

The Epistle to the **HEBREWS**

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Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, King of Kings and
Lord of lords



*H.H. Pope Shenouda III, 117th Pope of
Alexandria and the See of St. Mark*

This book has special significance in the Holy Bible, because it correlates between the Old and New Testaments. It declares to Christians from Jewish origin, that though they were expelled from the Jewish temple by the Sanhedrim, and were deprived of its service, yet they became outside the camp sharing with their Christ in His crucifixion outside Jerusalem. Consequently, He makes them enter His heavenly temple, to enjoy His great service, and the unique true Sacrifice. It is the book of the opening of heavens for the outcasts and the deprived.

Since I knew the difficulty of this book, I preferred to make its explanation simple and concise as much as I can for the benefit of the reader.

Father Tadros Y. Malaty

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Introduction

THE WRITER OF THE BOOK

Since the name of the writer is not mentioned in the book, the theologians since early time disagreed about who wrote it. In the West, Tertullian, one of the second century scholars, mentioned that Barnabas wrote it¹. However, by comparing it to the epistle of Barnabas, we find that there is a vast difference, which ascertains that it is impossible to have one writer for both. Another thought prevailed in the West that St. Clement the Roman, is the writer. However, after the fourth century, it was agreed that St. Paul is the writer.

In the East, it was mostly agreed from the beginning that St. Paul is the writer. In general, this was what the Eastern Church had accepted, and to be specific, the school of Alexandria. Eusebius, mentioned that St. Clement of Alexandria, had a missing piece of work, where it came that his professor philosopher Pantenius referred to the epistle, and to St. Paul as its writer¹.

We can summarize the view of the theologians concerning who wrote the epistle, as thus:

1. The writer is **St. Paul**: this thought prevailed in the Eastern Church since its beginning, then settled in the Western Church. Some of those who mentioned this view are St. Pantenius, St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine. This remains the prevailing view among the majority of theologians.

2. **Barnabas**: Tertullian, Weisler, and Ulmann.

3. **Luke**, the Evangelist: Origen mentioned this opinion, Ebrabd, and Calvin accepted it.

4. **Clement of Rome**: an early Western view which disappeared completely, however a minority accepted it like Reithmuier, Erasmus.

5. **Silas**: Rohme, Mynster.

¹ *Tertullian: De Pud., ch. 20.*

¹ *Eusebius: H. E., 6:14.*

6. **Apollos**: Luthea, Semler.

WHY DIDN'T THE APOSTLE MENTION HIS NAME?

St. Paul is used to mention his name in the beginning of his epistles. Why didn't he mention his name in this epistle? St. Paul was known in the early Church to be the apostle for the Gentiles, while St. Peter, St. John, St. James, and others were apostles for the Jews. Thus, St. Paul was more liberal in matters pertaining to some Jewish rituals, which made many Christians, who were from Hebrew origin, dislike him. It was mentioned about him that, "But they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses..." (Acts 21:21). Since this epistle was directed to that group of people, the Hebrew Christians, thus it was appropriate not to mention his name lest they would not read it.

THE PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE

1. St. Paul was called to minister to the Gentiles, however, he was not prevented from serving his own people, especially those who were living among the Gentiles, for he wished to be accursed from Christ for their sake (Rom. 9:3). God did not prevent him from serving them, but He sent him for a specific mission, to serve the Gentiles. As he said that the Lord Christ did not send him to baptize (1 Cor. 1:17), but this does not mean that he is not allowed to baptize². His love for everyone made him concerned about all groups of people; thus he did not shun writing to this group of people when he realized their need, especially because he is superior than others in studying Moses Law and the Jewish rites.

2. We can realize the purpose of this epistle when we know the true picture of the early Church. The apostles together with the Jews who were converted used to worship in the temple, to follow the Law, and adhere themselves to the Jewish nation and its hope, but in new spiritual hope in Christ Jesus. Truly, many of them were unable to separate themselves from this nation, not realizing that the concept of the Church as the one body of Christ contains the Jew as well as the Gentile, without partiality. The lord and the servant are equal, male

² St. John Chrysostom: *In Hebr. Argum., 1.*

and female are the same, without any preference. Therefore, if the Church is persecuted and the Sanhedrim condemned the Hebrew Christians by expelling them from the holy places, because they are defiled, considered unbelievers and against the Law, then they are deeply hurt. They felt that for the sake of the Messiah, they were isolated from God's old people, who were waiting for the Messiah. This was a difficult trial for them and a deep wound which tremendously hurt them. They were expelled as household and citizenship of Israel, and from the temple. Thus, the Apostle writes to them to confirm that they gained more than what they have lost. Hence, the word "for us," was repeated several times. They obtained the true heavenly temple instead of the symbolic temple, and they got the Heavenly High Priest instead of the Levitical priesthood. They were related to the Church of the Firstborn, the celebration of the angels, instead of the Jewish citizenship, and the heavenly Jerusalem instead of the earthly Jerusalem. The purpose of this epistle was to confirm that Christianity does not mean deprivation, but rather it is obtaining the heavenly matters and enjoying the eternity. Truly, it is expelling outside of the camp with the Crucified Christ outside Jerusalem, but in the mean time, it is enjoyment of His city, the city of the Heavenly Firstborn.

The camp was the favorite place of the Jews, but the Lord Christ was raised on the cross outside it, so that His Church may go out to Him, as expelled from the Jewish nation -bearing the literal thinking - sharing with Him His suffering and shame.

3. Since the Jewish temple was about to be totally demolished and all the Jewish rites, the sacrifices, the Levitical priesthood were about to end in Jerusalem, the Apostle revealed the Christian temple and the Sacrifice of Christ and the new priesthood. He clarified the reality of the old shadows, its power and integrity, and that they all go back to its deep roots in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal Sacrifice and Priest. Thus, He transformed us from the shadow to the truth, and instead of the heavens sketch and shadows to heavens itself.

PLACE FOR WRITING THE EPISTLE

St. John Chrysostom said that St. Paul wrote it in Jerusalem

and Palestine³.

ITS CHARACTERISTICS

1. This epistle is considered as the epistle to the Romans, like a scientific research. It is specifically characterized among the other books of the New Testament, that its teachings and proofs are based on the well known books of the Old Testament and the familiar ones, to the Jewish people. In it you will find the Old Testament bearing a Christian anointment, new perspectives, through the Sacrifice of the cross. St. Paul presented a heavenly song in an excellent style, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The purpose is to withdraw the heart of the Christian Hebrew from shadow to the truth, from outward physical worship to Christ's supreme service. This epistle is like a beautiful symphony revealing the unity of the two Testaments, through the manifestation of the hidden truth behind the Law and the true Sacrifice.

2. The Apostle handled the issues of the Jewish regulations and the Law, like circumcision, as he did in other epistles, like the one to the Galatians and the one to the Colossians, and these were private matters which one could reject or accept. However, in this epistle, he writes about a topic which involves the whole community pertaining the Jewish temple which was closed before everyone and the Jewish citizenship of which they were involuntary deprived of.

3. The apostle devoted the last two chapters, as he always used to in other epistles, to the practical commandments like commitment to love, obedience, and strife. But in the meantime, he mingled all his speeches, in the essence of the epistle, with the practical application, thus he transformed the dogma to an experienced life. He wrote not to fulfill one's thoughts theoretically, but to satisfy one's inner depths, feelings, as well as behavior, thus one can live absolutely new in the Lord.

4. This epistle was different from the rest of St. Paul's epistles, the major topics which occupied his mind. Here he did not write about the Church as the Body of Christ, whose Head is the Lord, nor about our unity with the Father in His Son through the Holy Spirit, nor about

³ *Ibid.*

our fellowship with the Savior sharing His suffering then His glories, but he wrote about a unique topic which is the deprivation of the Hebrew Christians from the temple and the rituals. Simultaneously, he concentrates on the *priesthood of Christ*, who intercedes with His blood in front of His Father, until we enjoy the heavenly temple and the angelic rite, through our unity in Him.

DIVISIONS OF THE EPISTLE AND ITS CONTENTS

St. Paul declares what we have received in the Lord Jesus, the Sacrifice and Priest, through its comparison with the blessings and the privileges that the Jews have obtained in the Old Testament. Hence, his epistle addressed the following topics:

1. Christ and the prophets Ch. 1:1-3
2. Christ and the angels Ch.1:4-14, Ch. 2
3. Christ and Moses Ch. 3
4. Christ and Joshua Ch. 4
5. Christ and Aaron Ch. 5
6. Talks about faith Ch. 6
7. Christ and Melchizedek Ch. 7
8. Christ, the Heavenly High Priest Ch. 8
9. The Heavenly ministry Ch. 9
10. Entry into heavenly holies Ch. 10
11. Faith Ch. 11
12. Strive Ch. 12
13. Concluding commandments Ch. 13

Chapter 1

Christ and the Prophets

*"God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,
has in these last days spoken to us by His Son,
whom He has appointed heir of all things,
through whom also He made the worlds;
who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of
His Person,
and upholding all things by the word of His power,
when He had by Himself purged our sins,
sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" [1-3].*

INTRODUCTION

St. Paul started his epistle by revealing God's speech with the fathers, that is, men of the Old Testament through the prophets, assuring first, his commitment to love, and his submission to the Old Testament men, and second, declaring the unity of both Testaments. God who talked in the past with the Old Testament men is the same God who talks with us now in His Son. He talked with the Old Testament men about the divine truth through shadows, but now He reveals the whole truth. Thus, He didn't belittle the prophets, nor the greatness of the glory of the Old Testament. However what is greater than that is the glory of the New Testament, for it is an extension of the old, going into its depth and achieving its goal.

As **St. John Chrysostom** says, [What a great act that He sends the prophets to our Fathers, but when the fullness of time came, He sent us His Only-Begotten Son. None of the prophets have seen God but the Only Son saw Him⁴.] [How splendid it is that He Himself chose to speak with us and not through His servants. Moses was their teacher, but for us, the Lord of Moses was our teacher. Let us, then, reveal the heavenly wisdom which is fit to this honor, and do not seek

⁴ In *Hebr., Hom., 1:1.*

an earthly matter⁵.]

Why did the Apostle start by comparing Jesus Christ with the prophets? Because at the beginning of the Jewish nation, Moses the prophet was their leader, his brother Aaron was the high priest. **Moses represents the revelation of the divine truth**, especially through the Law, while Aaron represents the practical aspects of worship and sacrifices which reconciled man with God. The two acts accompany and compliment one another. So that man may live as a true believer, and member of the holy community, he has to accept the truth, and get acquainted to it, not only through the Law, the commandment or the prophecy, but through a life of true worship, that is, through the sacrifice of reconciliation between God and the believer. This association between prophecy and priesthood, or between the commandment and worship did not last long, for soon the Jewish priests deviated from their mission to the outward appearances rather than the Spirit, and the truth was lost. Thus, there was an enmity between the hypocrite priests and the true prophets. This was apparent during the days of prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, where it was impossible to reconcile the hypocrites with them. But the Lord Jesus alone is the complete Truth who reveals that, through His unique Sacrifice on the cross. In the mean time, He is the Heavenly High Priest who can purge our sins, sitting at the right hand of the Father in the highest. In this epistle, he compares between the Lord Jesus and the prophets. At the end, he compares between Him and the Levitical priesthood to reveal in Himself the unity of the truth and the sacrificial act, or the prophecy with the priesthood in a unique way.

The prophets delivered the divine voice to the Fathers, as channels who only deliver the message. "Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2). Lord Jesus Himself testified that Moses and the prophets talked about Him. As for the Lord, is the **Voice Himself** or the **Truth** in Person, who declares about the Father, being one in His Divinity. Thus, He says, "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 he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Matt. 11:27).

⁵ In Joan. Hom., 15:3.

GOD TALKS TO US

In the Old Testament, God talked to the Fathers through the prophets, but now He talks to us through His Son. What does that mean? God is constantly talking with us. He draws near us to reveal His love, and He desires to interact with us. Since He is the Absolute beyond our comprehension, then He is not far from us, and wants to unite with us to grant us the fellowship of His eternal glories.

His talk with us is not mere words for us to hear, but rather an effective life, which God compares to the rain bringing fruit on earth. "I will cause showers to come down in their season; there shall be showers of blessing. Then the trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase..." (Ez. 34:26,27). Toward the end of this epistle, the Apostle emphasizes that "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight..." (Heb. 4:12,13). The Lord Jesus Himself said, "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."

GOD TALKS WITH US BY DIFFERENT METHODS

Since creation, the Loving God is moving toward us to talk with us. As **St. Augustine** says, [Isn't God the One who talked with Adam since the creation (Gen.3:17)? Isn't He the One who talked with Cain, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets, and Moses? Listen, He talks with the one person not only once but many times⁶.]

Since creation, He talks through various means using every method, so we may hear His voice, accept Him, and interact with Him. The Divine inspiration says, "I have also spoken by the prophets, and have multiplied visions; I have given symbols through the witness of the prophets" (Hosea 12:10). It is also written in the Psalms that "The Mighty One, God the Lord, has spoken..." (Ps. 50:1). **St. Augustine** comments, [He talked in different ways. He Himself talked through angels, through prophets, by Himself, through His believers, through our weaknesses when we say a part of the truth. He talks in

⁶ On Ps. 62.

different ways, using different instruments. However each time it is He who speaks, through touch, pictures or inspiration⁷.]

BETWEEN THE PROPHETS AND THE LORD JESUS

Since God the Father talked with our Fathers through the prophets, yet it differs when He talks with us through His Son in the latter days. Before mentioning the difference, we mention why St. Paul called it the latter days. **St. John Chrysostom** says, [It is good that He says the latter days, because through that, He encourages them to heed the future. In another place, He says, "The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing" (Phil. 4:5,6). Also, "...For now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed" (Rom. 13:11). Here he again says, (Whoever is struggling and endures the latter days feels relieved that his labor and strife will soon end and eternal rest will start⁸.] He still comments saying⁹, [Man expects in the last days, that punishment is approaching, gifts are decreasing, salvation is unexpected. However, what happened was contrary to that for abundant blessings overflow.]

The Father talks through the prophets as instruments, but in the latter days, He talks through His Son, not as an outside instrument declaring His voice, but He is the Word of God, One with the Father, incarnate, so we may accept to meet with Him. He carried the cross to grant us the right to enter to Him, abolishing enmity. Through His resurrection, we became righteous, meeting His Father as our Father too. We do not merely hear His voice or some of His words, but we accept Him inside us and we in Him, thus *we become one with the Word of God and members of His Body*. The words of God are no more mere commandments we have to obey, but rather accepting the Divine Word and abiding in Him. The Son alone is the subject of joy to His Father, complete in His obedience to Him. In Him we are the subject of His joy as well. His commandments are no more a burden, but become an enjoyment with the Word who grants us heavenly life and fellowship of the eternity inside us. That is what He meant when He said, "The kingdom of God is inside you."

When the prophets spoke with the Fathers in the old days, they

⁷ *Ibid.*, 49 (50).

⁸ *In Hebr., Hom.*, 1:2.

⁹ *Sermons on the New Testament*, 6:9.

offered glorious Divine messages. But when the Father spoke to us now in His Son, He offered us His Son Himself, the Mystery of life, salvation and resurrection! Who is this Son, the Word, whom the Father offers to us in these last days?

1. THE SON

The Apostle says, "He talks thus through His Son." He didn't say, He spoke thus through the prophets." Thus, the Son, who is one with the Father, carries the Father and contains us in Him by sanctifying us through His blood. Hence, we meet the Father in the Son. We get to know Him and unite with Him in a marvelous unity. Truly, the Holy Spirit was preparing the prophets to accept the Divine message and deliver it. But it was impossible for the Father to settle in them and unite. Besides, the prophets were not able to take the people deep inside them to meet the Father. The Only-Begotten Son is the One able to reconcile us with the Father to be in Him forever.

In our study of St. Paul's letters, we realized the main divine fact of Christian faith which is summarized in one word "**In Christ.**" In Him, the Father manifests Himself and talks, and in Him we became believers (Eph. 1:1), and enjoyed the divine choice (Eph. 1:4). In Him we obtained redemption (Eph. 1:7), and He gathered us both the heavenly and earthly creatures (Eph. 1:10), and by Him we were enriched in everything (1 Cor. 1:5).

2. WHOM HE HAS APPOINTED HEIR OF ALL THINGS

Here he talks about the role of the Divine Incarnation, the Son, Creator of everything, who emptied Himself and took the form of a servant, carrying us in Him, so that as He inherits everything through His righteousness, we may also inherit with Him and in Him. For our sake, He emptied Himself from His glory, forsaking everything; He was buried in a stranger's tomb, so that each one of us may find a place in Him.

This is the Son's role to grant us the inheritance in Him. However, the prophets were mere speakers about the inheritance which God prepared for us. They just referred to it without being able to present it to anyone, or even obtaining it themselves, until they enjoy

with us Christ, our True Inheritance.

3. THROUGH WHOM ALSO HE MADE THE WORLDS

Here the Apostle talks about the superiority of Christ over the prophets, without referring frankly to them. The prophets were human beings who accepted the divine messages, and devoted all their lives that God may fulfill this message through them. But the Lord Jesus is the Creator, Maker of heaven and earth, as St. John the beloved says, "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3). In Him all creation was fulfilled, on earth and in heaven. Also the new creation in us is fulfilled through Him, thus He edified in us a new heaven and a new earth. As **St. Augustine** says, that heaven refers to the soul and earth refers to the body. The Lord Jesus renews our souls and bodies, that is, He restores their creation by the Holy Spirit in the water of baptism.

4. BEING THE BRIGHTNESS OF HIS GLORY AND THE EXPRESS IMAGE OF HIS PERSON:

The Apostle elevates them to a higher level to see the Son, the Logos who in Him was everything, who is Himself the brightness of the glory of the Father and express image of His Person, to lead them to the unapproachable brightness.

Does the expression, "*brightness of His glory and the express image of His Person,*" belittles the equality of the Son with the Father or offends against their eternal unity?

The expression "*brightness of His glory,*" refers to His eternal birth, for the eternal Light cannot exist without His brightness. The Son is the Light out of Light, or the eternal Brightness inseparable from the Light, but rather One with Him. **St. Athanasius of Alexandria** says, [Who is mindless to doubt the eternity of the Son? For who can see Light without Brightness or shine?¹⁰] He also says, [He is inseparable from the Father as the brightness is inseparable from the light¹¹.] He says, [Who wouldn't see that brightness is inseparable

¹⁰ Discourses against Arians 1:4.

¹¹ De sent. Dionysii, 8.

from light, for this is the case by nature, they exist together, and not following each other¹².] He also says, [How can the Son not be the same in essence as the Father, while He is the Image of the Father and His brightness? The Lord Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Since the Son is the Word of the Father and His wisdom, how can it be that there existed time while the Son did not exist?¹³]

St. John Chrysostom says, [Notice with what great awe we understand this, then we will accept it, for He is begotten from the Father without suffering, not greater or lesser than Him¹⁴.] He also says, [Since the Father is called Light in the Old and New Testaments, the Lord Jesus called Himself Light too (John 12:46). Therefore, St. Paul called him, "brightness," showing that He is from Him, co-eternal¹⁵.] And he says, [Listen to the Lord Jesus Himself calling Himself, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). Thus, He used the word "brightness," meaning that He is Light out of Light. He also meant that He lights our lives and declares to us the unity of the Father and the Son as the unity of the light to its brightness¹⁶.]

If we compare the Lord Jesus with the prophets, we remember that when the prophet Moses met God, God's light was reflected on his face that the people could not look at him, so he had to cover his face with a veil whenever he spoke to them. He removes the veil when talking to God. This was a symbol of the Lord Jesus, the Brightness of the Father, who does not carry an outside brightness reflected on Him, but He is the Brightness Himself, inseparable from the Father. Our Christ put on a human body as the veil of Moses, that we may look at Him and get to know the mysteries of the Father, saying with the Psalmist, "With Your light we behold the light," that is, through Your Only-Begotten Son who is Your brightness, we may see Your mysteries, and enter into Your eternal glories.

He is called "*the Express Image of His Person,*" as **St. John**

¹² *Ad Episcopos Egypti*, 13.

¹³ *Depositum Arii*, 3.

¹⁴ *In Hebr., Hom.*, 2:1.

¹⁵ *In Joan. Hom.*, 4:2.

¹⁶ *In Hebr., Hom.*, 2:2.

Chrysostom says, that this phrase testifies to His Person that He is of the same essence as the Father¹⁷.

5. UPHOLDING ALL THINGS BY THE WORD OF HIS POWER

St. John Chrysostom¹⁸ sees that the Holy Spirit goes gradually with the reader till He elevates him on the high mountains, mountains of incomprehensible knowledge of Christ. Once, He talks to them about His incarnation, then He rises and tells them about Him as the Creator. Moreover, He tells them about His nature as being the Brightness of the glory of the Father. Then He descends to their level so they may realize His care for them by saying, "*Upholding all things by the Word of His power.*" Thus, He descends with them and elevates them so they may realize the mysteries of Christ, His characteristics and His deeds.

The divine inspiration talks about the Lord upholding all things by the Word of His power, that is, He is the Almighty, the *Pantocrator*. He cares for, and is concerned about all even the minor ones. He is so near to His creation, arranging even the trifle matters. Since the Son is the unapproachable brightness, in His great love, He carried us to be in Him and take refuge in Him.

We saw Him the Heir of everything. He inherits all nations not to control them, but to pour His love and to hold each one by His hand, to sanctify all by His Holy Spirit, preparing us to enjoy the fellowship of His inheritance. He gives us His inheritance and we own Him inside us, He bought us and we have Him! This is His unique power which declares the authority of love, His powerful care, and His capability of surpassing salvation! As St. John Chrysostom says, [His care is inexpressible, His compassion is incomprehensible, His goodness is unlimited, and His love is unconditional!¹⁹]

6. HE HAD BY HIMSELF PURGED OUR SINS

God, upholding all things by the Word of His power, did not only create us from nothing and created everything for our service, but

¹⁷ In Joan. Hom., 4:2.

¹⁸ In Hebr., Hom., 1:2,3.

also after we sinned and defiled our nature and forsook Paradise and fled from the face of the Father, He paid the price of our sins on the cross to take us to the kingdom of His love, and restore us to our Father's house, and His divine bosom, carrying the image of our Creator. He sits now at the right hand of the Father as the High Priest on our behalf, not through words intercession but through His Self-sacrifice which He offered once for our sake, and we became members of His Body. He intercedes by the Holy Blood shed to purify us.

St. John Chrysostom comments on His care and salvation by saying, [Remember that His delight in your salvation is greater than your delight in fleeing from danger and death!²⁰] He also comments on the same verse saying, [It is important that we should stay pure, without any defile, and to preserve the beauty which the Lord bestowed upon us, and His pure undefiled integrity, “not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27). For even the smallest sin is defilement and blemish; I mean even a word of rebuke or insult or any evil word²¹.

7. SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE MAJESTY ON HIGH

He sat down in the highest, at the right hand of the Majesty on high, not to be beyond our comprehension, but so that when He descends and becomes like one of us and purges us from our sins, we have a place in Him and unite with Him. When He ascends, we ascend with Him, and sit where He sits, enjoying the fellowship of His eternal glory. The Head was exalted so that the body may not remain on the earth, but that it may remain up in spirit and heart, till the great Day of the Lord, when the body is also exalted to enjoy the glory!

St. John Chrysostom says, [For your sake, O man, He prepared the kingdom! For your sake, He prepared indescribable blessings, an inheritance prepared in heaven, a unique abundant life and inexpressible joy²².]

²¹ *In Hebr., Hom., 1:3.*

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.6:8: 22

CHRIST AND THE ANGELS

After the Apostle briefly but strongly illustrated the Father's talk with humanity in His Only-Begotten Son in the fullness of time, which can not be compared with His talk with the Hebrew Fathers through the prophets, he moves to the comparison between Christ and the angels. The Hebrews gloried over the Gentiles in receiving the Law through the angels. This is what the Jewish tradition declared, and was confirmed by the New Testament. The deacon Stephen says, "Who have received the Law by *the direction of angels*, and have not kept it" (Acts 7:53). The Apostle says, "To whom the promise was made; and it was appointed *through angels* by the hand of a mediator" (Gal. 3:19). However, the Lord Jesus offered the New Testament Law to the multitudes when His disciples appeared before Him, and He gave them the message, neither did angels appear at that time, nor any supernatural signs accompany the scene, as when Moses received the Law on Sinai Mountain.

The Apostle compares between Christ and the angels in the following points:

1. HIS GREATNESS IN SONSHIP

"Having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You'? And again, 'I will be to Him a Father and He shall be to Me a Son'?" [4,5]

No way to compare between the Lord and His angels, for they are the work of His hands and His servants. But since Christ accepted the incarnation, and appeared in His humility as one of us and less than the angels, the Apostle wanted to clarify His position: that He is the Only-Begotten Son obtaining a more excellent name than them.

In the Revelation, it says, "He had a name written that no man knew except Himself" (Rev. 19:12). This phrase reveals the inability of the human language, or even heavenly language, to express the nature of the Son or His relationship with the Father. If the Bible calls Him 'Son,' it is because this word is the closest in expression, although it is incapable of expressing His nature as it should.

Through incarnation, the Son descended to us, and became as one of us. Thus, a comparison can be done between Him and the angels. However, in His essence, He is above any comparison. **St. John Chrysostom** says, [He was always greater than the angels and above any comparison, however, this was mentioned about Him regarding His taking a human body²³.] He also says, [If He were a Son, by grace only, He would not have been better than the angels, but rather less than them. How? For the righteous also are called sons. But to show the difference between the creatures and their Creator, listen to what he says, "*For to which of the angels did He ever say: 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You?' and again, 'I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son?'"*²⁴]

What does he mean by the word "*today*," except that it is an expression of His eternity, for He has no beginning. There was no time where the Son did not exist, for He is Begotten of the Father before all ages.

