

2006 Autumn Young Adult Retreat



The Life and Teachings of
St. John Chrysostom

Preparing for the 1600th Anniversary of his repose

November 24-26, 2006

Cleveland, Ohio

“Glory to God for all things”

These final words of the earthly life of St. John Chrysostom are at the core of the Saint’s life and teachings. One of the greatest Saints and teachers of the Orthodox Faith, St. John lived in a time of rising secularism and declining Christianity. His writings, teachings, and Divine Liturgy have been the foundation of Orthodox Christianity for nearly 1600 years.

This Young Adult Retreat, organized with the Blessing of Metropolitan Laurus and Bishop Peter of Cleveland, aims to bring the teachings of St. John Chrysostom to the lives of young Orthodox Christians in these modern times.

God willing, this Retreat will be followed by more events for Young Orthodox Christians, bringing together like minded youth and providing spiritual edification and an opportunity to share their experiences.

O Holy Hierarch John, pray to God for us!

"In the matter of piety, poverty serves us better than wealth, and work better than idleness, especially since wealth becomes an obstacle even for those who do not devote themselves to it. Yet, when we must put aside our wrath, quench our envy, soften our anger, offer our prayers, and show a disposition which is reasonable, mild, kindly, and loving, how could poverty stand in our way? For we accomplish these things not by spending money but by making the correct choice. Almsgiving above all else requires money, but even this shines with a brighter luster when the alms are given from our poverty. The widow who paid in the two mites was poorer than any human, but she outdid them all."

"For Christians above all men are forbidden to correct the stumblings of sinners by force...it is necessary to make a man better not by force but by persuasion. We neither have authority granted us by law to restrain sinners, nor, if it were, should we know how to use it, since God gives the crown to those who are kept from evil, not by force, but by choice."

"When an archer desires to shoot his arrows successfully, he first takes great pains over his posture and aligns himself accurately with his mark. It should be the same for you who are about to shoot the head of the wicked devil. Let us be concerned first for the good order of sensations and then for the good posture of inner thoughts."

"Even if we have thousands of acts of great virtue to our credit, our confidence in being heard must be based on God's mercy and His love for men. Even if we stand at the very summit of virtue, it is by mercy that we shall be saved."

"Why do you beat the air and run in vain? Every occupation has a purpose, obviously. Tell me then, what is the purpose of all the activity of the world? Answer, I challenge you! It is vanity of vanity: all is vanity."

- St. John Chrysostom

The Life of St. John Chrysostom

The legion of saints of the Church is comprised of men of extraordinary ability whose talents may have been dissimilar but many of whom seem to have shared a common genius for oratory. Yet out of this vast assembly of eloquent speakers, whose reputation might have rested on their gift of expression alone, the one for whom the title "Chrysostom" (in Russian, "Zlatoust"), or "golden-mouthed" was reserved, was John of Antioch, known as St. John Chrysostom, a great distinction in view of the qualifications of so many others.

Endeared as one of the four great doctors of the Church, St. John Chrysostom was born in 347 in Antioch, Syria and was prepared for a career in law under the renowned Libanius, who marveled at his pupil's eloquence and foresaw a brilliant career for his pupil as statesman and lawgiver. But John decided, after he had been baptized at the age of 23, to abandon the law in favor of service to the Savior. He entered a monastery which served to educate him in preparation for his ordination as a priest in 386 AD. From the pulpit there emerged John, a preacher whose oratorical excellence gained him a reputation throughout the Christian world, a recognition which spurred him to even greater expression that found favor with everyone but the Empress Eudoxia, whom he saw fit to examine in some of his sermons.

When St. John was forty-nine years old, his immense popularity earned him election to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, a prestigious post from which he launched a crusade against excessiveness and extreme wealth which the Empress construed as a personal affront to her and her royal court. This also gave rise to sinister forces that envied his tremendous influence. His enemies found an instrument for his indictment when they discovered that he had harbored some pious monks who had been excommunicated by his archrival Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria, who falsely accused John of treason and surreptitiously plotted his exile.

When it was discovered that the great St. John had been exiled by the puppets of the state, there arose such a clamor of protest, promising a real threat of civil disobedience, that not even the royal court dared to confront the angry multitudes and St John was restored to his post. At about this time he put a stop to a practice which was offensive to him, although none of his predecessors outwardly considered it disrespectful; this practice was applauding in church, which would be considered extremely vulgar today, and the absence of which has added to the solemnity of Church services.

