for we read

(Is.30:26) "the light of the sun will be doubled seven times". But when compared to the real Light, everything seems dimmed.

St. Jerome.

Moreover, we can understand this prophecy as signs that concern the church itself and every member in it. When the bishop Hesychius asked St. Augustine about the last coming of Christ and the signs preceding it, he wrote asking him to look for those signs in a symbolic way.

He may have meant here, by his mentioning of the sun, the light of knowing Christ who will have no place in the anti-Christ kingdom that rules most of the world, as if the sun has become dimmed. The moon is the church, for it was spoken of (Song of Sol.6:10) “fair as the moon, clear as the sun”. It has become cast out before its persecutors, that can never be seen. It is like a moon that gives no light. Some of the mighty ones fall, like the falling stars from the sky, to work for the account of the anti-Christ, and many are shaken in their faith. It is a terrible picture of this most difficult period faced by the entire world before the coming of the Son of Man.

What I am saying about the church could also be applied on the believer as a member in it. For, when he accepts the concept of the anti-Christ or the deceiver, or the lack of faith, he loses his inward vision. It is as if his inward sun has got dimmed, and he no longer retains the light of knowledge, and his moon no longer gives its light, for his heart has lost the kingdom of light. It has turned into a kingdom of darkness; and all of his talents and motivation have fallen as falling stars from the sanctified heavenly life into the abyss of corruption. His heart is shaken as heavenly powers that lose its higher nature, and falls low to the perishable thoughts of ingratitude.

✠ Many leave the Christian faith, and as a result the beauty of the faith is dimmed with the cloud of departure. For, the heavenly sun is dimmed or brightened in splendor according to the faith.

Just as the moon is darkened every month because the earth comes between the moon and the sun, and hence it disappears, likewise is it in the sanctified church when the physical drawbacks stand in the way of the heavenly light, by which God’s divine light is obstructed. This light has the source of Christ’s sun. In time of persecution, the love of the current present life stands in the way of God’s sun.

As for the stars, which are the people, these are surrounded by the praise of their Christians brothers. This makes them fall during the bitter and increasing persecution, which will eventually come to a halt. This will complete the number of the believers, and the good ones will be selected, whereas the weaker ones will be left out.

St. Ambrosios.

✠ The powers of the heavens will be shaken due to the persecution by the wicked ones, for, even some of the very firm believers will be filled with fear.

St. Augustine.

11-The Appearance for the Sign of the Son of Man:

(Matt.24:30,31) “Then, the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other”.

After the anti-Christ kingdom is stubborn in resisting the kingdom of Christ, that is, His church, and after the sun and the moon do not give their light and the stars fall, and the heavenly hosts are shaken -----after all this, the Lord Himself comes in His angelic procession, with the sign of the cross ahead, declared in the skies. This makes the church rejoice, the church that embodies the heavenly nature. It rejoices for the coming of the Groom, whereas all the tribes of the earth grieve, for they have embraced the deceiver, and they could no longer bear the Truth.

✂ Let us see the sign of the cross, which is seen by those who have pierced Him according to the prophecy of Zachariah and John (John 19:37) which is the sign of victory.

The scholar Oreganus.

✂ If the sun is dimmed, then it is impossible for the cross to appear unless it is of greater splendor than the sun!. Let the disciples be not ashamed of the cross, and not to grieve.

He speaks of it as a sign appearing in all glory. The sign of the cross will be manifested to dumb the daring Jews. Christ will come to judge, pointing to His wounds, and to the way He died such a shameful death. At that moment all the tribes of the world will lament. For, when they see the cross, they will think how they gained nothing from His death, and how they have crucified who they are supposed to worship.

St. John Chrysostom.

✂ In truth he says (Jer.17:13) “All who forsake you shall be ashamed”, for they are not dwellers of the heaven, but are rather written on the earth.

St. Jerome.

✂ The believers as well as the unbelievers see Him. The cross and the Savior shine in excessive brightness, more than the sun, and are seen by everyone. The believers rejoice in the Savior, the Crucified, whereas the unbelievers tremble in their fear of Him.

Father Theophlactius, Patriarch of Sylvania.

From the prophetic angle the sign of the Son of Man is manifested before Christ's coming. But as for our spiritual life, as much as the anti-Christ, the deceiver, exerts the effort to reign over our hearts, he is eager to extinguish the sun of the truth in us. He wants us to lose our real membership in the church, and hence the church would be to us as a moon with no light. He works in every guile and deception to make fall our talented stars, and our inward grace, so as to shaken in our hearts the heavenly powers. At this point the Lord Jesus hastens to us while coming from the heavens. He enters into us in His glory, offering us His cross, the sign of His victory and overcoming in us, and for our own account. It is moreover the sign of His dwelling inside us, and as a result all the numerable deceptions of the adversary fall and collapse, as well as every physical passion and earthly thoughts inside us. It is as if they have become the wicked tribes of the earth that lament when the Lord is manifested in us strongly in the Spirit and in the great heavenly glory. He thus sends His angles in the loud sounding trumpet, and we share them their praises and their liturgies. They gather all our physical abilities as if from the four winds, from one end of the earth to the other so as to work in harmony and accord, with the soul's potentialities so as to serve the heavenly King.

His Coming on the Clouds:

✂ The people will see the Son of God' with their physical eyes coming in the physical form 'in the clouds of heaven', that is, coming from heaven. In His transfiguration, a voice came from the clouds. Likewise is He coming another time transfigured in His glory. He will be sitting not on one cloud, but on many clouds as if a chariot to Him.

When He went up to Jerusalem, those who loved Him spread their clothes on the way, so the Son of Man would not walk on foot on the ground. They did not wish even the donkey He was on to touch the ground (Matt.21:8).

It is not surprising then that Father of everyone, spreads the clouds of heaven under the body of His Son, till the end of ages.

The scholar Oreganus.

✠ His coming on the clouds could be understood in two ways: He is either coming in His church in the clouds. Even up till now He does not object to coming, but He will come later on, in greater authority and splendor. He will manifest His authority and greatness all the more to His saints to whom He grants the power. They will not be overcome by a great ordeal such as this one, or that He would come physically as He was sitting on the right hand of the Father. In this way it is truly appropriate for us to believe He will come, not only in the body, but also in the clouds. He has left us in the body so He would come once again. (Acts 1:9) "He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight". At this point the angel said (Acts 1:11) "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.

St. Augustine

✠ The great events are understood in their link one to the other. Just as in His first coming He came in lowliness, likewise is He coming the second time in His appropriate glory.

St. Cyril the Alexandrian.

12- The Parable of the Fig-tree:

(Matt.24:32-34) "Now learn this parable from the fig-tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near----at the doors! Assuredly I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place".

The Lord Jesus has provided for us the signs preceding His coming at the end of ages. He will also come to reign over us spiritually while we are on earth, that is in our spiritual life, He wished to direct our thoughts to the spiritual side and not to the earthly matters. It is as if He is saying if you know how to discern the times, and can realize summer is near by means of the fig-tree when its branch is tender, and its leaves turn green. It is therefore of more importance to look for those signs I have given you, as if it is a fig tree through which you will know the time of His coming has drawn near, as if it is summer.

By saying these words, as St. John Chrysostom says, He confirms His coming as an ultimate matter of assurance. We should not doubt this, as much as we do not doubt the coming of summer in its due time. In such a way, the believer has to realize all the more God's care, when these signs appear such as the toil and sufferings, and he has to keep deep in his heart the faith in Christ. He assures us constantly of His coming in us by being transfigured in us from day to day, to declare Himself in us.

In this parable, too, the Lord answers us of His hidden glory inside us, as in the fig tree in winter time. But when summer time comes, this hidden glory is manifested, and we are crowned in the Lord's great day. We are now like people in wintertime, we appear in no glory nor any beauty, just like dry trees, leafless, flowerless, fruitless. But winter will be over, and life dormant inside us will surely spring forth.

The Lord compared His coming to the summer, for He provides us with a warm atmosphere of love, where our heart is kindled in more love when we see the Groom

of our souls coming to us and in us. Summer is the time of harvest (Jer.8:20) so the Lord comes to carry in us His spiritual fruit, and He rejoices for us. For this reason the soul asks its Groom (Song of Sol.4:16) "Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its pleasant fruits". And the Lord the Groom answers (Song of Sol.5:1) "I have come to my garden, my sister my spouse, I have gathered my myrrh with my spice, I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends! Drink, yes drink deeply, O beloved ones!" This is the time in which the Lord Himself picks the precious fruits, since He is the fruit in them. He rejoices and thrills and offers a banquet. Those in heaven rejoice as well will Him because of his fruitful bride!

Some fathers see the fig tree as a symbol for the Jews' return so as to establish a kingdom as a sign of the end of the ages. It could be also for their acceptance of the faith in Jesus Christ whom they rejected before the end of ages. Some others see the fig tree a symbol for the appearance of the anti-Christ kingdom.

✠ The fig tree is the symbol of the Jewish assembly, and as for the branch, this is the anti-Christ, Satan's son' the iniquity portion. With his appearance, it is as if life is dried up, and the leaves are seen, so the flowers of iniquity are triumphant in some way. In this way, summertime has drawn near, that is, the judgment day.

St. Hillary, bishop of Poitier.

✠ There are two interpretation for the fig tree: it could mean when the fruit appears on all of the tree, then every tongue will confess the Lord, and the people of Israel would believe also. At this time, we hope eagerly for the Lord's coming. It is as if summertime has come to harvest the fruit of the resurrection. Or, it could mean that when the son of perdition, Satan, wears the flowery crown, in his false and vain pride, the leaves of the Jewish collective branch appear. At this point we have to expect the judgment coming, for the Lord will hasten to come to reward the believers, and put an end to evil.

St. Ambrosios

As for the Lord's words (Matt.24:34) "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place", these words refer to two things: Firstly : it points to the fulfillment of the signs concerning the destruction of the Jewish temple by the hands of the Roman ruler Titus in 70 AD so as to declare the Lord's coming in a new temple.

Secondly : The Lord our God wishes to draw our attention to His inward coming in us, and to declare His glory in the heart. It is true, we are awaiting the great day of the Lord, but our deeds now are to enjoy His presence in us and His constant transfiguration in us.

13 - The confirmation of His Coming.

(Matt.24:35,36) "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away. But that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only".

What the Lord has proclaimed here is His immortal world that never passes away. For, heaven and earth pass away, but as for His words they will never pass away. What is this heaven other than our souls that depart from this world. The earth is our bodies that

return to the dust, until the 'Word of God' comes, He who never passes away, and heaven returns anew in Him, and also our land.

The Lord is coming, this is for sure. But as for the definite time, this is not our job or our mission. It is God's work, He who provides for all the times.

✂ Heaven and earth in their actual creation do not contain inside them their commitment to perpetual immortality. But as for the words of Christ, these are immortal, and perpetual existence dwells inside them.

St. Hillary, bishop of Poitier.

✂ It is as if He is saying that all what appears to be constant, does not last forever. And what appears, to you to be passing away, remains stable and unchangeable! My words express the things that are unchangeable.

Father Gregory the great..

14 -The Preparation for His Coming:

(Matt.24:37-39) "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be".

The Lord Jesus tells us of the flood that saved Noah and his family, and devastated the evil humanity, as an example of His coming, where the children of God will be blessed with the eternal crown. They will enter into glory, just as into the ark, whereas the evil ones will perish as happened in the flood. The evil ones were unprepared, and their hearts were preoccupied with eating and drinking and marrying, and they were never exalted to God.

Indeed, eating, drinking and marrying, all of which are not evil. But they could be changed into a god, unworshiped, and all of the heart becomes disturbed because of these things. These very same things are considered blessed and sanctified regarding the blessed heart in God. As for the former ones, the apostles speaks of them (Phil.3:19) "Whose end in destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is their shame-----who set their mind on earthly things".(Rom.16:19) "For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly". (Titus1:12) "Cretans are always liars evil beasts, lazy gluttons". They are enslaved to their bellies, and work for their account and not for the service of Christ. They live as idle ones, corrupting their life fruitlessly!. But as for the others, they say (1Cor.8::8) "But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are the worse". (Rom.14: 6,7) "He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. For none of us lives to himself". (Rom 14:17) "For the kingdom of God is not eating or drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit".

The Lord wished to confirm that the preparation is an inward work, and so He said (Matt.24:40,41) "Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left". Man can never be aware of the secrets in his brother's heart. For, while two men are working in the same field, and two women are working on one grinder, yet one of them has an uplifted

heart to heaven, and the other is disturbed about what is earthly. One works and thanks God and praises Him, whereas the other works to serve his belly and satisfy his passions, and is disturbed about the earthly matters.

St. Cyril the great comments on the two women grinding, one is taken and the other is left; he says, "It seems that these two women refer to those living in poverty and hardship. Even among those, there is a big difference. Some tolerate poverty in a mature way, and are strong in leading a righteous life. But the others have a different personality, for they live in cunningness leading an evil and debased life.

Therefore, let us be watchful, not in the apparent physical concept, but with the heart, and the inner life, awaiting His coming. The watchful and vigilant heart is like an eager bride for the groom. The Lord comes to her, and she rejoices excessively. But as for the negligent and lazy heart, the Lord's day comes to it as a thief breaking into a house. The wakeful heart rejoices whenever the hour draws near. But as for the slothful heart, he is taken aback by it, and grieves over what he loses, and which he had thought he possessed!

In this way the Lord asks us to be watchful so as to meet Him, even though He did not specify the time of His coming. As St. Ambrosios says "It is not for our own good that we know the time, but it is rather for our own good not to know it. Our ignorance of it makes us fearful, and get watchful, and thus correct ourselves".

15- The Parable of the Slave and the Coming Master:

We are as slaves that the Lord has placed to serve His servants, so as to give them food in its due time. He who is honest, knows how to develop, with the Holy Spirit, all his potentials, gifts, emotions and motivation in the Spirit. He will then be filled with the fruits, and thus his master comes and appoints him over all his possessions (Matt.24:47). The Lord makes him a king, blessed with the eternal heritage, and obtains an unperishable crown. But he who beats up the slaves, his colleagues, and destroy what God has granted them such as potentials, talents, emotions, motivation, and as a result they do not develop in the Spirit. They are rather obstructed and get diminished and so his portion becomes with the hypocrites.

Some may ask, do we love the body as well as one of the servants that the Lord has appointed us to take care of? St. Paul the apostle answers (Eph.5:29,30) "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones". In this way the apostle raises the body to this sanctification. We regard it as the Lord regards His church; we take care of its sanctification and not destroy it. We rather have to reject the physical passions that pull us down to the earthly troubles and the fatal pleasures. St. Jerome says, "I love the body, but I love it when it is pure, when in the virgin state when it is deadened with the fasting. I do not love its deeds, but I love it for what it is. It has to be subjected, and die as a martyr for Christ's sake, it is thus whipped, and torn and burnt with fire".

St. John Chrysostom speaks to us about the body as a servant, we have to take care of in the Lord; this body works with the soul for the Lord's account. He says, "The Lord has indeed created in us the eyes, the mouth, the hearing with this aim; that all of those members serve Him.