2. THEIR SUBMISSION TO HIM

No way to compare between the Son sitting on the throne and His servants the angels worshipping Him, though they are a flame of fire. *But when He again brings the Firstborn into the world, He says: "Let all the angels of God worship Him. Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire." But to the Son, He says, "Your throne, O God is forever and ever, a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom"* [6-8].

The Apostle calls the incarnation of the Word "*Eisodus*" to the world. This was fulfilled during His *Exodus*, as the Lord Jesus said, "I came forth from the Father, and have come into the world" (John 16:28). As He said, "Behold, a sower went out to sow" (Matt. 13:3). It is truly going out and coming in. Going out willingly from the glories, and coming into our lives to unite our nature and life with Him, so He gets us out of our world, that we may enter in Him into the bosom of His Father. **St. John Chrysostom** compares this act to a person fleeing from the royal palace, was arrested and imprisoned. The Son came out from His palace and entered the prison of our bodies to talk with

²³ *In Hebr., Hom., 1:3.*

²⁴ *In Hebr., Hom., 2:4,5.*

us in the matter of reconciliation, offering the price of our sins. Then, He frees us from the prison so we may enter the palace once more. Thus, the concept of going in and out which the Only-Begotten Son did during His incarnation and ascension, that is, during His act of salvation, is merely an act of exceeding love towards man. Its aim is to extract man from being self-centered to let him enter into the bosom of the Father through confirmation in the Son.

Since the Jews glory in the angels, because the Law was delivered to them by the hand of angels. However, it was impossible for an angel to enter the world to grant man entrance into the Divine bosom. The angels served believers and delivered good news, but they were incapable of achieving salvation. As in the **Gregorian Liturgy**, we say, [You did not entrust an angel nor archangel, nor a cherub, nor prophet for our salvation, but You, incarnate Logos Yourself became man.]

His divine love which made Him enter our world as one of us did not demean His honor before the angels. The Apostle says, "*When He again brings the Firstborn into the world, He says, 'Let all the angels of God worship Him'*" [6]. The angels gave the Old Testament men the opportunity to kneel before God. They themselves who delivered divine messages to the Old Testament men to support them, worship the Son. As **St. Athanasius of Alexandria** says, [While the Patriarchs worship Him, it was written, "Let all the angels worship Him.²⁵"]

His coming to the world did not effect His Divinity, nor prevented the angels from worshipping Him, but granted man honor. For the Apostle did not say, "When He brings the Son into the world, but he said, "*When He brings the Firstborn into the world.*" He came into the world as Firstborn, working on our behalf, and in our name. The angels see Him carrying our nature. Moreover, they see Him carrying the believers as members of His body, and they marvel. They worship Him as their Creator and praise Him joyfully for His great act with us! They see in Him being Firstborn, a declaration of His unconditional love toward His creation. His incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection

²⁵ *Discourses against Arians 1:40.*

and ascension opened a new field for the angels to worship Him, for He revealed His deep love, which was previously incomprehensible. He gave them new knowledge about His mysteries which drew them to worship Him and praise Him!

But this does not demean the angels, for He said assuredly, "*Who makes His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire*" [7]. This relates to the superiority of the angels. But to the Son, there is no way to compare, for he says, "*Your throne, O God is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom*" [8]. The angels are ministers, a flame of fire, but the Son is King full of authority. As **St. John Chrysostom** says, [See how he clearly distinguishes between the creation and its Creator, the ministers and the Lord, the True Son and the Heir and the servants²⁶.]

St. Athanasius of Alexandria says, [Observe here that the word "*who makes*" involves genuine matters, i.e. *the creation*. He calls the angels His creation, but for the Son, He does not call Him, His creation or a being who came into existence, but he talks about His co-eternity, royalty and His controlling everything.] He also says, [He showed that He is different than all what was created. Since He is different in essence and nature, there is no way to compare Him in that with His creation²⁷.]

3. HIS ANOINTMENT FOR THE ACT OF SALVATION

The Lord Jesus sitting on His throne, who is worshipped by all the heavenly hosts, rules by His love. He is the only Righteous, without sin, the Father anointed Him from the beginning to achieve salvation through His incarnation, and offering Himself a sacrifice of love for us. Here His divine love is joined with His righteousness to achieve His purpose in us: "*You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions*" [9].

Some Gnostic heresies preach about the brutality of the God of the Old Testament, the Creator of the body, and about the gentleness

²⁶ *In Hebr., Hom., 3:1.*

²⁷ *Discourses against Arians 1:57,58.*

of the God of the New Testament who desired to save humanity from the hands of the First. Therefore, St. Paul emphasized the role of the Father in salvation, by anointing His Only-Begotten Son for this act of salvation. He emphasized the unity of the work between the Father and the Son, and their positive role in salvation. In more than once, He assures us that the Father loves us as well as the Son, and that He sent His Only-Begotten Son, and made Him suffer for us, and raised Him to raise us in Him.

Let no one stumble when he hears the Apostle confirming that, thinking that the Son was incapable of love, incarnation or resurrection. However, the Apostle wanted to emphasize the role of the Father in the redeeming act of the Son.

He anointed Him with the oil of gladness, that is, the Son was devoted to fulfill this joyful act for the Father and men also. Truly, by His incarnation, He shared our nature, but He is still the Only Unique One in His righteousness and hatred for sin, for He knew no sin. He is the One capable of fulfilling the gladsome act of salvation. In the Son, the Father was glad, for He saw us as His children, justified and sanctified. In Him, we also rejoice, for we see the Father our holy Father opening His fatherly bosom for us!

4. HIS ETERNITY

In his comparison between the Lord Jesus and the angels, the Apostle clarified that the Lord Jesus is the eternal Creator, for the visible world vanishes away but He stays forever:

"You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands.

They will perish, but You remain;

and they will grow old like a garment, like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed.

But You are the same, and Your years will not fail.

But to which of the angels has He ever said, Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool?

Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?" [10-14].

He is the Creator of heaven and earth, thus, there is no way to compare between the Creator and His creation, not even the angels.

The Son as a Creator, begotten from the Father before all ages, existed at all times. There was no time when He did not exist. He created everything, thus, He does not change. However, since the creation was created from nothing, it is apt to change. **St. Athanasius of Alexandria** says, [The creation came into being from nothing; it has a changeable nature. However, the Son, since He is from the Father, is unchangeable according to His nature as the Father Himself²⁸.]

He is the unchangeable Creator of heaven and earth. He changes others, but He does not change, but stays forever as He is. His nature supports us from two aspects: first, because He can fulfill His promises since He is the Only unchangeable One; second, because we change when we submit our lives to His hands as God who renews us and does not get renewed, because He does not become old. We as human beings submit our lives into His hands so He renews our nature and life.

He is the Eternal, who conquered His enemies, for he says, "*But to which of the angels has He ever said, Sit at My right hand till I make Your enemies Your footstool?*" No angelic host can have this eternal victory, but only the Lord Jesus can conquer the power of darkness under His feet, and this is fulfilled in its fullness when He conquers them under His Bride's feet. He gave us the power to tread on serpents, scorpions and every power of the enemy, so that every victory in our life is for the glory of His holy Name. Thus, when we rule with our King, we completely conquer Satan and his kingdom! This promise which the Father offered His Son is for us, too, for He represents us.

This victory which we have in Christ Jesus, and this eternal triumph stimulated the angels to feel glad with us, being a holy bride. Thus, they desire to serve us, and rejoice at the day of our salvation. They serve us not because they are less than us, but it is a service of love, service of the heavenly creatures which rejoice with the earthly ones, when they enjoy fellowship with them in their heavenly life. This is what the Apostle said, "*Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?*" [14]

²⁸ *Discourses against Arians 1:35.*

The Apostle does not ignore our appreciation to the message of the angels and their role as servants sent to work for us, we who are called to inherit salvation. Since the Lord Jesus is our Savior, the angels are His ministers to serve us for His joy and their joy with us.

St. John Chrysostom comments on the words of the Apostle and says, [The angels are the servants of the Son of God sent to minister in different ways for our salvation. Also, they share in the service with us²⁹.] Also, he says, [He sent the Son also not as a servant or a slave, but as the Only-Begotten Son who has the same will as the Father. He was not sent as if He moved from one place to the other, but because He took flesh. However, the angels are sent and they moved from one place to the other³⁰.]

Origen³¹ talked frequently about the angels and their work with us. He said, [When we are unbelievers, we are under the dominion of Satan, but after we are baptized and renewed in the baptismal font, the Lord, who saves us with His blood, appoints a holy angel for us, who looks with purity at God's face³².] He also says, [Every soul, has a guardian angel who guides him as a brother³³.]

St. Athanasius of Alexandria says about the angels, [They are sent by God to spread His gifts, to those who accept them³⁴.]

²⁹ *In Hebr., Hom., 3:4.*

³⁰ *In Hebr., Hom., 3:4.*

³² *Comm. Matt., 26.*

³³ *In Luc. Hom. 35.*

³⁴ *Discourses against Arians 3:14.*

Chapter 2

Christ and the Angels

St. Paul continues his talk about Christ and the angels:

1. **The word of the angels and Divine salvation** 1-4.
2. **The humility of Christ more than the angels** 5-18.

1. THE WORD OF THE ANGELS AND THE DIVINE SALVATION

St. Paul concluded his previous talk by saying: "*Therefore, we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away*" [1]. He is emphasizing that his previous talk is not a theoretical talk declaring the glories of the Son when compared to angels, but rather it is for our practical spiritual benefit. Since the Jews glory in the Law which was sent to them by the angels, and it is truly the steadfast word of God, and whoever disobeys it is punished, what about us if we neglect so great a salvation which we received not by angels, but by the Creator of the angels, the Lord Jesus, the Only-Begotten Son?

He says, "*For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?*" [2-4].

Here, the Apostle is not comparing between the word of the angels and the divine word, for the word spoken by angels is the word of God sent by angels. But the comparison here is between the word which was sent by angles through words, visions and revelations, and the Word Himself who came incarnate to reveal salvation practically in its fullness. If the divine word delivered in the Old Testament has its power and sanctity up till today and no one can disobey it, how about the divine word which came through the Logos, the Word Himself who came to save us with His blood, confirming His incarnation through miracles, wonders, different powers and gifts of the Holy

Spirit. By this comparison, the Apostle wanted to drive us to be persevering in obeying the Living Word of God.

2. THE HUMILITY OF CHRIST MORE THAN THE ANGELS

Since the Jews were proud of the Law being delivered to them through angels, however, the New Testament was declared through the incarnation of the Son, His suffering until death, the death of the cross. Thus, He appeared to be less than the angels, not out of weakness, but in its depth it represented the only way to sanctification, that is, to restore the fallen man to the heavenly glory. As if when Christ humiliated Himself more than the angels He gave us the way to submit to God. He submitted to the Father as our representative and our Head. Thus, the believers can rise to the heavenly level, through Him and in Him. Therefore, the Apostle says, "*For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels*" [5]. For though angels who were sent by God to deliver His words to His people, were highly esteemed; yet the world to come didn't submit to them but to Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, whom God made a little lower than the angels. What does he mean by the world to come? Nothing, but the renewed humanity in Jesus Christ, this which became a new world or "the world to come." This world did not submit to God in complete obedience through the Law delivered by angels, but through Christ, who through Him we became obedient to the Father. If Christ is called the One to come (Rom. 5:4) by comparing Him to the first Adam, then the Church united with Him, His holy body, the world to come, submitted to God her Father.

Hence, the humility of Christ more than the angels has achieved what the angels could not achieve. The world, whether Jews or Gentiles, submitted to His kingdom and all became the obedient Church of God. The words of St. Paul correspond to the Jewish thought which was prevailing at that time, that God has sent His angels to protect His people. Thus, the Archangel Michael was the one to protect the Jewish nation, and each nation had its own angel. But the Lord Jesus, through the incarnation, became as if less than the angels, He protected everyone without being prejudiced to a certain nation, not according to the level of carnal protection, or receiving an

earthly blessing, but to restore the world. Thus, He made it the "*world to come*," offering a unique divine act.

Since we became members in the world to come through our unity with the humble Son in the water of baptism, it is appropriate for us to realize that every member of us became a world to come. When the spirit, the soul, and the flesh with all their inner capabilities and feelings are united, then the person becomes a world to come, that is, he lives on a heavenly level, a bride of the Heavenly Christ!

St. Paul talks more clearly about the Lord's humility as a unique road in the world's submission to God, whether on the level of all nations or individually. He says,

*"But one testified in a certain place saying,
'what is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man
that You take care of him?"*

*You made him a little lower than the angels;
You crowned him with glory and honor. And set him over the
works of Your hands.*

*You have put all things in subjection under his feet.
For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing
that is not put under him.*

*But now we do not yet see all things put under him.
But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels
for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that He, by
the grace of God, might taste death for everyone" [6-9].*

St. Paul excerpted these words from the prophecy of David, the Psalmist, who said, "What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas" (Ps. 8: 4-8).

St. Paul sees that the words of the Psalmist are prophetic words, which talks about the Incarnate Son, who was made a little lower than the angels. Through this humility, He had a spiritual dominion over the creation, which is the work of God's hands; thus re-

newing it. **St. Augustine**³⁵ says that the psalm here refers to the submission of all the creation, whether in heaven or on earth, to the Incarnate Son. He agrees with **Origen** who says that the Lord, being humble, united the heavenly creatures with the earthly ones, the angelic host with humans, to unite all as members in the one body that is His, for He is the Head of the Church which united heaven and earth in one spirit!

The Psalmist says that the sheep and oxen submitted to Him. If Adam is the lost sheep whom God left the ninety nine to search for, then the ninety nine refer to the heavenly creation which fills heaven. The Lord descended to us incarnate, leaving the righteous to seek the lost sheep and restore him to the flock. Thus, he gathers with his heavenly brothers sharing in praises and thanksgiving. **Origen**³⁶, talked repeatedly about the mixing of the heavenly creatures with the believers in Christ Jesus. He says that when the believers gather in the Church of God, the angels rejoice, for they similarly meet, because the angels of the believers meet each other. Thus, there is a visible Church gathering together and an invisible Church of angels meeting together as well. We share with them their heavenly praises, and they share with us our joy with the divine salvation!

The Psalmist says that the sheep, cattle, birds, and fish of the sea submit all to the One who, in His humility, became lower than the angels. What does the sheep and cattle mean except the rational flock, the old people, of whom some have submitted to the spiritual kingdom of Christ, while the rest of the flock will follow in accepting that submission. The beasts of the field refer to the groups of the Gentiles which lived as though in the wilderness, deprived of the pastures which God's people enjoyed, like the prophets, the Law, the promises, and the covenants etc. The birds of the air refer to the proud souls who seek high matters. With the spirit of love, they submit to the Lord, while the fish of the sea refer to the souls troubled with the worries of the world as one going through waves. Thus, the Word of God came incarnate to capture every one in the snare of His love; whether Jew or

³⁵ On Ps. 8.

³⁶

Gentile, the proud and the abased!

What we say about the outside world is fulfilled also in the inner world. If we find inside us a herd of cattle or wild beasts, birds fly in the sky or fish which swim in the water, let us submit them to the Only One who has the authority to submit them to His kingdom, sanctifying our inner depths and our outer behavior to become all at His disposal.

The humility of our Lord till the death of the cross is the road of the kingdom. As **St. John Chrysostom** says³⁷, [The Son of God visited us when we were nothing. Since He carried what is ours, i.e. our humanity, and united with us, He became the greatest of all.] This is the road of our submission to His kingdom. As our representative, He submitted to the Father, by His own free will, suffering till death, thus, we submitted to the Father and to Him too. Our submission to the Father is through the submission of the Son to Him, and it is achieved through our submission also to the Son. Yet, there is a difference between our submission to the Father and the Son, and the submission of the Son Himself to His Father.

It is appropriate for us to distinguish between various types of submission, especially in St. Paul's words, "Then comes the end when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For, 'He has put all things under His feet.' But when He says 'all things are put under Him,' it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who puts all things under Him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15: 24-28).

In these verses, the Apostle distinguishes between three types of submission, submission of complete defeat which will be fulfilled in the great Day of the Lord when Satan and death are completely defeated under the Lord's feet, submission as a kind of obedience of the creation to the Creator where it will enjoy its eternal crown, and what is greatest is the submission of the Son to the Father on a unique level!

³⁷ In Hebr. hom. 4:2.

St. Ambrose³⁸ talked about the submission of the Son to His Father, emphasizing that it is completely different from our submission to the emperor or the king or to any ordinance of man for the Lord's sake (1 Pet. 2:13), or the submission of the wife to her husband (Eph. 5:2), or our submission to the Father in fear.

The Lord Christ submits to the Father from two sides: the first side, He, being the Son who is one with the Father in divinity, does not carry a different will contradicting to the Father's, but it is the same will. Thus He submits not as a slave who takes orders, but as the Only-Begotten Son who carries one and the same will with His Father. The other side, when He carried our human nature, and represented us, He submitted in complete obedience to His Father so we may be counted in Him as children of obedience, and to uproot the rebellious nature which we have inherited from the first Adam.

St. Ambrose noticed that the submission of the Son to His Father will be fulfilled in the future as the Apostle says, "Then, the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who puts all things under Him" (1Cor. 15:28). Does the Son not submit to the Father now? [Christ has not submitted yet (with all His Church), for His members has not submitted yet, but when we become, not as many members, but as one spirit, then He will submit through our submission³⁹.] The submission of the whole Church, when all her members with one spirit, as the body of Christ will submit in the great Day of the Lord to the Father through the Head, then Christ is considered submitting to His Father in us!

In other words, The Lord Christ, as the Head, is submitting to His Father since eternity, before the incarnation. But when He accepted the believers to become His body, He submits to the Father in us, or we submit to the Father in the name of His Son, on His behalf and with His abilities.

This is the purpose of the divine incarnation. Through it, the Son became humble as lower than the angels, so that the believers may come to the Father in submission. This was partly fulfilled, and

³⁸ On Christian Faith, Book 5, ch. 13.

³⁹ Ibid 5:168.

remains active, through His redeeming act. As the Apostle says, "*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone*" [9].

St. John Chrysostom comments on the previous apostolic verse by saying,

[All things should submit to Him, but they did not submit yet, but do not be saddened nor worried⁴⁰.]

[He tasted death for everyone, not only for believers but for the whole world. Truly, He died for everyone, but what if everyone has not yet believed? He did His part!!⁴¹]

[He rightly said: "He might taste death for everyone," he did not say "die," as if He truly taste death where He spent a short time then resurrected⁴²." But the reason for tasting death for everyone of us is His accepting death so we may not need to fear death. **St. John Chrysostom** says, [As the physician who does not need to taste the food offered to a patient, but for his concern for that patient, he may taste it, first to encourage him to eat from it. Thus all people dreaded death, but to encourage them to accept death, He tasted death, though He does not need it, for He says, "The ruler of the world is coming and he has nothing in Me" (John 14:30)⁴³.]

St. John Chrysostom comments on the words of the Apostle, "*You made Him a little lower than the angels*" by saying when the Lord humiliated Himself accepting death, He humiliated Himself a little, that is, for three days, where He rose declaring His glory. But we fell under the dominion of death for a long time because of sin, till He came and raised us.

After he talked about the role of the Son in our salvation through His incarnation and sufferings, he clarified the role of the Father saying, "*For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the au-*

⁴⁰ In Hebr. hom. 4:3.

⁴¹ In Hebr. hom. 4:3.

⁴² In Hebr. hom. 4:3.

⁴³ In Hebr. hom. 4:4.

thor of their salvation perfect through sufferings" [10.] St. John Chrysostom comments on this verse by saying, [He does whatever is appropriate for His love to humanity, offering His Firstborn Son more glorious than everyone, for He proclaims Him as an example to others, as a honorable militant surpassing everyone. He is the Author of their salvation, that is, the Cause of their salvation. Notice the difference between Him and us, for He is the Son, and we are children, however, He saves others but we are saved through Him. See how He separates between Himself and us saying, "bringing many sons to glory"⁴⁴ ."

Since the Only-begotten Son was lowered than the angels so He may be crowned with glory and honor through the salvation of everyone by His redeeming sufferings. This act does not concern the Son only, but also the Father, who offered His Son as the Leader for our salvation, giving Him to suffering until death to achieve our salvation and to grant us His adoption in His Son. As though the Father is working in us by the sufferings of His Son so we may enjoy the glory of His adoption.

In other words, since the Father has created us through His Son for, "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3), the renewal of our creation and our salvation from the evil old man was achieved by His Son through His sufferings. **St. John Chrysostom** compares between the divine act in His creation and the divine act in our renewal by saying, [The sufferings are perfecting the salvation and its purpose... He accepted to be in the flesh to endure sufferings and this is much greater than His creation of the world from nothing. Certainly, the act of creation is the result of His compassionate love, but the other act (salvation by His sufferings) is much greater. This is what the Apostle refers to by saying, "That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus... He raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2: 7,6)⁴⁵ .]

⁴⁴ In Hebr. hom. 4:4.

⁴⁵ In Hebr. hom. 4:4.

We go back to the humility of the Son by accepting the incarnation, and sufferings for our salvation, and allowing us to enter in His kingdom to be glorified in us, that we may enjoy the fellowship of His glories. The second reason for His incarnation or His humility lower than the angels is His becoming our Firstborn Brother to dwell among us, being His young brothers. Let us be united with Him, being Holy so we may become holy. Thus, the Apostle continues by saying,

"For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one,

for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren saying,

'I will declare Your name to My brethren;

in the midst of the congregation I will sing praise to You' "

[11,12].

St. John Chrysostom says, [See how He unites both the believers and the Lord Christ, honoring them, granting them rest for He made them the brethren of Christ. But He sanctifies and they are being sanctified by Him; and overwhelmingly is the difference!⁴⁶.]

He is not ashamed to call them His brethren, for He, upon taking the flesh, took His brethren too⁴⁷, granting them His divine capabilities to practice a holy life in Him. As **St. Athanasius of Alexandria** says⁴⁸, [Through the divine incarnation, we resembled Him, from the standpoint of the flesh, we became branches in the Vine united with Him, enjoying His fullness. (John 1:16). Hence, our body became sanctified which was dead and corrupt before, and was granted the resurrection and the salvation through our brotherhood to the Lord Christ carrying our body!]

In details, we say that the Son, the Incarnate Logos, became the Firstborn Brother to us. He is not ashamed to call us His brothers, for when He descended to us, He raised us to Him. He took our flesh, which resembles the flesh of sin. But as it was impossible for sin to come near Him, He rather raised us, the sinners, to His holiness: "For

⁴⁶ In Hebr. hom., 4:5.

⁴⁷ In Hebr. hom., 4:5.

⁴⁸ De Sententia Dionysii, 11

both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one." We became members in His Holy Body having the fellowship of His superior traits.

In other words, the humility of our Lord, lower than the angels, that is His incarnation opened for us the door of our brotherhood to Him. Through His sufferings and resurrection, we had the right of enjoying His Holy Spirit dwelling inside us, this who takes from Christ and tells us, that is, takes His holy traits to pour them on us so we may become sanctified in Him. Through this divine act, we get to know the Holy Father, being our Heavenly Father, and get to realize His incomprehensible divine mysteries hence our inner tongue will utter praises and thanksgiving. The Only-Begotten Son calls His Father saying, "*I will declare Your name to My brethren; and in the midst of the congregation I will sing praise to You*" [12].

He continues saying, "*I will put My trust in Him. And again Here am I and the children whom God has given Me*" [13].

As a Representative of humanity, and as Firstborn Brother to the believers, the Son relied obediently on the Father, thus we are considered children of obedience to God after we were rebellious slaves. The Son takes us to the bosom of His Father through the road of obedience of the Son to His Father, the obedience of the unique love, the obedience of the one will with His Father, this matter which all creation is unable to reach without the Son. It is strange that while He presents us to His Father as children of obedience, He presents us as children of obedience to the Son Himself, because we could not obey the Father without going through the new life which we have in the Son, obeying Him. Our obedience to the Father is through our obedience to the Son opening the road of obedience! Through this obedience which we have in the Son, the Son became not only the Firstborn Brother but also a Father. For the Apostle says through the Lord, "Here I am and the children whom God has given Me." **St. John Chrysostom** comments saying, [Here He shows Himself as a Father as previously He showed Himself as a Brother⁴⁹.]

His Brotherhood and His Fatherhood to us declare our fellow-

⁴⁹. In Hebr. hom., 4:5.

ship in Him. so we may enjoy victory over death, which dominated us, by His accepting death for us. Through His death, He mortified our death. The Apostle says, "*Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil*" [14].

Thus, the humility of Christ more than the angels is the road for our enjoyment of His divine kingdom. It is the road of our salvation through the Brotherhood of the Lord Christ and His Fatherhood also. Finally, this humility was the road of His entry to death so He may abolish the dominion of death, that is, the devil, thus liberating us. As **St. John Chrysostom** says, [Here he points out to what is marvelous, for Christ has defeated the devil by the same matter with which we were defeated, through the strong weapon against the world, that is, death. Here is manifested the greatness of the Conqueror! Do you want to find out what great goodness has death brought to us? The Apostle says, "*And release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage*" [15]. Why do you tremble? Why do you fear who became as nothing? Satan and death are no more fearful, but they were trodden under foot, completely despised⁵⁰.]

This is the purpose of the divine incarnation. He carries our body so through His death, He mortifies our death, granting us the power of salvation and eternal resurrection. **St. Athanasius of Alexandria** says, [He became man, carrying our human nature that needs salvation, so that He may have what to offer us, that is salvation for all⁵¹.]

St. Ambrose comments on this sentence by saying, [Who is He who wants us to share in His flesh and blood? He is certainly the Son of God! How did He become a partaker with us except through the flesh, and how did He break the bonds of death, except through His physical death? The endurance of our Lord Christ to death mortified death⁵².]

⁵⁰ In Hebr. hom., 4:6.

⁵¹ Epistle, 61:3.

⁵² On Christian Faith, 3:48.