St. John delivered a sermon in which he deplored the adulation of a frenzied crowd at the unveiling of a public statue of the Empress Eudoxia. His sermon was grossly exaggerated by his enemies, and by the time it reached the ears of the Empress it resulted in his permanent exile from his beloved city of Constantinople. The humiliation of banishment did not deter the gallant, golden-mouthed St. John, who continued to communicate with the Church and wrote his precious prose until he died in the lonely reaches of Pontus in 407.

The treasure of treatises and letters which St. John left behind, included the moving sermon that is heard at Easter Sunday services. The loss of his sermons which were not set down on paper is incalculable. Nevertheless, the immense store of his excellent literature reveals his insight, straightforwardness, and rhetorical splendor, and commands a position of the greatest respect and influence in Christian thought, rivaling that of other Fathers of the Church. His liturgy, which we respectfully chant on Sundays, is a living testimony of his greatness.

The slight, five-foot St. John stood tall in his defiance of state authority, bowing only to God and never yielding the high principles of Christianity to expediency or personal welfare. In the words of his pupil, Cassia of Marseilles, "It would be a great thing to attain his stature, but it would be difficult. Nevertheless, a following of him is lovely and magnificent."

It is impossible to cover the entire life of St John Chrysostom in a few pages. However apart from providing a very brief outline of his life, we have included a little more information about his life as a monk and as Patriarch of Constantinople.

Chrysostom as a Monk (AD 374-381)

After the death of his mother, Chrysostom fled from the seductions and tumults of city life to the monastic solitude of the mountains south of Antioch, and there spent six happy years in theological study and sacred meditation and prayer. Monasticism was to him (as to many other great teachers of the Church) a profitable school of spiritual experience and self-government. He embraced this mode of life as "the true philosophy" from the purest motives, and brought into it intellect and cultivation enough to make the seclusion available for moral and spiritual growth.

He gives us a lively description of the bright side of this monastic life. The monks lived in separate cells or huts, but according to a common rule and under the authority of an abbot. They wore coarse garments of camel's hair or goat's hair over their linen tunics. They rose before sunrise, and began the day by singing a hymn of praise and

common prayer under the leadership of the abbot. Then they went to their allotted task, some to read, others to write, others to manual labor for the support of the poor. Four hours in each day were devoted to prayer and singing. Their only food was bread and water, except in case of sickness. They slept on straw couches, free from care and anxiety. There was no need of bolts and bars. They held all things in common, and the words of "mine and Thine," which cause innumerable strife in the world, were unknown among the brethren. If one died, he caused no lamentation, but thanksgiving, and was carried to the grave amidst hymns of praise; for he was not dead, but "perfected," and permitted to behold the face of Christ. For them to live was Christ, and to die was gain.

Chrysostom was an admirer of active and useful monasticism, and warns against the dangers of idle contemplation. He shows that the words of our Lord, "One thing is needful"; "Take no anxious thought for the morrow"; "Labor not for the meat that perisheth," do not inculcate total abstinence from work, but only undue anxiety about worldly things, and must be harmonized with the apostolic exhortation to labor and to do good. He defends monastic seclusion on account of the prevailing immorality in the cities, which made it almost impossible to cultivate there a higher Christian life.

Chrysostom as Patriarch of Constantinople (AD 398-404)

After the death of Nectarius towards the end of the year 397, Chrysostom was chosen, entirely without his own agency and even against his remonstrance, archbishop of Constantinople. He was hurried away from Antioch by a military escort, to avoid a commotion in the congregation and to make resistance useless. He was consecrated Feb. 26, 398, by his Theophilus, patriarch of Alexandria, who reluctantly yielded to the command of the Emperor Arcadius.

Constantinople, built by Constantine the Great in 330, on the site of Byzantium, assumed as the Eastern capital of the Roman empire the first position among the Episcopal sees of the East, and became the centre of court theology, court intrigues, and theological controversies.

Chrysostom soon gained by his eloquent sermons the admiration of the people, of the weak Emperor Arcadius, and, at first, even of his wife Eudoxia, with whom he afterwards waged a deadly war. He extended his pastoral care to the Goths who were becoming numerous in Constantinople, had a part of the Bible translated for them, often preached to them himself through an interpreter, and sent missionaries to the Gothic and Scythian tribes on the Danube. He continued to direct by correspondence those missionary operations even during his exile. For a short time he enjoyed the height of power and popularity.