We are to speak His words and do His deeds, and chant continuous praises, and

offer Him thanksgiving sacrifices. In this way we absolutely purify our conscience. Just as the body becomes more healthy when it enjoys the pure air, likewise does the soul, all the more so, when it is blessed with the practical wisdom when it is refreshed with these exercises. If the eyes of the body are exposed to smoke, they weep constantly, and if they are exposed to pure air, gardens and water springs, they become sharp and are restful. Likewise is the case with the eye of the soul; for if it lives on the spiritual words it becomes pure and of sharp vision. But if it departs to the smoke mentioned, it will weep endlessly, and will suffer here and later on. This is why one of them said, "For my days are consumed like smoke," (Ps.102:3).

Chapter XXV (Page 688)

Awaiting the Kingdom

The Lord Jesus offers us, when he was in Jerusalem as a lamb to be presented as a sacrifice for the Passover in our place, the Lord thus spoke of live concepts for the kingdom we are awaiting. It is not an exterior thing from us, but we receive it as an extension of the earnest in us.

1. The Wise Virgins	1 – 13
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1. The Wise Virgins:

At every midnight, the believer reads this chapter of the gospel in the first service of the midnight prayer. This is to come to know the mystery behind his standing up in prayer, which is the awaiting of the Groom. The believer is careful to be as one of the wise virgins who enter the eternal wedding. He says, “Here is the Groom coming at midnight. Blessed is the servant whom he finds wakeful. But he whom the Groom find sleepy, is not worthy to go with him. So, be watchful my soul, lest you fall asleep and he cast out of the kingdom. Rather be watchful and cry out saying, “Holy, Holy are you O God, have mercy on us, for the sake of the Mother of God.””

Let the believer stand up in God’s presence, eager to offer his five senses in sanctification to him. For these are the wise virgins who took oil in their vessels with lanterns, awaiting the Groom. For real, the wise virgins stand side by side with the ignorant ones. They are all virgins, and have lanterns, and they all fell asleep (Matt 25:5) but the wise ones had the oil which the ignorant ones did not have.

St. John Chrysostom believes this oil refers to the good and righteous deeds that distinguish the live man from the dead one. The believer offers his sanctified senses to the Groom in faith that works in love (Gal 5:6). He comes forth to the Groom carrying his practical attributes in all his senses, emotions and actions. If we take the tongue as an example, St. John Chrysostom says, “When your tongue is like that of Christ’s, and your mouth becomes that of the father’s, you hence become a temple for the Holy Spirit. So, what kind of honor is that? If your mouth is made of gold and precious stones, it will not shine like this lowliness and humility. What more love is there than that mouth that knows no insults, but it is rather used to bless and utter the good words?”

As for the ignorant ones, these have carried their lanterns, but were unable to possess the holy oil, that is, the good deeds in the Lord. They rather carried the deed faith, and the worshipping appearance. When daytime is over, when man could have

evoked, then comes the nighttime when no work could be done. It is not possible for anyone to barrow oil from someone else, and thus they are unable to encounter the Groom, for the Lord says, (Matt 25:10) "And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut." They do not encounter the Groom as the wise ones do, but they remain out where the door is shut. Indeed, the son of man will appear on the clouds, and will speak with the evil ones to condemn them. But they will not obtain his glory, and neither will they realize his mysteries. They will see him only as the fearful Son of Man, and will only see his eyes kindled in fire. In other words we can say, the glory obtained by the saints becomes to the evil ones a thing of fear and terror, and they will to see in the Lord any glory, but rather terror!

As for the wise ones, their hearts, or rather their inward eyes are pure, and could see God and could enjoy his splendor, as the Lord says, (Matt 5:8) "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

What happens to the virgins is not a new thing; for it is an extension to what they did on earth. The wise virgins are blessed with the new life, as a life of partnership and unity that they practiced on earth. The wise ones enjoy the new inward life as a life of partnership and in unity with the Groom, but they live out of the doors even when they are on earth, and even if they have the appearance of the life of worship and preaching as well. At this point, he who has chosen to enter with Christ to live for eternity, has the right to see him in eternity, face to face. Whereas he who has accepted to stay outside, will not be able to see the Lord as a Groom, and to enter his eternal wedding with him, since he is far away from the kingdom.

It is not surprising that the Lord says, "I do not know you," for they have not entered with him in real partnership, and neither have they seen his glory inside them.

St. Augustine comments on the parable of the wise virgins and the ignorant ones by saying, "Who are the ten virgins, who five of them are wise and five are ignorant? This parable, or this analogy I do not think applies to those women called 'virgins' in the church because of their great sanctity. I think it applies to the entire church. It does not apply to the priests alone about whom we spoke of yesterday, or to the congregation alone, it rather applies to the whole church."

Why was the number of each group only five? Every soul in the body is known by number five, for the five senses are used. The body is unaware of anything except it be through the entrance of the five doors. Visualizing, hearing, smelling, touching and tasting. He who controls his vision, his hearing, his tasting, his touching, and his smelling away from what is impure, carries the title of 'virgin'.

It is good for man to keep his senses away from the blemished temptation, and in this way every Christian soul will have the name 'virgin'. So why are five of them acceptable, whereas five others are rejected?

It is not enough that they are virgins, and that they are carrying lanterns. They are virgins because they have kept themselves away from the defiled pleasures of the senses. They also have lanterns for the good deeds they made, and that the Lord spoke of (Matt 5:16) "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify you father in heaven." At another time he tells his disciples (Luke 12:35) "Let you waists be girded and your lamps burning." By the girding he means the 'virginity,' and the burning lanterns mean the 'righteous deeds!'

The word 'virginity' is usually not attributed to those who are married. But here he means the virginity in the faith, which represents the crowned purity. Therefore my blessed brethren, know for sure that every person and every soul that has the imperishable faith, by which you control the impure things, and by which you make the good deeds, this person is worthy of being called 'virgin'. In every church that has its members as virgins, youths, married ones there are given the name of 'virgin.' How so? Listen to the words of the apostle about the church in general, and not about the virgin women alone (2 Cor 11:2) "For I have betrothed you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." Due to his fear of Satan the corrupter of purity, the apostle went on to say (2 Cor 11:3) "But I fear lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." Few are the ones who have the physical virginity, but it is appropriate for all to possess the spiritual virginity. To keep yourself from corruption is a good thing, and thus the soul receives the title of 'virginity.' If the righteous deeds are praiseworthy, and have been likened to lanterns, then why are five of them accepted whereas the five others are rejected? How can we distinguish between them?

The wise virgins carried oil, which is love. This is why they have slept with the foolish ones, which is, they lay in their graves (1 Thes 4:13). If the bridegroom is slow in his coming, where thousands of years pass by, from Adam's time to the Lord's coming yet in a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet (1 Cor 15:52) when the wise virgins hear his voice, they find the oil with them and so light their lanterns. As for the foolish ones they ask for oil but they cannot find it!

St. Augustine believes those foolish ones represent those monastic people who, because of their monasticism, they have become virgins, but this was to please people, and not to please God. They carried the lantern for people to praise them, yet inwardly they had no oil which God sees in the heart."

St. Jerome warns us in the same spiritual outlook, saying, "You may lose the virginity by merely one thought. The evil virgins are those of physical virginity without the spiritual one. These are foolish, for they have no oil, and they are thus cast out by the bridegroom"

2. The Parable of the Talents:

(a) In this parable the Lord offers his servants money. He gives to one five talents, to the other two talents, and to the third only one talent. Each one is given according to his capability (Matt 25:14,15). The Lord is not miserly in distributing his gifts, and is not partial to anyone on account of the other. But he knows how to distribute to each one according to his potential. What God has given us as talents has not been given haphazardly, for he knows what is appropriate for each member for his own salvation. This urges us not to be puffed up against those of lesser talents, and not to envy those of greater talents than ourselves, but we rather have to thank him who grants the talents, for it is enough that this is given to us by his own hands. The apostle says, (1 Cor 12:4-6) "There are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all."

St. Augustine in one of his sermons to his congregation, congregation, confirms to them that all have talents given to them by God. He said to them, "Do not assume that this work concerning the usage of talents does not concern you as well. Indeed, you cannot work from this highly important position, but you can act in as much opportunity as you are allowed. Wherever Christ is attacked, defend him, answer those who grumble, rebuke those who blaspheme, and do not befriend them. Fulfill your duties in your homes. The bishop is called so, because he takes care of others and listens to them. Hence, every person who is head of his home, let him do the work of the bishop, paying attention to the faith of his household so no one falls to heresy: neither a wife, nor a son, nor a daughter, nor a servant to himself, for they were all bought for a great price. Do not neglect the least of those pertaining to yourself, but rather be concerned vigibuttly about the salvation of all members of your household. If you do so, then you have made use of the talent, and you are not counted as slothful servants, and you will not fear the terrible penalty."

(b) God is not expectant of any gain, and he is not concerned about the quantity; he is rather concern about the loyalty of his servants or their negligence. What the servants of the five and the two talents have profited is only 'the honesty in the job.' They were worthy to be in charge of a big amount. But as far those of one talent, their problem is their carelessness, for he has hidden the talent, and has led an idle life.

(c) Profit begets more profit, and loss begets more loss, and sin gives birth to more sin. The one who had the five talents, because he gained five more talents, he was appointed over more, by entering to his master's wedding. Moreover, he was given the talent that the careless servant had neglected. As for the owner of the one talent, because he was careless and lived an idle life, he not only did not gain another talent, but he also lost the one he had and he fell into another sin, which is his accusation of his master by saying he was cruel and unjust. He said to him (Matt 25:24,25) "Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground." The life of laziness and idleness urged him to accuse his master of cruelty. Consequently this motivated him to fear. Each sin led to another one. As Father John of Kronstadt says, "Every sin that

seems to be simple and unimportant leads to greater sins. This is why we have to resist it at the very beginning and crush is down.”

One of the most important sins that seems simple but it is actually destructive is negligence or idleness. St. Cyril the Great says, “Because St. Paul knew that laziness is the door to perishing, he said (1 Cor 9:16) “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!””

(d) When the master began to condemn his servants and asked them for the account, he began with those who had the five talents, then the two talents, and lastly him who had the one talent. Whenever the talents are more, our condemnation begins ahead of others, and we are asked for more.

(e) The reward is (Matt 25:21) “Enter into the joy of your Lord.” This is the entrance to the eternal wedding so as to stay inside. As for the punishment it is (Matt 25:30) “Cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness.” This means begin unable to enjoy witnessing God’s light, but to remain outside in the dark.

Those who enter are found to remain inside, and it is impossible to get them out, and vice versa, those outside can never enjoy what is inside.

St. Augustine speaks of this inward joy when he comments on the Lord’s words (John 6:37) “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will by no means cast out.” What kind of ‘inside’ is it that no one comes out of? It is an inward life that is absolutely perfect, and sweet shelter! What a hidden dwelling, of no dissensions, of no bitter wicked thoughts, of no passionate temptation, and corruption of sonows! Is this not the secret place that the worth servant enters? It is he to whom the Lord says, “Enter into the joy of your Lord.”

Father John of Kronstadt speaks of this eternal heavenly joy as a normal extension to our spiritual and heavenly life that we live here on earth, for he says, “Our variable earthly service to our king and our nation is an image of our major service to our heavenly king. This has to continue everlastingly, it is he who is to be truly served before all others. The earthly service is the experience and first service for the heavenly one.”

The Symbolic Interpretation of the Parable:

The owner of the five talents refers to the believer who offers his five sanctified senses to the heavenly Bridegroom. He declares the work of God’s Holy Spirit in his body as well as in his soul so he would be totally for the heavenly Lord. In other words, this refers to the man who is kindled by God’s gift through his five doors, which are his senses.

As for the owner of the two talents, this refers to the believer whose love for his brother in the Lord has filled his heart, for the two have become one in the Lord. For this same reason, we find the good Samaritan offering two denarii’s for the innkeeper as a sign of his love to the wounded man. Also, the widow whom the Lord praised, by her offering two cents as a sign of her love to God, and to her needy brethren. In the tomb of

the Lord Jesus, two angels were found, one at the head and the other at the feet; a sign of the love that has bonded those in heaven with those on earth. They have therefore become one body in the Crucified Lord. The Lord himself declared to the two Amos disciples, manifesting he reveals himself and his mysteries to the loving hearts.

Hence, the owner of the five talents, and of the two talents, they have both obtained the eternal reward due to their love to God and to the people. But as for the owner of the one talent, which he hid in the ground, this refers to the selfish man who words for his own account alone. He is not tied in any love to God or to man, but is centralized in himself in all selfishness which is able to bury him in the dust.

3. The Coming of the Son of Man:

After the Lord had spoken of the virgins awaiting their Bridegroom, and the wise servants in expectation of their master's coming to take them in to the joyful wedding, the Lord revealed more clearly this find coming.

Firstly: (Matt 25:31) "When the Son of Man comes in his glory;" The Lord confirms (John 5:22) "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son." St. Augustine comments on this, declaring the incarnate Son is the one who will judge, so that the evil ones may not see the glory of God. Their vision will stop short at the boundary of the physical form which will appear terrifying to them, "He will appear in the form of a slave to the slaves, and will keep the form of God for his sons."

Secondly: He grants the kingdom to those who offered love to the little ones as if to the Lord Jesus himself. As St. Jerome says, "Every time you stretch your hand in donation, remember Christ." He moreover says, "The real temple of Christ is the believer's soul, so let us ornament and clothe it. Give it donations, and let us welcome Christ who is in this soul! Of what use are the walls decorated with precious stones, if Christ is in poverty, in the fear of dying because of hunger?"

St. Kaprianous says, "How can Christ declare this more clearly? How can he urge us more to do righteousness and mercy than his saying that all what you give to the poor and needy is only given to himself. He also said he is grieved for the sake of the poor and needy if they do not take from us. If anyone is in the church and does not give for the sake of his brother, let him think of Christ and he may be touched. He who does not think of his servant colleague, the suffering poor one, might think of his God who dwells in this rejected man." St. Ambrosios furthermore says, "What treasures are these to Christ better than those miserable ones that Christ loves to be seen in them? If you serve the poor, you only serve Christ."

Donation does not stop at the materialistic aspect, but we have to pour out love as perfume with which we rub our Saviour's feet by means of these little ones, that is, those destroyed and needy souls. As St. Ambrosios says, "Christ dies once, and was buried only once, and yet he desires the perfume to be poured on his feet everyday. Who are

those counted as Christ's feet on whom we pour the perfume other than those about whom he said (Matt 25:40) "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." these are the two feet that were refreshed by the woman mentioned in the Gospel, and were washed with her tears."

Thirdly: The Lord offers his heavenly kingdom to those who, they themselves, have become his kingdom during their estranged life. They have preceded in carrying him in themselves as a kingdom in which his glory shines on them. St. Augustine comments on the Lord's words (Matt 25:34) "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." This means you were the kingdom, but with no authority to judge, come so you could reign! You are the ones who were previously in the hope alone, but now, you have obtained the authority as our actual fact! Therefore, God's house is like this, his temple, the heavenly kingdom, is still being constructed, executed and getting ready for the assembly. In it there will be places which the Lord is preparing now, and also these places were actually prepared as the Lord has promised."