We were all under bondage, no one was able to trample death, nor be liberated from the captivity of the devil. Therefore, came the Almighty who alone can enter the way of death, rise and rise, to raise us with Him, thus liberating us from captivity. He destroyed the sentence of death, and tore it, He also ruined the dominion of Satan over us, thus, granting us the freedom of the glorious resurrection, as life which we can live every day till we meet Him in the Last Day.

St. Athanasius of Alexandria says, [Let us not forget what St. Paul delivered to us, that is, the resurrection of the Lord! He says that the Lord has abolished the one who has authority of death that is, Satan, and raised us with Him. He untied the bonds of death, granting us blessing instead of curse, joy instead of sorrow, feasting instead of lamenting. He granted us the joy of the holy resurrection, the continuous feast in our hearts, so we may rejoice forever⁵³.] He says in a different place, [He has put an end to the judgment which was against us by the Sacrifice of His body, granting us a new beginning of life in hope of the resurrection⁵⁴.] **St. John Chrysostom** also says, [He showed not only that He conquered death, but He also nullified the devil, who was unceasingly fighting against us. Whoever is not afraid of death becomes outside the circle of the dominion of Satan... Whoever is not afraid of anyone is above all, having more freedom than anyone. When one is not concerned about his temporal life; therefore he would be rather not afraid of anything. When the devil sees such a person, he cannot do anything against him. Thus, He removes the tyranny of death over us and grants us victory over the power of the devil⁵⁵.]

Once more through the divine incarnation, since the Son became lower than the angels, becoming from the descendants of Abraham according to the flesh, He became a Firstborn Brother, resembling us in everything, so that He being tempted, is able to aid those who are tempted. He became like one of us, sharing our feelings, interceding for us to His Father.

⁵³ Psch. Epis., 2:7.

⁵⁴ Incar. Of the Word, 10.

⁵⁵ In Hebr. hom., 4:6.

The Apostle says, "*For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted*" [16,17,18].

St. John Chrysostom explains this by saying, [He did not take the nature of angels but rather the nature of man⁵⁶.]

Why did the Apostle say "*give aid to*"? Because the nature of man was away from Him, not wanting to meet Him, but He followed its traces and caught it through His incarnation! In His love and concern, He held our nature for He carried our humanity to grant us new capabilities. As **St. John Chrysostom** says, [As for me, when I ponder on this, I marvel and imagine great matters regarding the human race. I see great magnificent gifts, and that God has great zeal for our nature⁵⁷.]

He came to us as a Faithful High Priest able to liberate us from our sins by the sacrifice of the cross. He suffered and was tempted, so He may help those who are tempted, He cured our sufferings and temptations not by removing them from us, but by carrying them and sharing our sufferings. **St. John Chrysostom** says, [He does not ignore our sufferings, but He knows them all, not just by being God Himself, but by being Man who was tempted. He suffered much, thus He knows how to be compassionate. He knows what sufferings and temptations are, not less than we do, because He has experienced them, for He suffered too. Hence, He stretches His hand with great zeal and compassion⁵⁸.] **St. Athanasius of Alexandria** says, [Truly, He did not take the nature of angels, but the nature of the seed of Abraham, therefore, it was appropriate that He resembles His brothers in everything, so He may be merciful and faithful High Priest in what concerns God, achieving reconciliation for the sins of the people. He suffered, being tempted so He may aid those who are tempted. There-

⁵⁶ In Hebr. hom., 5:1.

⁵⁷ In Hebr. hom., 5:1.

⁵⁸ In Hebr. hom., 5:2.

fore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus who was faithful to Him who appointed Him⁵⁹.]

Briefly, we can say that the divine incarnation, where the Son became lower than the angels, has achieved what no heavenly creature can achieve which are the following:

- 1. It opened the door of the kingdom, thus everyone submitted to the Father in His Son.**
- 2. It granted the human race unity with the Holy One, thus, they became holy in Him.**
- 3. It considered us His brothers, telling us about His Father's name and we practice the life of praise in the midst of the holy church.**
- 4. He became our Father presenting us as children of obedience to His Father.**
- 5. Through His death, He destroyed death, and liberated us from the dominion of Satan.**
- 6. Being tempted, He can intercede for those who are tempted, so He precedes us as the High Priest and Sacrifice in the mean time.**

⁵⁹ Discourses against Arians, 2:8.

Chapter 3

Christ and Moses

In his comparison between Christ and the prophets of the Old Testament and the angels, the Apostle clarified the great attributes of Christ, without demeaning the prophets nor the angels. Here, he compares between Christ and Moses the Prophet, being the first leader of the Israelites, who led them from captivity, crossed to the wilderness, and stood on the Mountain of Moab. He delivered them to Joshua, their leader, to enter the promised land. The Apostle did not demean the great prophet Moses, but confirmed his faithfulness in work and projected the Lord Jesus, the true Leader, capable of delivering us from bitter captivity to the freedom of the children of God. He discussed two points:

1. **The Lord Christ and Moses** 1-6.
2. **The hardness of the heart** 7-19.

1. THE LORD CHRIST AND MOSES

"Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house" [1, 2]

St. Paul called the Hebrews "*holy brethren*." In his previous talk when comparing the Lord Christ with His angels, he mentioned the humility of the Incarnate Logos, who became the Firstborn Brother. The Apostle sees that the believers are "*holy brethren*," being members in His Holy Body and partakers of the Divine calling. In the Heavenly Christ, the believers enjoy His holy heavenly life, so they may live in Him up to a holy heavenly standard. As **Origen** says, [If you believe that He sat on the right hand of the Father in heaven, then it is appropriate that He is preparing a place for you not on earth but in heaven⁶⁰.]

When the Apostle was comparing between Christ and Moses the prophet, he told them to look at the Lord Jesus from two aspects:

⁶⁰ *Comm. On John, Fragm. 144.*

A. The Apostle of our confession

Through the incarnation, the Son was declared as an Apostle, the Father sent Him to declare the divine love practically on the cross, and grant us the capability of the resurrection by His resurrection, and the entry to heaven by His sitting at the right hand of the Father. The Lord Jesus differs from the prophets and the angels from that aspect, for He, being sent, does not mean that He left a place to go to another, but it means His apparition in the flesh and His dwelling among us, and that His divinity remains not separate from His Father, and He fills the heaven and the earth.

The purpose of His message is to declare our faith or our confession of the Truth. He presented Himself as the divine unchangeable Truth. We accept Him, thus, we know the mysteries of the Father, too. As He says, "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him... He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:7,9).

Therefore, His mission is unique. Through it he holds us within Him, so we may enter the bosom of His Father, thus we may know Him, unite with Him and have fellowship with Him. We see in the Father the unseen, and enjoy what the physical senses cannot express!

B. High Priest: The Hebrews, upon accepting the faith in Christ, were deprived of the Levitical priesthood and of enjoying the works of the high priest, the descendant of Aaron. However, they enjoyed a much better High Priest, on a divine level. He works in heaven forever, without ceasing, this matter which the Apostle discusses when he talks about the Lord Jesus as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, and his intercession on our behalf in the heavenly holies.

We mentioned earlier that the Jews saw the bitter conflict between the true prophets and the hypocrite priests who were not true worshipers. But the Lord Jesus surpassed all. In Him, the prophecy is not a partial knowledge, but it is the "*truth and the perfect knowledge*." In the mean time, He is the High Priest, not on the level of offering bloody sacrifices, but through the divine love. He offers His life a ransom for His people, where the prophecy is united with the priest-

hood in a unique way which surpasses Moses, the great prophet and Aaron the high priest whom God appointed.

This is an introduction of the comparison between the Lord Jesus and Moses the Prophet, which is summarized in the following points:

First: The Apostle praises Moses the prophet being faithful in all his house [2]. He did not start by revealing how the Lord Jesus surpasses Moses, because the Jews were so attached to Moses. [He was afraid lest the hearer may flee, and block his ears, for in spite of them being believers, yet they carried special deep emotions towards Moses⁶¹.] When he said "*In all his house*," he meant in the midst of all his people, for Moses was faithful in caring for the people as their guardian and care taker.

St. Paul raised the status of Moses, for he declared that he is faithful in all his house, and that the Lord Jesus whom the Father raised is faithful too. The Arians tried to concentrate on this phrase to stumble the believers in the Person of Jesus Christ, especially when he said, "*He appointed Him*," declaring that this phrase makes the Lord Jesus less, as being created, and that the Creator appointed Him to be on his house, or the Church. **St. Athanasius of Alexandria** explained this phrase by emphasizing that the Lord Jesus is the Eternal Word of God, and He raised for Himself a house in the womb of Virgin Mary, where He became one with our humanity. This is what the wise Solomon talk about, saying: "Wisdom has build her house..." (Prov. 9:1) The Word of God is the Wisdom who built His house, it is our human nature with whom He united⁶²."

St. Ambrose comments on this apostolic phrase by saying, [Here we see that the Apostle said, Jesus was appointed, He took a flesh from the seed of Abraham, obviously emphasizing the point of start of the body, for how could he make propitiation for the sins of the people except in His flesh? Because He suffered according to the flesh, as it was said . Moreover He is the High Priest, who shared His

⁶¹ St. John Chrysostom: *In Hebr.*, hom. 5:4.

⁶² *Against Arians*, 3:6.

priesthood with His priestly people⁶³.]

Second: Moses is faithful in his pastoral work. However, there is a vast difference between his faithfulness and the faithfulness of the Lord Christ. As He says, "*For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God*" [3,4]. What a great difference between the Lord Jesus our Creator, the Builder of the house, who is capable of renewing our nature, and between Moses, for truly he is faithful, yet he himself is the house which the Lord Jesus builds!

Third: Moses was faithful as a minister to witness for God's love and care, and to declare His Law and statutes. Therefore, he used to take off his shoes when entering the holies, (Exod. 3:5) as a faithful minister who wants to be holy to meet the Holy One. However, the Lord Jesus is the Son, the Heir of everything. St. Paul says, "*And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward*" [5]. **St. John Chrysostom** comments by saying, [Moses cared for others' possessions, but the Lord Jesus cares for His private possessions⁶⁴.] This means, He cares for us, His house, His holy temple and the subject of His kingdom.

Fourth: The practical result of this comparison is, "*Whose house we are, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end*" [6]. We have to remain as the house of God which Moses previously served, as a faithful prophet, and where the Son dwells as the Owner of the house, and who sanctifies us by the Holy Spirit. And we be as an eternal dwelling for Him which does not perish, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

We conclude this comparison by the words of **St. John Chrysostom**, [We see him talking not about the temple, but about the whole people. Do you realize how the Apostle differentiate between the thing created (house of God) and the Creator, between the servant

⁶³ *On Christian Faith*, 3:86.

⁶⁴ *St. John Chrysostom: In Hebr., hom. 5:5.*

and the Son? Moreover, He takes the possessions of His Father as a Master, while the other deals as a servant⁶⁵.]

2. THE HARDNESS OF THE HEART

The Apostle moves from his talk about the Lord Christ comparing him with His prophet Moses, to the people themselves. If the Hebrews glory in their great leader, yet the people coming out of Egypt did not enter the promised rest, not due to the weakness of the leader, but due to the rebellion of the people in the wilderness. Moses was faithful, but because of the disobedience of the people and their unbelief, they lost what God has promised them through Moses. Therefore, it was appropriate for them not to glory in Moses, but to look at themselves lest they be deprived of the true rest and enjoyment of the divine promises like their fathers, because of the hardness of their hearts and unbelief. *“Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me, proved Me, and saw My works forty years’”* [7-9].

Here, the Apostle quotes the last part of psalm 95. First he compared between the faithfulness of the Lord Christ, being the Son and the Creator of the house of God, and between the faithfulness of Moses the Prophet, being the faithful servant and who is an important part of the house itself. Then, he revealed to them how their fathers were deprived of the divine promises, for they perished in the wilderness, and did not enter the promised land, in spite of the faithfulness of Moses their leader. This generation perished not because of lack of the divine care, nor because of the unfaithfulness of their leader and faithful servant Moses, but because of the hardness of their hearts, and their unbelief. God cared for them for forty years. Number ‘40’ refers to our temporary life on earth, for God's kind hand cares for us unceasingly all the days of our life, desiring to enter us to His rest. However, our unbelief deprives us of this care, or as **St. John Chrysostom** says, [Unbelief is based on hardness of the heart. As there are dry hard organs in the body which do not submit to the hands of the physician, so there are hard souls which do not submit to the Word of God⁶⁶.] As

⁶⁵ St. John Chrysostom: In Hebr., hom. 5:4.

⁶⁶ St. John Chrysostom: In Hebr., hom. 5:3.

long as the heart is hard it does not accept the work of the divine Word in it, but one leads the life of unbelief depriving himself of God's wonderful care!

The Apostle gave us a practical example of the Israelites leaving Egypt, who lost their enjoyment of God's promises due to their unbelief, because of the hardness of their hearts. They lived in a state of unceasing grumble and complaint. Before crossing the Red Sea, they said to Moses, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt?!" (Exod. 14:11). After crossing the Red Sea and singing to the Lord, they soon started complaining about the bitter water (Exod. 15:11). At Elim, they complained for the third time saying, "Oh, that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, and when we ate bread to the full!" (Exod. 16:3). When God sent them Manna to eat, they still did not obey, for they kept some till the following day (Exod. 16:19). On the Sabbath, they went to gather Manna but found none (Exod. 16:27). When Moses was late in descending from the mountain, they insisted that Aaron makes them a golden calf to go before them instead of God (Exod. 32). In unbelief, they craved for cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic, for they said, "We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the leeks, the onions and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!" (Num. 11:5,6) When God sent spies to spy out the land of Canaan, the Israelites murmured against Moses and Aaron saying, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why has the Lord brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" (Num. 14: 2,3) Thus, their lives became continuous murmuring, and this became their nature, to grumble all the time. Therefore, the Lord rejected this generation and none entered the promised land except Joshua and Caleb. This communal experience should always be in our minds, so we may not lose God's promises, because of the hardness of our hearts.

Here he concentrates on the heart which is the source, for it

may be a holy temple for the Lord through which the whole body is sanctified, or it may be a source of evil, when it is hard, and rejecting the work of God's grace therein. The cure is **repentance** which, in essence, is returning of the heart to God as the secret of each one's life, salvation and sanctification. The word of God draws the heart to repent, thus the Apostle says, "*Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts...*" He is emphasizing the word "*Today*," because our life yesterday does not intercede for us if we today live in hardness of heart. Also, the future is not in our hands as long as we do not hear His voice today. However, if we today live in repentance, listening to His voice, we benefit from the past with its blessings and weaknesses, and we are full of hope regarding the future. Time becomes useful to us as long as our lives submit to the Lord. Therefore, the Apostle continues saying, "*But exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*" [13].

St. John Chrysostom comments by saying, [Let each one teaches the other. Watch lest what happened to them happens to you, so no one is 'hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.' See how sin begets unbelief. As unbelief begets an evil life, thus when the soul enters into the depth of sin it becomes contempt. "When the wicked comes, contempt comes also; and with dishonor comes reproach" (Prov. 18:3). When one becomes contempt, he does not even accept faith to be freed of fear⁶⁷.]

Sin deceives the soul and drives it to unbelief, and unbelief drives it to sin. Thus one is in a daze of unbelief and falling in evil.

The Apostle continues, "*For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end*" [14]. St. Paul moves from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Since the people of the Old Testament fell in the hardness of their hearts, the Lord Jesus offered us His fellowship as a new capability, so we may not fall as the fathers did. He offered us Himself as the Head of the body and we became members of His body, of His flesh and of his bones (Eph. 5:30), if we hold the beginning of our confi-

⁶⁷ St. John Chrysostom: *In Hebr., hom. 5:3.*

dence, that is, if we hold the foundation of our faith in Him as our Creator and the one who Renews our nature.

He emphasizes our positive role in enjoying the rest promised to us by obedience. He says,

“while it is said: ‘Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.’

For who having heard, rebelled?!

Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses?!

Now with whom was He angry forty years?

Was it not with those who sinned whose corpses fell in the wilderness?!

And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey?!

So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief” [15-19].

St. John Chrysostom comments on that, [They also listened as we listen, but they did not benefit from listening. Do not think that benefiting is from listening, for they listened but did not benefit because they did not believe⁶⁸.]

⁶⁸ St. John Chrysostom: *In Hebr., hom. 5:4.*

Chapter 4

Christ and Joshua

After the Apostle compared between the Lord Jesus and Moses, the first leader of the Israelites, now he talks about his successor Joshua who led them to the rest in the promised land.

St. Paul compared between three kinds of rest: the first is the entry to the rest on the seventh day, "Sabbath." The second is the entry to the promised land under the leadership of Joshua. The third is our entry to the eternal rest in Christ Jesus, the Mystery of our rest.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. Warning against unbelief | 1-3. |
| 2. The seventh day (rest) | 4-5. |
| 3. The promised land (rest) | 6-13. |
| 4. Rest in Christ | 14-16. |

1. WARNING AGAINST UNBELIEF

St. Paul has previously given us an example of the fathers who were deprived of entering into the promised land, that is to enjoy His rest, because of their unbelief. He warns us saying, "*Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it*" [1]. From God's standpoint, He offered us a promise to enter His rest, however, from our standpoint, we have to fear lest we are deprived of enjoying it, in spite of the true divine promise. As the Father, He opened to us the door of hope, and we, as children, have to fear, not as servants in a state of fear, but the fear of a son who is afraid lest he hurts his father's feelings by depriving himself of the inheritance which the Father has prepared for him. Since God as the Father has offered us the blood of His Son as a price for our salvation, then with the spirit of sonship, we fear lest we are deprived of this salvation. St. Peter says, "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:17-19). He also says, "Work out your own salvation in fear and trembling." (Phil. 2: 12)

Regarding holy virginity, **St. Augustine** writes to the virgins lest they fall in pride and become deprived of Christ Jesus, urging them to work out their salvation in fear and trembling: [I am con-

cerned about you, lest when you brag because you are following the Lamb anywhere He goes, you cannot follow Him uprightly because of your pride. It is better for you, virgins, to carry the fear of God which begets the spirit of salvation. It is true that there is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out fear. (1 John 4: 18) However, perfect love casts out the fear of people not the fear of the Lord, the fear of temporal evil not the fear of the divine judgment in the Last Day. "Do not be haughty but fear." (Rom. 11: 20) Love the goodness of the Lord but fear His severity, and do not be proud. Through love, fear God lest you seriously disobey Him, the One whom you ought to love. What greater vice than to despise the Lord by pride, who for your sake is not pleased with the haughty?! If you do not love, fear lest you perish. If you love, fear Him lest you displease Him⁶⁹.]

Let us then fear, that in spite of the divine promise to enter His rest, we may be dismayed because of our neglect or unbelief. He does not say "promise to enter our rest," but "*promise to enter His rest,*" for when we enjoy His rest, we enjoy our true rest. The Father finds His rest in Christ Jesus alone, and Christ presents us to Him as justified members of His Body and sanctified by the precious Blood, as a result the Father rests in us being members of the Lord's body. Our rest is likewise fulfilled, for we rest in Him forever, in the bosom of the Heavenly Father. Christ is the "**Mystery of the true rest,**" in whom the Father and consequently we as His children find rest.

Opening the doors of hope for rest, by abiding in the Lord Christ, does not drive us to laziness and negligence, but to continuous strife, holding fast faith, and proceeding with confidence to the throne of grace. Meaning that the enjoyment of rest requires one to be aware lest he loses faith, and to continue struggling by holding fast faith in continuous growth. Therefore, he says, "*Let us fear,... let us be diligent,... let us hold fast our confession,... let us come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*" [1,11,14,16]. The divine fear drives us to diligence and diligence drives us to hold fast the confession of faith, which in turn gives us continuous progress having full confidence in the work of God's grace that God works within us in time, that is, in the proper time, for our edification.

2. THE SEVENTH DAY

Since St. Paul wrote about being diligent in the fear of God to obtain His promise of rest, he is now relating this promise with the seventh day, that is, the "Sabbath" which in Hebrew means "rest."

⁶⁹ *Of Holy Virginity* 39.

"For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: *"And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"* [4].

What is the relation between the promise of entering His rest and between the Lord resting on the seventh day?

Since God rested on the seventh day after He created the world in six days, that is, in six periods of time, yet this does not mean that He rested from work, for the Lord Jesus says, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (John 5: 17). **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, [God does not need a day of rest like man, for He does not get tired or becomes wearied or is in need⁷⁰.] Thus, God's rest on the seventh day means His rejoicing for creating man on the sixth day after preparing all his needs.

Since God rested on the seventh day, then the six days refer to the temporal life where God always works for us, so when the Day comes, that is, the true Sabbath comes, God rests because of our resurrection and our union with Him in the glories where He declares our perfect salvation. Thus, we are with Him forever in the new heaven and on the new earth (Rev. 21: 1). In the holy city, the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband, it was told of her, "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God" (Rev. 21: 2,3). This is the true rest for God and the people, or it is the Sabbath of the Lord and our Sabbath. The Lord Jesus is our "*True Rest*" or our "*True Sabbath*." In Him, the Father rested in humanity, as we became sanctified members in the body of His Son. We also rested in the Father where we found Him our Heavenly Father, when we enjoyed His sonship by abiding in the Only Begotten Son⁷¹. The rest was accomplished when the Lord Jesus rose from the dead and raised us with Him, granting us the authority over death, conquering Hades, and abolishing sin. Thus, we had the right to enter into heaven to the bosom of the Father by uniting in the One who rose from the dead. The Father accepted us as members of the body of His Beloved Son. Father Barnabas, from the second century, talks about the resurrection of the Lord that it is the mystery of the true rest, or Sabbath, by saying, [We keep the eighth day (Sunday) joyfully, the day where Christ declared Himself as the Lord who rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven⁷².] Since the apostolic age, the churches used to officiate the Eucharist as a mystery of the true rest, where we receive the Body of the Risen Lord and His

⁷⁰ *Stromata*, 6:16.

⁷² *Ep. of Barnabas* 15.

Blood in memory of His resurrection!

St. Paul continues his talk about God's rest on the seventh day by saying, "*And again in this place, they shall not enter My rest*" [5]... Why?

First: Because the Jews misunderstood the meaning of the rest on the seventh day. They stopped working or doing any good deed, moreover, they defiled the Sabbath by their sins, so they lost the rest.

St. John Chrysostom advises us saying, [To rest on the Sabbath does not mean to be idle, but rather to rest from being wearisome. God still works until now as Christ says, "My Father works up till now and I work." Therefore, I urge you to avoid laziness and to be filled with the zeal toward virtue because the pleasure of evil is temporary but its pain remains. On the contrary, virtue gives lasting satisfaction and its labor is temporary⁷³.]

Second: The second reason for not entering God's rest is that the Jews did not believe that Christ is the "*True Sabbath*." Christ says, "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin" (John 15: 22). The true Sabbath came to the world and the Jews rejected Him, thus they rejected their rest in God. St. John says, "He came to His own and His own did not receive Him" (John 1: 11). The true Sabbath came to liberate them from literally keeping the Sabbath so they may know the true Sabbath. Therefore, He came to do good on the Sabbath, emphasizing that the Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath too" (Matt. 12: 8; Mark 2: 28; Luke 6: 5).

3. THE PROMISED LAND (REST IN CANAAN)

Instead of talking about the rest we have on the Sabbath, St. Paul now talks about the rest that God's people had in the promised land, the land which overflowed with milk and honey. He wants to compare between the Lord Jesus Christ our Leader to the new earth and the new heaven and between Joshua, the son of Nun, who led them to Canaan to grant them comfort, which He had promised their fathers. The Apostle says that God still promised them with rest even though they had the land. As if what they have received through Joshua did not achieve the true complete rest for them, but was a symbol of anticipated rest (they were waiting for). "*There remains therefore a rest for the people of God*" [9]. There is still rest for which we have to struggle until we enjoy it, as God rested on the seventh day from His works, and the people entered the land of rest. "*Let us there-*

⁷³ In Ioan, hom., 36:2.

fore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience" [11]. This rest is the strife along our life with the Lord Jesus Christ, the Mystery of our rest. We are rested when we believe in Him, and continuous struggle means our abiding in the eternal rest. **St. John Chrysostom** says, [Truly, faith is great and brings us salvation, and without faith, there is no salvation. Yet faith alone is not sufficient, for he says, "Let us be diligent." Beside faith, we need to lead a practical life of faith and zealously to be great in spirit. Since the Israelites who passed through many tribulations in the wilderness were not worthy to enter the promised land and enjoy it because they grumbled, how can we deserve to go to heaven if we live in negligence and idleness? We need to be very zealous⁷⁴.]

What does this mean: "*Let us be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall...*" [11]? **St. John Chrysostom** says, [This means that our thoughts, our hopes and our expectations are in heaven, lest we fail⁷⁵.]

He also means that since we enjoyed the rest in Christ Jesus and entered with Him and in Him to the heavens, it is fit that we struggle to grow in Him, lest we fall and be deprived of what we have already gained. As St. Paul says to the Galatians, "Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" (Gal. 3: 3) Thus, after some start with the spirit and enjoy the true rest in Christ Jesus, they may neglect their strife and continue to live as carnal, thus regressing from heaven to earth. Let us strive to be spiritual and not carnal. As **St. Jerome** says, [We who follow Christ, why do we still want to be carnal, after we have crucified the flesh with its desires?⁷⁶] In the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15), the Shepherd left the ninety-nine to look for the lost sheep among the mountains. This lost sheep represents the person, who after living according to the spirit, becomes carnal, and he is consequently deprived of the true rest.

Our armor which helps us to enter the heavenly rest is the word of God, whether it is the written word or the Incarnate Word. "*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account*" [12,13]. The Lord Jesus is the living and effective Word of

⁷⁴ *In Hebr. hom.*, 7:1.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Adv. Jovin.* 1:38.