But he also made enemies by his denunciations of the vices and follies of the clergy and aristocracy. He emptied the Episcopal palace of its costly plate and furniture and sold it for the benefit of the poor and the hospitals. He introduced his strict ascetic habits and reduced the luxurious household of his predecessors to the strictest simplicity. He devoted his large income to benevolence. He refused invitations to banquets, gave no dinner parties, and ate the simplest fare in his solitary chamber. He denounced unsparingly luxurious habits in eating and dressing, and enjoined upon the rich the duty of almsgiving to an extent that tended to increase rather than diminish the number of beggars who swarmed in the streets and around the churches and public baths. He disciplined the vicious clergy and opposed the perilous and immoral habit of unmarried priests of living under the same roof with "spiritual sisters." This habit dated from an earlier age, and was a reaction against celibacy. Cyprian had raised his protest against it, and the Council of Nicea forbade unmarried priests to live with any females except close relations.

Chrysostom's unpopularity was increased by his irritability and obstinacy. The Empress Eudoxia was jealous of his influence over Arcadius and angry at his uncompromising severity against sin and vice. She became the chief instrument of his downfall.

The occasion was furnished by an unauthorized use of his Episcopal power beyond the lines of his diocese, which was confined to the city. At the request of the clergy of Ephesus and the neighboring bishops, he visited that city in January, 401, held a synod and deposed six bishops convicted of shameful simony. During his absence of several months he left the Episcopate of Constantinople in the hands of Severian, bishop of Gabala, an unworthy and adroit flatterer, who basely betrayed his trust and formed a cabal headed by the empress and her licentious court ladies, for the ruin of Chrysostom.

On his return to Constantinople he used unguarded language in the pulpit, and spoke on Elijah's relation to Jezebel in such a manner that Eudoxia understood it as a personal insult. The clergy were anxious to get rid of a bishop who was too severe for their lax morals.

The Repose of Saint John and the Transfer of His Relics

The saint died in the city of Comene on September 14th in the year 407 on his way to a place of exile, having been condemned by the intrigues of the empress Eudoxia because of his daring denunciation of the vices

ruling over Constantinople. The last words on his lips were, "Glory be to God for all things!" The transfer of his venerable relics was made in the year 438: after 30 years following the death of the saint during the reign of Eudoxia's son emperor Theodosius II (408-450).

Saint John Chrysostom had the warm love and deep respect of the people, and grief over his untimely death lived on in the hearts of Christians. Saint John's student, Saint Proclus, Patriarch of Constantinople (434-447), making Divine-services in the Church of Saint Sophia, preached a sermon which in glorifying Saint John he said: "O John! Thy life was filled with difficulties, but thy death was glorious, thy grave is blessed and reward abundant through the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. O graced one, having conquered the bounds of time and place! Love hath conquered space, unforgetting memory hath annihilated the limits, and place doth not hinder the miracles of the saint." Those who were present in church, deeply touched by the words of Saint Proclus, did not allow him even to finish his sermon. With one accord they began to entreat the Patriarch to intercede with the emperor, so that the relics of Saint John might be transferred to Constantinople. The emperor, overwhelmed by Saint Proclus, gave his consent and made the order to transfer the relics of Saint John. But the people dispatched by him were by no means able to life up the holy relics -- not until that moment when the emperor realising his oversight that he had not sent the message to Saint John, humbly beseeching of him forgiveness for himself and for his mother Eudoxia. The message was read at the grave of Saint John and after this they easily lifted up the relics, carried them onto a ship and arrived at Constantinople. The reliquary coffin with the relics was placed in the Church of the holy Martyr Irene. The Patriarch opened the coffin: the body of Saint John had remained without decay. The emperor, having approached the coffin with tears, asked forgiveness. All day and night people did not leave the coffin. In the morning the reliquary coffin with its relics was brought to the Church of the Holy Apostles. The people cried out: "Receive back thy throne, father!" Then Patriarch Proclus and the clergy standing at the relics saw Saint John open his mouth and pronounce: "Peace be to all."