Fourthly: The Lord Jesus has offered his kingdom to his believers, since "it was prepared for you from the foundation of the world." When the wicked ones are cast out, the Lord says about the eternal hellfire (Matt 25:41) "into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." The Lord has not prepared man for the outer fire, but rather for the eternal kingdom. The wicked ones have chosen themselves to be thrown out into what was prepared for others, that is, for 'Satan and his angels.'

Finally: the kingdom we see and hope for, is to enjoy the Lord Jesus himself, who is the mystery of our eternal joy. He reigns in us, and we dwell in him forever. As St. Kaprianous says, "Christ himself, dear brethren, is God's kingdom that we are eager for from day to day, that it should come. His coming is our passion, and we wish it to be manifested in us soon. Since he himself is our resurrection, in him we resurrect. Let us understand that God's kingdom is he himself, for in him we reign."

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Chapter XXVI

The Passover of the New Kingdom

The lord entered Jerusalem as the Passover lambs to be. He offered himself the unique sacrifice for the entire humanity and his life a redemption for all

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1-The Passover and Cross.

(Matt. 26:1,2) "Now it cause to pass, when Jesus has Finished all there sayings, that he said to his disciples, " You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified'."

In the Lord's words to his disciples, he bonds the Passover with the cross, since it is the unique Passover the Lord himself has offered. This to cross with the believing humanity from the fatal bondage, to the real restfulness. He also up-lefts them from the concern about the earthly life, to enter with them to his Father's embrace. We have previously studied this relationship in chapter 12 of the book of Exodus.

The mystery of the Passover is fulfilled in the Lord's body. He was led us as a lamb, and slaughtered as a sheep and He has thus saved us from the bondage of the world(Egypt). He has delivered us from Satan's slavery just as from Pharaoh. He has given us His seal by His Spirit. And our physical members by his blood. He is the one who has saved us from slavery to freedom.; from darkness to light; from death to life; from injustice to the everlasting kingdom.

Father Melito, bishop of Sardis.

We cross from the physical love to propriety and virtue, from our old ignorance to the real knowledge of God, from evil to virtue, in the hope of entering the glory of righteousness instead of the shame of sin, and hence we cross from death to incorruption.

St. Cyril the great.

2-Plotting Against Him:

(Matt. 26: 26-5) “Then the chief priests, the scribes and the elders of the people assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas and plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill Him. But they said “not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people”

The church is concerned about this action, and therefore it has dedicated every Wednesday, year round, except in the fifty days, so the believers fast, in remembrance of his plotting. The religious authorities assembled together to plot killing Him instead of witnessing for the truth and preaching it. It was appropriate for the chief priest, who intercedes for the people, to rejoice at the coming of the greatest Chief Priest, who alone is able to make enter everyone to His heavenly Father’s embrace. The scribes had to be thrilled because what they were studying in documents, that is the written word of God, has been fulfilled by God’s incarnate coming, to dwell amongst His people, encountering Him and getting in unity with Him. The elders of the people as well as, had to be overwhelmed with joy on seeing the multitude surrounding the Messiah the king. We expected them all to assemble in the court of the chief priest, announcing their joy with the Messiah the King who could fulfill what they were unable to do, and neither did their forefathers. But due to the appearance of worshiping and the law literacy, as well as the temporary honors, and running after positions and dignitaries----- all of these together have shut their hearts against the truth, and so they plotted against Him to kill Him. Indeed, they have assembled together in the court of the chief priest, all drown together by their fatal literal thinking and their insistence on conspiring to kill ‘life’ itself. They were not aware that what they were doing was only killing their deadly literacy. They assumed they were able to kill life by the cross. But this cross alone was able to scarify their deadly literacy, and grant them the Spirit that builds up they thought they were able to suppress the breath of light with their own darkness. They did not realize that this Light was scattering their darkness, and that they themselves would be enlightened by His own light.

They feared the multitudes gathered to celebrate the annual Passover, and they did not realize that because of their conspiracy they participated in fulfilling the unmatched new Passover. He alone is able to make them cross over from the fatal literacy to the enliving Spirit.

+The of Jesus supported their ruler against the Glory of Christ, and struggled against the Lord of all. But we all realize they only did this against themselves and were only entrapping themselves .they Have dug for themselves a pit for their own devastation. As the psalmist says (Ps.9:15) ‘The nations have sunk down in the pit which they made, in the net which they hid, their own foot is caught .’ But the savior, the Lord of everyone, even through His right hand alone is able to, and strong enough to cast away corruption and death, yet He was the One to yield all willingly of His own will power. He has become to taste of the death for the sake of giving life to all, so he would delete corruption and wipe away the sin of the world, and save those under the adverse hand, so overpowering and intolerable.

St. Cyril the great

3- Pouring the Fragrant Oil for His Burial:

The events were put together to fulfill the Passover by means of the cross, the issue for which the Son of God has become incarnate. In Bethany in the house of Sairon the leper, a woman came forth to pour a vessel of priceless fragrance as He was sitting. This was as a prophecy for His burial, it was as if this woman's deed represents a deed of love the church offers in its entirety for this pure body, who has accepted His own death willingly for the sake of its salvation, as a mystery of the real Passover.

Many have met the Lord Jesus representatives of the catholic church, for He is the bridegroom. But this woman seems to me she has surpassed them all, after the Mother of God Saint Mary who has carried the Lord in the womb. She is the symbol of the church, and His Kingdom has been carried inside her, the mystery of the church's life and its joy.

The church that has not yet been seen met with her Groom, through the Samaritan women (John 4) who had been married to five men, and the one with who she was living was not her husband. The man of truth came to take her to the real well of water to quench her thirst, and she overflowed the entire world with the mystery of her satisfaction.

In the midst of human crowds, the church of the new covenant secretly encountered the real physician to her, touching His clothes, and the flow of blood stopped (Matt 9). The church blemishes are wiped away through the power that was released to its inner depths.

The church developed, that was previously had fallen under the verdict of death, as a prostitute caught in the very act (John 7: 53-8:11) It has then taken by force His forgiving mercies.

The church has been freed as a poor widow who enters the Lord's house, not knowing what to offer except two cents, which was all she had; this was an acceptable offering of love.

The church, moreover, has met the mother of Zabadee's sons, offering her sons to the Groom so they be blessed with His eternal kingdom through their partnership with Him in His cup, and getting dyed with His won dye.

In the personality of Martha, the church came forth serving her Groom (Luke 10) in the person of His single, as an offering of sublime excessive love. In the house of Simon the Pharisee, the sinful woman came barging in the assembly (Luke 7) and she stood at the Lord's feet, weeping, and she wet his feet with the tears, and wiped them with her hair. She kissed His feet and rubbed them with fragrant oil (Luke 7:38). She represented the mystery of the church membership. It is the entrance to the Lord Jesus to encounter Him without being hindered by the Pharisee life of Simon's. The soul stands in humility weeping in tears of repentance at the Savior's feet. She bends with her head, that is, with the thoughts and hair, her physical beauty, wiping the Lord's feet. She is declaring her repentance, mingled with joy, for she is kissing His feet and pouring the fragrant oil in them. This declares the beautiful fragrant of Christ in her life.

As for this woman who met the Lord in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, she came to declare the most perfect encounter of the two brides, the church & the Groom. This was in heavenly splendor, poring out all her life, a fragrant oil of

great price, filling up heaven and earth with the beautiful fragrance of love. This meeting makes us enter into overwhelming mysteries, before which I stand in amazement that I am unable to express. It carries the mystery of eternal life, which no human language could record as it is.

Firstly: This woman is probably the Saint Mary, Martha, Lazarus's sister. She is known for her peaceful sitting at the Savior's feet, listening to Him, and speaking to Him. Whereas Martha was busy in her many chores. She knew how to sell everything so as to possess the priceless pearl.

In her continuous meeting with the Lord, she came to know the mystery of the cross, and she realized His death and His burial, not as historical events she was awaiting in fear and confusion, but as godly deeds, so overwhelming. This is why she was exerting every effort to save all what she could to offer the vessel of fragrant oil, so priceless, at the right time and the right place. In the fragrant vessel, the Lord could see the heart of the church, His bride. It had realized the mystery behind His death, as a good and joyful mystery to the soul. This is why He said affirmingly that wherever this gospel is preached in all over the world, what this woman did will be mentioned. The evangelist St. Mark said that she broke the vessel! What an amazing mystery; for the church has seen the Lord offering His life in sacrifice on the cross, and the springs of His love breaking out through His open and pierced side. She, too, came as Mary, as a bottle of fragrant oil, breaking it voluntarily, and the fragrance of her love is exploded through the perfume. In this way love is blended with love, and pain is blended with pain, and the cross with the cross, and the pierced with the broken vessel, poured on the sanctified body.

Secondly: The encounter took place in Bethany, in Simon the leper's house. This is Bethany, Mary's birthplace. The Lord came to this place preferring it to Jerusalem. There he rested every night. Bethany means 'the house of suffering' or 'the house of tolerance'. He has come to us, to the land of our pain, to meet Him through our pain. We are aware of His burial, let us be buried with Him, let us offer our life to Him as sacrifice for His sake.

She met Him in the house of Simon the leper; he might have been a leper healed by Him. The Lord has come to us, to our leprous and defiled, not to It is He who would rather cleanse it. At this point the church, holy and pure, with encounter her Groom who dwells in her house, so as to offer Him an offering of thanksgiving. Just as the Pharisee nature of Simon was unable to deprive the sinful woman of meeting the Lord and to express her repentance (Luke 7) it was also not possible for Simon's Here to hide the grateful Mary's meeting the source of her sanctification.

Thirdly: The timing of the meeting was extremely accurate, for the Lord came after He had raised Lazarus her brother from the dead, as a thanksgiving offering. She was joyful her brother was raised from the grave, so she came willingly so she would be buried with her Groom in the holy grave, and would be raised by Him and in Him. But what is surprising is that she offers it in the last day the Lord comes to Bethany. This was on a Wednesday, after the Jewish rulers had conspired together to kill Him. There only remained the Covenant Thursday, in which the Lord would

be arrested to be judged and crucified. If she had been one day late she would not have been given this great honor, and she would not have been worthy of prophesying His burial. It is God's Spirit that made her realize in her depths the suitable time to meet Him in this unique way.

+ The Lord accepted the fragrant oil to be poured on His head, so the church would be well-perfumed and well-preserved.

Do not be anointed with the filth of teachings given by the ruler of this world, Satan, lest he leads you to imprisonment, away from the life prepared for you.

St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch

+ Christ is not in need of any fragrance, and neither do the martyrs need the candlelight. But the woman poured the fragrant oil to honor Christ, and He therefore accepted the reverence in her heart.

St. Jerome

4- Judas' Betrayal:

Father Joseph says, "What other thing of more profit to the entire world could she offer such as the blessings of the sincere suffering of the Lord? Despite this, the traitor who betrayed the Lord and handed Him to the suffering, gained nothing of his betrayal, but he was rather actually harmed, for it was said about him (Matt 26:24)" But woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." The outcome of his deed did not revert to him according to its result in actual facts, but rather according to what he wished for and believed in."

At the time when St. Mary cautiously went in to meet her Groom at Bethany, eager to be buried with Him, Judas 'the disciple' was selling the Lord for a few pennies as a slave. Judas was with the Lord most of the days, spending long hours, and even days, and saw Him make amazing miracles and heard Him a great deal. He also obtained from the Lord the authority to preach and make miracles, yet, despite all of this, his heart did not encounter the Lord due to his love of money. But as for the woman, she saw nothing of all this, and neither did she hear the Lord as much as he did, nor was she given the authority, yet she knew Him by means of the purity of her heart. For greed has blinded the heart of Judas, so as to sell His Lord. But as for the woman, she came forth in love, in the warmth of the Spirit, to receive the salvation and the right of hidden preaching.

Mary was not blessed in being a disciple; for, the mystery behind the power is not due to man's position or his job, but rather the power is in his life. St. John Chrysostom says, "The virtuous person, even if he may be a slave or a prisoner, is the happiest of all people. Vice is so weak, whereas virtue is strong indeed."

Mary has offered her riches as a gift to the Lord, so she may remain rich inside herself, even if she seemed to have no money. Judas sold his master for silver in his hands. As St. John Chrysostom says, "He who is not rich within himself, can never be rich, just as he would never be poor, if he is not poor in his mind. If the soul is more sublime than the body, the members lesser sublimity have no authority with which to act even on itself. But what is of more sublimity will have authority over it and change it. Money is of no use if the soul is in poverty, and there is no harm in poverty if the soul is rich."

Just as St. Mary represents the honest souls that come forth in love to Him, so does Judas represent the deceitful souls that seek evil and sell their Master for some temporary pleasure.

At this point we have to realize that not every sin may falls into is betrayal to the Lord. But to chase it and seek it, and when man asks for it in neglect of the Lord and His precious blood, then this is counted treason!

+ The very same hand which received the blessed gift a few moments ago, has stood up to receive the money for conspiring the death of her Lord.

St. Cyril El Orshileing

+ When the disciples prepared the Passover, Christ ate with them, for He was tolerant with the traitor. Before embracing him to the table of love and endless tenderness, even tough he was a traitor, the devil has been able to set foot in him.

St. Cyril the great.

+ The evangelist says ‘one of the twelve’ (Matt 26:14,47). This shows something of extreme importance, for the sin of treason is made more clear. He who has honored him, making the apostolic honors, and has made him beloved and embraced him to the sanctified table, this one has become a way and a means of killing Christ.

St. Cyril the great

+ What place did Satan find Judas?

Satan could not draw neat all those about whom we spoke, such as the blessed St. Peter or St. or St. John, for their hearts were firm and their love to Christ was stable. But Satan found a place in the traitor because of the disease of bitter greed of which the righteous St. Paul has said “the source of all evil” (1...6:10) which has defeated him.

St. Cyril the great

5- The Passover offering:

The more the hour of crucifixion drew near, the more the evangelist put into details every action the Lord Jesus made. This is to reveal the mysteries in His salvation deed.

(Matt 26:17-19) “Now on the first day of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, ‘where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover’ and He said, ‘Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples’ So the disciples did as Jesus directed them, and they prepared the Passover.” Why did the disciples ask the Lord this question?

Firstly: May be because the disciples, since they have followed Christ, they left everything behind, and have become like people having no particular place where to prepare the Passover. St. John Chrysostom says, “From this it is evident He had no home, or any place of accommodation, and it is assumed they too were likewise, otherwise they would have begged Him to go there.”

Secondly: The Passover, according to the Jewish custom was carried out on a family level. Every family would slaughter the Passover sheep. If the family could not afford that, they could join another family in performing this ritual. But the Lord Jesus provided a new concept for the new Passover. The family that celebrates it, has the head of Jesus Christ Himself, and the members are related on a spiritual basis in Christ, and through any blood relation. (Matt 26:20-21) “ When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve, now as they were eating, He said, ‘Assuredly I say to you, one of you will betray Me.’ “ What is surprising is that the Lord spoke of His betrayer in the midst of them all, without pointing at him. The Lord was concerned about His own salvation, without hurting the betrayer’s feelings. But when the Lord saw they were truly sorrowful, and each of them asked Him, (Matt 26:22) “Lord, is it I?” The Lord got concerned about them lest they be disturbed and die in their despair, and therefore He had to point at him.