God who penetrates into our inner life, working in the heart and senses, and sanctifies all our members, preparing us by His Holy Spirit to go to the bosom of the Father as heirs with Christ in His heavenly kingdom. He reveals our inner secrets, knows our depths, and can continuously renew us. **St. Athanasius of Alexandria** says, [The Son of God is living and effective, and works day after day, for the salvation of everyone⁷⁷.] He also says, [Man works by his hands not by words, because he is created and his word has no significance, but the Word of God is living and effective, for He is the Creator of everyone and without Him nothing was made that was made (John. 1: 3). It is not fit to ask, "Why the word of God is not like our word? We have to realize that God is not like us"⁷⁸.]

What we say about the Lord Christ that He is the Living Word of God, we repeat it for the written word of God. We enjoy the word of God, when we meet the Lord Jesus who is hiding behind the letters. The soul enters to the depth of the word through the Holy Spirit to enjoy the heavenly chambers and live with the Living Word of God to enjoy His work through His words!

The psalmist tells us about the effect of the word of God in the life of believers saying, "Your word is lamp to my feet and a light to my path." I will never forget your precepts, for by them You have given me life." "Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path." "The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple." "I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure" (Ps.119: 105, 93, 130, 162). The Psalmist found in the divine commandment life, mystery of enlightenment, fountain of wisdom , and a treasure of riches!

4. REST IN CHRIST

Since Joshua, the son of Nun, could not offer complete rest, but there still remains a rest for the people of God [9], what is then this true complete rest? And who can make us enter in it?

St. Paul says, "*Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore, come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*" [14-16].

⁷⁷ *Incar. of the Word, 31.*

⁷⁸ *Adv. Arians, 2:35,36.*

We know that Joshua, the son of Nun, could not cross the Jordan River to Canaan unless the high priest and the Levitical priests carrying the holy ark of the covenant accompany him. Joshua said to the priests, "Take up the ark of the covenant and cross over before the people. The Lord said, "And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, that the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that come down from upstream, and they shall stand as a heap" (Josh. 3:13). But Christ, the "Son of God" and "Our High Priest" did not carry the ark of the covenant to make us cross the Jordan River and enter Canaan, but He, being one with His Father in the *ousia* (essence) of Divinity, passed through the heavens to make us enter the Heavenly Canaan and rest in the bosom of the Father!

The Apostle says, "*we have a great High Priest.*" He is not a mere high priest, but "*we have a great High Priest,*" who offered Himself so we may carry Him inside us. We own Him and He owns us; he enters our hearts so we may enter into His heavens. For this reason Isaiah the prophet says, "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Is. 9:6). He is born for us and is given to us. This is what the angel had emphasized to the shepherds when he announced them with the birth of Christ, "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:11) Christ became ours, so when He passes through the heavens, we may pass through Him and with Him to be with our Christ.

The Apostle asks us to hold fast our confession, that is "faith," and to come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need... Our confession is our faith, that is, to hold on to our faith that He is the Christ, the Son of God, our Savior, the Son of the Heavenly God who is able to make us cross to His eternal glory. Let us proceed struggling, and be filled with hope that His grace will help us in time of need. Let us ask that we may cross with our true Joshua not to the temporary promised land but to the heavenly Canaan. We enter its deposit here, taste its fruits, enjoy its glory in our hearts, utter its heavenly language and carry the traits of its citizens, so that in due course, we enjoy it in perfect glory.

St. Paul does not want us to doubt that we cannot make it because of our weaknesses, so he encourages us by saying, "*For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin*" [15].

St. John Chrysostom says, [He does not ignore what concerns us, as what happens with many high priests, for they do not know who are in trouble... For it is impossible for man to realize the grieves of those who are annoyed... However, our High Priest endured everything. He first suffered then He ascended,⁷⁹ so He may be able to be compassionate on us and share our feelings⁷⁹.]

⁷⁹ *In Hebr. hom 7:5.*

Chapter 5

Christ and Aaron

St. Paul made a comparison between *the rest* offered through Joshua as a symbol, and *the true rest* offered through the Lord Jesus, then, he is starting to write about the essence of the subject of his epistle which is "*The Priesthood of the Lord Jesus.*" It is not according to the order of Aaron, but according to the order of Melchisedek forever. He is starting to write that Aaron was the first high priest called from God directly for this work, and that he surpassed all his predecessors, in order to present to us the One who surpasses him, our Lord Jesus Christ who will make us enter His heavenly holies. He intercedes for us on a new and unique level.

- 1. Christ as the High Priest 1-5.
- 2. High Priest for our sake 7-10.
- 3. The need for the oracles of God 11-14.

1. CHRIST AS THE HIGH PRIEST

St. Paul presents the traits and work of the high priest, so he may reveal to us how the Lord Jesus surpasses Aaron. And to clarify the work of priesthood of the Lord Christ in relation to us, in the New Testament.

The First condition is that the high priest is "*taken from among men.*" The high priest intercedes for his people, thus, he feels their weaknesses, and works for them. This condition was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus, for though He is the Only-Begotten Son of God, the Incarnate Son, He became like one of us, and not a stranger to us, to fulfill His role in priesthood on behalf of the people. But there is no comparison between Aaron as a priest and between the Lord Jesus. The first can "*have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way, for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity*" [2]. However, the Second has compassion on the ignorant and going astray, not because He is compassed with infirmity, but because He is the Creator who knows our inner secrets and weaknesses. He endured suffering, and passed through pain, not due to His weakness, but to share with us our weariness, and to live with us in the midst of our agonies. We entered through these troubles because of our sins, however, He entered because of His love to mankind. Therefore, suffering and troubles cannot overcome Him, nor death can destroy His life. He carries us in our troubles, sharing with us agony, to raise us to His glory, and grant us His risen life. He experienced suffering, but He is

not beset by inner weakness. The high priest of Aaron's predecessors offers sacrifices for his sins first, then he intercedes for the sins of his people by offering bloody sacrifices for them. Therefore, he intercedes by prayer relying on the bloody sacrifices. But the New High Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ, did not need a propitiation for Himself, for He is sinless. He intercedes, not by mere prayers, but by carrying us in Him as members of His body through the sacrifice of Himself, which He offered in perfect love. A unique Sacrifice offered once for the sake of the least of His brothers, that never grows old, is continuously effective, able to justify us, and carry us in Him to the bosom of the Father. Our High Priest is holy, without blemish. His holiness did not push Him to be severe in judging sinners, but rather He is the Only One who became the propitiation for our sins, that is, He was able to carry us to the bosom of His Father by our unity in Him. His Self-Sacrifice is acceptable to the Father, for He is without blemish, and through His Sacrifice we grow to be the subject of God's pleasure!

The holiness of our High Priest has the more revealed the mysteries of His deep divine love for all human race, in spite of our indulgence in sin. He carves our names, not on precious stones, that He may present them in the Holy of Holies in front of the ark of the covenant, but He carves our names in His bowels, written by His precious blood that we may enter to His heavens through Him, for He presents us as children to His Heavenly Father!

The second condition in the high priest: *"appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins" [2].*

The Aaronic high priest is appointed for men for the purpose of offering gifts and sacrifices for sins, which they have committed, so they may belong to God. He does not work for their economical, social nor political matters, but cares solely to present them to God, through the Spirit. However, the Only-Begotten Son became the Son of Man, who presented Himself to them as the High Priest from them and to them, offering Himself as the Sacrifice of love, to purify men from their sins, sanctifying their consciences, and renewing their inner souls, to be fit to be called the Father's own belongings. They become children to the Father through their sanctification by their unity and abiding in Him.

We were first sold under sin and death dominated us (Rom. 5:12-14). But when Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8), we were no more under the dominion of death, but became living in Christ, and He presents us to His Father. As the Apostle says, "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ

Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:11). This is the work of the propitiation of our Lord Jesus, which every high priest is incapable of doing, for he himself needs someone to lift him from the dominion of death and weakness. Therefore, the Apostle says, "*Because of this, he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins*" [3].

The third condition is that the high priest is called by God:

*"And no man takes this honor to himself,
but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.*

*So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest,
but it was He who said to Him:*

'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.'

As He also says in another place: 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek' [4-6].

The high priest has to be called by God, so God may accept the oblations and sacrifices and answer his intercession for the people. This what made the Jews boast, that God has called Aaron by his name, and in a clear way as the first high priest for them. But our high Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal Son called by the Father: "You are My Son, today I have begotten You." He was called by His Father, the One with Him in essence, not by an outside appointment as Aaron, but it is the call of the Light to His unseparable Brightness. It is the specialization of the work of the Three Persons. The Father specialized in discretion, the Son in the work of salvation, and the Holy Spirit in the fellowship. He is the co-eternal Priest who offered Himself for our salvation, and remains forever Priest on the order of Melchizedek.

2. HIGH PRIEST FOR OUR SAKE

"Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear.

Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek" [7-10].

He accepted our humanity and carried our bodies as the Bible says, "The Word became flesh" (John 1:14), to practice His Priesthood by offering His life as a ransom. The Apostle says, "in the days of His flesh" to proclaim that His suffering was in the flesh as St. Peter says, "Christ suffered for us in the flesh." (1Pet. 4:1) The Lord offered prayers and supplications with vehement cries and tears. St. Paul wanted to ascertain that the sufferings of the Lord Jesus were true and

bitter. That is why they were accompanied by vehement cries and tears, with prayers and supplications, not as some of the *Gnostic* thought, that His sufferings were delusive, because His body was not except a shadow. He truly suffered and cried with tears, prayed and supplicated!

He is not like Aaron who wears the priesthood clothes, and practices his rituals as priest with no sacrificing on His part, but rather he was oriented and dignified by people. On the contrary our Jesus; He was clothed with the garment of humility. He carried our body, but with no sin, and practiced His priesthood by prayers, supplications, cries, tears, and even death on the cross. His priesthood was connected to His sacrifice, thus becoming a unique rite, the rite of suffering and of sacrificing love even until death! He changed our concept of the work of priesthood; it is no more authority and honor in the eyes of the priest, but rather acceptance of death with the slain Christ, all day long, for the sake of the Beloved! This is what St. Paul experienced in his apostolic work, as he says, "And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved. But be that as it may, I did not burden you" (2 Cor. 12:15,16).

St. John Chrysostom his self-giving to his people with the same spirit, saying, [May you see the inflamed fire in my heart so you may know that I burn inside, more than the sorrow of a young wife who lost her husband, or a father who lost his son; my sorrow is for my people⁸⁰.]

St. Augustine says, [It is written in the Bible that "He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). As He laid down His life for us, we ought also to lay our lives for our brothers and for the sake of our faith⁸¹.]

Our High Priest suffered by vehement cries, thus He treated the problem of suffering not by eliminating it, but by entering through it as the Author of faith or Leader and Accomplisher of faith, so we may enter with Him under His care, following His footsteps. We hide in Him so that sufferings may have no dominion over us. He suffered because of love, thus He changed the concept of suffering. It is no more a sign of sin and Divine wrath as a fruit of rebellion, but rather a union with the Crucified Christ and fellowship with the Holy Trinity.

Some may ask: **Why did He cry to the One who can save**

⁸⁰ *In Hebr. hom.*, 23:9.

⁸¹ *The author: "The Pastoral Love" p. 673.)in Arabic).*

Him? Couldn't He save Himself?

The Lord came to represent us. The Second Adam handles the mistakes of the first Adam. Therefore, He came in complete obedience not to do His own will, but the Father's will, although They carry one and the same will without contradiction. In other words, we say the Son fulfilled the Father's will, although it correlates with His will. He did that proclaiming that in Him, we lead abiding by His will not our own will.

Did the Lord cry so that the Father may save Him from death and raise Him? When the Lord carried the cross, He was in complete obedience to the Father, crying and supplicating by saying, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death." "...Not as I will but as You will." (Matt. 26:38,39) He had to cry and groan because He became true Man and carried true sufferings! He proclaimed His undergoing sufferings without asking for the resurrection, because the resurrection is not an outside matter for Him, for He said to Martha, "I am the Resurrection" (John 11:25).

St. John Chrysostom says, [Regarding His resurrection, He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). Also He said, "I have power to lay it (My life) down, and I have power to take it again" (John. 10:18). What is that then? Why did He pray then? He prayed for those who believe in Him so they may follow His example⁸².]

The Lord is risen by His authority, but in obedience and submission to the will of the Father, Who declared the worthiness of the Righteous Son of resurrection. He is the Resurrection Himself, and through His righteous life, He accepted the will of the Father to be resurrected, so that through His righteousness, we may enjoy the risen life.

We conclude that since the Son submitted to sufferings even to the point of death to fulfill our eternal salvation, we learn to submit to suffering too as a road to salvation.

St. John Chrysostom says, [Since He who is the Son has obeyed by His sufferings, it is more appropriate for us to obey⁸³.]

3. THE NEED FOR THE FIRST PRINCIPLES OF THE ORACLES OF GOD

The Apostle saw that these comparisons comprise difficult

⁸² *In Hebr. Hom.*, 8:3.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

matters for them to understand, therefore, he is presenting them the basics like the milk for babies. He is offering them the milk of the true Gospel upon which beginners can nurse.

The Apostle says,

"Of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk, and not solid food.

For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.

But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" [11-14].

The Apostle compared those who deviated to the Jewish thought to immature children. It was more appropriate for them to become teachers, since they have a long experience in talking with God, from them came the prophets, and to them the Law was delivered. Instead of becoming spiritual leaders and teachers to the Gentiles, they became like children who need someone to nurse them.

The Apostle says, *"of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain."* **St. John Chrysostom** says, [Not because the words are difficult but because they themselves are dull of hearing, as St. Paul says. This is the nature of the weak person who gets confused with few or many words; and he thinks everything is hard, even the easy matters. Let no one be like this⁸⁴.]

Thus the drawback is not in the Christian faith but in the Jews who received the clear prophecies and the symbols which declare the true faith, but they could not understand them and concentrated their thoughts on the letter that kills! That's what hindered their growth and made them lose their maturity, thus they became in dire need of simple milk rather than solid food that belong to the mature.

St. John Chrysostom says, [There is weakness in listening like the weak stomach which cannot digest all food. Likewise the proud, angry, negligent soul cannot accept the word of the Spirit. Listen to what many of the disciples said, "This is a hard saying, who can understand it?" (John 6:60) However, everything becomes easy, light, and more glorious to the strong person, thus he can be elevated to heavenly matters⁸⁵.]

⁸⁴ *In Ioan. Hom., 2:10.*

⁸⁵ *In Acts hom., 55.*

Since the Jews did not take their positions as teachers, but in weakness became as children, therefore the Apostle offered them milk. When we say "milk," we do not mean to minimize the basic Gospel proclamation, but that the believer should not be satisfied with the spiritual childhood, but he has to strive toward maturity to enjoy solid food offered to the adults. This is accomplished through his practical exercise to enjoy the spiritual knowledge. Discerning good and evil touches all the practical life of faith from all its aspects, not just our behavior or our knowledge.

St. John Chrysostom says, [A child cannot discern between good and bad food, for sometimes, he puts something harmful in his mouth, without discerning; however, the mature person does not do that⁸⁶.] Therefore, the child needs his mother to offer him pure milk. But when he matures, he gets solid food, for to everyone who has, more will be given.

The Church, as a mother, offers milk to her children and solid food to the mature. Does that mean that she offers two kinds of food or two kinds of teachings? Never, for the only work of the Church is to offer her Groom the Lord Jesus Christ to every individual. But she presents her Groom the Lord Jesus in a different way to the children which is geared to their capabilities, and another for the adults. He is One Christ for everyone, for children as well as adults.

St. Athanasius says, [Those who did not reach the way of perfection, the Logos becomes as the sheep who gives forth milk. This is what St. Paul said, "I fed you milk and not with solid food..." (1 Cor. 3:2) But those who have grown but still are weak and did not reach perfection, the Logos becomes food for them according to their abilities. As St. Paul said, "...he who is weak eats only vegetables." (Rom. 14:2) But when man walks toward perfection, then the Logos becomes as bread and meat for food, as it is written, "*But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*"⁸⁷ [14].

Thus, the Apostle presented the Word to some of his people as milk, to others as beans, to others as strong food, according to the abilities of the listeners to accept and discern!

⁸⁶ *In Hebr. Hom.*, 8:7.

⁸⁷ *Paschal Epistles*, 10:4.

Chapter 6

Talks about Faith

After St. Paul talked about the Lord Jesus being the Heavenly High Priest, comparing Him with Aaron, now he starts to talk about aspects of faith. He talks about the Lord Jesus being High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, then he talks about the work of the priesthood of the Lord Jesus.

1. **Enlightenment and repentance** 1-8.
2. **Living strife** 9-12.
3. **Promise to Abraham by oath** 13-20.

1. ENLIGHTENMENT AND REPENTANCE

St. Paul says, "*Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits*" [1-3].

What does he mean by the discussion of the elementary principles of the doctrine of Christ, which he wants to leave to go on to perfection? He enumerates six points as basics for the Christian faith, every two are related to each other. These are like the a, b, c's for every Christian who is baptized. They are very essential fundamental principles which need not to be explained. **They are the following:**

1, 2: Repentance from dead works and of faith toward God: These are the first two points, without which one loses his membership in the Church or his Christianity. The Apostle puts repentance from dead works before faith, although repentance is a fruit of faith, but he wants to assure that repentance is extremely essential, for there is no faith outside repentance. As St. James said, "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? . . . Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (James 2:14,18).

3, 4: Of The Doctrine Of Baptisms, Of Laying On Of Hands: One of the fundamental principles of Christian life is to accept being buried with Christ in baptism to enjoy resurrection with Him. That is, to obtain the new life in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:4), and to receive the Holy Spirit through the laying of hands for the sanctification of the soul and body together, to become a holy temple.

5, 6: Of resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment: The hope of the believer lies in the resurrection of the dead where the body with the spirit enjoys eternal life on the heavenly angelic level, waiting for eternal judgment to receive his crown from the hands of his Groom the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

The first two points represent the foundation on which our life is built which is, "the living faith declared through repentance from dead works." The second two points represent the work of God in the believer's life, that is, to enjoy the adoption to God

through baptism, and the dwelling of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands (or through *Myroon*). The last two points are the hope of the believer, without which he loses his path and is destroyed by despair!

Some see that St. Paul tells the Hebrew Christians about the fundamental points which the Christian faith is built upon, and which have their roots in the Old Testament. Therefore, he does not need to tell them about these matters. A Christian, of Jewish origin, easily accepts the road of repentance through faith in the Messiah. Besides, he realizes the sacraments of baptism and confirmation which the Old Testament had mentioned through symbols and shadows, as a preparation for accepting them, and hopes for the resurrection from the dead and the eternal judgment.

Now he talks about an important issue. What is the viewpoint of the Church regarding a believer who got baptized, was enlightened with the Holy Spirit, have tasted the word of God, enjoyed the joy of salvation, and experienced the power of the new heavenly life, then he deviated under the pressure of persecution, or the temptations of sin? If he repents, does he need to be renewed through baptism once more? St. Paul said that he cannot be re-baptized.

He says, "*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame*" [4-6].

St. John Chrysostom emphasized that it is impossible to re-baptize those who fell away and repented⁸⁸. He says, [It is impossible to repeat baptism, therefore, we cannot practice what is impossible! He says that those who were enlightened, and tasted the heavenly gift, that is, received forgiveness and became partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the good word of God, that is the educational part, and the powers of the age to come, that is performing miracles and the zeal of the spirit (2 Cor. 1:22), and fell away, it is impossible to renew them again for they crucify again for themselves the Son of God and put Him to an open shame. This does not mean that they cannot repent. God forbids! But it means that they cannot be renewed through baptism. Renewal here means makes new, i.e. "makes a new man," and what makes new is the baptismal font. It is mentioned that "Your youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Ps. 103:5). Thus, repentance works in those who were renewed and became old once they fell away. It liberates them from being aged so they may become strong once more⁸⁹.]

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes that it is impossible to repeat baptism by saying that St. Paul says that they crucify again for themselves the Son of God and put Him to an open shame. For baptism is crucifixion with the Lord Christ, and repeating it means repeating the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus as if putting Him to shame.

St. Paul continues his talk by saying that, "*For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near*

⁸⁸ In *Hebr. Hom.*, 9:4.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 9:5.

to being cursed, whose end is to be burned" [7,8].

The heart which accepts the free gifts of God, which is like the earth which drinks rain repeatedly, becomes a blessing. These divine gifts, or the rain, are the free gifts of the Holy Trinity which we receive in the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, and through our hearing to the true word of God. If this soul who receives the free rain and the heavenly blessings does not react with them, then it becomes a dry desert bearing thorns and briars, becomes useless, and ready for burning with fire. However, the tears of true repentance restores to us the fruit of the Spirit, and converts our wilderness to a holy paradise, in which the Heavenly Groom enjoys His fruits in us.

St. John Chrysostom⁹⁰ states that rain refers to the teachings of the Holy Bible. God speaks through the mouth of Isaiah the Prophet about His fruitful vine by saying, "I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned or dug. But there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it" (Isa. 5:6). He said on the mouth of Amos the prophet, "Behold the days are coming, says the Lord God, that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst of water; but of hearing the words of the Lord." As David the Psalmist says, "The river of God is full of water..." (Ps. 65:9). The earth, which accepts the water of the divine rain, that is, the Heavenly Word, brings forth fruits of the joyful spirit and becomes a blessing. However, the earth which hears the word but does not apply it, is like the earth which does not accept rain and becomes cursed. Therefore, the Lord Jesus says to the Jews: "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin" (John 15:22). He came and offered Himself the "Divine Word," the Heavenly Rain expecting to get fruits from His vine, but instead got thorns (Isa. 5:2), that is, sin and rebelliousness and unbelief.

St. John Chrysostom comments on that by saying, "I am afraid that these words apply to us more than others, for he says, "the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it." We often drink and continuously listen. But when the sun rises (Matt.13:6) we lose our humidity and bear thorns. What do we mean by thorns? Let us listen to the words of the Lord Jesus saying, "The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful" (Matt. 13:22)⁹¹.

2. THE LIVING STRIFE

He wanted to warn them lest they become unfruitful, in spite of the abundance of the Divine Rain, and produce thorns which bear the curse instead of their enjoyment of the riches of God's free gifts. Lest they fall in despair, St. Paul instilled in them the spirit of hope, as usual, emphasizing that he does not see in them a cursed land, but rather a blessed one. He says, "*But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner*" [9]. As **St. John Chrysostom** says, [What does he say? I do not utter these matters to judge you, or because I think that you are full of thorns. But I am afraid

⁹⁰ *Ibid* 10:2.

⁹¹ *Ibid*.

lest you become thus. So it is better to scare you with these words than to fall. This is St. Paul's wisdom⁹².]

St. Paul continues by saying, "*For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love, which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises*" [10-12].

St. John Chrysostom commented by saying, [God rectifies their spirits by offering them new power, by reminding them with old matters, not assuming that God forgets their previous labor. As he wrote to the Galatians saying, "You sought well" (7:6). He mingles praise with rebuke by saying, "*For by this time you ought to be teachers*" (Heb. 5:12) Also in Galatians, he writes, "I marvel that you are turning away as soon from Him" (Gal. 1:6) Thus, praise accompanies rebuking⁹³.]

St. Paul was so wise, for while he is rebuking them, and comparing them to earth which rejects Divine Rain which carries thorns and briars, a sign of curse, he opens for them doors of hope lest they perish because of despair. He tells them that God is not unjust to forget their labor of love which they have shown toward His name by serving the saints. With his extreme frankness and unprejudice toward any individual on the expense of truth, St. Paul was extremely kind in his rebuking others. He encourages them, even while rebuking them, without flattering them. He urges them all to continuous strife without sluggishness. He ignites them with the fire of true faith and long suffering, and raises their eyes toward the inheritance of divine promises.

St. John Chrysostom says, [Hope drives us to the top, and cures us! Never be worried nor in despair lest your hope becomes in vain⁹⁴.]

It is appropriate for all of the Lord's servants to follow St. Paul's example, who is known to be the Apostle of hope. He used to support every heart, even in the midst of rebuking, following the Lord Jesus' example, of whom was said, "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 Gentiles will trust" (Matt. 12:20,21; Isa. 42:1).

Though rebuke is essential, so one may not deviate to the side of evil, and remain there, yet hope supports the soul to repent and strife joyfully without falling in despair.

Hence, St. Paul encourages the Hebrews by emphasizing to them that God does not forget their labor of love, especially their service to the saints.

What does he mean by the saints? **St. John Chrysostom** says, [Every believer is a saint in spite of his living in the world, for St. Paul says, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband..." (1 Cor. 7:14). See how faith can keep the sanctification of a person? If we ever see a lay person in trouble, we have to extend a helping hand to him. We should not help only the monks or hermits, for those truly are saints in their behav-

⁹² *Ibid* 10:4.

⁹³ *Ibid*.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10:5.

ior as well as their faith. However, lay people are saints by their faith, and many through their behavior too. Therefore, let us not go and help a monk thrown in prison and forget about helping lay people, for they are saints too. Moreover, if we see an atheist in tribulation, let us have mercy on him by good deeds, thus, we help all people especially the believers. Listen to what St. Paul says, "...Let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10)⁹⁵.]

As **St. Jerome** says, [It is your duty to clothe Christ in the poor, visit Him in the sick, feed Him in the hungry, lodge Him in those who have no shelter, especially to those of the household of faith. Let us support the virgins, and care about God's servants who live an angelic life and utter God's praises while on earth⁹⁶.]

3. THE PROMISE FOR AN OATH FOR ABRAHAM

After St. Paul talked about the living strife of a believer which is translated into serving the saints, he presents to us Abraham, the Patriarch, and the man of practical faith, who received divine promises by divine oath. "*For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could not swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself saying, 'Surely blessing I will bless you and multiplying I will multiply you.' And so after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise*" [13-15].

God grants His promises and confirms them by the way which man understands. He said, "*For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute*" [16]. An oath is the language which people understand to confirm a promise. However, man has to be patient to receive the practical faith. The gift is free, awesome, and assured, but no one receives it except he who lives in patience and faith!