St. John Chrysostom: The Prophet of Charity *Archpriest Georges Florovsky*

CHRYSOSTOM was a powerful preacher. He was fond of preaching, and regarded preaching as the duty of a Christian minister. Priesthood is authority, but it is authority of word and conviction. This is the distinctive mark of Christian power. Kings compel, and pastors convince. The former act by orders, the latter by exhortations. Pastors appeal to human freedom, to human will and call for decisions. As Chrysostom used to say himself, "We have to accomplish the salvation of men by word, meekness, and exhortation." The whole meaning of human life for Chrysostom was in that it was, and had to be, a life in freedom, and therefore a life of service. In his preaching he spoke persistently about freedom and decision. Freedom was for him an image of God in man. Christ came, as Chrysostom used to remind, precisely to heal the will of man. God always acts in such a way as not to destroy our own freedom. God Himself acts by calls and exhortations, not by compulsion. He shows the right way, calls and invites, and warns against the dangers of wickedness, but does not constrain. Christian pastors must act accordingly. By temperament, Chrysostom was rather a maximalist, sharp and rigoristic, but he was always against compulsion, even in the struggle with heretics. Christians are forbidden, he used to insist, to apply violence even for good aims: "Our warfare does not make the living dead, but rather makes the dead to live, because it is conducted in the spirit of meekness and humility. I persecute by word, not by acts. I persecute heresy, not heretics. It is mine more to be persecuted, than to persecute. So Christ was victorious as a Crucified, and not as a crucifier." The strength of Christianity was for him in humility and toleration, not in power. One had to be strict about oneself, and meek to the others.

Yet, Chrysostom was in no sense a sentimental optimist. His diagnosis of the human situation was stern and grim. He lived in a time when the Church was suddenly invaded by crowds of nominal converts. He had an impression that he was preaching to the dead. He watched the lack of charity, and the complacent injustice and saw them almost in an apocalyptic perspective: "We have quenched the zeal, and the body of Christ is dead." He had an impression that he was speaking to people for whom Christianity was just a conventional fashion, an empty form, a manner and little more: "Among the thousands one can hardly find more than a hundred of them who are being saved, and even about that I am doubtful." He was rather embarrassed by the great number of alleged Christians: "an extra food for fire."

Prosperity was for him a danger, the worst kind of persecution, worse than an open persecution. Nobody sees dangers. Prosperity breeds carelessness. Men fall asleep, and the devil kills the sleepy. Chrysostom was disturbed especially by an open and deliberate lowering of standards and requirements, even among the clergy. Salt was losing its savour. He reacted to this not only by a word of rebuke and reprimand, but by deeds of charity and love. He was desperately concerned with the renewal of society, with the healing of social ills. He was preaching and practising charity, founding hospitals and orphanages, helping the poor and destitute. He wanted to recover the spirit of practising love. He wanted more activity and commitment among Christians. Christianity for him was precisely "the Way," as it had been sometimes described in Apostolic times, and Christ Himself was "the Way." Chrysostom was always against all compromises, against the policy of appeasement and adjustment. He was a prophet of an integral Christianity.

Chrysostom was mainly a preacher of morality, but his ethics was deeply rooted in the faith. He used to interpret Scripture to his flocks, and his favorite writer was St. Paul. It was in his epistles that one could see this organic connection between faith and life. Chrysostom had his favorite dogmatic theme, to which he would constantly return first of all, the theme of the Church, closely linked to the doctrine of Redemption, being the sacrifice of the High Priest Christ; the Church is the new being, the life in Christ, and the life of Christ in men. Secondly, the theme of Eucharist, a sacrament and a sacrifice. It is but fair to call Chrysostom, as he was actually called, "the teacher of Eucharist," doctor eucharisticus. Both themes were linked together. It was in the Eucharist, and through it, that the Church could be alive.

Chrysostom was a witness of the living faith, and for that reason his voice was so eagerly listened to, both in the East and in the West; but for him, the faith was a norm of life, and not just a theory. Dogmas must be practised. Chrysostom was preaching the Gospel of Salvation, the good tidings of the new life. He was not a preacher of independent ethics. He preached Christ, and Him crucified and risen, the Lamb and the High Priest. Right life was for him the only efficient test of right beliefs. Faith is accomplished in the deeds, the deeds of charity and love. Without love faith, contemplation, and the vision of the mysteries of God are impossible. Chrysostom was watching the desperate struggle for truth in the society of his own days. He was always concerned with living souls; he was speaking to men, to living persons. He was always addressing a flock, for which he felt responsibility. He was always discussing concrete cases and situations.

One of his constant and favorite subjects was that of wealth and misery. The theme was imposed or dictated by the setting in which Chrysostom had to work. He had to face the life in great and overcrowded cities, with all the tensions between the rich and the poor. He simply could not evade social problems without detaching Christianity from life, but social problems were for him emphatically religious and ethical problems. He was not primarily a social reformer, even if he had his own plans for Christian society. He was concerned with the ways of Christians in the world, with their duties, with their vocation.