Lest the disciples assume that what was about to happen to the Lord is out of weakness, He confirmed to them assumingly (Matt 26:24) “The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.” The Lord declared the misery that would befall Judas so as to assure them that what is being fulfilled, even though it is of God’s provision, yet what Judas was doing is not to be fulfilled without his own will. Judas was evil indeed, and God has used his wickedness to fulfill His divine issues.

6- The Last Supper:

as they were eating the symbolic Jewish Passover (Matt 26:26-28) “Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying ‘Drink from it all of you, for this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.’”

St. Cyril the great comments on the last supper saying, “By what means can man on earth, wrapped in death come back to incorruption? I answer and say that this dead body has to share in the power of the Giver of life descending from God. As for the power of the Giver which belongs to God the Father, this is the only begotten Son, the Word, whom He sent to us as Savior and a Redeemer. How did He send Him to us? St. John the evangelist tells us very clearly, (John 1:14) “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” When we eat the holy body of Christ, our Savior of us all, and drink of His precious blood, we thus obtain the life in us, for we become as if we are one with Him; we dwell in Him, and He too reigns in us. Do not doubt, for this is true, since He is the One who says it clearly (John 6)’ This is my flesh, this is My blood.’ Rather, accept the word of the Savior in faith, for He is the Truth who can never lie.”

This happened in the evening (Matt 26:20). As St. John Chrysostom says, “The evening is a definite sign of fulfilling the times, the have now drew near to that same end.”

When the Lord had completed the Passover, so He would not seem to be easy in the law, He offered Himself a new Passover in place of the entire humanity. He

declared the sacrifice of the cross was not fulfilled haphazardly. It was of His own will that He handed Himself over to the cross. He transformed the bread and the wine into His own flesh and blood, sanctified, a true sacrifice given for the remission of sins (Matt 26:28). He has offered them to His church for us to obtain through generations, as a confirmation to the continuance of the cross sacrifice. It is a live sacrifice, a unique and unequalled one, by means of which He grants the believers His sanctified flesh and blood as the mystery of their lives. St. John Chrysostom says, "Many say now we wish to see His form, His clothes, His sandals, oh? Here you are seeing Him, touching Him, eating Him. Indeed, you do wish to see His clothes, and here He is giving you Himself. This is not only that you see Him, but also o touch Him, eat Him, and accept Him inside you."

The Lord goes on to say (Matt 26:29) "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the wine from now until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." What is this 'new' that we will drink with Him in our Father's kingdom other than our enjoyment in the partnership of the unity with God in the sacrifice of His Son in the heavens on a new level. It is an extension of the current liturgy, but in a way that can not be uttered!

After they had eaten (Matt 26:30) "When they had a hymen, they went out to the Mount of Olives." The thanksgiving sacrifice was fulfilled, and was concluded in hymens. This is what happens in the church in every godly liturgy in which the liturgy Eucharist is concluded in joyful hymens concerning the Psalm 150.

7- Warning Them of Doubting:

The Lord went to the Mount of Olives voluntarily, so as to receive the cup from the Father's hands. This is how He accepts to carry the heavy burden of our sins on His shoulders, offering himself sacrifice of iniquity for us, in our place.

On His way to the cross, He warned His disciples, and encouraged them, speaking all the while of the cross and the resurrection as well. He said, (Matt 26:31,32) "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I will strike the Shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee."

By means of the cross, the enemy wished to strike the shepherd so as to scatter the flock. But the cross has been changed to the resurrection, and the Lord will go ahead of us to Galilee. The word 'Galilee' means 'a neighborhood', or a 'circle'. It is as if the Lord by means of His resurrection has gone ahead of us in a new circle, or a new region. He is the Prime of those asleep, and He carries in Himself the resurrected life, so that with Him we enter, and also in Him, in the circle of this life, new and resurrected.

St. Peter the apostle assumed he is able to stand next to the Lord, and never to doubt Him. But what St. Peter did not know about himself, his Creator knew it, and assured him (Matt 26:34) "Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." St. Peter was sure of himself on no basis, for he said (Matt 26:35) "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" What St. Peter the apostle said, was likewise said by all the disciples.

We are so badly in need of going to the Father's embrace, for He knows our every weakness. We should not be sure of ourselves, but rather in the Father's

grace, that is able to raise us from these weakness. We may think we are able to exercise the holy and virtuous life, and we are unaware of the fact that we are weak in every way, and could fall in only a moment! As St. Cyril the great says, “ Let us not pride ourselves on His gifts.”

What is surprising is that the Lord Jesus who has warned His disciple of the result of Satan’s temptation to him, for he would deny Him three times , He also gave him a word of comfort, that he would rise up again and even support his (Luke 22:31-34).

8- In Gethsemane:

When the Lord came to Gethsemane, He told His disciples (Matt 26:36,37) “ ‘Sit here while I go and pray over there.’ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed.” Gethsemane is an Aramice word meaning ‘an oil grinder’. It is as if the Lord, so willingly, is entering this grinder and that it was not possible for the disciples to enter with Him there. But He choose St. Peter and the sons of Zebedee as witnesses to see Him for a while; yet, they are unable to and they slept instead. This happened a second time; He asked them to be up with Him, yet they could not. The third time He said to them (Matt 26:40) “Sleep now and rest.”

In a prophetic spirit, Isaiah the prophet saw Him at Gethsemane, where He underwent the real wine press, He therefore said, (Is. 63:1-3) “who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this One who is glorious in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength? ‘I who speak in the righteousness, mighty to save.’ Why is Your apparel red, and Your like one who treads in the winepress? I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the people no one was with Me.”

The Lord has undergone the winepress all by Himself, and He says, (Matt 26:38) “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even to death.” The secret and reason of His sorrow, is not because of the fear of physical suffering, but it was due to the weighty iniquity which the Lord could not bear or tolerate. But it was for this that He came, and in our place, He yielded in obedience to the Father, so as to carry the death of sin in Him. He cries out (Matt 26:39) “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”

As St. Augustine says, “The will of the Father and the Son are one and the same, for they have one Spirit. Then why did He say so? He has come in our place, we who have rejected God’s will, and hence He yielded gladly to the cross , in obedience to the Father, and at the same time, He wanted this as well. This is what the Lord Himself has declared when He said (John 3:16) “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” The sacrifice and effort here is God’s loving will. At the same time the apostle says (Gal 2:20) “Who loved me and gave Himself for me.” He has shed Himself, so full of Love.

+ It is impossible that the Son of Man has said “O My Father, if it is possible, et this cup pass from Me” due to His fear! The Lord Jesus would not reject the sacrifice of death, until the gift of salvation reaches all of humanity.

The scholar Oreganus

+ “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death”

Let us offer our thanks that Jesus has a real body and a real soul. For, if the Lord had not taken the human nature in its totality, humanity would not have been saved. If He had taken the physical form only, with no soul, He would have saved the body, without the soul, though we need the salvation of the soul more than we do that of the body. He has taken the body and the soul together so as to save them, to save the entire man just as He had created him.

St. Jerome.

+ Being God, who has taken the form of man, He lived the role of physical weakness, so there would be no pretext for the evil ones who deny the incarnation. Though He said so, yet the followers of Mani still do not believe, and denies the incarnation, and Mercion claims this is only fantasy.

He has manifested Himself that He carries a real body.

St. Ambrosias.

St. Cyril the great thinks the mystery in the grief of the Lord Jesus is the rejection of Israel to His Prime Son to Him, for he says

+ Just as He wept over Lazarus in compassion for the entire human race, for He has become a prey to corruption and to death, likewise do we say that He was sorrowful here when he saw Jerusalem surrounded by major misfortunes, and there was no remedy for these disasters.

St. Cyril the great.

+ His suffering was not fulfilled without His own will, yet from another aspect it was very grievous, for it led to the Jewish assembly rejection and its downfall. It was not His will that Israel would be the Lord’s killer, exposing himself to condemnation, blame, and deprivation fro God’s gifts, whereas previously they were His people. They alone were His people, His chosen ones and His heirs!

St. Cyril the great

The Lord went to pray as well, so as to teach us, for He tells His disciples (Matt 26:41) “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

St. Jerome says, ”whereas my soul is strong, and it leads me to life, yet my body is weak, and draws me to death.”

It is an urgent need that we pray, so God would support our souls, and raises up our bodies from their weakness. St. Cyril the great speaks to us of the necessity to follow the Lord’s example in time of temptation, He says, “He was praying when those who wished to arrest Him were close by. No one is to understand that at this point He is pleading like someone in need of strength or support from someone else. For, He Himself is God the Father’s strength, able and authoritative, He rather did this so as to teach us, so He would cast away our carelessness at the time of temptation, and when persecution oppresses us, and when deception is harbored against us, and the net of death plotted for us. Our means of salvation is to be watchful, to Down,

and entreat Him, and ask for help from above, so we do not get weakened and are inflicted with terrifying devastation.”

The Lord has asked them to be watchful; yet after He had prayed three times, He returned to them and said (Matt 26:45) “Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.” When the Lord hands Himself over to death, we sleep and rest. He is the cause of our restfulness; He goes to the cross to pay our own debt, He suffers, so we are restful, He is crucified so we be crowned!

9- Arresting the Lord:

The Lord Jesus took the last row so as to carry our suffering and drink the cup till the end, in our place. He had to accept the pain at the hands of one of His disciples, and through one kiss, His wound was as bitter as could be.

The prophet saw Him wounded, and he asked Him (Zech. 13:6) “What are these wounds between Your arms?” And the Lord answers in bitterness (Zech. 13:6) “Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends.”

The wounds increase in their bitterness because they came wrapped up in the covering of false love, and tender words that carry under the poisonous evil.

We, too, when we unite with the Lord Jesus, we are encountered by one of our own ‘household’, as Judas. He cuts short the Spirit of truth in us, for he says that man’s enemies are of his own household.

The Lord gave Judas the last chance, even at the last moments when He was being arrested. He blamed him in gentle words (Matt 26:50) “Friend, why have you come?”

With a kiss, Judas gave up his Master. As St. Ambrosias says, “You are offering a kiss, you who do not know the mystery of a kiss. What is wanted is not the kiss of lips, but rather the kiss of the heart and the soul.”

St. Peter the apostle stretched out his hand, took his sword to strike Melchus, the servant of the chief priest, and he cut his ear (Matt 26:51). But the Lord commanded him to put his sword in its place, and He healed the servant’s ear, saying (Matt 26:52-54) “for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?”

When man uses violence for his service under the pretence of defense for the Lord Jesus the Truth, he will be like St. Peter who strikes with the sword and cuts the ear of the servant, and he loses the listening to the voice of the Word. The word of violence increases the stubbornness of those who resist, and makes them lose their spiritual listening to the Truth. They are no longer eager to cease their resistance, and are not keen for the truth.

In gladness did the Lord stand the wounds of His resisters, but He could not stand the disciples’ defense for Him in using the sword. What St. Peter had as bitterness towards those who crucified the Lord was in His eyes, of the evil sword. As St. Ambrosias says, “Jesus did not wish to be defended against the wounds of those who persecuted Him. He rather wished all to be healed by these wounds.”

+ He did not want us to use the swords in resisting our enemies, but rather to use love and reverence, and thus win over those against us. St. Paul teaches us something similar when saying (2 Cor. 10:5) “Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” This is because the war for the sake of the truth is spiritual, and the weapon that makes us saints is mental and full of God’s love.

St. Cyril the great.

+ St. Peter cut the right ear of the servant of the chief priest. This act was a sign of the inability of the Jews to good listening, for they did not listen well to the words of Jesus. They have rather honored the left ear, that is, they obeyed their impulses that sprung up from their fanaticism. They have thus become (2 Tuin. 3:13) “deceiving and being deceived” As the book says (Matt 15:19) “And in vain they worship Me, teaching as the commandments of men.”

+ It is as if St. Peter has revealed what is in their depths that the spiritual right ear has been cut off, since they paid more attention to the left ear and listened to falsehood. But the Lord has come to heal the right ear and to make it listen to spiritualities.

St. Cyril the great.

10- The Religious Judgment:

The judge stood before the scribes, the chief priests and the elders to be judged as a blasphemer. They were supported by false witnesses in their accusations, yet He remained silent.

He was accused of being a blasphemer for the words He said (Matt 26:61) “I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.” This was false accusation, for He did not say so. He rather said (John 2:19) “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” He was actually speaking of the temple of His body (John 2:12). But as for them, they understood He was speaking of the Jerusalem temple.

As for the other the second aspect of blasphemy, it was because He said of Himself He is Christ the Son of God. When the chief asked Him about this, He answered (Matt 26:64) “It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

The chief priest was unable to bear the Lord’s answer, so he tore his clothes. This was a sign of the tearing down of the Levite priesthood and its coming to an end. A new priesthood thus came up on the rites of Milchezedec.

St. Cyril the great comments on the chief priest’s question to the Lord Jesus (Matt 26:63) “I put You under oath by the living God: tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!” St. Cyril says, “Tell me why are you asking Him this? Is it to know if He is the Christ? You can easily know Him by means of the law and the prophets. Search in the books of Moses, and you will see Him described in various ways.

Investigate into the prophetic books and you will hear them declaring His godly and amazing miracles.”

11- St. Peter’s Denial:

St. Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. Then one servant girl came forth to accuse him of being with Jesus. But he denied it before all. As he was going out at the gateway, another maid saw him and accused him as did the first one. But again he denied it. After a while, those close by said his speech betrayed him. But he To curse and swear he didn’t know Him, at that moment the rooster crowed.

The soul that remains slothful, sitting outside, and does not go with the Lord to the cross to know its inner depths, can never witness but it rather denies. If it goes out to the gateway, that is, to live without a secretive life, then it repeats its denial, and many chase this soul so as to wage it to deny. But as for the soul that goes to the cross, and draws near to it, as John did, this does not deny, but it rather from the Lord Jesus His own mother as a mother to itself.

St. Cyril the great speaks of the weakness of St. Peter the apostle and his repentance saying, “Christ had not yet risen from the dead, and neither did He cancel death, nor did He wipe away, therefore the fear of death as above the capabilities of human nature. The apostle has condemned himself by his own conscience, for he wept bitterly soon after. He wept in regret, in bitter tears, because of his very serious sin. He was not careless in his repentance, just as he has quickly fallen in sin, likewise did his tears fall due to it. he not only wept, but he wept in sincere bitterness. He is as a man who has fallen, and in courage he got up a second time, for he knows how merciful the Lord can be, as He said to one of His prophets (Jer. 8:4) “will they fall and not rise? Will one turn away and not return?” in his return he did not lose the sign, but he rather continued as previously, as a true disciple. “St. Ambrosias also says, “St. Peter wept because he committed an error. He is like someone who was and got lost; and so he wept and did not apologize, for the tears do not ask for forgiveness, but they rather obtain it. Jesus looked at him, so he wept bitterly. O. Lord Jesus, look upon us, and let us know to weep over our sins”

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Chapter XXVII The Crucified King

The cross is the kingly road, and for this reason the evangelist St. Matthew presented to us a detailed account of the cross events:

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1- His Judgment before the governor:

The religious judgment remained all night long, in the midst of the darkness of envy and hate (Matt 27:1-2) "When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor."