St. Augustine says regarding the divine oath, [It is an awesome thing when God speaks, how about when He swears?! He uses the oath for confirmation. What is He swearing by? He swears by Himself, and by Himself, He confirms His promises⁹⁷.]

Thus, God grants us His promises and help, however, we should not take a negative stand toward this divine help, but we have to react to it positively and practically with perseverance. For God sanctifies human freewill.

St. John Chrysostom says, [God does not want the gift to be from His part only, but He wants us to feel that we, His servants, have participated in the gift, so we do not feel ashamed.] [Grace is always present to help, accepting those who welcome it. Thus, when the Lord sees our watchful souls and inflamed spirits, He pours abundantly His riches, which exceeds our requests⁹⁸.]

St. Paul concludes the promise to Abraham by saying, "*Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stead-*

⁹⁵ *Ibid* 10:7.

⁹⁶ *Ep.* 130:14.

⁹⁷ *On Ps.* 95.

⁹⁸ *The author: The Divine Incarnation, love and work!*, 1975, p. 14 (in Arabic).

fast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" [17-20].

St. Paul declares that our comfort lies in two aspects:

First aspect: Our comfort is realized by two immutable things which are the divine promise, and the oath for confirmation. God never lies in His promise, and never breaks His oath. With this promise confirmed by an oath, our hearts are filled with hope like the anchor which supports a ship in the midst of the waves of the sea.

Second aspect: The promise given to us in Abraham was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus who is our First-fruit or Forerunner. This is our true comfort, for our Lord Jesus as our Forerunner, did not receive earthly promises nor temporary blessings, but entered the Presence behind the veil, to the heavenly holies, and not to its shadows. Thus, we have the right to enjoy all this with Him, being His holy Body. He is our eternal High Priest, according to the order of Melchizedek, who is able to intercede on our behalf to the Father.

St. Athanasius of Alexandria says, [The Lord Jesus entered heavens for our sake, though He is the Lord of heavens, and its founder. It is written that He was glorified for our sake. He Himself said, "And for their sakes, I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth" (John 17:19) This does not mean that He becomes sanctified, but He sanctifies us in Him. We understand the phrase "glorify Himself," not that He needs to be glorified, for He is above all, but that He is Righteous and we are glorified in Him, and can enter the doors of heaven which He has opened for us. Therefore, it was written, "Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors!" And the King of glory shall come in" (Ps. 24:7). The doors were never closed in front of Him, for He is the Lord and Creator of all, but this was written for us, whom the doors of Paradise were closed in front of us⁹⁹.]

⁹⁹ *Against Arians, Discourse 1:41.*

Chapter 7

Christ and Melchizedek

St. Paul talked to the Christians, of Hebrew origin, not to console them about the privileges that they had lost by accepting the Christian faith, but rather to declare to them what they have tremendously enjoyed. He compared the Lord Christ and His service with the angels and their services to the old fathers, between the Lord Christ and Moses the Prophet, Joshua, Aaron, and now between Him and Abraham, the Patriarch and the man of faith. He excerpted a part of Abraham's life, which may seem mysterious to all the Jews, which is his meeting with Melchizedek, his submission to him and offering him the tithes. Though all the Jewish nation, including the Levite tribe from which Aaron and the priests came, came out of the loins of Abraham, yet he belittled himself before Melchizedek, who was a symbol of the Lord Christ.

- 1. Melchizedek, a symbol of Christ 1-10.**
- 2. The promise of a new priesthood 11-17.**
- 3. Between the old priesthood and the new one 18-28.**

1. MELCHIZEDEK, A SYMBOL OF CHRIST

The story of Melchizedek was mentioned in the book of Genesis in chapter 14. Abraham welcomed him, as the king and priest, after his victory over Chedorlaomer, and rescuing his nephew Lot. Abraham offered the tithes to Melchizedek who offered a strange sacrifice, of bread and wine. This story represents a mystery to the Jews, who still cannot explain it.

- How can Abraham the Patriarch who had the Levitical priesthood in his seed, offer the tithes to a strange man?
- And why did this king and priest appear in the Holy Bible and suddenly disappear, and nobody knows anything about his father or mother or his genealogy?
- Why did he not offer a bloody sacrifice as it was the custom at that time?

The Jews cannot find an answer to all these questions. How-

ever, the apostle Paul reveals its mystery by declaring that Melchizedek being the symbol of the Lord Christ, has surpassed even Abraham who is carrying the priesthood in himself. He was the symbol of the Lord Christ, thus considered for more better than the one who obtained the promises.

St. John Chrysostom says, [He could not offer the tithes to a stranger unless that stranger is greater than him¹⁰⁰.] Abraham, offering the tithes to Melchizedek, means that he wants his blessing, or in other words Melchizedek is blessing the one who has the promises. As the Apostle says, "*Now beyond all contradictions the lesser is blessed by the better*" [7].

Truly it is surprising that Abraham who accepts the tithes, in the person of Levi who came out of his loins, pays tithes to a stranger who is Melchizedek, as if the Levitical priesthood itself, who is supposed to accept tithes and offerings, in the person of Abraham, has bent down in the person of Abraham to pay tithes to the one who is the symbol of the Lord Jesus, the great heavenly High Priest.

Melchizedek was a symbol in these aspects:

First: His name "Melchizedek" linguistically means "the king of righteousness," who is a symbol of the Lord Christ who reigns over the hearts by His righteousness. He rules the soul, so that she may hide in Him to appear in the eyes of the Father bearing His righteousness. In other words, when the Lord Jesus reigns spiritually over the person, all his weakness will disappear, and the Lord Jesus will appear with His righteousness and glory! As the Apostle says, "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 3:24)

Second: His work is "King of Salem," that is king of peace. The Lord Jesus reigned over His Church granting His believers peace with the Father, with their brothers, and with themselves. Humanity has reconciled with the heavens, humans with one another, and also the person with himself: between the soul and the body where everything in the person became spiritual abiding by the one spirit. Truly the Lord Christ is the true king of Salem spreading his peace over

¹⁰⁰ In Hebr. hom., 12:4.

each soul that seeks Him.

The Lord Christ has concluded his farewell speech with His disciples before His arrest, by proclaiming that the purpose of His talk with them was that they enjoy peace in Him. "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulations; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

St. Augustine comments on this divine saying, by these words, [The purpose of His speech was that the disciples may find peace in Him. This peace is the purpose of every righteous deed we perform nowadays, for while we are full of His peace, we are well prepared to enjoy His mysteries, His teachings, works, true faith and hope in Christ Jesus. We are comforted in all our tribulations and are delivered from them by His peace. For His sake, we endure afflictions happily till we conquer tribulations in Him and live joyfully beyond pain¹⁰¹.]

St. Augustine commented on the Lord's words: "My peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you" (John 14:27) by saying, [He left us His peace before departing to the heavens, and will give us His private peace when He comes at the end. He leaves us His peace while we are in the world, and will grant us His private peace in the world to come. He leaves us His peace so that we may conquer the devil and will grant us His private peace when there is no more devil to fight us, so we may reign as kings... He leaves us His peace so that we may love each other, and will grant us His peace when we are above all divisions and quarrels. He leaves us His peace so no one may condemn the other; for while we are on earth, everything is vague. And He will grant us His peace when "He reveals the counsels of the hearts and then each one's praise will come from God" (1 Cor. 4:5). Yet in Him, and through Him we may constantly receive peace, whether on our departure to the Father, or whether when we lastly approach to be between the hands of the Father (in those fearful moments, His peace never departs from us, as His believers)¹⁰².]

Third: We notice in the first chapter that a division took place

¹⁰¹ *In Ioan. tr. 104:1.*

¹⁰² *Ibid, tr. 78:3.*

in the old Testament, between the prophecy and the priesthood, or more precisely between the prophets and the priests. The latter could not accept the word of truth, being satisfied with practicing the rituals of worship outwardly without any spirit. Then the Lord of Truth Himself, and the High Priest came carrying the prophecy with the eternal, heavenly priesthood, reconciling the knowledge with the worship, and the truth with the ritual! Here the Lord combined the kingdom with the priesthood, for He is the King of righteousness and peace and in the same time the Priest according to the order of Melchizedek forever. In the mean time He is the King and Priest; whereas His royal work cannot be separated from His priesthood service. While He reigns over the heart through His unique Sacrifice, He offers this sacrifice as the heavenly High Priest, for He is the King of authority, who through His sacrificing practical love, declares His intercession in propitiation of our sins to raise all the believers with Him and in Him as spiritual kings and priests.

Fourth: The Bible did not mention anything about the parents nor the genealogy of Melchizedek who is a symbol of the Lord Christ who has no beginning nor end. The Lord Christ has no father according to the flesh, nor mother according to the divinity; He is the eternal Priest, immaculate and omnipotent.

Fifth: The sacrifice of Melchizedek of bread and wine has no meaning except that it is a symbol of the Eucharist sacrifice, which is the Body and Blood of the Lord Christ. The Lord Himself transformed the bread and wine to establish the sacrament. **St. Jerome** says, [You are a Priest forever, not through offering Jewish sacrifices, but rather on the order of Melchizedek. As Melchizedek, King of Salem, offered bread and wine (Gen. 14: 18), You also offer Your Body and Blood as the true Body and the True Blood. This is our Melchizedek who granted us the divine Sacrifice, for He said, "He who eats my Body and drinks my Blood..." (John 6:55), according to the order of Melchizedek, granting us His mysteries¹⁰³.]

2. THE PROMISE OF NEW PRIESTHOOD

After God chose Aaron and his sons to serve Him as priests in

¹⁰³ On Ps. Hom., 36.

His temple, and to offer sacrifices in the name of the holy congregation, He promised a new priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek, and not according to Aaron. He said, "*You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek*" [17]. The apostle Paul sees three changes in this promise: first, in the nature of the priesthood, second in the tribe who was consecrated for this job, third in the Law connected with it.

First: The nature of the priesthood: The promise came of a priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek and not according to the order of Aaron or Levi. This means there is an alteration of the features and nature of priesthood. Also it reveals the weakness of the first priesthood and its being unperfected, or why then is there a need for a different rite? "*Therefore if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the Law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron?*" [11] The Levitical priesthood was established according to a divine call, and was connected to the Law of God, but it was only to prepare the minds to understand another priesthood, which is the priesthood of the Lord Jesus. This is the subject of the epistle to the Hebrews, which the Apostle explains clearly in the following chapters.

Second: Change in the Tribe: The priesthood was transferred from the tribe of Levi to the tribe of Judah. "*For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest*" [13-15]. This change in the tribe was not without a purpose, for the tribe of Judah is the royal tribe from whom the kings of Judah came. This is to point out that in Christ only, the new priesthood has met with the royal work, which has never happened before. The prophecy of our Patriarch Jacob was fulfilled; he has blessed his son Judah saying, "Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's children shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as

a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes. And to Him shall be the obedience of the people" (Gen. 49:8-10). This prophecy has been completely fulfilled in the Person of the Lord Jesus, whom His brothers praise and thank for He became our Firstborn Brother, who destroyed his enemy, Satan, by the cross, and His hand was on the neck of His enemies. The children of His heavenly Father worship Him, the Lion who was nailed to the cross and rose to raise us with Him. He reigns by the cross granting peace to His people, and all nations from every tribe and tongue worship Him.

Third: Change of the Law: The change of priesthood requires change of the Law, for there are certain regulations and commandments for each priesthood. The Levitical priesthood serves through the bloody sacrifices and the washing of the bodies as a symbol, and its law agrees with it. However, while leaving a priesthood remarked by symbols, on the way to a heaven spiritual priesthood, there appeared a new covenant, a new Law, and new teachings, not to contradict the past, but to complement it. It reveals Its depth, and we are carried from childhood to spiritual maturity, from the promise of earthly blessings like the promised land which overflows with milk and honey to heavenly promises and union with the Father in His Son. Therefore, the Lord emphasized that He did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17).

The Apostle compares between the Law of the Levitical priesthood and the Law of the Heavenly Priest by saying, "*For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the Law... For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment, because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the Law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God*" [12,18,19]. The old commandment was annulled not through its destruction but through its fulfillment in the new commandment, which complement it and which opened a new hope for us when we approach the Father through the unity with His Son.

Thus, the Apostle talks to us about better sacrifices and a better priesthood, better promises and a better hope through the Lord Jesus

Christ. As **St. Athanasius of Alexandria** says, [The sacrifice through Him, the hope in Him, and the promises through Him are much better, not because the former ones were less, but because the new ones are different in nature than the former ones, for the One who officiates them is greater¹⁰⁴.]

3. THE COMPARISON BETWEEN THE OLD PRIESTHOOD AND THE NEW PRIESTHOOD

The Apostle presented us a comparison between the Levitical priesthood and the priesthood of the Lord Jesus. The following are the important points:

First: Annulling the Levitical priesthood and establishing the new priesthood means annulling the former commandment for it is unable to draw us near to God and unite us with Him [18,19].

Second: The Levitical priesthood was through a divine call, but without an oath, for it is temporary, whose goal is achieved by the new eternal priesthood with an oath. He said, "*And inasmuch as He was not made priest without an oath (for they have become priests without an oath, but with an oath by Him who said to Him: 'The Lord has sworn and will not relent, You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'*" [20] The Lord Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant [22]. The former one was unable to cleanse sins nor sanctify the soul, however the second fulfills what the first one was unable to accomplish.

Third: In the old priesthood, many priests were called, so that if one dies, the other succeeds him. "*And there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He, because He continues forever, has unchangeable priesthood*" [23,24]. The reason for the weakness of the former priesthood is that it was not connected to one priest, but to many priests from the sons of Kohath, the sons of Levi. The high priest used to rejoice when his son succeeds him, for he cannot stay forever. However, the priesthood of the Lord Jesus is eternal, for death cannot overpower Him. Through His incarnation, He declared His priesthood; and when He died, He did not lose

¹⁰⁴ *Against Arians, Discourse 1:60.*

His priesthood, for death cannot defile Him, nor stop His intercession as an Advocate. On the contrary, His death was the foundation of His priesthood, for He offered Himself a Sacrifice of love to the Father, thus, He became the Priest and the Sacrifice at the same time. The Lord rose to declare the eternity of His priesthood and His heavenly Sacrifice. Hence, His priesthood remains permanent and His Sacrifice effective and cannot be repeated! His priesthood is still effective in His Church and His Sacrifice present and does not perish, nor gets old. Through this surpassing Priesthood and unique Sacrifice, the Church enjoys priesthood and sacrificial services, in the Lord Christ, the Priest and Sacrifice!

The Apostle declared the power of this act by saying, "*Therefore, He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them*" [25]. He did not die till the end, nor His sacrifice was consumed, but He ever lives before the Father, offering Himself a Sacrifice, the mystery of our sanctification. This is the fountain of power from which the priests derive their work and offerings, for they practice the priesthood by putting on the Lord Christ, the High Priest, and what they offer is the sacrifice of Christ which cannot be repeated!

Fourth: The high priest and priests in the Old Testament were sinners like the rest of the people, who need to be sanctified. However, The High Priest, the Lord Christ is "*holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens*" [26]. Since He became one of us, yet He is the only holy One, separated from sinners, who is higher than the heavens. In Him we are sanctified in the bosom of the Heavenly Father. The priests of the Old Testament need to offer sacrifices first for themselves, then for the sins of the people, repeating this act continuously. But the High Priest the Lord Jesus "*did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the Law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever*" [27,28]. What a great difference between the men who have weaknesses and the eternal perfect Son!

Chapter 8

Christ, the Heavenly High Priest

St. Paul was raised under the feet of Gamaliel, the leader of one of two traditional Jewish schools. Everyone was hoping that he would succeed his teacher because of his inflamed zeal toward the heritage of his fathers and their traditions, which had captured all his feelings and emotions in loving the temple with all its rituals. Now he is confronting the Christians, of Hebrew origin, to talk to them about a new reality which may seem contradicting to their past experiences, which is that the new High Priest is heavenly, and He came to raise man's life, behavior and worship to the heavens. He raised us to the heavenly matters, with no retreating to the darkness. He offered us Himself as a new High priest, new Sacrifice, and made us enter into His new temple for a new work on our behalf.

- 1. Heavenly Priesthood 1-6.**
- 2. Heavenly Covenant 7-13.**

1. THE HEAVENLY PRIESTHOOD

*"Now this is the main point of the things we are saying:
We have such a High Priest,
who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in
the heavens" [1].*

The main point or the goal of what we want to say is that we have a heavenly High Priest who serves in our name and on our behalf, and is sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven. Since the Lord Christ is the unique High Priest on the order of Melchizedek, who came by an oath, carries an eternal priesthood, and serves in the heavens, then the Levitical priesthood, associated with serving the tabernacle or the temple at Jerusalem, disappears. All this is for us "*we have,*" as if St. Paul wants to emphasize that what is written is not for argument thought, but it is a practical gain, where we have a new Priest with His new ministry. What the Christian of Hebrew origin have lost by their faith in the Lord Jesus is their loss of the shadow, for the sake of the enjoyment of the truth, and the deprivation of the form of heavens to enter heavens itself.

We have a High Priest who offered Himself, so we may have Him and say, "I am for my Beloved" (Song 2:16). In the Old Testament, the high priest used to represent me, and serve in the holies as my representative, but I cannot take him inside me. However, the new High Priest gave me Himself, so I can possess Him. This what the angel emphasized to the shepherds, "Unto *you* is born..." (Luke 2:11) and what Isaiah the prophet enjoyed through the prophecy saying, "For *unto us* a Child is born..." (Isa. 9:6).

The Apostle does not belittle the Levitical priesthood, for the priests "*who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, 'See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain'*" [5]. But the ministry of the New Testament is the ministry of the better covenant by entering in the heavenly matters.

Since the priests of the Old Testament were from dust and God chose them to serve Him, they still served the shadow of the heavenly things. However, our Priest is heavenly, and His temple which He serves is heavens itself. This heavenly temple is the Church of the New Testament which carries the heavenly traits, for our citizenship is in heavens. (Phil. 3:20) and our worship is also heavenly.

St. John Chrysostom says, [The Church is heavenly! It is heaven itself!¹⁰⁵]

[The heavens became instead ours of the temple, after He led us into the heavens. These matters were symbols for what has become a reality. Through them, the ministry of the New Testament was glorified and the (proper) glory of priesthood appeared¹⁰⁶.]

He also says, [Our affairs are heavenly, the heavenly matters became ours, even if they are practiced while we are still on earth, like the angels who are called heavenly ones even while they are on earth. The Cherubim appeared on earth, but they are heavenly... Also our citizenship is in heavens (Phil. 3:20), even while we live here on earth. Since we are heavenly creatures and has obtained such Sacrifice, let us fear, and stay no more on earth! We are able to choose to live in heaven from now, while still on earth (if that's what we want)! It is said that God lives in heaven. Why? Not because that He is limited to stay in a restricted place (the heavens) God forbid! Nor does this mean that the earth is void of His presence. However, this is due to

¹⁰⁵ *In Hebr. Hom., 14:3.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid., 14:4.*

His relationship with the angels and their attachment to Him. If we are close to God, we are close to heaven. What do I mean by heaven? I see the Lord of heaven and I myself become heaven! For He says, "We will come to him and make Our home with him." (John. 14:23) Then, let our souls become heaven¹⁰⁷.]

2. A NEW COVENANT

Through our entrance into the new heavenly temple in a heavenly ministry instead of the old temple, through the leadership of the heavenly High Priest, we entered in the New covenant for which all the prophets were longing.

St. Paul says, "*For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.*

Because finding fault with them.

He says, 'Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,

not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt:

because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord'" [7-9].

This is the purpose of the Holy Bible: man entering into a covenant with God. In the beginning, in Paradise, when man committed sin, God did not forsake him, but entered into a covenant with him that the Seed of the woman will bruise the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). When the world was under the punishment of the flood and the creation was renewed by the waters, the Lord made a covenant with Noah and gave him a sign in nature (rainbow) (Gen. 9:9). This sign appears around the divine throne (Rev. 4:3; 10:1) The Lord made a covenant with Abraham, the Patriarch, through the flesh, which was, circumcision (Gen. 17). Then God entered into a covenant with the people during the time of Moses, on Mount Sinai for He drove them out of the land of captivity holding their hands and leading them to the promised land. The sign was the blood which was sprinkled on the tablets of the covenant or the book of the covenant, the temple and everything that is used in worship. We are going to elaborate on using the blood as a sign of confirmation in the next chapter.

Thus, the covenant passed through many stages, first, merely, as a promise with Adam, then by a sign in nature with Noah, then a sign in the flesh with Abraham, finally the sign of

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 16:7.

blood with Moses... What was the fate of that covenant? The people worshipped the golden calf before Moses went down from the mountain, for he heard God's voice saying: "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves" (Exod. 32:7). God considered the people that they belong to Moses (your people), and not God's people, for they rejected the covenant until Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain" (Exod. 32:19). Moses declared the breaking of the covenant and man's inability of keeping it. That is what made the prophets of the Old Testament look forward to a New Testament with new traits capable of changing man's heart, and entering into an inner life, so man may not break the covenant anymore. Jeremiah the prophet said, "Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My Law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jer. 31:31-33). Also Ezekiel the prophet said, "Moreover, I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Ez. 37:26,27).

The new covenant is not like the old covenant carved on outer stones, but the Holy Spirit records it in our depths, for He touches our inner lives where the kingdom of God is inside us. The Lord says, "*I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people*" [10].

The Holy Spirit engraves this covenant in our inner man, and the Lord Himself becomes our Teacher. St. Paul says, "*None of them shall teach their neighbor and none his brother; saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me from the least of them to the greatest of them*" [11].

In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus does not come to us as an outside Teacher presenting His commandments, but He is inside our lives to change our nature, and renew it by the Holy Spirit... He becomes the commandment, life, resurrection, and righteousness inside us!

As **St. Athanasius of Alexandria** says, in his articles against the Arians: [If we are not created in Him, then the Lord is not inside us, and He becomes just a teacher whom we accept from Him the teachings. If this is the case then sin does not lose its dominion over the body, as an heir to it and not rejected from it. But the Apostle objects to this teaching for he says, "We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus..."¹⁰⁸ (Eph. 2:10)]

¹⁰⁸ *Against the Arians, Discourse 2:56.*

Chapter 9

The Heavenly Ministry

Since we have a great High Priest, not on the order of Aaron, nor from the tribe of Levi, but on the order of Melchizedek, who has a new priesthood, then it is appropriate for Him to serve in a new temple to offer a unique new sacrifice on our behalf.

- 1. Comparison between the two testaments 1-14.**
- 2. Confirming the heavenly covenant 15-22.**
- 3. The unique Sacrifice 23-28.**

1. COMPARISON BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

St. Paul compares between the Old and the New Testament, presenting the following points:

First: St. Paul illustrated that the tabernacle of meeting and the temple of Jerusalem contained two major parts, which were the Holy and the Holy of Holies which were separated by the veil, hiding the Holy of Holies behind. He says,

"Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary.

For a tabernacle was prepared:

the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary;

and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, which had the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat.

Of these things we cannot now speak in detail" [1-5].

St. Paul saw that those two parts are symbols of the two testaments. The Holy refers to the Old Testament, and the Holy of Holies refers to the New Testament. Many priests serve daily in the former, while the latter refers to heaven, where no one enters except the high priest once a year, a symbol of the Lord Christ who offered Himself once, to make us enter His heavens.

The Apostle does not ignore the holiness of the Old Testament, for it is like the tabernacle with certain ordinances, which contains the lampstand, the table and the showbread... These are holies which re-

semble the heavens, about which St. Paul says, "Of these things we cannot speak in detail," for it carries living symbols about the Lord Jesus and His ministry, for through Him we enjoy the enlightenment, and His Body, the Living Bread! We discussed that in our study of the book of Exodus¹⁰⁹.

All this is about the Holy, what about the Holy of Holies, which has the golden censer and the ark of the covenant which represent the Divine presence. It is covered with gold from all sides, symbolizing the Divine nature. It contains the golden vessel, which has the manna, referring to the true Manna, the Holy Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus. Aaron's rod is a sign of the Lord's priesthood and His personal care for His Church. The tablets of the covenant refer to Him being the Word of God. Above the ark are the two cherubim overshadowing the mercy seat, which are signs of our union with the heavenly creatures, in the Lord Jesus¹¹⁰.

Since the Holy refers to the holy present life in the Lord, or the ministry of the Old Testament, then the Holy of Holies refers to the heavenly life which the Heavenly Lord has offered us through His new covenant with us. St. Paul says that the road for the new heavenly life cannot be manifested as long as the first tabernacle exists. The ministry of the spirit in Jesus Christ cannot be revealed as long as Moses' rituals are still performed literally as a shadow. The veil has to be torn and the shadow removed by the manifestation of the Truth Himself. Moses' ministry has to disappear before the new sanctuary. St. Paul says, "*The Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience*" [8,9].

St. John Chrysostom says, [What does he mean by saying the present time? He means the time before Christ, for after the Lord's coming, there is no more present time, for how can there be time while He already came?!¹¹¹]

The ministry of Moses' Law is the ministry of the present time. However, after the Lord Jesus came in the fullness of time, He elevated us to the heavens matters, beyond time.

¹⁰⁹ *The Author: Exodus, 1981 (in Arabic).*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *In Hebr. hom., 15:2.*

Second: The Apostle compares between the sacrifices of the Old Testament and the Sacrifice of the New Testament. In Moses' Law, the priests sprinkle the blood of bulls and goats on the unclean for the purifying of the flesh [12-14]. But the Priest of the New Testament offers His blood. St. Paul says, "*Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*" [12-14].

In the Old Testament, the animals were led to be slaughtered without its free will, however, in the New Testament, the High Priest offered Himself by His own free will, in obedience to His Father, even unto death for His love to the human race, although they adverse Him! He is the Priest and the Sacrifice at the same time.

As **St. Augustine** says, [You are the Priest and the Sacrifice. You are the One who offers and the Offering Himself!¹¹²]

Third: Upon comparing the two ministries, he saw that the first ministry, which is the ministry of the present time concentrates on the purifying of the flesh [13]. However, the second ministry, beyond time, which is the ministry of the heavens, touches the conscience and the inner souls, that is, the ministry of the effective spirit which establishes the kingdom of God inside us. The first ministry is based on the blood of animals which die and are consumed, but the second is based on the blood of the Son of God who offered Himself eternally, for He has no tendency to corrupt, nor can He be captured by death. He is the Donor of life and resurrection! The priests, who under weaknesses and the need for forgiveness of their sins, perform the first ministry. However, the second ministry is performed by the One who is without blemish and is able to sanctify us!

Fourth: When the Apostle talks about the old sanctuary or the first tabernacle with all its contents, he says: "*of these things we cannot now speak in detail.*" He left the door opened for comparing the ministries of both testaments, about which many Fathers talked.

The writings of **St. Athanasius** compared between the old sanctuary, with its Mosaic Law, and the new one which is the Body of Christ, in which we became a new holy creation, or as St. Paul says,

¹¹² On Ps. 65.

“In whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:21,22).

St. Athanasius compares between the old sanctuary and the Body of Christ by saying,

[The old sanctuary was built of stones and gold as a shadow, but when the Reality came, the symbol was nullified, as the Lord said, "not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down." (Matt. 24:2)

Whoever despises the temple despises the Lord Himself who dwells in the temple. Whoever separates the Word from the body nullifies the grace which was granted to us in Him. We do not accept what the evil Arians presume that as long as the body is created then the Word is created, and as long as the Word is not created then His body is despised!

Since the Word is the Creator, who created everything, then in the fullness of time, He put on a body to sanctify the creation, for He is its Creator, and Cure. Creation cannot be saved with someone created, and the Creator is the One who brought it into existence...¹¹³]

In the New Testament, the Incarnate Lord came to us offering His Body as a mystery to sanctify us. In Him we hide, and with Him we unite to carry Him inside us as we are in Him... This is *the time of reformation* [10], not with laws, orders and rules, but with the capability of our union with Him and in Him.

2. CONFIRMING THE HEAVENLY COVENANT

A Roman Law indicated that as long as the testator is living then the will has no effect, and the father can change its conditions anytime. However, when the father dies, the will becomes in effect and no one can change it. Thus, St. Paul sees that the relationship between God and man is like the relationship between the father, the testator, and his son. In the Old Testament, He offered His testament through the Mosaic testament, and since the testator could not die to enforce the testament, then the blood of animals fulfilled that role. However, in the New Testament, when we received the testament, the Testator died on the cross to declare the enforcement of the testament. As if death on the cross or the blood of the Lord Jesus is a seal on divine Law, and an assurance of enjoying the eternal inheritance. The Lord said, "Most assuredly I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47). He concluded the commandment by sacrificing His body and shedding His blood for us. "Unless you eat the

¹¹³ Ep. Ad Adelphius 7,8.

flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53).

St. Paul says, "*For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives*" [16,17]. Since a testator has to die and a certificate of death has to be issued to confirm the testament, then the blood of the Lord Jesus on the cross is a sign of the enforcement of the testament because of death of the Testator.

Now we can understand why the blood was a sign of purification in the Old and New Testaments, because it is a sign of the enforcement of the testament. Therefore, the book of the covenant, or the testament, and all the people were sprinkled with the blood to be sanctified [19,20]. It was not the blood of the testator, but its symbol, the blood of animals. However, in the New Testament, the testament became powerful through the blood of the Son of God, the Testator: "*And according to the law almost all things are purged with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission*" [22]. Moses used blood and water for purification [19].

St. John Chrysostom commented, [Tell me why were the people and the book of the covenant sprinkled, except for the precious Blood of which the blood of animals was a symbol? And why the water? to sanctify... And why the scarlet wool? To preserve the blood, so blood and water become as one¹¹⁴.]

Regarding the New Testament, **St. John Chrysostom** questioned, [Where is the book, then? He has sanctified their minds so they may become the book of the New Testament... Where is the tabernacle? They themselves are the tabernacle, for He said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them, I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (2 Cor. 6:16). They were not sprinkled with scarlet wool nor with hyssop. Why? Because this is not a physical washing, but rather spiritual. The blood was spiritual (True blood which He took from St. Mary and shed on the cross, but the Holy Spirit prepared for the incarnation) How? Moses did not sprinkle us with this blood, but rather Christ, through the word which was said: This is the blood of the New Covenant for the remission of sins. This word replaced the hyssop which was dipped in the blood and sprinkled us all. Back then, the washing of the body was external for the purification was physical, but here the purification is spiritual and washes the soul... There

¹¹⁴ In *Hebr. Hom.*, 16:3.

the sprinkling was done on the outside only and whatever is sprinkled was washed from the traces of the blood... However, this is different with the soul, for the blood is mingled with the soul to make her strong, active and leads her to the unapproachable beauty¹¹⁵.]

3. THE UNIQUE SACRIFICE

The shadows of the heavenly matters were sanctified by the blood of animals. However, the secret of sanctifying the heavenly matters is the unique Sacrifice, the Sacrifice of the cross which cannot be repeated, the Sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Himself who is able to raise from the dead.

The bloody sacrifices were offered in the tabernacle or at the temple of Jerusalem, the first tabernacle which is the shadow of the heavenly matters. However, Christ, being the Sacrifice and the Priest, stands in heaven in front of the Father, as the slain Lamb. Truly He was not separated from the Divine nature of the Father, but for our sake, He descended to us, without separation from the Father, offering Himself a Sacrifice of love for us, so He may elevate us to heaven and intercede with His blood on our behalf, to take us to the bosom of the Father.

The priests in the Old Testament offered the blood of dead animals; thus the sacrifices were unable to raise the people or even to raise themselves. But the High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ is the only One who offered Himself to give us life, thus there is no need for the repetition of the sacrifice. His priesthood is eternal and the effect of His sacrifice never stops, nor gets old! St. John Chrysostom compared between the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament and the Sacrifice of the New Testament by saying: [What a great difference! He is the Ransom, the Priest, and the Sacrifice! If this was not the case, then there would be a need for offering many sacrifices and for Him to be crucified many times¹¹⁶.]

Perhaps some may question: Since the Sacrifice of the Lord Jesus cannot be repeated, why does the Church offer the Eucharist, the Sacrifice of Christ, every day on the altar? We answer that the Eucharist is not repetition of the sacrifice of the cross, but rather it is an extension of the one, real, eternal, non bloody Sacrifice which never stops. For Christ, the living Victim, Himself, risen from the dead, offers His Holy Body and Blood, without repetition nor change. The various local altars are truly one altar to one Church! We have previ-

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 16:5.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

ously discussed that according to the writings of the Fathers and the testimony of the liturgies¹¹⁷.

St. Paul said that as we die once then we rise to be judged, He died once for us to carry our judgment in His body saving us from death. He will not die again, and His Sacrifice will not be repeated, but remains a unique Sacrifice beyond time which works in anyone who enters Golgotha by faith to meet the Sacrifice who can lift us up to the divine throne to, reconcile man with the Father.

St. John Chrysostom says: [He died for everyone. This death was to save humanity from destruction, but He did not carry the sins of those who did not want to be saved¹¹⁸.] He bent His back to carry the sins of all, but those who attain salvation are the ones who believe in Him as a Savior. Those will appear with Him when He comes on the clouds, after being purified of their sins. So He may carry them as righteous in Him to His Father.

St. John Chrysostom commented on verses 26 to 28 by saying, [These verses refer to the power of life in God and the power of sin. Regarding the power of life in God, Christ will die no more. However, sin that He carried on our behalf, brought death for the Sinless, how much more destruction it will bring on those who submit to it?!¹¹⁹]

¹¹⁸ *In Hebr. hom., 17:4.*

¹¹⁹ *In Rom. Hom., 11.*

Chapter 10

Entering the Holies

St. Paul continues his comparison between the ministry of the first temple and the ministry of the new heavenly temple, to assure them that what they were deprived of by their expulsion from the Jewish temple, was just a shadow to minister to the truth, and to open the door to the heavenly ministry. What they have lost from the Levitical priesthood cannot be compared to the ministry of the Lord Jesus Himself, the Heavenly High Priest who is the Only One who can make us enter through the Holies.

- 1. The inability of the animal sacrifices** 1-11.
- 2. The power of the Unique Sacrifice** 12-18.
- 3. Entering through the Holies** 19-23.
- 4. The continuous strife** 24-39.

1. THE INABILITY OF THE ANIMAL SACRIFICES

"For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect" [1].

St. Paul emphasizes the inability of the Mosaic Law to perfect those who offer animal sacrifices, for this Law cannot offer a deposit of heaven or the life to come, but rather its shadow. Thus, it cannot purge the inner conscience and change the soul to become a heaven and a kingdom of God.

St. John Chrysostom¹²⁰ compared the Mosaic Law to an artist who holds the pen to draw the broad lines of the scene. No doubt, this is a necessary task and beneficial and without it, the picture cannot be completed, but it does not portray the features of the picture nor reveal its beauty. However, the New Testament represents an artist who offers strong and attractive features of the picture through his bright colors which illustrate many details of heaven. The Old Testament with all its rites pointed to the road, but its features were not clear nor attractive. But the Sacrifice of the New Testament made us enter the road itself, so we may attain the heavenly perfection. The Old Testament is essential and beneficial but is deficient. It leads us to enjoy perfection in the New Testament which offered us the heaven as a true

¹²⁰ In *Hebr. hom 17:5*.

fact inside the heart, and made our inner depths as living icons of the life to come.

St. Paul presented two proofs of the deficiency of the sacrifices of the Mosaic Law:

The first proof: "*For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins*" [4]. It is impossible for the blood of irrational animals to purge man physically and spiritually. It doesn't carry the power of purification, but rather they derive their effect from their obedience to the will of God which declared these sacrifices as symbols. Thus, God rejects these sacrifices, if they are offered as routine rather than obedience to Him. God does not delight in meat, nor fat and blood of animals, but rather in obedience. This is what St. Paul emphasized by saying: "*Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come, in the volume of the book it is written of Me, to do Your will, O God'*" [5-7]. God does not desire animal sacrifices, but rather He demands them as symbols of the Incarnate Son who came in the flesh offering obedience to the will of the Father, obedience till death, death of the cross, so we may be sanctified in the Holy Son. "*By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*" [10].

The Second Proof: It compliments the former, where St. Paul declares that the daily repetition of the bloody animal sacrifices is a sign of their deficiency.

"And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices,

which can never take away sins.

But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever,

sat down at the right hand of God,

from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool.

For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" [11-14].

St. John Chrysostom commented by saying,

[Tell me why is there a need for many sacrifices if one Sacrifice is sufficient?

Offering many sacrifices continuously assures that the worshipers are not yet sanctified.

This is like medicine, if it is strong, it can destroy the disease completely, just by using it once. However, when the medicine is re-

peated, this means that it is weak in its effect. The good medicine is used once only and is not repeated.

Why do they keep using the same sacrifices continuously? For if they had been freed from all their sins, they would not have to repeat the sacrifices daily. For it was assigned to them to offer permanent morning and evening sacrifices. This repetition doesn't mean they are freed from sins, but it is an accusation, and emphasis that it is still existing. What happens is not just a demonstration of the power of the sacrifices, but rather of their weaknesses. The first sacrifice is not powerful, thus, a second one is offered. A second one is not effective, thus another one is offered. The repetition of the offerings testify to their weaknesses, but this is completely different with the Lord Jesus Christ¹²¹.]

St. John Chrysostom proposed the question, the sacrifice of the daily Eucharist, is it repeated? Meaning, the Sacrifice of Christ on the cross, is it repeated? He answered by saying: [It is not a different sacrifice as the high priest used to do, but rather it is one and the same Sacrifice offered daily¹²².]

We previously mentioned that the sacrifice of the Eucharist is a true Sacrifice, and it is not a repetition, but rather it is the same sacrifice of the cross which cannot be repeated¹²³.

2. THE POWER OF THE ONE UNIQUE SACRIFICE

What corresponds to the repeated sacrifices is the one unique Sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. "*But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified*" [12-14].

The sitting of the Lord Christ at the right hand of God in heaven waiting till His enemies are made His footstool is a strong testimony to the power of the living Sacrifice which works continuously to reconcile humanity, so that believers may enter into the bosom of the Father, declaring victory over Satan, and all his evil powers. The Lord does not need to declare His sitting at the right hand of God, for He is one with Him, but what He did is achieved in the name of His Church throughout the ages.

He is the only Oblation sitting at the right hand of God which is not repeated, and works continuously for our victory and freedom

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*, 17:6.

¹²³ *The Author*, "Christ in the Eucharist," p. 42-163 (in Arabic).

from sin. As **St. John Chrysostom** says, [As long as He forgave sins through the One Sacrifice, then there is no need for another sacrifice¹²⁴.]

Once more St. Paul emphasizes that as long as the Sacrifice of the New Testament can enter the heart and works to purge the mind, then there is no need for another sacrifice. *"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them, then He adds, 'Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.' Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin"* [16-18].

3. ENTERING INTO THE HOLIES

"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God" [19-21].

St. Paul addresses them as brothers who are very intimate, having the ties of brotherhood, by abiding in the Lord Jesus, the Priest and the Sacrifice. They became confident of entering the Holies by the worthiness of the blood of Christ, through our membership in His holy Body. The veil that was torn by His death made us enter the Holy of Holies, and the Priest is the only Almighty One who can take us to heaven.

St. Athanasius of Alexandria talks to us about the broken Body as a way for us to cross to the Holies. He says: [When the Lord stretched His hands on the cross, He conquered the prince of the power of air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience (Eph. 2:2), preparing the road to heaven for us¹²⁵.]

Through the Sacrifice of the cross, that destroyed the power of Satan and sin, we are assured, and can boldly enjoy the heavens. As **St. John Chrysostom** says, [How do we get this boldness? Since sin brings us shame, then forgiveness of sin, our enjoyment of the heavenly heritage, and such great love bring us boldness¹²⁶.]

When God offered the Law with its old sacrifices, He prepared the way to accept the sacrifice of the Body of the Lord Jesus who alone lifts our hearts to heaven. As **Origen** says: [Through the Law, we reap the harvest of the mysteries as a ladder to climb from the

¹²⁴ In Hebr. hom., 18:3.

¹²⁵ In Num. Hom., 3.

¹²⁶ In Hebr. hom 19:2.

earthly to the heavenly matters. Now, let us raise our minds, as much as we could, above the earthly thoughts, through meditation and the inner insight of the heart. Let us forget the earth and lift our hearts to the clouds of heaven. Let us search for the tabernacle of God, (the Church), where the Lord Jesus entered to prepare a way for us. He appears before God, interceding for us¹²⁷.]

We have the confidence of entering the Holiest, that is the Holies of God. Here, he does not say, the "Holy of Holies" or the "Holy," for the two became one; there is no veil that separates them. Through the worthiness of the Blood, our heavenly life here on earth is not separated from our future heavenly life. The Holy (our present worship) became one with the Holy of Holies (our eternal worship).

The way that was opened is His Body, being the veil that was torn. When the Lord's Body was crucified on the cross, the veil of the temple, that separated the Holy from the Holy of Holies, was torn. His Body became the mystery of opening the Holies in front of us, or our move towards it, that we may reach there. We, as members of His Holy Body, have the right to enjoy the heavenly matters. His body was the veil, where divinity was hidden behind, so we may meet Him and get acquainted with his divine mysteries. **St. John Chrysostom** says: [When His Body was lifted up, the heavenly matters appeared.] He also says that in the Old Testament, the high priest used to enter the Holy of Holies while the others stayed outside. However, now we enter with our High Priest. The high priest, entering alone into the Holy of Holies, was a sign of the obstruction of the Holies before humanity. However, now when the Lord Jesus entered heaven and sat at the right hand of the Father, carrying our nature, this became a manifestation of opening the road of the Holiest for us.

St. Athanasius of Alexandria talks about the Body of the Lord Jesus on the cross as One hanging in the air to destroy the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2). He says:

[Since Satan, our enemy, fell from heaven, to our earth, he has the authority to use his fellow devils to trick men and tempt them to lead a sinful life.]

He does not only work in men who can be easily deceived, but rather hinders those who are climbing to heaven. As St. Paul says: "According to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (Eph.2:2). The Lord came to expel Satan and purify the air, thus preparing the way to heaven through the

¹²⁷ In Num. Hom., 3.

veil, that is His flesh (Heb.10: 20), as St. Paul says, what kind of death that can achieve that, except the death in the air, that is, on the cross?! The Lord endured this death. When He was lifted on the cross, He purified the air from the evil of Satan, for He said, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18), thus He opened the door to heaven. He also says, "Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors!" (Ps. 24:7) The Word did not need someone to open for Him because He is the Lord of all, and nothing can be closed before Him, for we are all His creation. We are the ones who needed the doors to be opened. As He carried us in His body, He died on our behalf to prepare for us, the road to heaven¹²⁸.]

St. Athanasius¹²⁹ refuted the Arians who claim that the Lord Jesus is created because of His incarnation, by saying, that through the Word's incarnation, men are saved from death, redeemed from sin, and the gates of heaven are thus opened before us. [Those who do not want to worship the Word who became flesh, deny His incarnation...We cannot separate the Word from the flesh.]

The road to the Holies has been opened by His flesh. As if the Apostle means to say, that the way of the Holies is opened through Incarnation. We cannot separate the flesh from the Word, for He is One Person, the Word of God, the Incarnate Logos.

We enjoy this opened door when we are baptized, where we unite with our Christ as members in His Body, for it is written, "**Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water**" [22].

4. THE CONTINUOUS STRIFE

Our faith in the blood of the Lord Jesus is the road which grants us the assured hope to enter the Holiest. This hope has to be with our good conscience, away from evil, obligated to continuous strife in the life of righteousness, especially to follow love. A living and effective faith has to be co-ordinated with hope and love. He said, "*Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith... let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering...Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works*" [22-24]. Faith grants us to enter the road, hope opens the heart to see the road joyfully, and love is the sign of the road itself!

¹²⁸ *De Incar.* 25.

¹²⁹ *Ep to Adelphius* 5.

The acts of love; such as "*And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works*" [24]. This means that we support one another through acts of love and good deeds. Our strife is canonical once we meet together in the spirit of love as members of one another. As **St. John Chrysostom** says: [The Church meeting is strong, for what one cannot do alone, he can do by joining the rest of the Church. Thus, group prayers on behalf of the troubled, each person all over the world, and all Church members that they may be in peace, is extremely essential¹³⁰.]

St. Paul, then emphasizes the necessity of strife in a communal spirit saying, "*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching*" [25].

St. John Chrysostom used this verse in praising the communal church life and in rejecting the isolation from the Church community by saying, [There is no greater evil than the isolation from the Church community¹³¹.]

Truly, what is more beneficial than the communal spirit, for it supports each member without one losing his personal relationship with the Lord!

Finally, the Apostle is warning us we, who enjoyed the work of the Blood of the Lord Jesus, from falling into sin. For "*Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much more worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?*" [28,29].

Sr. John Chrysostom commented by saying: [How do you trample the Son of God underfoot?!... Those who sin do not appreciate the Lord... You became the body of Christ; how, then, you surrender yourself to Satan, so he may step on you?!¹³²]

He also says, [Such person deserves greater condemnation. Yet, the Lord opens the door of repentance in front of him and offers him many ways to wash his sins¹³³.]

Since the Lord Jesus has widely opened the door of hope by His blood, this does not mean that we take advantage of God's mer-

¹³⁰ In Acts hom., 37.

¹³¹ In Ioan. Hom., 78:41.

¹³² In Hebr. hom., 20:3.

¹³³ In Ioan. Hom., 28:1.

cies, and His kindness and patience with us. As St. Paul said, "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and long suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds..." (Rom. 2:4-6)

After St. Paul presented the commandments, he revealed to them one side of their strife, as an encouragement, for he was used to combine his rebuke with praise, his strictness with love, and his severity with hope. He said, "*But recall the former days in which after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings*" [32]. After they received the sacrament of baptism, that is the mystery of enlightenment, they struggled and endured many sufferings especially from their people, the Jews. They accepted sufferings not only by struggle and patience, but also by great joy, for he said, "*For you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven*" [34].

The sign for their spiritual progress is that they have accepted sufferings with joy. As **Origen** says, [Joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the Bible. My soul rejoices in the Lord for it rejoices in hope, rejoices in enduring injustice for His name in all occasions, offering the first-fruit of joy to God through the true Great Priest¹³⁴.]

The secret of their joy in enduring injustices and the plundering of their money, is their enjoyment of their heavenly reward. They put all their trust in the heavenly Jerusalem with hearts full of faith, holding on steadfastly to the hope till the end. They endured the present sufferings of love with patience and joy, waiting for the fast second coming of the Lord, so He may take them with Him to the Holies.

¹³⁴ In Num. Hom., 11.

Chapter 11

Faith

This chapter is considered a practical application of faith through example of some Old Testament faith heroes. After St. Paul talked about the Lord Jesus as the High Priest, who opened the heavenly Hobbies, comparing between the ministry of the Levitical priesthood and the new priesthood, he emphasizes the importance of faith as a road to enjoy these heavenly Hobbies, opened for all humanity in Christ Jesus.

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|--|-------------------|
| 1. What is faith? | Ch. 1-3. |
| 2. Men of faith | Ch. 4-12. |
| 3. Faith in the heavenly country | Ch. 13-15. |
| 4. Men of faith (to be continued) | Ch. 16-39. |

1. What is faith?

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony" [1,2].

Faith is the confidence in the unseen divine hobbies as present facts, then one lives in evidence of things not seen and not touched by our senses.

St. John Chrysostom says: [Faith is a clear vision of things, and complete assurance of unseen things¹³⁵.]

He also says, [I will demonstrate what I says with examples... The Lord said that whoever forsakes father, or mother or brother or sister for His sake is rewarded. We see that this was really fulfilled. He also said, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). This means that no one can overcome the believer. This is a true fact. He also says, 'The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it' (Matt. 16:18). Even if the Church is persecuted, no one can stop preaching the Gospel. This prophecy was fulfilled although it was said in a time when it was hard for anyone to believe it.¹³⁶]

By faith, we have accepted God's hard commandments and promises, the words cannot prove their truthfulness, but rather a practical experience in their application. [Thus, faith requires a zealous active soul who is above sensual matters, human reason, and beyond

¹³⁵ In Hebr. hom 21:4.

¹³⁶ Ibid. 21:5.

ordinary customs¹³⁷.]

Since St. Paul was talking to Christians of Hebrew origin, therefore, he said, "*For by it the elders obtained a good testimony*" [2]. He is telling them that this is not a strange thing, for your Fathers have experienced it. Their Jewish history is a testimony to the life of faith. St. Paul related the lives of the heroes of faith from the books of the Old Testament, as a living testimony of the Church of the Old Testament.

The Old Testament started by declaring that God is the Creator. "*By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible*" [3]. Men of the Old Testament cannot accept the Lord Christ, the "Incarnate Word of God," as the Savior who renews their inner nature by the Holy Spirit, unless they accept the first basic concept that God is the Creator by His Word. The Word who creates is the only One who can renew the old nature after it has been defiled.

St. Athanasius of Alexandria says: [God is good, in other words, the goodness is in His essence... He created everything from nothing by His own Word, the Lord Jesus Christ¹³⁸.]

God also renewed the creation in Christ, and saved it. **St. Athanasius** also adds, that God is the immeasurable Creator existing before all ages, it's Him who created time¹³⁹.

2. HEROES OF FAITH

St. Paul now moves from the first basic foundation of faith in the Word of God, the eternal Creator, to practical examples of men of faith in the Old Testament. The faith of the Church is an extension of that of the men of the early Church before the Incarnation.

St. John Chrysostom says that St. Paul wanted to reveal to them that the Jews have started their lives with God by faith in many ways, but unfortunately they completed in weakness by lukewarm hearts in faith.

St. Athanasius of Alexandria who spent most of his pastoral life in struggling for the Orthodox faith, and often he used to leave his papal residence and escape from the Arians who insisted on killing him, believed that struggle for faith is not less than martyrdom. Most of the heroes of faith mentioned here were not martyred, but rather

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 22:10.

¹³⁸ *De Incar.*, 3.

¹³⁹ *De Decretis*, 18.

lived as men of faith. **St. Athanasius** says: [A martyr does not become a martyr for his mere refusal to worship the idols, but rather for his refusal to deny faith. This is a clear testimony to his good conscience. Those who are condemned are not only those who worship idols, as strangers to God, but rather those who deny faith¹⁴⁰.]

He also praises faith by saying: [Abraham the patriarch received the crown, not because he suffered until death, but because he believed in God. The other saints mentioned by St. Paul, like Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and others were not crowned because of shedding their blood, but they were justified by faith, for they were ready to accept death for the sake of righteousness in God¹⁴¹.]

St. Paul presented the following examples of the heroes of faith:

a. **Abel:** He is the first example of the heroes of faith, not due to his private life, but St. Paul says, "*By faith, Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks*" [4,5]. God testified of his righteousness, not because of the superiority of his life of private deeds, but rather because his sacrifice was better than Cain's offering. Cain offered from the fruits of the earth, but God accepted the bloody sacrifice of Abel, because it carried the aroma of the Sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on the cross, and its shadow. This is the foundation of our faith that the Word of God the Creator renews us, we His creation, through the precious Blood. Thus, we offer our life a sacrifice of love, through our unity with the true Sacrifice, and we become like Abel who became a sacrifice himself, though rejected by his brother.