The Jewish rulers were asking for the Messiah, the Savior so He would deliver them from the Roman rule, and He would establish for them the earthy kingdom of the Messiah. Each one coveted to have authority and a prominent position in it. But the Lord has destroyed every materialistic concept for this kingdom, and has declared the spiritual one instead. They therefore resorted to the Roman chiefs themselves to pass judgment over Him, not only from their religious point of view, but also as a national traitor who established a kingdom for Himself. It was as if those who wished to get rid of Caesar, they themselves, for the sake of their personal profit, they pretended to be defenders to Him against the Savior! Their inward principle and the hidden one was their personal benefit, not the majority or the service of God and the nation!

2- Returning the silver:

it was not possible for Judas to keep the silver with him. Just as he who leaves something for the Lord's sake, he would be rewarded a hundred fold in this world and in life to come (Matt 19:29), likewise, he who sells the Lord for a price loses a hundred fold in this world and also loss his life forever. Judas assumed, in his greed, he would gain thirty pieces of silver, but as a result he gained disaster and misfortune. So he went to return the silver pieces in regret, without any repentance, and in bitterness without any hope. He could no longer stand his life so he went to strangle and hang himself.

The chief priests did not accept the silver to be put in the treasury, since it is the price of blood. So they bought a potter's field, a graveyard for stranger, and it has been called the 'field of the blood', as a witness to what mankind did to their Savior.

St. Cyril El Orshilimy comments on the words of the chief priests and the elders to Judas (Matt 27:4) "What is that to us? You see to it!" also he comments on their words about the silver thrown in the temple (Matt 27:6) "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury because they are the price of blood," saying "this is amazing!

The killers say ‘what is that to us?’ they ask of him who received the price for the crime to see for himself. As for them, His killers, they did not have to see. They then tell themselves “It is not lawful to put it in the treasury is considered sinful, how much more would the shedding of blood be? And if you see a pretext for crucifying Christ, then why do you refuse to accept the price ?”

The ‘Field of Blood’ bought for thirty pieces of silver as a graveyard for strangers, refers to the world redeemed by the Lord with His blood, so the Gentiles could be buried in it, and be blessed with Him in His resurrection. As St. Jerome says, “Why have they bought it? So as to use it as a graveyard for strangers. We are the ones making use of it, for it was bought for our sake with the blood of Jesus for its price.” St. Ambrosias says, “ The field according to the divine words, is the entire present world (Matt 13:36) . The price of the blood is the price for the Lord’s suffering, who has bought the world with the price of His blood so as to save it, (John 3:17). He came to keep those who are buried with Christ and have died with Him in the baptism (Rom. 6:4,8 ; Col.2:12) so as to obtain the eternal blessings. Instead of living as strangers under the law, they have become close by means of the blood of Jesus (Eph. 2:11-13)”. We have previously explained the thirty pieces of silver, and the house of pottery, and the field of blood, and what they signify in our study of the book of Zechariah the prophet (Zech. 11:12,13).

3- His Silence before the Governor:

(Matt. 27:11-14) “Now Jesus stood before the governor. And the governor asked Him, saying, ‘are You the king of the Jews?’ Jesus said to him, ‘It is as you say.’ And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. Then Pilate said to Him ‘do You not hear how many things they testify against You?’ But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly.”

His answers to Pilate the governor are concise indeed, to the extent in which He reveals the truth and so he would have no excuse. At this point He stopped speaking either to the religious rulers or the governor, for He did not wish to defend Himself. If He had wanted to, He could have testified of Himself, and would have commanded the heavens and it would have witnessed to Him. But He was not in need of this testimony, and His defense. Indeed, a lot of words, particularly when man justifies himself, this only declare the inward hollow weakness inside. But, as much as the soul is inwardly satisfied, our inward man would be just as strong, even tough by means of very few words!

The Lords’ silence before His accusers is a priceless treasure and stock from which the believers supply themselves, when they are mocked and are unjustly accused, and hence they do not flare up in anger, or get disturbed. As St. John Chrysostom says, “Has anyone insulted you? Draw the sign of the cross on yourself, and remember all what happened at the crucifixion, and thus everything will be put out.” He goes on to say, “have pity on him who curses you, for he is subjected to a master, a fearful ghost which is spite, and to a scary devil which is anger.”

+ At any rate, Jesus is attacked at all times by false witnesses. As long as evil is in the world, then He is exposed to accusations continuously. Despite this, He is still

silent before this without giving any audible answer. He rather puts His defense in the life of His real disciples. This life is an exalted testimony that surpasses above any other false witnessing, and it destroys all the attacks and accusation, that are altogether unbiased upon anything.

The scholar Oreganus.

4- The release of Barabas:

as much as the power of evil has bonded together so as to get rid of the Lord by means of crucifixion, the Lord gave Himself a Passover for the entire humanity, all joyfully. He allows visible symbolic blessings during His crucifixion, as a symbol of invisible blessings. When conspiring against Him, the opposing religious groups met together in sharing this one aim. It is as if by means of His death, He was offering the reconciliation between the contradicting opponents in concepts, and those at discord not only among one national category, but rather among variable races and tongues and nations. During His judgment, Pontius Pilate sent Him to Herod for being the governor over Galilee. The latter was eager to see Him; and so a reconciliation issued between Pilate and Herod, because of the Lord who was tied under the judgment. Just before the crucifixion, Pilate asked the people that he releases one at the feast. They cried out that Jesus be crucified, and Barabas released, for Barabas was a famous prisoner. Therefore the Lord saved Barabas with His own death!

When the Lord stood before Pilate, the latter marveled greatly (Matt 27:14) "For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy (Matt 27:18). Because the Lord God wanted to guide him, He spoke to him by means of his ... in a dream. She therefore sent to him saying (Matt 27:19) "Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him." This was a lesson not only to Pilate alone, but also to the chief priests and the elders so they see and hear this foreign Pilate declaring the innocence of the Lord, by the washing of his hands before all, and saying (Matt 27:24) "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it."

5- His suffering before the Crucifixion:

After the Lord had been (Matt 27:26) and was handed over to be crucified, all the garrison gathered round Him. They stripped Him of His clothes, and put a scarlet robe on Him. They also twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. They bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him saying, 'Hail king of the Jews! They spat on Him and took the reed and struck Him on His head.

When accepting to be crucified, the Lord revealed the outcome of evil, for He was representative of humanity who carried the fruit of their wickedness.

Man asks for sin and seeks it for the sake of temporary pleasure, or physical pleasure. The Lord handed over His body to be scourged and whipped, and the Holy One was exposed to deadly whips! With each whip, the traces were there on His tender and modest body. The Lord sees the weight of our iniquity as everlasting whips which no one could bear except Himself. He accepted them for these were of God's justice. This is why the apostle says (2Cor. 5:21) "For He made Him who

knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

The iniquity in its reality is the fruit of our ego, and it is also the one to give it birth at the same time. Man in his selfishness asks what is for himself materialistically, or as honors or pleasures. These in essence kindle all these more his love for himself. He thinks within himself he is the center of the whole world, and all work for his sake. This is what the serpent declared to Eve when it tempted her (Ger. 3:5) “For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Man wished to be like God, and thus his eyes will be opened to see himself above all others, and enslave everything for himself. This is why the garrison gathered against Him, as if representing the entire humanity or the entire world. They surrounded the accused not to give Him honor or work for His account, but rather to strip Him of His clothes, and put on Him a scarlet robe for mockery, for the accused One wished to establish Himself as a God or King. With iniquity, man lost the crown of hidden glory that God had granted him so as to control with it the worldly creation. He twisted for himself a crown of thorns, made of the earth that was cursed because of him. This was instead of the that God offered to him to reign over his heart, his senses and emotions before he reigns over others. Sin handed him a reed in his right hand, which is a flint of mockery that reveals his loss of authority over his inward life, and all of his senses and emotions. He has therefore become as a reed moved by the wind! In humiliation and scorn, sin holds this fake scepter to hit Him on the head with it, as if declaring that what He thought honor and glory to Him is only a Even up to His head and inner thoughts.

Man believed being so sinful, that he reigns over all and that the world kneels down to him. But the world in mockery kneels down to make fun of Him, saying “Hail, King of the Jews!” as if rebuking Him, and telling Him “You who have lost Your inward peace, how are You asking for outward to the glory of God the Father.”

I believe, moreover, that we have to draw your attention at this point here, that the cross is being carried, which reminds us of our righteous father Abraham when he went up the mountain he saw, to offer Isaac a sacrifice as God has commanded him. He put the stones on the son, which is a symbol of Christ, who carried His cross on His shoulders, exalted up to the glory of His cross. For, the suffering of Christ was His glory as he taught us Himself (John 13:31) “Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him.”

On the way to the crucifixion, He felt several times due to the heavy weight of the cross. They therefore called a Cyrene man named Simon, to carry with Him the cross. It is as if he is representing the church of the new covenant that has to be committed to carrying the cross with the Lord in His crucifixion, since it is mature in spiritual manhood. Thus, the church will the kingdom in this partnership. It is great glory for the believer bend down and carry the suffering with His Lord, so he would experience the power of the resurrection and its glory in him.

On the cross (Matt 27:34) “they gave Him sour wine mingled with gall to drink. But when He had tasted it, He would not drink.” This was a custom with the Romans in crucifixion; the vinegar was given, mingled with bitterness, as a way of

anesthesia or, and the crucified one would not feel the weighty suffering as much. But the Lord tasted the sour vinegar, and refused to drink it, so that He would bear the pain in its totality, out of His own self will.

When the Lord was crucified, the soldiers divided His garments into four parts, but as for His robe that had no seams, woven all from the top (John 19:23) they cast lots for it. (Matt 27:35) “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: ‘They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots’.” But they were no sandals with His clothes.

Concerning His garments divided into four parts, this refers to the church that has Christ’s body glued to it. It has spread to the four sides or corners of the universe. It has become in the hands of the Roman soldiers, in the hands of the Gentiles, and they are able to obtain the membership in it.

As for the robe that had no seams to it, all woven from the top, this is not split or divided, this refers to the one church that should have no divisions or splitting. The Lord was careful, even in His crucifixion, that His robe be not divided. It is as if, whenever the church shares His cross, the Lord is careful not to have any division or splitting among itself. But unfortunately, this happens when the church is found to be in a period of luxury, far away from the cross.

The cross has revealed that His robe is woven from the top (John 19:13). In such a way, when the church goes round in a circle of suffering, its heavenly nature is revealed. It is woven by God’s hand Himself, it is the work of His Holy Spirit.

There were no shoes for the Lord to take off. When studying the book of Exodus, we saw how the shoes refer to the evil and dead deeds. This is why man has to take them off when standing before God, in a holy place, just as Moses had done (Ex. 3:5).

After casting lots over His robe (Matt 27:36) “Sitting down, they kept watch over Him there.” The Lord Jesus was not in need of any watch, for He is the Creator who through Him is everything made, and without Him nothing would have been made. Yet He yielded with His body to this watch. Indeed the Lord Jesus allowed in a hidden way His persecutors, those soldiers, to be guards to Him on the cross! It is bright picture of God’s divine work for He allows the ordeals that surround the church. His own body to be a guard to the church. These hardships support the believers, and thus they live in the spirit of lowliness, and are exalted. As much as this issue to be guarded is precious, as much as the watch is increased. Also, as much as God cherishes His children and His church, as much as He allows hardships, so they cross this life well kept in it. “And they put over His head the accusation written against Him: This is Jesus the king of the Jews.”

The king was crowned with the cross! As the church says in the Song of Solomon (Song of So. 3:11) “Go fourth, O daughters of Zion, and see king Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, the day of the gladness of his heart.” The church calls the souls of the believers to go out of itself and look up to its King, the Donor of the heavens, so it could enter with Him, by means of the cross to His wedding and be blessed with the eternal hearty wedding.

(Matt 27:38) “Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left.”

The Jewish masters sat in their seats teaching, as if they came from above. They rebuked and blamed, and feared to touch anything defiled lest they themselves be defiled as well. But as for the Lord, He came presenting a new concept of edification; for He has left His seat and position to be counted among the criminals and sinners. He event into their midst, sharing them their pain till the cross, accepting their mockery. He declared His practical love so as to release them to His father’s embrace. He has been crucified with the two robbers, and for their sake, to the extent that one of them wished to be accepted inside Him, a real king, uplifting him to His paradise. The Lord answered him; “Today you will be with Me in paradise.”

7- Mocking Him:

The evil forces united together against the Lord to give us the most bitter picture of the cross. (Matt 27:40) “And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads & saying, ‘You who destroyed the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.’”

The passers by lost their balance and wagged their heads as a sign of mockery against Him. They blasphemed against Him and said ‘You who destroy the temple and build it in three days save Yourself.’ They were unaware of exerting their utmost to destroy the temple of His body, and were only witnessing oh Him that He had previously declared of His resurrection ahead of time. Those blasphemers have become true witnesses to His deed of salvation, and His resurrected life. They have asked of Him to save Himself, and they did not realize He was only resurrecting them by His own resurrection; He would rise and make them rise as well.

Satan might have felt the danger of the cross, and he got terrified, and was eager the Lord comes down from His cross. But it was too late; he therefore motivated those blasphemers to ask of the Lord ‘if You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.’ Satan’s fear increased, and so he motivated further the chief priests and the scribes and elders to ask the Lord if He could come down from it, saying (Matt 27:42) “He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.” At those moments, Satan focused on the Lord coming down from the cross. Even the two robbers reviled Him (Matt 27:44) and asked Him to come down if He could.

8- Darkness on the Earth:

(Matt 27:45) “Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land.”

Darkness prevailed over all the land, declaring its authority that has prevailed over the world since the moment of downfall. The Lord has left it to prevail to a certain time, for He says (Luke 22:53) “But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.” The Lord left the authority to darkness to a certain hour, so that when it tries to lure and entrap Light in its web, then the Light would destroy darkness and ruin its entrapping.

That hour came before the Lord gave up His spirit. It is as if the Lord gave to hell the opportunity to accept His spirit, whereas it was unaware that He alone is able to break down the doors of hell, so as to embrace those who slept in the hope, and thus carry them as His holy sheep, entering with them into paradise.

The prophets were concerned about their prophecy of this hour of darkness. As mentioned by St. Cyril El Orshilimy, Zechariah says 'On this day there will be no light ...' then the prophet says (Zech. 14:6,7) "It shall be one which is known to the Lord." Does God not know the other days? God forbid! For the days are many, but (Ps. 118:24) "This is the day which the Lord has made." The Lord was patient in His sufferings. Then, how can this be explained? This is what the gospel explains when it relates to us it was not an ordinary day in which the sun shines as usual from morn till dusk. But from the sixth hour there was darkness at midday, till the ninth hour. This darkness is explained by God, saying (Gen. 1:5) "and the darkness He called Night." For this reason, it was neither Day nor Night, for there was there entire night so that it be called night. But the sun shone after it was nine. Concerning this, the prophet also prophesies (Zech. 14:7) "But at evening time it shall happen that it will be light." Just contemplate to what extent this has been so accurate, and how it has taken place. Amos the prophet, also makes definite the darkness of the sun. I wish he would say this to the Jews who try to make their ears deaf to it. (Amos 8:9) "And it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord God, that I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight" this is because darkness fell at six o'clock. He also makes definite the season in which all of this will occur, for Amos says "I will turn your feasts into morning, and all your songs into lamentation" because Christ was crucified in the days of the feast, in the Passover. After this He says (Amos 8:10) "I will make it like morning for an only Son, and its end like a bitter day", because on the Passover feast, the women wept and lamented, and moreover, the apostles hid in fear and it was as bitter as could possibly be.