St. Paul was addressing the Hebrew Christians who were expelled from the temple. They became like Abel who was rejected from his brother for the sake of the accepted Sacrifice to God the Father, the Sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even if their brothers try to kill them, yet their voices remain, and their testimonies cannot be suppressed by death nor destroyed by time. Abel's voice is still loud declaring God's acceptance to his bloody sacrifice, and the voice of the rejected and persecuted believers remain crying testifying to the truth, unceasingly.

b. **Enoch:** "*By faith Enoch was translated so that he did not*

¹⁴⁰ *Ad Episc. Egypti, 21.*

¹⁴¹ *Ad Episc. Egypti, 21.*

see death, 'and was not found because God had translated him' for before his translation he had this testimony that he pleased God" [5]. Since Abel has declared the mystery of the accepted Sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ through his faith, and we, through our acceptance to the daily death with the Lord, then through Enoch's faith, his life has carried a living picture of the surpassing heavenly Church, which surpasses the natural human life, and witnesses through practical attitude before the world. Thus, the Lord translates every true believer to live with Him, sharing His glories. St. Paul says, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" (Phil 3: 20,21).

Through faith, we enjoy the heavenly life as members of God's Church acceptable to her Bridegroom. *"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" [6]. May our hearts truly believe in God like Enoch and seek Him diligently, so we may get the reward which is obtaining the Lord Jesus Himself. This is the reward of the soul who seeks Him diligently, she abides in Him in His heaven and eternal glory in the bosom of the Heavenly Father.*

c. **Noah:** Since Abel declares through his faith the unique Sacrifice that testifies to the Truth, within us unceasingly. And Enoch represents the Church elevated to her Bridegroom to live with Him in heaven while still existing on earth, then Noah's faith is a condemnation of the world which rejected entering the ark. For there is no salvation outside the ark, and no enjoyment of the new life except through the baptismal water. *"By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" [7]. Since the church enjoys salvation through the cross, as Noah's ark was saved in the midst of the baptismal water, then this salvation condemns the world¹⁴².*

The Fathers used to build churches in the shape of Noah's ark as a sign of crossing from the old world to the new life. We have previously mentioned the Church and her relation to Noah's ark in accordance with the writings of the early Fathers¹⁴³.

d. **Abraham:** Each of the Fathers presented one aspect of the many aspects of faith. Abel presented the divine aspect which is offering the holy Sacrifice, that is, offering the Lamb of God. Enoch revealed the nature of the believing Church which is the heavenly aspect. Noah declared that there is no salvation outside the holy Church. Abraham presented the practical aspect of faith which is obedience to God, besides other aspects of his life interacting with each other to bring out a serial of virtues as landmarks on his path with God. Abraham, the Patriarch believed in a practical way, thus, he forsook all the visible matters trusting in God's invisible promises. St. Paul says, "*By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterward receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundation, whose builder and maker is God*" [8-10]. He obeyed to go out to enjoy the inheritance, not knowing where he was going. Faith led him! He has never heard of living examples of faith except what he heard, from tradition, about Abel, Enoch and Lot. He had no holy Bible, neither Law, nor a prophet nor a priest to guide him, but faith only enlightened the path before him.

As **St. John Chrysostom** says: [His father was pagan and worshipped idols, he never heard of prophets, nor knew where to go¹⁴⁴.]

By faith, he did not inherit the land, but believed that his descendants will inherit the land on which he, his son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob were sojourners. He was not worried nor troubled, but trusted in God's promises to be fulfilled in the following generations of his successors.

¹⁴⁴ In *Hebr. hom.*, 23:2.

e. **Sarah:** As St. Paul presented men of faith, He is also presenting living examples of women believers like Sarah who represents the Church believing in God who grants us resurrection. *"By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. Therefore, from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude, innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore" [11,12].*

From the men of faith, Abel was the first one mentioned to declare the Sacrifice of the Lord Christ that remains effective throughout all generations. Sarah, the blessed mother is the first of the believing women who was under the judgment of death. She was barren, and this ascertained her old age! Through faith, she received the power of resurrection to give birth, from her dead bowels, to innumerable children of God like the stars of the sky and the sand of the sea shore. St. John the Baptist said to the Jews, "And 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" (Matt. 3:9). This was not an exaggerated saying, for the Lord had really raised up children to Abraham from the stones, because Sarah's bowels were like stones which cannot bear children. But through faith, God granted her children to Abraham. This is Sarah's faith in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, who through His resurrection raised children to Abraham from stones, and still raises! Our Fathers were from the Gentiles like stones, for they worshipped stony idols, but they were changed not to be children of Abraham, but rather children of God! Faith has converted the stony hearts into living children of God!

3. FAITH IN THE HEAVENLY COUNTRY

Since the believers were expelled from the Jewish temple, and from practicing the communal worship with their brothers, yet St. Paul is lifting up their eyes to a heavenly temple and an angelic worship, to realize that what they have lost is not compared to their enjoyment in the unseen world. This was not an imaginary matter, but rather a life of faith which represented an extension to the life of their Fathers, who endured deprivation of many blessings in order to enjoy the heavenly promises. *"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.*

But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them" [13-16].

Here St. Paul emphasizes that the Old Testament men did not put their hope in temporary promises, as some believe, but saw the heavenly country, and the eternal promises hidden behind the temporary promises. They saw with the eyes of faith God's eternal promises, were assured of them by faith, and embraced them by hard labor, because they were fervently longing for them. These promises gave them the feeling that they were strangers waiting for the passover, to enjoy their heavenly country. No worldly matter, regardless of its magnitude, is worthy to distract us from our heavenly goal.

St. John Chrysostom says, [Truly, they were in labor pains every day, longing to be liberated from this world, to return to their country. However, whenever we have high fever, we neglect everything and cry like little children who are afraid of death. This we do, not without reason, for we live here not as strangers longing for our country, but instead as ones who feel sad because they are going to receive a penalty. We turn matters upside down, for we become sad when we should be happy, and we tremble as criminals do, whenever they stand before the rulers, for they remember how much fault they have done, thus fear and are scared¹⁴⁵.]

Men of faith desire their heavenly country, hence God is pleased with them. He is called their Lord, for He prepared a heavenly country for them, where they assemble, and He dwells in their midst forever. He delights in them, and they delight in their Heavenly Father.

St. John Chrysostom says, [What a great honor! He is called their Lord. He is glorified in them, those whom He calls Himself their God, that is, the righteous, the long sufferers and those who strive to attain virtues.] In our previous studies of some Old Testament books, we saw that God takes pride in calling Himself Lord to the blessed and not to the evil, although He is Lord to all! He considers holy people His people, but when they commit evil, He does not call them "My people" but rather "the people" or "your people" meaning "Moses' people"¹⁴⁶.

¹⁴⁵ In *Hebr. hom.*, 24:5.

4. MEN OF FAITH (CONTINUED)

St. Paul interrupted his talk about examples of men of faith to emphasize their goal, which is their enjoyment of the heavenly country. Then he resumed to give more examples of men and women of the Old Testament:

a. **Abraham:** Once more St. Paul talks about Abraham, declaring his wonderful faith in God's promises, given to him, which seemed to be conflicting with the divine orders to him. God gave him a promise that He will bless Isaac to have innumerable descendants, and in the mean time, He asked him to offer his only son Isaac, the son of the promise, as a sacrifice. Through faith, our father Abraham trusted God's promise without any doubt.

St. John Chrysostom says, [He heard the contrary of what was promised from the One who promised him. He obeyed without hesitation, as if God's order was in harmony with the promises He has already gave him before. Truly according to human calculations, they don't match, however, according to faith, they do. How did this happen? St. Paul taught us this by saying: himself, "*Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead*" [19]. Through the same faith, God granted him Isaac from a dead womb, also through faith, Abraham believed that even if he offers Isaac as a sacrifice, God can raise him from the dead. According to human calculations, both matters are not possible, that is, giving birth from a dead womb, a barren's and one suffering from old age, and raising a sacrifice after it is slaughtered, but his former faith in accepting the first made him prepared for accepting the next¹⁴⁷.]

St. Athanasius of Alexandria commented on Abraham's faith's in offering Isaac as a sacrifice, by saying: [When offering his son, he worshipped the Son of God. When he was prevented from offering Isaac as a sacrifice, he saw the Messiah in the lamb, which was offered as a sacrifice to God instead of him (Gen. 22:15). Our Father the Patriarch was tempted in his son. But anyway, he did not offer a sacrifice, of which was said in Isaiah: "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its sharers is silent, so He opened not His mouth" (Isa.53:7). God accepted the intention of the one who offered the sacrifice, but he was prevented from slaughtering, because Isaac's death does not grant salvation and freedom to the world, but the death of the Savior only can grant salvation. "The chastisement for our peace was upon Him." (Is.53:5)¹⁴⁸]

¹⁴⁷ *In Hebr. hom.*, 25:2.

¹⁴⁸ *Pasch. Ep.* 6:8,9.

Thus, through faith, Abraham offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice of love to God. This he saw in the lamb hanging on a tree, the picture of redemption, of the Lamb of God, carrying the sins of the world. Also, he saw in Isaac himself a living picture of Christ's work of redemption. It is the custom in our Church to mention the fraction of offering Isaac in the Eucharist of every Holy Thursday, as a symbol of the Sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on the cross¹⁴⁹.

b. **Isaac:** *"By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come"* [20]. Isaac the foreigner blessed his sons Jacob and Esau, looking forward to future matters, that were clear before his eyes. He preferred Jacob over Esau, although Esau was the first-born, because in the eyes of God Jacob became like the first-born, although according to the flesh he is the second. This became like a symbol of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Second Adam, who became the First-born of the dead, while the first Adam lost his position and is no more the first-born, because after Adam fell, he was not able to please God. But the Lord Jesus was the subject of the delight of the Father, in Him we enjoy to be God's delight, and He is pleased with us¹⁵⁰.

c. **Jacob:** *"By faith Jacob when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff"* [21]. When Jacob blessed Joseph's sons, he put his right hand on Ephraim, the youngest, and his left hand on Menassah, the oldest, thus at the time he gave his blessing, his hands crossed together taking the shape of the cross. This had caused Joseph their father to be upset, and he tried to correct the position of his father's hands, but Jacob insisted on what he intended to do. Thus, Jacob blessed Ephraim, the youngest, and not the first-born Menassah. This is to prove that God's blessing is not granted to the first-born according to the flesh, but it is a free gift of God granted to anyone who spiritually deserves it. As if Jacob is repeating what his father Isaac has done when he blessed him, though he was the youngest. On the other hand, our father Jacob declared that any spiritual blessing we get, is through the sign of the cross. About the effect of the cross and its blessing, St. Hyppolitus says, [The cross is Jacob's ladder, this tree with heavenly dimensions, was elevated from earth to heaven, which became an eternal branch between heaven and earth to raise up humanity... and join up men of different natures.]

His bowing on his staff is a symbol of his bowing to the cross.

d. **Joseph:** *"By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel and gave instructions concerning his bones"* [22]. Joseph heard the divine promise to his grandfather Abraham, therefore he believed that God will never forsake his people as a foreign nation, therefore, he asked that they may move his bones, declaring his eagerness to see God's promises through his dry bones. In Egypt, Joseph, being the second man after Pharaoh, lived in glory, however, neither was he occupied with the luxury of the palace nor did it make him forget the divine promise. Therefore, he shared the people through faith, the exodus from Egypt, through his intentions of doing so... This is a symbol of going out from the bondage of sin to the new life in the Messiah, the Savior.

e. **Moses' Parents:** *"By faith, Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command"* [23]. When mentioning Moses as a great man of faith, St. Paul did not forget to mention the faith of his parents. St. Paul presented such parents as an example of faith, so we may realize the importance of the family in instructing their children to be raised up as true believers of God. Meaning that we can't ignore the role of the family in supporting the practical life of faith of their children, side by side with the spiritual father. Writing to St. Timothy, St. Paul wrote, "When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also" (2 Tim. 1:5).

The faith of Moses' parents was apparent when they hid baby Moses three months, because they saw he was a beautiful child. Stephen, the deacon, says that Moses was very beautiful. What did he see in his face except the reflection of the glory of the risen Christ?! Moses was under the judgment of death, because Pharaoh asked for the killing of all male babies. But the faith of his parents saw an inner beauty in him, therefore they hid him three months to avoid his facing such destiny. Number three refers to the resurrection (the Lord Jesus rose on the third day). So when the baby reappears on the surface of water after these three months, he is drawn out of the water, to preserve life. This is a symbol of Christ's resurrection, after the three days, to raise us with Him, with the power of His resurrection, for we were condemned to death.

Moses was very beautiful in his parents' eyes, therefore they hid him for three months. Thus, by faith, we carry in ourselves not

only Moses but his Lord, realizing that He is fairer than the sons of men. We hide Him inside us three months till we enjoy the resurrection with Him, so we are no more carried on the river water but rather on the glass sea in Upper Jerusalem.

f. **Moses:** "*By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin*" [24,25].

St. John Chrysostom commented on this verse by saying: [Putting heaven before Moses made his admiration for the Egyptian palace very trivial... He considered the reproach of Christ much better than the easy life, and particularly for this, he deserves a reward... Voluntarily, Moses has put himself in many dangerous situations, although he could have lived in his religious life while enjoying all the luxuries... But he considered, not being prepared to endure afflictions with his brothers, a sin. Therefore, his enduring afflictions and forsaking the royal palace became a good deed, because he saw better things to come, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he looked to the reward¹⁵¹.]

By faith, he led the people of Israel in their exodus from Egypt, without fear of the king's anger, for he knew the real substance of his call! Besides the mystery of how strong the work is, when the leader is God Himself, was clear before his eyes. Hence he told his people, "for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out of this place" (Exod. 13:3). In the first time he escaped, not merely out of fear of the king but of his brethren, and we may say probably of God. For he didn't know what is the hope of his calling (Eph. 4:4), and he worked with human hands. But as the divine order came out to him to work, he obeyed and confronted Pharaoh without any fear. For he knew how strong a work can be when one abides in Him the Almighty God alone.

"*By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them*" [28]. Moses performed this act being a symbol of the act of salvation of the Lord Jesus, the true Passover who made us cross from the bondage of Satan to the freedom of the glory of God's children. This was mentioned in the

¹⁵¹ In Hebr. hom., 26:4.

book of Exodus¹⁵².

"By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned" [29]. Here, he compares one people with another people. Moses led the people to pass through the Red Sea as by dry land. Since Moses and his people represent God's kingdom, to which the road is opened through the baptismal water, then Pharaoh and his army represent Satan's kingdom which is destroyed through the same baptismal water. Through baptism, the kingdom of Satan is destroyed in us, and will have no place therein, and the kingdom of heaven is risen in us.

g. **Joshua:** "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days" [30]. **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Definitely, the voices of the trumpets cannot destroy the stones of the walls... but faith can do everything¹⁵³.]

h. **Rahab the harlot:** "By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace" [31]. **St. John Chrysostom** says: [What a shame that we don't have enough faith when compared to a harlot's! She heard what the two spies said and believed! The result was that she was the only one who was saved, while everyone else perished. She did not say, "I'd better stay with my many friends," nor, "Why should I be wiser than all the other men who did not believe?" But immediately she believed what will happen, and what the Canaan's will have to face¹⁵⁴.]

St. Paul moved from talking about the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, to Joseph then Moses, being the first leader of God's people, then his disciple Joshua who led the people to the promised land. Then he talks about a harlot, a Gentile, Rahab, who received more than what all the other Hebrews received. She deserved to be counted in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus (Matt.1:5) Then he talks about the judges like Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, and kings like David, and prophets like Samuel. Thus, he presented examples of a variety of men testifying to God from every era of their history, for there are always witnesses to God even in the darkest ages.

After discussing the men and women of faith, he presented examples of the works of faith like:

- Subduing kingdoms, through faith.

¹⁵³ In Hebr. hom., 27:2.

¹⁵⁴ In Hebr. hom., 27:3.

- Working righteousness.
- Obtaining promises.
- Stopping the mouth of lions.
- Quenching the violence of fire.
- Escaping from the edge of the sword.
- Obtaining strength, of weakness.
- Becoming valiant in battle, turning to fight the armies of the aliens.
- Women received their dead raised to life again, like what the widow has done with Elijah the prophet..
- Enduring the pains of torture, not accepting deliverance, to obtain a better resurrection.
- Undergoing trials of mockings and scourgings, of chains and imprisonment.
- Enduring pains till death, being stoned, sawn in two, tempted, and slain with the sword.
- Wandering about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented.

These are but actual living examples of works of faith, which the Old Testament people had lived. However, in the New Testament, the believer lives the life of faith with a new spiritual perspective. Through Christ Jesus, the believer overcomes the kingdoms of Satan, sin, and the love of the world. Through Christ Jesus, the believer practices righteousness as His Lord, and is granted the divine promises. Through faith, we can stop the mouth of lions of evil and all the defilement that want to devour us. Through faith, we can quench the fire of carnal lusts, and enjoy deliverance from every sword and evil arrows. Through faith, we are strengthened in spite of our weaknesses as spiritual soldiers in our war against the invisible enemy. By faith, we come near God, as the widow who lost her only son did, assured that our Christ can raise us from the death of sin, as He raised the widow's son. Through faith we endure afflictions joyfully and we do not ask for temporary salvation but rather an eternal reward.

Briefly, we repeat what **St. John Chrysostom** says about what faith does for the believer, and how it grants him victory and spiritual power. He says: [If you put the world on one side of the scale against the believers, you will find that the believers' side will win¹⁵⁵.] Though they were destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom yet the Apostle adds, "*the world was not worthy*" [37,38].

¹⁵⁵ In Hebr. hom., 27:5.

Chapter 12

Strife

Since "The Priesthood of Christ" is the main subject of this epistle, where St. Paul presented the Lord Christ as the Great High Priest sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven, the Holy of Holies, interceding for us by His blood, to make us enter the bosom of His Father, therefore, he concluded his epistle by saying that this amazing intercession is not granted to the lazy and negligent. Therefore, after discussing the living examples about the heroes of faith, he talks about our obligation to continuous struggle, without which we cannot enjoy the redeeming act of the Lord Jesus.

1. Strife and the cloud of witnesses	1.
2. Strife and reflecting on the Lord's suffering	2,3.
3. Strife till the end	4.
4. Accepting the divine chastisement	5-11.
5. Helping others	12-17.
6. The old Law and the new kingdom	18-29.

1. STRIFE AND THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES

"Therefore, we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us..." [1]. Since we are weak and this represents a weight over the soul, and sin attacks us from every side, therefore, we have to struggle unceasingly, looking unto the cloud of witnesses surrounding us, so we may follow their example in witnessing to the truth. This cloud is for "us," not only so we may follow their examples but for "us" to help us in our strife by praying for us.

St. Paul compares the saints to a cloud because the cloud is high up, and is transformed to rain to water the earth. Likewise the true believer lives in heaven, but he does not neglect the weak souls who are still carnal, but he prays for them so God may use him to help them, as rain which waters the earth by heavenly blessings and brings forth abundant fruits.

When the Lord Jesus speaks about His second coming, He emphasized that He is coming on the clouds, surrounded by His saints, who are the spiritual cloud surrounding Him and carrying Him. Let us live as clouds seeking the heavenly matters, without ignoring our actual life on earth, so we may carry the Lord Jesus inside us and declare

Him day after day, so He may be completely transfigured in us at the Last Day!

In order to have fellowship with the "cloud of witnesses" whom St. Paul could not measure by saying "so great," and so that we may become a part in this divine cloud, we have to "lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us." These matters defile our nature and deprive us of enjoying the new creation which we have received in baptism. In the book of Isaiah, he talks about the Lord riding on a swift cloud and coming into Egypt. (Is. 19:1) **St. Cyril the Great** states that this refers to St. Mary carrying the Child Jesus and escaping to Egypt. In the mean time, it refers to every pure soul who carries the Lord Jesus inside him, and rides as a light and swift cloud, not hindered by the weight of sin, and its pure nature is not defiled as well.

We desire to cleave to this great cloud of witnesses, the light and swift cloud carrying the Savior. This attachment is not just by mere talks or emotions, but rather by strife in the Lord, for St. Paul continues and says, "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" [1]. This means to run with patience the race so we may win the reward. As **St. Athanasius of Alexandria** says, [We encounter continuous tribulations, for "tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance, character, and character, hope, and hope does not disappoint" (Rom. 5:4). Isaiah the prophet expects tribulations, therefore, he cries saying, "Come, my people enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation is past" (Isa. 26:20)¹⁵⁶.]

St. Jerome says: [In this present age, we live in the valley of tears! This world is the place of tears not of joy, so it is appropriate for us not to laugh... however, the world to come is the place of joy... God made us enter as wrestlers in a race, where we have to struggle all the time... Thus, this place is the valley of tears where we should never be negligent, but endure sufferings and continue our strife¹⁵⁷.]

I would like to comment here on the real meaning of grief and joy. We shed tears of repentance, and feel deep sorrow for our sins. On the other side, we can't miss crying with the prophet David by saying: "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation" (Ps. 51:12). Joy and Laughter, St. Jerome mentions here as something wrong are different, it means to be negligent of our salvation and laugh ridiculously at what we should sanctify...

¹⁵⁶ *Apol. De Fuga, 21.*

¹⁵⁷ *On Ps. Hom. 16.*

2. STRIFE AND REFLECTING ON THE SUFFERINGS OF THE LORD JESUS

"Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself,

lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls" [1-3].

Since the testimony of the saints is our help in our struggle, where we follow their example and ask for their intercession, let us lay aside every earthly weight and the surrounding sin, so we may rise with the divine cloud and have the privilege of carrying the Lord inside us. The suffering of our Lord Jesus for us until death, death of the cross, is a fountain of divine blessings which support us in our struggle. **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Since the sufferings of those who are close to us motivate us to struggle, what about the sufferings of our Lord Jesus? Truly, His suffering and the suffering of the Apostles are a great consolation for us! My beloved, suffering accomplishes two great matters: it purifies us of our sins and grants us power as spiritual men¹⁵⁸.]

The Lord Jesus was called "*the Author and Finisher of our faith*," for He is the Leader of believers in the narrow road of perfection, where He crosses with them from glory to glory, where they enjoy perfection before the Father through their unity with Him.

The sufferings of the cross are unbearable and their shame is bitter, but in the eyes of the Lord Jesus, they are the subject of His joy for this is the road in which He carries us to His resurrection, where we sit on the right hand of His divine throne. By the Lord Jesus Christ, we rejoice in suffering, in spite of its bitterness, for we see the road of the Holies opened before us. The Lord endured sufferings for our sake, we as sinners, and not for Himself; how much more should we accept sufferings for our own sake, especially when we accept them in the suffering Christ!

3. STRUGGLING UNTIL THE END

"You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin" [4].

¹⁵⁸ In *Hebr. hom.*, 28:6,7.

St. Paul did not present this commandment about the spiritual strife except after presenting practical and living examples of patriarchs, prophets, judges and kings. He clarified the capability of strife, for we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses working with us, and above all, the work of the Crucified Christ Himself in our lives. He accepted sufferings joyfully, and belittled the shame of the cross, which make us accept our spiritual strife until death with joy. **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Until now you haven't endured death. You have lost wealth, dignity, exile from place to place..., but still you haven't done what Christ did on our behalf. He shed His blood for us, but you haven't done this, even for yourself. He struggled for the truth till death for your sake. However you didn't yet pass through dangers that threatens your life, and let you face death¹⁵⁹.]

4. ACCEPTING THE DIVINE CHASTISEMENT

As long as we are God's children, God allows us to encounter tribulations and difficulties through our strife on this earth, not to condemn us, nor as a revenge, but to support us. He helps us not only through His gentleness and compassion, but also through chastening us for our spiritual benefit. Troubles for a true believer who is struggling lawfully is a clear indication of God's care for his edification. St. Paul says, "*And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives.'*" [5,6].

St. Jerome says: [Happy is the one who is chastened in this world, for God will never punish him twice (Nah. 1:9 LXX)¹⁶⁰.]

St. Cyprian says: [When God rebukes us, it is to rectify us, and when He rectifies us, He preserves us¹⁶¹.]

St. Augustine says: [The soul does not return to God unless it is taken from the world. When the soul is strongly attached to the desires of the world, that are liable to defile and destroy it, nothing brings her back except pain and suffering. When one is chastised, he realizes that he is suffering because of sin. May he goes back to himself and say: "Lord be merciful to me, heal my soul for I have sinned against you" (Ps. 41:4). Lord chastise me by afflictions, for you scourge every son you accept, except the Only Begotten Son who is sinless. Lord, I tell you "I have sinned against you."¹⁶²]

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 29:1.

¹⁶⁰ *On Ps. 9:41.*

¹⁶¹ *Ep. 7:5.*

¹⁶² *On Ps 9,41.*

St. Jerome says: [A father does not chastise his son except because he loves him. A teacher does not rectify his student unless he sees him responding. When the doctor stops caring for a sick person, this is a sign that he lost hope in his recovery¹⁶³.]

St. Jerome also says:[Which is better: to enter the battle of chastisement for a short period of time and get wearied from carrying the heavy burdens of our equipment of war as weapons, then rejoice for we became victorious, or remain as slaves of sin forever because we did not endure for one hour?¹⁶⁴]

St. John Chrysostom says: [We can never say that a righteous person lives without any difficulty, even if it is not apparent... For every righteous person has to choose the narrow gate as the Lord Jesus says, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, but difficult is the way that leads to life (Matt. 7:13,14)...

Do you think that the Lord has forsaken you or does not love you any more because you suffer many afflictions? If you do not suffer, then this means that He has forsaken you; for the Lord chastens every son, for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? What shall we say? Don't the evil people also meet difficulties? Certainly, they do, but this is a punishment for their evil deeds and not as the chastisement of sons¹⁶⁵.]

Chastisement is a sign of sonship, for a father cares for the edification of his legal son and does not care for the illegitimate. "*For if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons*" [8]. As **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Since illegitimate are not chastened, then we should rejoice when we are chastened, for it is a sign of our legitimate sonship¹⁶⁶.]

St. Paul compares the chastening of our physical fathers and the chastening of our Heavenly Father by the following points:

First: Chastening gives the human fathers their dignity, for a child fears his father for he is strict. "*We have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?*" [9] Here St. Paul stresses on a very important point which is "the fatherly fear and respect." Since we are God's children, our Father has sacrificed His Only-Begotten Son as a ransom for us, and the Son became our Advo-

¹⁶³ Ep. 118:1.

¹⁶⁴ Ep. 22:39.

¹⁶⁵ In Hebr. Hom., 29:2.

¹⁶⁶ In Hebr. Hom., 29:3.

cate in front of the Father. This gives us the feeling that God indulges us, for chastening grants the son to have fear mingled with the pamper of love, so that this pamper may not lead us to recklessness. What a difference between fear in a son's heart, and fear mingled with scare in a servant's heart. A son fears his father lest he hurts his feelings, but a servant fears lest he loses his wages and he fears the punishment.

Second: Our human fathers chasten us as seem best to them for a short period of time [10], wishing to see us successful in this present age, that we may fulfill what they hope to see us like.. However, God chastens us for a greater purpose, so we may share in His holiness. This is His purpose for He wishes to see us partakers of His glorious life carrying His marks and resembling Him. This is God's purpose from creating man, to see him as a son carrying the image of his Father.

Third: *"No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous"* [11]. A son groans under the pain of chastening, but the more he matures, the more he realizes that this chastening is for his own benefit and success. Likewise, God's chastening is grievous at the beginning, but in the mean time, it grants us the fruit of righteousness for peace, where we enjoy God's free righteousness which fills our hearts with His surpassing peace. **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Those who drink the bitter medicine first have to drink it unwillingly, but they feel comfortable after that... You suffer now, thus is chastening... Every chastening seems to be for sorrow, however this is not the case¹⁶⁷.]

5. SUPPORTING OTHERS

One of the important factors in spiritual struggle is that members support one another. Life with God represents an inner personal relationship between God and the believer, but not in isolation, but in fellowship between God and His one Church. Every member supports his brother in the Lord and strengthens him as one bride. St. Paul says, *"Therefore, strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees"* [12]. **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Nothing defeats people and make them collapse in temptations except isolation. Tell me, if you scatter a troop of soldiers in war, then it is very easy for the enemy to conquer individuals and bring them as captives¹⁶⁸.]

Others in relation to you are like hands and knees. You cannot overcome the devil if your hands are weak and your knees are feeble,

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 30:1.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 30:2.

so every support from you toward your brother is a support to you personally, for he represents your hands and knees! No wonder then that St. Paul feels he himself weak, when someone is weak, he used to burn with indignation whenever someone stumbled, and rejoiced whenever someone repented!

Strengthening the weak hands and the feeble knees is not merely with words, but by the inner practical life and the living spiritual behavior. St. Paul continues by saying, "*Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord; looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled*" [14,15]. Here St. Paul emphasizes two traits which are important in strife, which support the soul and help others. These are pursuing peace with everyone and enjoying a holy life. As for pursuing peace, once the believer realizing his position as a member of the holy body but rather of all humanity, he works harmoniously with everyone through the Head, the Planner. He endures the weaknesses of others for the edification of the community, for his inner peace and for pushing the weak through love, to repent. **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Enduring harm that befall you, is the strongest weapon in temptations, whereby Christ strengthens His disciples. He says, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10: 16). Nothing makes the one who committed sin against us, shameful of himself as our endurance of his hurt with gentleness and without taking revenge on him. This makes us philosophers, (as wise) and we are greatly rewarded. In the mean time, this attitude brings great benefit to the soul of the one who committed evil against us¹⁶⁹.]

As for the holy life, it is associated with following peace and accompanies it. True love that works in us to follow peace is the same working for our sanctification, in the Holy Lord Jesus. Anyone who truly loves his brother and is eager for his salvation, cannot accept leading a sinful life but loves holiness and reacts with it. Also, our love to our brothers opens for us the doors of God's grace, so we may enjoy the fellowship of the holy life in the Lord.

What is, following peace, except entering in a practical fellowship with the Lord Jesus, the Lover of mankind and the King of peace? This fellowship is the holy life. **St. Jerome** says: [Christ is holiness, without which no one can see the face of God. Christ is our salvation, for He is the Savior and the Redeemer at the same time.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Christ is everything for us. Whoever forsakes anything for the Lord finds in Him all his satisfaction and compensation for all what he had forsaken. Thus he can freely say: "The Lord is my portion" (Ps. 123:6)¹⁷⁰.]

The reason for falling in the spiritual life and the inability to struggle, is negligence and laziness. Thus, one's destiny becomes like Esau who asked with tears to inherit the blessing but couldn't find a place in his heart for repentance, because he got used to be profane and justify his faults, and his senses became dull, so regret found no place inside him. **St. Paul** says, "*Lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears*" [16,17]. Any love begets more love, and every spiritual strife inflames the heart to more strife in the Lord. Any carelessness begets more carelessness, and any negligence begets more negligence until it defiles completely the believer's life. His feeling towards God grow to be lukewarm, and he may desire the former holy life but slackly without true repentance. Our Fathers related to us their experiences and warned us from the small foxes and the sins that may seem trivial. Satan does not fight us straightway with apparent major sins but first, he sneaks into ones heart, deceiving him to commit trivial sins. Hence, when the inner heart is defiled, Satan can attack one with all other kinds of sins so one may fall in major sins, which he thought he would never commit. The prophet David, the great Psalmist with the pure heart, went up on the roof instead of participating in prayer with his army in the war. This simple negligence opened the door for him to look at the wife of his brother and the leader of his army. Thus, he fell from one weakness to the other until he fell completely in the snare of the devil..., but the Lord did not forsake him!

As the devil sneaks into your heart through trivial matters, struggle spiritually in your heart against these trivial matters. One of the excellent spiritual exercises for a believer whenever he feels that he is careless, is that he tells himself, "Let me struggle harder today, so I may rest tomorrow." As this day passes, his heart will be more inflamed toward God, then he repeats the same saying. Thus, he lifts his heart to the heavenly life through struggling for the present moment, neither puts for himself long range plans nor postpones God's work until tomorrow.

¹⁷⁰ Ep. 116:8.

6. THE OLD LAW AND THE NEW KINGDOM

Since St. Paul wanted to emphasize the effectiveness of the commandment of the New Testament and the blessings of the new kingdom, he compared between the way the Law was received in the Old Testament by Moses on Mount Sinai and between receiving the Divine Word in the New Testament.

First: When Moses received the Law, the mountain was shaken with fire in a physical way and fog and darkness appeared. A turmoil and a voice of trumpet and many voices were heard which made the people unable to hear God's voice directly. Even animals were unable to approach the mountain lest they are thrown with arrows without anyone touching them! Thus was the relationship between God and man, fearful and mysterious. However, in the New Testament, we do not see anything of this sort, for the Word of God became united with us through His incarnation, hence there is no more fear nor mystery.

St. John Chrysostom comments on that, saying: [The New Testament was not given accompanied with the following matters (fire, fog, darkness, tempest, or trumpet voices). These matters were very fearful to the extent that they could not endure hearing them. Also the cattle could not dare to touch the mountain. However, what came after that was completely different, that is the New Testament, which was presented to us as simple quiet words of God. After all, what can be the count of Sinai when compared to heaven?! and the fire to the unapproachable God, who is a consuming fire?!¹⁷¹]

These signs which appeared with the receiving of the Law revealed the nature of this law. Fire referred to the severe punishment of the wicked; the fog and darkness referred to the mystery and hiding the truth in its integrity, that is, everything was revealed through shadows and symbols. The sound of trumpet refers to the nature of preparing for the heavenly King's Second Advent. (1Cor. 15: 52) The tempest refers to the people who need a tempest to wake them up from their spiritual sleep and carelessness.

In our study of the Book of Exodus, we discussed in details the symbols of these spiritual matters of the inner condition of the soul when it accepts the Word of God. The soul becomes like steadfast mountain inflamed with the divine fire, surrounded by the divine mysteries as fog. The trumpet sound is heard inside the soul declaring the truth, through its inner life and its apparent behavior. The tempest of

¹⁷¹ In *Hebr. hom.*, 32:1.

the spirit erupts in the soul to destroy all evil that had sneaked therein. Any beast touching the mountain should be stoned or thrust with an arrow like the evil thoughts, when attacked by the arrows of truth and of the cross, thus will have no place therein.

Second: This state of fear did not affect the people only, but rather Moses too, for Moses said, "*I am exceedingly afraid and trembling*" [21]. However, now the Word is very close to us, inside our heart, for "the Divine Word" entered our lives and dwelled in us.

Third: Upon receiving the Law, the people were at the bottom of the mountain in the wilderness, as if the Law was incapable of offering the heavenly life to the people and making them enter the upper Jerusalem, the promised land. However, in the New Testament, the Word of God makes us enter heavens itself and makes of us a host of angels. "*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better than that of Abel*" [22-24].

Origen says that there are four ranks in heaven which are: Mount Zion, city of the living God the heavenly Jerusalem, an innumerable company of angels, the general assembly and Church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven. The highest rank is the membership in the Church of the firstborn where we enjoy the fellowship with Christ the Firstborn. He says: [Strive very hard to grow and progress in your works, life, customs, faith, behavior until you reach the Church of the firstborn registered in heaven. If you cannot make it, you may reach a lesser level... If you still cannot approach the innumerable company of angels and be elevated to that level, then you may at least reach the city of the living God the heavenly Jerusalem. If you cannot attain that level, then at least you may approach Mount Zion to be saved there. (Gen. 19:17) It is sufficient that you do not stay on earth and live on valleys and low regions¹⁷².]

In either case, in the New Testament, we entered the glorious kingdom of God where He elevates us to the true Mount Zion, where we enjoy the upper Jerusalem and are considered among the company of angels and the firstborn of the Lord. As **St. Athanasius of Alexandria** says: [Who does not want to enjoy the heavenly company? Who does not want to register his name with them, so he can hear the voice:

¹⁷² In Num. Hom., 3.

"Come you, blessed of My Father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34)¹⁷³.]

The kingdom inherited in Christ Jesus offers us eight things: Mount Zion, the city of God, the company of angels, the Church of the firstborn, God the Judge of all, the spirits of just men made perfect, Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel... We know that number 8 refers to what is beyond time (7 days of the week), or to the life to come, for the new kingdom is a heavenly kingdom which elevates man to the surpassing heavenly life.

Many of the Fathers emphasized on "the Church of the firstborn registered in heaven.", for we became firstborn in Jesus Christ the Firstborn. The Lord Jesus being Firstborn is not according to the flesh, where others are deprived of enjoying it. But on the contrary, it grants others fellowship in it. As **Origen** says: [Those who are considered firstborn before God are not the ones according to the flesh, but they were chosen because of their readiness to receive such blessing. This is what had happened with Jacob who was the youngest, but God considered him firstborn and he received the blessing of the firstborn. This happened because God permitted that his father be blind, for God knew how much Jacob was well prepared for such blessing (Gen.27:11). For it was said: "For the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls, it was said to her, 'The older shall serve the younger.' As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.'" (Rom. 9:11,12; Malachi 1:2,3) Thus, the Levites were not firstborn according to the flesh, but they proved to be firstborn by their readiness and diligence¹⁷⁴.]

As St. Paul realizes how some Christians, of Hebrew origin, felt bitter because they were deprived of Mount Zion, the city of Jerusalem, and the Law given by angels, therefore He revealed to them the new kingdom which satisfies all their needs, and compensates them for all what they have lost, even more. He calls it:

- **Mount Zion**, because they were persecuted and deprived of living on Mount Zion, which was so special to the Jews, the Lord Jesus elevated them to the true inner Mount Zion. He raises the soul to a high mountain to enjoy the heavenly life.

¹⁷³ Pasch. Ep. 3:3.

¹⁷⁴ In Num. Hom., 3:1.

- **The city of the living God**, the Heavenly Jerusalem, replaced the earthly Jerusalem where the temple was, which was so dear to the Jews. The soul became the city of God, the new Jerusalem, where there is no temple, for the soul itself is the temple. St. Peter says, "Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:4,5).
- **Company of angels**: Since the Jews have lost the literality of the Law which was delivered by angels, they themselves became a company of angels. **St. Clement of Alexandria** says: [True believers who have a spiritual knowledge (*The gnostics*) are not only accompanied by angels, but they themselves become as angels.] This was also repeated by **Origen** and **St. John Chrysostom** in more details¹⁷⁵.
- **The Church of the firstborn**: The Jews had their spiritual firstborn, the tribe of Levi, whom God accepted on behalf of the holy community, instead of all the firstborn according to the flesh. Now they became the Church of the firstborn through their unity with the Son, the True Firstborn.
- **God the Judge of all**: Due to their literality the Jews thought that God is the Judge of the Jews only. But after they accepted faith in the Savior of the world, they realized that God is the Judge of all the human race.
- **To the spirits of just men made perfect**. They were justified through Christ and made perfect in the eyes of God.
- **Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant**: While the Old Testament men sought the Messiah and waited for Him, rather than the New Testament men have enjoyed Him, who granted them "*the new covenant*" and made them enter His heavenly kingdom.
- **To the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel**: Thus he concludes his talk about the blessings of the New Testament by comparing them with the Old Testament with the blood sprinkled in the heart which cries therein witnessing to the truth and sanctifying us... Time cannot choke it.

After comparing the two testaments, He tackled the practical aspect, which is our obligation to respond to what we have received not just to take pride in. "*See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised,*

saying, 'Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.' Now this, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire" [25-29].

The greater the gift is, the more is the responsibility. If those who neglected the Law, which made the earth shake, upon giving it (as fire, fog, darkness, and thundering happened), were not saved, how can we be saved if we neglect the Heavenly Divine Word, who said that He can shake the earth and heaven? In the Old Testament, the earth used to shake when the Law touched the body made of dust, however the New Testament touches the earth and the heaven, that is the body and the spirit. Therefore, the punishment for breaking the Law in the Old Testament mostly touched our earthly life, however those who despise the Law in the New Testament are punished here on earth and in the life to come. On the other hand, if we have received a kingdom that can not be shaken and which grants the body and soul eternity, let us thank God and serve Him with reverence, realizing that our God is a consuming fire, who can inflame the body and soul together with the fiery Spirit. Let us become inflamed true servants of God! **St. Athanasius** says: [God's servant should be alert and careful. Moreover, he should be inflamed with fire, so that he can overcome every sin with the inflamed Spirit, and can approach God who is a consuming fire as the saints call Him¹⁷⁶.]

¹⁷⁶ Pasch. Epis. 3:3.

Chapter 13

Concluding Commandments

St. Paul concluded his epistle by a practical speech like in all his other epistles. The speech corresponded to the spiritual thought which was declared throughout the whole epistle. In the previous chapter, he talked about our commitment to the living strife, to enjoy the intercession of the Lord Jesus and our unity with the Father in Him. In this chapter, he translates this strife to practical points like love, praise, obedience etc.

1. Brotherly love	1.
2. Love for strangers	2,3.
3. Marital love	4-6.
4. Love for the Pastors	7.
5. Fleeing from heresies	8-11.
6. Suffering with Christ	12-14.
7. Praise	15,16.
8. Submitting to those who rule over us	17-22.
9. Conclusion	23-25.

1. BROTHERLY LOVE

To enjoy the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus as the Heavenly High Priest and the propitiation for our sins, we have to declare our love to others. This is not a condition, but rather a unity between the divine love and the brotherly love. Truly, the more our heart is widened through His love and work in us, the more we love our brothers. The more we love our brothers, the more that God manifests His love in us.

St. Paul commands us by saying: "*Let brotherly love continue*" [1]. **St. John Chrysostom** says: [See how he commands to continue on what they were previously doing... For he does not say, "love the brothers," but rather, "Let brotherly love continue"¹⁷⁷]."

Thus through the wisdom of the Spirit, St. Paul encourages them to grow in love, not as a new commandment, but rather as a life that they have practiced. He repeated what he had said to the Thessalonians, "But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another" (1 Thess.4:9). St. Paul realized that the believers cannot be void of love, but they carry its seeds all the time, and they need to

¹⁷⁷ In Hebr. hom 33:1.

grow and be steadfast in it.

2. LOVE OF STRANGERS

St. Paul translates the brotherly love into practical aspects, starting with entertaining strangers. For the second time, he does not present the commandment as an order, but rather as a reminder to practice what they already do, and their fathers have formerly practiced it, and obtained a great reward. He said, "*Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels*" [2]. He reminded them of their father Abraham when he entertained the three angels at his tent door at Mamre, then he discovered that they were the Lord Himself and two angels. He also reminded them of Lot who entertained two angels.

We, as strangers on this earth, have to take care of strangers; and as liable to fall into trouble to help those who are in trouble. He said, "*Remember the prisoners as if chained with them, and those who are mistreated, since you yourselves are in the body also*" [3]. We do not share just with mere sympathy, but practical love. We have true fellowship with each member and share his feelings. "If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it" (1 Cor. 12:26). "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15). God's children lived in this fellowship in the Old and New Testaments. When Jeremiah the prophet saw the people suffering because of the captivity, he said, "For the hurt of the daughter of my people I am hurt. I am mourning; astonishment has taken hold of me" (Jer. 8:21). St. Paul says, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?" (2 Cor. 11:29) The fellowship of practical love was also apparent in what the loving Church Fathers have said. **St. John Chrysostom** says, [I love you more than anything else in the world, more even than light! I would like to offer my eyes many times, very happily to you, for your repentance! I love you, and you are everything to me, my father, my mother, my brothers and children¹⁷⁸.]

3. MARITAL LOVE

"*Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge*" [4]. Marriage is honorable in the eyes of man who cannot tolerate defilement. A true Christian lives in purity not under the slavery of carnal lusts. St. Paul emphasized, "*Marriage is honorable among all,*" that is, in the eyes of the married as well as the celibates. St. Paul was afraid lest the *Gnostic*

¹⁷⁸ In Acts, hom., 3.

philosophy, which antagonizes the body and defiles marriage, may sneak into the thoughts of Christian people. Even the Fathers of the wilderness have emphasized this to the monks and the nuns, that their choice of the life of virginity was nothing except a desire to devote all energies to worship God and serve Him, and not as hatred to marital life nor consider it impure.

St. Athanasius of Alexandria wrote to Father Amon saying: [There are two roads in life: one is chaste and normal, which is marriage, and the other is surpassing nature and angelic, which is virginity. When someone chooses the former way, that is marriage, he is not to be blamed, but he is not rewarded like the other, for he brings forth fruit, thirty times. However, when one chooses the latter road, the harder way, he is more wonderfully rewarded for this way of life brings forth more complete fruits, that is a hundred times¹⁷⁹.]

St. Jerome says: [Virginity, which is a product of marriage, is preferred over marriage. Is it considered an insult to the tree when its apples are preferable to its roots and leaves? Does it hurt the wheat when priority is given to its spike rather than the stem and the blade?! As the apples are from the tree, and the wheat seeds are from the spike, likewise virginity is from marriage. Crops may produce hundred times, sixty and thirty times from the same soil and from one plant, but the difference is in the quantity. Thirty times refer to marriage... Sixty times refer to widowhood where the widow is in distress... Hundred times refer to the crown of virginity¹⁸⁰.]

After talking about the holiness of marriage and fleeing from adultery, St. Paul moves on to talk about not loving money, and depending on God without fear and worry, for He cares for us. and supports us. "*Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said. 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'* So we may boldly say: *'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'*" [5,6] Adultery and love of money are related to one another, for both come out of an empty heart, and have no place in a heart satisfied with God's love. Such a person does not need a physical lust which gives a temporarily satisfaction, nor money on which he can rely! God's love satisfies a person so he may find rest, physically, spiritually, and psychologically, under all circumstances.

¹⁷⁹ Ep. 48.

¹⁸⁰ Ep. 98:2,3.

4. LOVE OF PASTORS

"Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct" [7]. Let us remember our spiritual fathers the shepherds who hide behind the Word of God and witness to it, not by their money, but by the Divine Word proclaimed in their ministry and behavior. **St. John Chrysostom** says: [What kind of remembrance is that? Let us follow what is good in them, for He said to follow their example and faith, for faith is declared in the pure life¹⁸¹.]

We have previously mentioned in the book "*Pastoral Love*," that believers should declare their love to the priests, because they have devoted all their lives to the Word of God. The priest by his turn, should not preach only by words but by his life and example which should be illuminated and witnessing to the truth.

5. FLEEING FROM HERESIES

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines..." [8,9] St. Paul, commanding them not to be carried about with various and strange doctrines, assured them that Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever. He is the living Son of God who is unchangeable. We accept Him as our Fathers have accepted Him yesterday, and we deliver the faith to the next generations without deviation. He is the heavenly High Priest who worked in our Fathers, and still works for our sake, and works forever till He brings the whole Church to His eternal glory.

When we abide in the Lord Christ, we reject all heresies. We do not ask for new teachings, for our Christ never gets old, but His blessings are new, every day in our lives.

Here, he mentions the heresies which appeared in his era, as the *Gnostic* philosophy that deprived people of certain food, not because of spiritual asceticism, but because it is evil, and they also consider marriage defilement. St. Paul says, "*For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them*" [9]. St. Paul wanted to remove that Gnostic approach from their thinking, and presented a holy look toward everything, even food.

6. SUFFERING WITH THE LORD CHRIST

St. Paul moves from the talk about fleeing from heresies to the

¹⁸¹ In *Hebr. Hom.*, 33:3.

necessity to contemplate on the sufferings of the Crucified Lord. And instead of occupying ourselves with temporary foods, we should lift our hearts to the Holy Heavenly Sacrifice!

Upon meditating on the cross, St. Paul wanted to accomplish two matters: to remove bitterness the Hebrews who believed in Christ felt, because they were deprived of the Jewish rites, and were expelled from the camp. The second matter is to accept suffering with the Crucified Christ joyfully. St. Paul says, "*We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp*" [10,11]. As if he says, since in the Jewish rite, the Jewish priests had no right to eat from the beasts whose blood was brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, and were burnt outside the camp, then, how much more, they can not enjoy the Sacrifice of the Lord Christ who was crucified outside the camp, and risen to heaven! They were deprived of what we enjoy, the Lord's Body and Blood shed for us; the mystery of the Eucharist for our sanctification! Here St. Paul assumes them, that it's not them who are deprived, but rather those who still follow the Jewish rites and are still remaining under the symbols and shadows. They are deprived of eating animal sacrifices that the high priest offers for sin, also the True Sacrifice which the Lord has granted to His believers.

This rite symbolizes that the Lord Christ is cast outside the camp and is crucified outside the gates of Jerusalem. Therefore, we have to go out and carry the reproach of His cross, and share in His sufferings while we are expelled outside Jerusalem. "*Therefore, Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore, let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach*" [12,13]. He is telling the Hebrews not to be ashamed of being expelled from the Sanhedrin, because their Christ was expelled earlier. It is a great honor for us to be expelled with Him and remain outside the camp, as a deposit for our going out of this world and enjoying the city to come. "*For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come*" [14]. Our expulsion from the earthly Jerusalem is a deposit for our entry into our Heavenly Jerusalem. **St. John Chrysostom** says: [He was crucified outside as a criminal; therefore, we should not be ashamed of our expulsion¹⁸².] By the Lord's expulsion as a criminal, we became honored to be expelled. Even if people do not expel us by troubling us, we should not love

¹⁸² In *Hebr. Hom.*, 33:4.

worldly things, but carry our cross inside us, and desire the heavenly glory.

7. PRAISE

"Therefore, by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name" [15]. Going outside the camp does not cause grumbling nor murmuring, but transfers the person to a divine harp which utters praise and arouses joy. As long as one is not expelled alone, but with the Lord Jesus, and in Him, then suffering and expulsion become a source of inner joy, which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who gives joy to the believer by offering himself a sacrifice of love to God through His Son. This joy is declared through praises, through the fruit of our lips that witness to Him, and through the inner heart, as well as through action by fulfilling the commandment. St. Paul continues, *"But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased"* [16]. Praising is not just mere words to be uttered by the lips, but rather it is a nature of life which the believer lives. He declares it in his heart through feelings full of love to God, through words of praises by his lips, and through good deeds. **St. Jerome** comments on what the Psalmist says, "Let the rivers clap their hands" by saying that believers, who became like rivers, on which the waters of the true River flows, clap not only by hands but by continuous spiritual deeds, and praise the Holy Trinity by the living behavior.

8. SUBMITTING TO THOSE WHO RULE OVER US

"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you" [17].

St. John Chrysostom talks about the importance of submitting to spiritual guidance by saying: [Lack of administration causes many problems and creates chaos and no organization! A band with no conductor has no harmony in the music. When the officer is away from his army, he cannot discipline his troop. If the ship has no leader, it will sink. Likewise, when the flock is without a shepherd, it will be scattered.. Hence, Lack of administration causes chaos. Moreover, not obeying the rulers is worst. Those who have no rulers are excused if they are not disciplined. But those who have rulers, and they do not obey them, have no excuse, but they have to be punished¹⁸³.]

Obeying the rulers does not mean aristocracy of the pastors or

their superiority over the people. for St. Paul himself feels that he needs the prayers of his people. He says, "*Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably. But I especially urge you to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner*" [18,19]. St. Paul declares the relationship of love between the pastor and his flock. The pastor prays for them, and they for him. He desires to meet them soon, thus he asks for their prayers to support him, and to fulfill his desire for them.

9. CONCLUSION OF THE EPISTLE

St. Paul concludes his epistle by his apostolic blessing. "*Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever, Amen*" [20,21].

The apostolic blessing is in harmony with the content of the epistle, for he asks the Father to grant them the perfect life in every good work to do His will, working in them through the heavenly High Priest, the great Shepherd of the sheep, the Lord Jesus Christ. Since the Lord Jesus has offered Himself the Perfect Sacrifice, submitting to the Father in complete obedience, therefore, St. Paul desires that we carry His traits in us.

Finally, St. Paul asks them to bear with the word of exhortation [22], as if the epistle here is directed to the whole congregation. As he says to them: "*Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints*" [24].