St. Cyril the great says, "This was an obvious sign for the Jews, that the minds of those persecutors who crucified Him, these were wrapped in spiritual darkness (Rom. 11:25) "blindness in past has happened to Israel." They have been rebuked and cursed by king David due to his love to God (Ps. 69:23) "Let their eyes be darkened, so they do not see." Yes indeed, creation lamented itself to God; for the sun got And the rocks cracked, and the temple itself was clothed in sorrow, for the veil got torn from top to bottom. This is what God suffered as said by Isaiah (Is.50:3) "I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make Their covering."

9- His Crying Out and Giving up His Spirit:

(Matt 27:46-50) "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabactani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?' Some of those who stood there, when they heard that, said 'This Man is calling Elijah!' Immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink. The rest said 'let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him.' And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit."

Being the representative of humanity that has fallen under the authority of darkness, He cried in pain, moaning due to its weight, as someone departing “My God, My God, why hast Forsaken Me?” when the Lord bent down His head, carrying the entire sin of humanity, He became as if blocking the Father’s face from Him, so He would break down the authority of sin by paying the totally absolute price. It is then that He would take us back to the Father’s face, that was obstructed from us.

With this His cry, He might have wished to awaken the Jewish thinking from its sleep, to go back to Psalm 22, that has begun with this cry, declaring in detail the crucifixion events. It is as if He wished to confirm that what was happening is only of His divine and godly provision, previously prophesied by the prophets.

10- The Veil of the Temple in Torn:

When the Lord Jesus gave up His spirit, the veil of the temple got torn in two, from top to bottom (Matt 27:51). This was a declaration of what was previously prophesied. He had said (John 2:19) “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” What happened in the Jewish temple, has been fulfilled in His Holy body, so He would raise it up on the third day.

The tearing down of the temple veil referred to the ingratitude of the Jews towards the Messiah, and their rejection of His work of salvation. They have thus become rejected, as St. Cyril El Orshelimy says, “Not one part of it was not cracked, for the Lord had said (Matt 23:38) “See! Your house is left to you desolate.”

The tearing down of the veil, which separates the holiest of the holiest from Jerusalem, only reveals the work of salvation made by the Lord Jesus. With His death, the doors of heaven have been opened for the first time, so that in joy we enter the divine holiest of the holies, in our unity with the Lord.

St. Jerome says that the separation of God’s grace from the old temple, has opened the door to the Gentiles, and has established the new temple. He also says that the Jewish historian, Youssephios himself assures us that at the time of the Lord’s crucifixion, there came out of the temple, voices of the heavenly hosts saying “let us go out of here.”

The temple veil of the Jews got torn down, and the earth shook. That is to say, it is the collapse of the Jewish materialistic way of thinking concerning the worship. The earthly concepts have got shaken, so that the believer would no longer ask for what is worldly, but he would rather be liberated towards that which is heavenly. With the Lord’s death our old and worldly person would get shaken inside the baptismal waters, and thus we be blessed with the new man, the one resurrected from the dead. For this reason (Matt 27:52,53) “ And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and opened to many.” What occurred in the crucifixion as an actual fact, has been touched and experienced by those in Jerusalem. This is fulfilled in the believer’s life when he accepts the cross with the Lord Jesus in the baptismal waters. He shakes his inward ground and cracks his rocks, and opens the holy grave so as to be blessed with the resurrection of the Lord, and he adopts his new life.

Moreover, the resurrection of many of the bodies of saints who were asleep, this carried the assurance of our resurrection not only spiritually but also physically in the great day of the Lord. As St. Ambrosias says, "When He gave up His spirit He manifested His death for our resurrection sake, for He worked in the range of His resurrection."

As for the fruits of these events, the evangelist made them clear by his words (Matt 27:54) "So when the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly saying, 'Truly, this was the Son of God'." These have represented the Gentile church that accepted the faith in Christ through the work of the cross.

11- The Lord's Burial:

(Matt 27:57-60) "Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given to him. When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tombs, and departed."

We have not heard of St. Joseph of Arimathea before, for he was a secret disciple to the Lord for fear of the Jews (John 19:30). But he appeared at the ordeal moments, and with him was Nicodemus (John 19:39) when everyone deserted the Crucified. The came up to Pilate bravely, and asked for the sanctified body. He has therefore obtained this tremendous honor to enter with the sanctified place on earth. In moments of trial and hardship, saints are manifested, for as the yellow leaves From the sun's heat the green leaves increase in the sun of ordeals that scorches the plants is the very same one that give fruits their ripeness.

St. Joseph had hewn a tomb for himself in the rock. If he had preferred himself to his Master, then this tomb would have become, in the Jewish eyes, a place to represent fifth as all other tombs. He who draws close to it becomes defiled all day long till he is cleansed. Because the tomb turns into a place that contains rotten and corrupted bones, no one alive lives there, unless those overpowered by the evil spirits, or have been inflicted with leprosy. But because he offered this tomb to the Lord Jesus 'the real Rock' it has become a sanctified church, to which pilgrims go, believers from all over the world, throughout of the power and joy of the resurrection.

The prophets have also declared previously His burial. Isaiah the prophet says (Is. 53:8,9) "for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked---but with the rich at His death." He also says (Is 51:1) "look to the rock from which you were hewn." As for the door of the tomb, Jeremiah the prophet says, (Jer. 3:53) "They put Me in the cave and threw stones at Me."

+ Therefore mediate how the corner-stone, the precious and chosen One, lays for a little while behind the rocks. This is the rock of destruction for the Jews, and the rock of salvation for the believers. The true of life has been planted in the

ground, even the ground that has been cursed has been blessed with the resurrection of life from the dead.

St. Cyril El Orshelimy

+ These matters and events have not been planned haphazardly, the body was placed in a new tomb where no one has been put before so that no one would think that the resurrection has been to someone else placed with Him. It is also to make possible for the disciples to come quickly and witness what happened, and that there would be witnesses to His burial. This is not only to the disciples alone, but also to the enemies as well, by sealing the grave and appointing soldiers to guard Him as witnesses to His burial.

St. John Chrysotom

+ Joseph and Nicodemus had brought a lot of fragrant oils because of their love to Christ. In this too, there are divine mysteries; so that if Christ rose and went out of these That clung to Him so hard with the linens, this would be a great spices. And indeed, it is a very great thing that the linens were found alone, as well as the handkerchief. This was so, because the opposing voices would not say that His disciples came out at night and stole Him. For he who comes to steal Him would not have enough time, and would be too fearful to separate the One stolen from these spices, nor would he place the linens by themselves, and the handkerchief separately, though their sticking to the spices prevents them at such time from doing all of this.

St. Peter El Sedmenty

+ Since the Lord was born from a new and pure vessel with no one using it before Him, it is good likewise that He be buried in a new tomb where no one was laid before.

+ As for His being in a garden, this is a symbol of Adam's salvation who had died the death of sin in a garden. The Lord was therefore buried in a similar one, so as to erase the criminal aftermath away from him, and to bring him back to it once more. There is moreover another interpretation: that it becomes an assurance that He who robs is no one else; particularly because the garden was not a graveyard, but it was Joseph who had hewn this tomb, by means of inspiration in a place not known for any burial before.

St. Peter El Sedmenty

12- The Sealing of the Tomb:

The chief priests and the Pharisees assembled together with Pilate, and said to him (Matt 27:63,64) "Sir, 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 until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead'. So the last deception will be worse than the first."

They acted in such a way that shown their hateful and envious spirit towards the Lord Jesus. This was living proof, though, from the enemies before those foreign authorities that He had previously spoken of the resurrection. It was as if the Lord's resurrection was not an unexpected matter, but it was rather declared by the Lord, as to prepare the minds in expectation for it. By doing and saying this, they have spread out all the more the news of the Lord's resurrection. They made out of it a reality not be doubled. The tomb was besieged by the Jews and the Gentiles, as well as by the seal itself.

+ If the soldiers alone were the ones who had sealed the tomb, they would have been able to say the soldiers have allowed the body being stolen, and that the disciples have invented the idea of resurrection and have provided for it.

St. John Chrysostom.

Chapter XXVII The Crucified King

The cross is the kingly road, and for this reason the evangelist St. Matthew presented to us a detailed account of the cross events:

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1- His Judgment before the governor:

The religious judgment remained all night long, in the midst of the darkness of envy and hate (Matt 27:1-2) "When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor."

The Jewish rulers were asking for the Messiah, the Savior so He would deliver them from the Roman rule, and He would establish for them the earthy kingdom of the Messiah. Each one coveted to have authority and a prominent position in it. But the Lord has destroyed every materialistic concept for this kingdom, and has declared the spiritual one instead. They therefore resorted to the Roman chiefs themselves to pass judgment over Him, not only from their religious point of view, but also as a national traitor who established a kingdom for Himself. It was as if those who wished to get rid of Caesar, they themselves, for the sake of their personal profit, they pretended to be defenders to Him against the Savior! Their inward principle and the hidden one was their personal benefit, not the majority or the service of God and the nation!

2- Returning the silver:

it was not possible for Judas to keep the silver with him. Just as he who leaves something for the Lord's sake, he would be rewarded a hundred fold in this world and in life to come (Matt 19:29), likewise, he who sells the Lord for a price loses a hundred fold in this world and also loses his life forever. Judas assumed, in his greed, he would gain thirty pieces of silver, but as a result he gained disaster and misfortune. So he went to return the silver pieces in regret, without any repentance,

and in bitterness without any hope. He could no longer stand his life so he went to strangle and hang himself.

The chief priests did not accept the silver to be put in the treasury, since it is the price of blood. So they bought a potter's field, a graveyard for stranger, and it has been called the 'field of the blood', as a witness to what mankind did to their Savior.

St. Cyril El Orshilimy comments on the words of the chief priests and the elders to Judas (Matt 27:4) "What is that to us? You see to it!" also he comments on their words about the silver thrown in the temple (Matt 27:6) "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury because they are the price of blood," saying "this is amazing! The killers say 'what is that to us?' they ask of him who received the price for the crime to see for himself. As for them, His killers, they did not have to see. They then tell themselves "It is not lawful to put it in the treasury is considered sinful, how much more would the shedding of blood be? And if you see a pretext for crucifying Christ, then why do you refuse to accept the price?"

The 'Field of Blood' bought for thirty pieces of silver as a graveyard for strangers, refers to the world redeemed by the Lord with His blood, so the Gentiles could be buried in it, and be blessed with Him in His resurrection. As St. Jerome says, "Why have they bought it? So as to use it as a graveyard for strangers. We are the ones making use of it, for it was bought for our sake with the blood of Jesus for its price." St. Ambrosias says, "The field according to the divine words, is the entire present world (Matt 13:36). The price of the blood is the price for the Lord's suffering, who has bought the world with the price of His blood so as to save it, (John 3:17). He came to keep those who are buried with Christ and have died with Him in the baptism (Rom. 6:4,8 ; Col.2:12) so as to obtain the eternal blessings. Instead of living as strangers under the law, they have become close by means of the blood of Jesus (Eph. 2:11-13)". We have previously explained the thirty pieces of silver, and the house of pottery, and the field of blood, and what they signify in our study of the book of Zechariah the prophet (Zech. 11:12,13).

3- His Silence before the Governor:

(Matt. 27:11-14) "Now Jesus stood before the governor. And the governor asked Him, saying, 'are You the king of the Jews?' Jesus said to him, 'It is as you say.' And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. Then Pilate said to Him 'do You not hear how many things they testify against You?' But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly."

His answers to Pilate the governor are concise indeed, to the extent in which He reveals the truth and so he would have no excuse. At this point He stopped speaking either to the religious rulers or the governor, for He did not wish to defend Himself. If He had wanted to, He could have testified of Himself, and would have commanded the heavens and it would have witnessed to Him. But He was not in need of this testimony, and His defense. Indeed, a lot of words, particularly when man justifies himself, this only declares the inward hollow weakness inside. But, as much as the soul is inwardly satisfied, our inward man would be just as strong, even tough by means of very few words!

The Lords' silence before His accusers is a priceless treasure and stock from which the believers supply themselves, when they are mocked and are unjustly accused, and hence they do not flare up in anger, or get disturbed. As St. John Chrysostom says, "Has anyone insulted you? Draw the sign of the cross on yourself, and remember all what happened at the crucifixion, and thus everything will be put out." He goes on to say, "have pity on him who curses you, for he is subjected to a master, a fearful ghost which is spite, and to a scary devil which is anger."

+ At any rate, Jesus is attacked at all times by false witnesses. As long as evil is in the world, then He is exposed to accusations continuously. Despite this, He is still silent before this without giving any audible answer. He rather puts His defense in the life of His real disciples. This life is an exalted testimony that surpasses above any other false witnessing, and it destroys all the attacks and accusation, that are altogether unbased upon anything.

The scholar Oreganus.

4- The release of Barabas:

as much as the power of evil has bonded together so as to get rid of the Lord by means of crucifixion, the Lord gave Himself a Passover for the entire humanity, all joyfully. He allows visible symbolic blessings during His crucifixion, as a symbol of invisible blessings. When conspiring against Him, the opposing religious groups met together in sharing this one aim. It is as if by means of His death, He was offering the reconciliation between the contradicting opponents in concepts, and those at discord not only among one national category, but rather among variable races and tongues and nations. During His judgment, Pontius Pilate sent Him to Herod for being the governor over Galilee. The latter was eager to see Him; and so a reconciliation issued between Pilate and Herod, because of the Lord who was tied under the judgment. Just before the crucifixion, Pilate asked the people that he releases one at the feast. They cried out that Jesus be crucified, and Barabas released, for Barabas was a famous prisoner. Therefore the Lord saved Barabas with His own death!

When the Lord stood before Pilate, the latter marveled greatly (Matt 27:14) "For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy (Matt 27:18). Because the Lord God wanted to guide him, He spoke to him by means of his ... in a dream. She therefore sent to him saying (Matt 27:19) "Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him." This was a lesson not only to Pilate alone, but also to the chief priests and the elders so they see and hear this foreign Pilate declaring the innocence of the Lord, by the washing of his hands before all, and saying (Matt 27:24) "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it."

5- His suffering before the Crucifixion:

After the Lord had been (Matt 27:26) and was handed over to be crucified, all the garrison gathered round Him. They stripped Him of His clothes, and put a scarlet robe on Him. They also twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. They bowed the knee before Him and mocked

Him saying, 'Hail king of the Jews! They spat on Him and took the reed and struck Him on His head.

When accepting to be crucified, the Lord revealed the outcome of evil, for He was representative of humanity who carried the fruit of their wickedness.

Man asks for sin and seeks it for the sake of temporary pleasure, or physical pleasure. The Lord handed over His body to be scourged and whipped, and the Holy One was exposed to deadly whips! With each whip, the traces were there on His tender and modest body. The Lord sees the weight of our iniquity as everlasting whips which no one could bear except Himself. He accepted them for these were of God's justice. This is why the apostle says (2Cor. 5:21) "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

The iniquity in its reality is the fruit of our ego, and it is also the one to give it birth at the same time. Man in his selfishness asks what is for himself materialistically, or as honors or pleasures. These in essence kindle all these more his love for himself. He thinks within himself he is the center of the whole world, and all work for his sake. This is what the serpent declared to Eve when it tempted her (Ger. 3:5) "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." Man wished to be like God, and thus his eyes will be opened to see himself above all others, and enslave everything for himself. This is why the garrison gathered against Him, as if representing the entire humanity or the entire world. They surrounded the accused not to give Him honor or work for His account, but rather to strip Him of His clothes, and put on Him a scarlet robe for mockery, for the accused One wished to establish Himself as a God or King. With iniquity, man lost the crown of hidden glory that God had granted him so as to control with it the worldly creation. He twisted for himself a crown of thorns, made of the earth that was cursed because of him. This was instead of the that God offered to him to reign over his heart, his senses and emotions before he reigns over others. Sin handed him a reed in his right hand, which is a flint of mockery that reveals his loss of authority over his inward life, and all of his senses and emotions. He has therefore become as a reed moved by the wind! In humiliation and scorn, sin holds this fake scepter to hit Him on the head with it, as if declaring that what He thought honor and glory to Him is only a Even up to His head and inner thoughts.

Man believed being so sinful, that he reigns over all and that the world kneels down to him. But the world in mockery kneels down to make fun of Him, saying "Hail, King of the Jews!" as if rebuking Him, and telling Him "You who have lost Your inward peace, how are You asking for outward to the glory of God the Father."

I believe, moreover, that we have to draw your attention at this point here, that the cross is being carried, which reminds us of our righteous father Abraham when he went up the mountain he saw, to offer Isaac a sacrifice as God has commanded him. He put the stones on the son, which is a symbol of Christ, who carried His cross on His shoulders, exalted up to the glory of His cross. For, the suffering of Christ was His glory as he taught us Himself (John 13:31) "Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him."

On the way to the crucifixion, He felt several times due to the heavy weight of the cross. They therefore called a Cyrene man named Simon, to carry with Him the cross. It is as if he is representing the church of the new covenant that has to be committed to carrying the cross with the Lord in His crucifixion, since it is mature in spiritual manhood. Thus, the church will the kingdom in this partnership. It is great glory for the believer bend down and carry the suffering with His Lord, so he would experience the power of the resurrection and its glory in him.

On the cross (Matt 27:34) "they gave Him sour wine mingled with gall to drink. But when He had tasted it, He would not drink." This was a custom with the Romans in crucifixion; the vinegar was given, mingled with bitterness, as a way of anesthesia or, and the crucified one would not feel the weighty suffering as much. But the Lord tasted the sour vinegar, and refused to drink it, so that He would bear the pain in its totality, out of His own self will.

When the Lord was crucified, the soldiers divided His garments into four parts, but as for His robe that had no seams, woven all from the top (John 19:23) they cast lots for it. (Matt 27:35) "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: 'They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots'." But they were no sandals with His clothes.

Concerning His garments divided into four parts, this refers to the church that has Christ's body glued to it. It has spread to the four sides or corners of the universe. it has become in the hands of the Roman soldiers, in the hands of the Gentiles, and they are able to obtain the membership in it.

As for the robe that had no seams to it, all woven from the top, this is not split or divided, this refers to the one church that should have no divisions or splitting. The Lord was careful, even in His crucifixion, that His robe be not divided. It is as if, whenever the church shares His cross, the Lord is careful not to have any division or splitting among itself. But unfortunately, this happens when the church is found to be in a period of luxury, far away from the cross.

The cross has revealed that His robe is woven from the top (John 19:13). In such a way, when the church goes round in a circle of suffering, its heavenly nature is revealed. It is woven by God's hand Himself, it is the work of His Holy Spirit.

There were no shoes for the Lord to take off. When studying the book of Exodus, we saw how the shoes refer to the evil and dead deeds. This is why man has to take them off when standing before God, in a holy place, just as Moses had done (Ex. 3:5).

After casting lots over His robe (Matt 27:36) "Sitting down, they kept watch over Him there." The Lord Jesus was not in need of any watch, for He is the Creator who through Him is everything made, and without Him nothing would have been made. Yet He yielded with His body to this watch. Indeed the Lord Jesus allowed in a hidden way His persecutors, those soldiers, to be guards to Him on the cross! It is bright picture of God's divine work for He allows the ordeals that surround the church. His own body to be a guard to the church. These hardships support the believers, and thus they live in the spirit of lowliness, and are exalted. As much as this issue to be guarded is precious, as much as the watch is increased. Also, as much as God cherishes His children and His church, as much as He allows hardships, so they cross this life well kept in it.

“And they put over His head the accusation written against Him: This is Jesus the king of the Jews.”

The king was crowned with the cross! As the church says in the Song of Solomon (Song of So. 3:11) “Go fourth, O daughters of Zion, and see king Solomon with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, the day of the gladness of his heart.” The church calls the souls of the believers to go out of itself and look up to its King, the Donor of the heavens, so it could enter with Him, by means of the cross to His wedding and be blessed with the eternal hearty wedding.

(Matt 27:38) “Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left.”

The Jewish masters sat in their seats teaching, as if they came from above. They rebuked and blamed, and feared to touch anything defiled lest they themselves be defiled as well. But as for the Lord, He came presenting a new concept of edification; for He has left His seat and position to be counted among the criminals and sinners. He event into their midst, sharing them their pain till the cross, accepting their mockery. He declared His practical love so as to release them to His father’s embrace. He has been crucified with the two robbers, and for their sake, to the extent that one of them wished to be accepted inside Him, a real king, uplifting him to His paradise. The Lord answered him; “Today you will be with Me in paradise.”

7- Mocking Him:

The evil forces united together against the Lord to give us the most bitter picture of the cross. (Matt 27:40) “And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads & saying, ‘You who destroyed the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.’”

The passers by lost their balance and wagged their heads as a sign of mockery against Him. They blasphemed against Him and said ‘You who destroy the temple and build it in three days save Yourself.’ They were unaware of exerting their utmost to destroy the temple of His body, and were only witnessing oh Him that He had previously declared of His resurrection ahead of time. Those blasphemers have become true witnesses to His deed of salvation, and His resurrected life. They have asked of Him to save Himself, and they did not realize He was only resurrecting them by His own resurrection; He would rise and make them rise as well.

Satan might have felt the danger of the cross, and he got terrified, and was eager the Lord comes down from His cross. But it was too late; he therefore motivated those blasphemers to ask of the Lord ‘if You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.’ Satan’s fear increased, and so he motivated further the chief priests and the scribes and elders to ask the Lord if He could come down from it, saying (Matt 27:42) “He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.” At those moments, Satan focused on the Lord coming down from the cross. Even the two robbers reviled Him (Matt 27:44) and asked Him to come down if He could.

8- Darkness on the Earth:

(Matt 27:45) “Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land.”

Darkness prevailed over all the land, declaring its authority that has prevailed over the world since the moment of downfall. The Lord has left it to prevail to a certain time, for He says (Luke 22:53) “But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.” The Lord left the authority to darkness to a certain hour, so that when it tries to lure and entrap Light in its web, then the Light would destroy darkness and ruin its entrapping.

That hour came before the Lord gave up His spirit. It is as if the Lord gave to hell the opportunity to accept His spirit, whereas it was unaware that He alone is able to break down the doors of hell, so as to embrace those who slept in the hope, and thus carry them as His holy sheep, entering with them into paradise.

The prophets were concerned about their prophecy of this hour of darkness. As mentioned by St. Cyril El Orshilimy, Zechariah says ‘On this day there will be no light ...’ then the prophet says (Zech. 14:6,7) “It shall be one which is known to the Lord.” Does God not know the other days? God forbid! For the days are many, but (Ps. 118:24) “This is the day which the Lord has made.” The Lord was patient in His sufferings. Then, how can this be explained? This is what the gospel explains when it relates to us it was not an ordinary day in which the sun shines as usual for morn till dusk. But from the sixth hour there was darkness at midday, till the ninth hour. This darkness is explained by God, saying (Gen. 1:5) “and the darkness He called Night.” For this reason, it was neither Day nor Night, for there was there entire night so that it be called night. But the sun shone after it was nine. Concerning this, the prophet also prophesies (Zech. 14:7) “But at evening time it shall happen that it will be light.” Just contemplate to what extent this has been so accurate, and how it has taken place. Amos the prophet, also makes definite the darkness of the sun. I wish he would say this to the Jews who try to make their ears deaf to it. (Amos 8:9) “And it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord God, that I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight” this is because darkness fell at six o’clock. He also makes definite the season in which all of this will occur, for Amos says “I will turn your feasts into morning, and all your songs into lamentation” because Christ was crucified in the days of the feast, in the Passover. After this He says (Amos 8:10) “I will make it like morning for an only Son, and its end like a bitter day”, because on the Passover feast, the women wept and lamented, and moreover, the apostles hid in fear and it was as bitter as could possibly be.

St. Cyril the great says, “This was an obvious sign for the Jews, that the minds of those persecutors who crucified Him, these were wrapped in spiritual darkness (Rom. 11:25) “blindness in past has happened to Israel.” They have been rebuked and cursed by king David due to his love to God (Ps. 69:23) “Let their eyes be darkened, so they do not see.” Yes indeed, creation lamented itself to God; for the sun got And the rocks cracked, and the temple itself was clothed in sorrow, for the veil got torn from top to bottom. This is what God suffered as said by Isaiah (Is.50:3) “I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make Their covering.”

9- His Crying Out and Giving up His Spirit:

(Matt 27:46-50) “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabackhani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’ Some of those who stood there, when they heard that, said ‘This Man is calling Elijah!’ Immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink. The rest said ‘let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him.’ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.”

Being the representative of humanity that has fallen under the authority of darkness, He cried in pain, moaning due to its weight, as someone departing “My God, My God, why hast Forsaken Me?” when the Lord bent down His head, carrying the entire sin of humanity, He became as if blocking the Father’s face from Him, so He would break down the authority of sin by paying the totally absolute price. It is then that He would take us back to the Father’s face, that was obstructed from us.

With this His cry, He might have wished to awaken the Jewish thinking from its sleep, to go back to Psalm 22, that has begun with this cry, declaring in detail the crucifixion events. It is as if He wished to confirm that what was happening is only of His divine and godly provision, previously prophesied by the prophets.

10- The Veil of the Temple in Torn:

When the Lord Jesus gave up His spirit, the veil of the temple got torn in two, from top to bottom (Matt 27:51). This was a declaration of what was previously prophesied. He had said (John 2:19) “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” What happened in the Jewish temple, has been fulfilled in His Holy body, so He would raise it up on the third day.

The tearing down of the temple veil referred to the ingratitude of the Jews towards the Messiah, and their rejection of His work of salvation. They have thus become rejected, as St. Cyril El Orshelimi says, “Not one part of it was not cracked, for the Lord had said (Matt 23:38) “See! Your house is left to you desolate.”

The tearing down of the veil, which separates the holiest of the holiest from Jerusalem, only reveals the work of salvation made by the Lord Jesus. With His death, the doors of heaven have been opened for the first time, so that in joy we enter the divine holiest of the holies, in our unity with the Lord.

St. Jerome says that the separation of God’s grace from the old temple, has opened the door to the Gentiles, and has established the new temple. He also says that the Jewish historian, Youssephios himself assures us that at the time of the Lord’s crucifixion, there came out of the temple, voices of the heavenly hosts saying “let us go out of here.”

The temple veil of the Jews got torn down, and the earth shook. That is to say, it is the collapse of the Jewish materialistic way of thinking concerning the worship. The earthly concepts have got shaken, so that the believer would no longer ask for what is worldly, but he would rather be liberated towards that which is heavenly. With the Lord’s death our old and worldly person would get shaken inside the baptismal waters, and thus we be blessed with the new man, the one

resurrected from the dead. For this reason (Matt 27:52,53) “ And the gravers were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and opened to many.” What occurred in the crucifixion as an actual fact, has been touched and experienced by those in Jerusalem. This is fulfilled in the believer’s life when he accepts the cross with the Lord Jesus in the baptismal waters. He shakes his inward ground and cracks his rocks, and opens the holy grave so as to be blessed with the resurrection of the Lord, and he adopts his new life.

Moreover, the resurrection of many of the bodies of saints who were asleep, this carried the assurance of our resurrection not only spiritually but also physically in the great day of the Lord. As St. Ambrosias says, “When He gave up His spirit He manifested His death for our resurrection sake, for He worked in the range of His resurrection.”

As for the fruits of these events, the evangelist made them clear by his words (Matt 27:54) “So when the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly saying, ‘Truly, this was the Son of God’.” These have represented the Gentile church that accepted the faith in Christ through the work of the cross.

11- The Lord’s Burial:

(Matt 27:57-60) “Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given to him. When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tombs, and departed.”

We have not heard of St. Joseph of Arimathea before, for he was a secret disciple to the Lord for fear of the Jews (John 19:30). But he appeared at the ordeal moments, and with him was Nicodemus (John 19:39) when everyone deserted the Crucified. The came up to Pilate bravely, and asked for the sanctified body. He has therefore obtained this tremendous honor to enter with the sanctified place on earth. In moments of trial and hardship, saints are manifested, for as the yellow leaves From the sun’s heat the green leaves increase in the sun of ordeals that scorches the plants is the very same one that give fruits their ripeness.

St. Joseph had hewn a tomb for himself in the rock. If he had preferred himself to his Master, then this tomb would have become, in the Jewish eyes, a place to represent fifth as all other tombs. He who draws close to it becomes defiled all day long till he is cleansed. Because the tomb turns into a place that contains rotten and corrupted bones, no one alive lives there, unless those overpowered by the evil spirits, or have been inflicted with leprosy. But because he offered this tomb to the Lord Jesus ‘the real Rock’ it has become a sanctified church, to which pilgrims go, believers from all over the world, throughout of the power and joy of the resurrection.

The prophets have also declared previously His burial. Isaiah the prophet says (Is. 53:8,9) “for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked---but with the rich at His death.” He also says (Is

51:1) “look to the rock from which you were hewn.” As for the door of the tomb, Jeremiah the prophet says, (Jer. 3:53) “They put Me in the cave and threw stones at Me.”

+ Therefore meditate how the corner-stone, the precious and chosen One, lays for a little while behind the rocks. This is the rock of destruction for the Jews, and the rock of salvation for the believers. The true of life has been planted in the ground, even the ground that has been cursed has been blessed with the resurrection of life from the dead.

St. Cyril El Orshelimy

+ These matters and events have not been planned haphazardly, the body was placed in a new tomb where no one has been put before so that no one would think that the resurrection has been to someone else placed with Him. It is also to make possible for the disciples to come quickly and witness what happened, and that there would be witnesses to His burial. This is not only to the disciples alone, but also to the enemies as well, by sealing the grave and appointing soldiers to guard Him as witnesses to His burial.

St. John Chrysotom

+ Joseph and Nicodemus had brought a lot of fragrant oils because of their love to Christ. In this too, there are divine mysteries; so that if Christ rose and went out of these That clung to Him so hard with the linens, this would be a great spices. And indeed, it is a very great thing that the linens were found alone, as well as the handkerchief. This was so, because the opposing voices would not say that His disciples came out at night and stole Him. For he who comes to steal Him would not have enough time, and would be too fearful to separate the One stolen from these spices, nor would he place the linens by themselves, and the handkerchief separately, though their sticking to the spices prevents them at such time from doing all of this.

St. Peter El Sedmenty

+ Since the Lord was born from a new and pure vessel with no one using it before Him, it is good likewise that He be buried in a new tomb where no one was laid before.

+ As for His being in a garden, this is a symbol of Adam's salvation who had died the death of sin in a garden. The Lord was therefore buried in a similar one, so as to erase the criminal aftermath away from him, and to bring him back to it once more. There is moreover another interpretation: that it becomes an assurance that He who robs is no one else; particularly because the garden was not a graveyard, but it was Joseph who had hewn this tomb, by means of inspiration in a place not known for any burial before.

St. Peter El Sedmenty

12- The Sealing of the Tomb:

The chief priests and the Pharisees assembled together with Pilate, and said to him (Matt 27:63,64) “Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘fter three days I will rise.’ Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead’. So the last deception will be worse than the first.”

They acted in such a way that shown their hateful and envious spirit towards the Lord Jesus. This was living proof, though, from the enemies before those foreign authorities that He had previously spoken of the resurrection. It was as if the Lord’s resurrection was not an unexpected matter, but it was rather declared by the Lord, as to prepare the minds in expectation for it. By doing and saying this, they have spread out all the more the news of the Lord’s resurrection. They made out of it a reality not be doubted. The tomb was besieged by the Jews and the Gentiles, as well as by the seal itself.

+ If the soldiers alone were the ones who had sealed the tomb, they would have been able to say the soldiers have allowed the body being stolen, and that the disciples have invented the idea of resurrection and have provided for it.

St. John Chrysostom.

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Chapter XXVIII

The Kingdom is a Resurrected Life

St. Matthew concludes his gospel speaking of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, since this is the mystery of the kingdom:

1- The Vacant Tomb	1-10
2- Bribing the Soldiers	11-15
3- The Encounter at Galilee	16-20

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1- The Vacant Tomb:

(Matt 28:1) “Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. As soon as the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, Clopa’s wife, they ran to look at the tomb. Their love attracted them to the tomb so as to encounter Lord Jesus. They offered what they possibly could on their part. But as for God’s part himself; he has offered them ‘the resurrected life’ in the person of the Lord Jesus, the risen from the dead. For their sake, being as representatives to the Gentile church and the Jews, God sent His angel, and an earthquake occurred, and the stone was rolled for the angel to sit on; the angel scared the guards and

received the two women. When man carries out a simple task from his heart, such as the two women's visit to the tomb, God is found to have performed wonderful things for them.

The resurrection happened after the Sabbath, at dawn on Sunday. The Lord did not wait till Sunday is over, which is the third day. St. John Chrysostom says concerning this, "If He had risen after the guards had left, after the third day, they would have obtained what they wanted, and what they resisted and objected to. This is why the Lord was ahead of them and He rose before, for it was necessary He rises as they were guarding watchfully."

(Matt 28:2-4) "And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His Was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.'

The resurrection was fulfilled with the power of His authority. It was He who in obedience yielded Himself in the hand of His Father, accepting death and accepting resurrection, even though He had said (John 10:18) "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." In authority He rose, and the stone was there as before, as well as sealed. As the bishop Paul El Boshy says, "The Lord rose although the rock was sealed on the grave door, just as He was born of a virgin as the prophet Ezekiel had prophesied. As for the rolling of the stone by the angel, from the grave door, this is to proclaim was ..., it was thought His body, and the angel of the Lord descended to roll away the stone from the door for us, and he sat on it. Similarly, the resurrection happened in our inward life. Our old self was demolished, and it offered us by means of the baptismal waters, the resurrected life, or the new man in God's image. By means of the resurrection the heavenly hosts descended to us, to roll away the stone that has locked the door of our graves. Then we meet then in love partnership and brotherhood through Christ Jesus the risen from the dead.

+ Just as when He yielded up His spirit the earth shook, likewise in His resurrection He made the earth shake, so as to declare that He who died is the One to rise.

Bishop Paul El Boshy

+ The angels who conveyed the good news to the Bethlehem shepherds, are now declaring His resurrection message. The Heavens and all its hosts declare Him. The higher spiritual hosts proclaim the Son, that He is God, even when in the body.

St. Cyril the great

The angel descended proclaiming the good news of the Lord's resurrection. He seared the guards and terrified them so much that they seemed as if dead. The angel moreover thrilled the heart of the church in the person of the two women, for he said to them (Matt 28:5,6) "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is raised, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay." The angel has given them a divine gift 'Do not be afraid.' As for the mystery of them not being afraid.' As for the mystery of them not being afraid, that

is, of being blessed in peace, it is due to the fact that Christ, the crucified has risen! It was not possible that He stays in the grave, for death cannot imprison Him, and neither could corruption touch Him. He, who unites himself with Him, can never have death come close to him. Therefore, there is no opportunity for any fear, but rather, this person is blessed with the joy of the resurrection perpetually.

St. Cyril El Orshilimy speaks on behalf of the angel “I do not tell the guards not to be afraid, but I am telling you too. As for them, let them fear until they touch with their own hands, and ... they would witness, saying (Matt 27:54) ‘truly this was the Son of God! But as for you, do not be afraid for (John 4:18) “but perfect love casts out fear.”

The angel calls the Lord Jesus ‘Jesus the crucified’ even though He has risen; for the crucifixion has been a particular quality of the Lord as a work of salvation surpassing all time limits. He will always be the crucified Messiah, the Risen from the dead.

+ The angel did not say “I know you are asking for my Lord” but he said openly “I know that you seek Jesus the crucified” because the cross is a crown and not a shame.

St. Cyril El Orshilimy

The angel offered them a message for preaching the resurrection among the disciples (Matt 28:7) “And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.”

By this heavenly message, the woman has regained her honor. In old time, she had preached to Adam the devastating message in paradise, but now she is preaching the good news of the resurrection to the disciples!

+ She was previously a servant to death. But now she has become released of her crime, by serving the voice of the saintly angels, for she is the first to preach the news concerning the joyful mystery of the resurrection.

St. Cyril the great

What is amazing is that as soon as they ran in great joy and yet fear to preach, they met the Lord Jesus who gave them peace, and allowed them to touch His feet and kneel down to Him in worship it is as if when man is released to serve and to preach in real joy, it is at this moment that God is transfigured inside him, and offers Himself, so as this person touches Him and worships Him, and he is supported in his mission of preaching.

(Matt 28:8-10) “So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word. And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them saying, ‘Rejoice’.” So they come and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me’ “

2- Bribing the Soldiers:

(Matt 28:11-15) “Now while they were going, behold, some of the guards came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying ‘Tell them, His disciples came at night, and stole Him away while we slept’. And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will appease him and make you secure.’ So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.”

This is truly amazing; the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate the Gentile, saying that the Lord is deceiving, for He has declared ahead of time of His resurrection (Matt 27:63). This was instead of the Jews preaching to the Gentiles of the Messiah, they came forward preaching the ingratitude and disobedience. It is as if they shut the door of faith against themselves, whereas it has been opened to the Gentiles. Now when the Lord has risen, the Roman soldiers came to testify of the resurrection to the Jewish leaders. Unfortunately they did not accept their testimony they rather offered bribery to share them their misleading and denying the resurrection.

What these people did, confirmed the resurrection all the more; for the news spread that the body was not in the grave, and as for the theft, this was unacceptable. For how did the guards know that the apostles have stolen Him? And why have they stolen Him on a Sabbath when work was not allowed? Can the unarmored apostles steal Him from the soldiers? And what need was there for all of this?

3- The Encounter at Galilee:

(Matt 28:16-20) “Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’

The site of the meeting was in Galilee, that is ‘the declaration’. It is not possible for the servant to preach or make disciples to the Lord, or baptize, unless the Lord declares Himself in him inwardly. He would then taste and experience, and he offers nothing of himself, but what is declared to him by the Lord.

+ After His resurrection Jesus was seen on the mountain in Galilee. There, they worshiped Him, but some doubted; and this doubting of theirs, has increased our faith.

St. Jerome

The fact that Galilee was the site chosen for the disciples to meet the Lord Jesus, the One risen from the dead, this means the renewal of the covenant. For in Galilee the Lord has chosen most of His disciples, and has

sent them on their preaching mission. Because they were weakened in the crucifixion events, He brought them back to the very same site, granting them the power of his resurrection, so as to start a new, carrying new possibilities and potentials.

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St. Ambrosias

Therefore You are with us, O Lord. We do not have one single day without You. Without Your presence nest to us we cannot live. You are with us particularly in the mystery of Your body and Your blood.

Father John of Kronstadt

An important notice:

You can refer to many of the sayings of our fathers concerning the Lord Jesus entering into Jerusalem, till His resurrection in our book ‘The divine love of God’, so as to avoid repetition.

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St. Matthew concludes his gospel speaking of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, since this is the mystery of the kingdom:

1- The Vacant tomb 1-10

2- Bribing the soldiers 11-15

3- The encounter at Galilee 16-20

1- The Vacant tomb:

(Matt. 28:1) "Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb."

As soon as the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, Clopa's wife, ran to look at the tomb. Their love attracted them to the tomb so as to encounter the crucified Lord Jesus. They offered what they possibly could on their part. But as for God's part himself, He has offered them "The resurrected life" in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the risen from the dead. For their sake, being representatives to the Gentile church and the Jews, God sent his angel, and an earthquake occurred, and the stone was rolled for the angel to sit on; the angel scared away the guards and received the two women. When man carries out a simple task from his heart, such as the two women's visit to the tomb, God is found to have performed wonderful things for them.

The resurrection happened after the Sabbath, at dawn on Sunday. The Lord did not wait until Sunday was over, which is the third day. St. John Chrystosom said concerning this, "If he had risen after the guards had left, after the third day, they would have obtained what they wanted, and what they resisted and objected to. This is why the Lord was ahead of them and rose before, for it was necessary He rises as they were guarding watchfully.

(Matt. 28:2-4)" And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men."

The resurrection was fulfilled with the power of his authority. It was he who in obedience yielded himself in the hand of his father, accepting death, and accepting resurrection, even though he had said, (John 10:18)"I have powers to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." In authority he rose, and the stone was there as before, as well as sealed. As the bishop Paul El Boshy says, "The Lord rose although the rock was sealed on the grave door, just as he was born of a virgin as the prophet Ezekiel had prophesied as for the rolling of the stone by the angel, from the grave door, this is to proclaim the resurrection well enough, for as long as the stone was there, it was thought his body was still in the tomb."

An earthquake shook the ground, and the angel of the Lord descended to roll away the stone from the door for us, and he sat on it. Similarly, the resurrection happened in our inward life. Our old self was demolished, and it offered us by means of the baptismal waters, the resurrected life, or the new man in God's image. By means of the resurrection the heavenly hosts descended to us to roll away the stone that has locked the door of our graves. Then we meet them in love partnership and brotherhood through Christ Jesus the living of the risen from the dead.

Just as when he yielded up his spirit the earth shook, so as to declare that he who died is the one to rise.

Bishop Paul El Boshy

The angels who conveyed the good news to Bethlehem's shepherds, are now declaring his resurrection message. The ravens and all its hosts declare him. The higher spiritual hosts proclaim the son, that he is God, even when in the body.

St. Cyril the great

The angel descended preaching the good news of the Lord's resurrection. He scared the guards and terrified them so much that they seemed as if dead. The angel moreover thrilled the heart of the church in the person of the two women, for he said to them (Matt. 28: 5-6) "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay." The angel has given them a divine gift "Do not be afraid." As for the mystery of them not being afraid, that is, of being blessed in peace, it is due to the fact that Christ, the crucified was risen! It was not possible that he stays in the grave, for death cannot imprison him, and neither could corruption touch him. He who unites himself with him, can never have death come close to him. Therefore, there is no opportunity for any fear, but rather this person is blessed with the joy of the resurrection perpetually.

St. Cyril El Orshilimy speaks on behalf of the angel "I do not tell the guards not to be afraid, but I am telling you two. As for them, let them fear until they touch with their own hands, and then they would witness, saying (Matt. 27:54) "truly this was the son of God! But as for you, do not be afraid for (John 4:18)" But perfect love casts out fear."

The angel calls the Lord "Jesus the crucified" even though he has risen; for the crucifixion has become a particular quality of the Lord as a work of salvation surpassing all time limits he will always be the crucified Messiah, the risen from the dead.

The angel did not say "I know you are asking for my Lord" but he said openly "I know that you seek Jesus the crucified" because the cross is a crown not a shame.

St. Ciryel El Orshilimy

The angel offered them a message for preaching the resurrection among the disciples (Matt. 28:7)"And go quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead, and indeed he is going before you into Galilee; There you will see him. Behold, I have told you."

By this heavenly message, the woman has regained her honor. In old time she had preached to Adam the devastating message in paradise, but now she is preaching the good news of the resurrection to the disciples!

She was previously a slave to death. But now she has been released of her crime, by serving the voice of the saintly angels, for she is the first to preach the news concerning the mystery of the resurrection

St. Cyril the great

What is amazing is that as soon as they ran in great joy and yet fear to preach, they met the Lord Jesus who gave them peace, and allowed them to touch his feet and kneel down to him in worship. It is as if when man is released to serve and to preach in real in real joy, It is at this moment that God is transfigured inside him, and offers himself, so as this person touches him and worships him, and he is supported in his mission of preaching.

(Matt. 28:8-10) "So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring his disciples word. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them saying, "Rejoice!" So they came and held him by the feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

2-Bribing the Soldiers:

(Matt. 28:11-15) "Now while they were going, behold, some of the guards came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers. Saying "Tell them, his disciples came at night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this comes to the ears of the governors, we will appease him and make

you secure .” So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported to this day.”

This is truly amazing; the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate the Gentile, saying the Lord is deceiving, for he has declared ahead of time of his resurrection (Matt. 27:63). This was instead of the Jews preaching the ingratitude and disobedience. It is as if they shut the door of faith against themselves, whereas it has been opened to the Gentiles. Now when the Lord has risen, the Roman soldiers came to testify of the resurrection to the Jewish leaders. Unfortunately they did not accept their testimony, they rather offered bribery to share them their misleading and denying the resurrection.

What these people did, confirmed the resurrection all the more; for the news spread that the body was not in the grave, and as for the theft, this was unacceptable, for how did the guards know that the apostles have stolen him? Can the unarmoured apostle steal him from the soldiers? And what need was there for all of this?

3-The encounter at Galilee”

(Matt. 28: 16-20) “ Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them saying “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son, and of the holy spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

The Lord encountered the eleven disciples in Galilee to give them after the resurrection, the authority of preaching and making disciples, on the level of all nations, and also the authority to baptize. he assured them of his presence in the midst, to the end of all ages.

The site of the meeting was at Galilee, that is ‘the declaration’. It is not possible for the servant to preach or make disciples to the Lord, or baptize unless the Lord declares himself in him inwardly. He would then taste and experience, and he offers nothing of himself, but what is declared to him by the Lord.

After his resurrection Jesus was seen on the mountain in Galilee, there they worshipped him, but some doubted; and this doubting of theirs increased our faith.

St. Jerome

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