In his sermons we find, first of all, a penetrating analysis of the social situation. He finds too much injustice, coldness, indifference, and suffering and sorrow in the society of his days. And he sees well to what extent it is connected with the acquisitive character of the contemporary society, with the acquisitive spirit of life. This acquisitive spirit breeds inequality, and therefore injustice. He is not only upset by fruitless luxury of life; he is apprehensive of wealth as a standing temptation. Wealth seduces the rich. Wealth itself has no value. It is a guise, under which the real face of man is concealed, but those who hold possessions come to cherish them, and are deceived; they come to value them and rely on them. All possessions, not only the large ones, are dangerous, in so far as man learns to rely upon what is, by its very nature, something passing and unreal.

Chrysostom is very evangelical at this point. Treasures must be gathered in heaven, and not on earth, and all earthly treasures are unreal and doomed to corruption. "A love for wealth is abnormal," says Chrysostom. It is just a burden for the soul, and a dangerous burden. It enslaves the soul; it distracts it from the service to God. The Christian spirit is a spirit of renunciation, and wealth ties man to inanimate things. The acquisitive spirit distorts the vision, perverts the perspective. Chrysostom is closely following the injunctions of the Sermon on the Mount. "Do not be anxious for your life, what you shall eat, nor for your body, what you shall put on. . ." Life is greater than clothing or food, but it is anxiety which is the prevailing temper of the acquisitive society.

Christians are called to renounce all possessions and to follow Christ in full confidence and trust. Possessions can be justified only by their use: feed the hungry, help the poor, and give everything to the needy. Here is the main tension, and the main conflict, between the spirit of the Church and the mood of the worldly society. The cruel injustice of actual life is the bleeding wound of this society. In a world of sorrow and need, all possessions are wrong--they are just proofs of coldness, and symptoms of little faith. Chrysostom goes so far as to denounce even the splendor of the temples. "The Church," he says, "is a triumphant company of angels, and not a shop of a silversmith. The Church claims human souls, and only for the sake of the souls does God accept any other gifts. The cup which

Christ offered to the disciples at the Last Supper was not made of gold. Yet it was precious above all measure. If you want to honor Christ, do it when you see Him naked, in the person of the poor. No use, if you bring silk and precious metals to the temple, and leave Christ to suffer cold and nakedness in the outside. No use, if the temple is full of golden vessels, but Christ himself is starving. You make golden chalices, but fail to offer cups of cold water to the needy. Christ, as a homeless stranger, is wandering around and begging, and instead of receiving Him you make decorations."

Chrysostom was afraid that everything kept aside was in a sense stolen from the poor. One cannot be rich, except at the cost of keeping others poor. The root of wealth is always in sortie injustice. Yet, poverty was not for Chrysostom just a virtue by itself. Poverty meant for him first of all need and want, and suffering and pain. For this reason Christ can be found among the poor, and he comes to us in the guise of a beggar, and not in that of a rich man. Poverty is a blessing only when it is cheerfully accepted for Christ's sake. The poor have less anxiety than the rich and are more independent-or at least may be. Chrysostom was fully aware that poverty can be tempting too, not only as a burden, but as an incentive of envy or despair. For that very reason he wanted to fight poverty, in order not only to ease the suffering, but to remove temptations also.

Chrysostom was always concerned with ethical issues. He had his own vision of a just society, and the first prerequisite was, in his opinion, equality. It is the first claim of any genuine love. But Chrysostom would go much further. He felt that there was but one owner of all things in the world-God Himself, the Maker of all. Strictly speaking, no private property should exist at all. Everything belongs to God. Everything is loaned rather than given by God in trust to man, for God's purposes. Chrysostom would add: Everything is God's except the good deeds of man--it is the only thing that man can own. As everything belongs to God, our common Master, everything is given for common use. Is it not true even of worldly things? Cities, market-places, streets-are they not a common possession? God's economy is of the same kind. Water, air, sun and moon, and the rest of creation, are intended for common use. Quarrels begin usually when people attempt to appropriate things which, by their very nature, were not intended for the private possession of some, to the exclusion of others.

Chrysostom had serious doubts about private property. Does not strife begin when the cold distinction "mine" and "thine" is first introduced? Chrysostom was concerned not so much with the results, as with causes-with the orientation of the will. Where is man going to gather his treasures? Chrysostom was after justice in defense of human dignity. Was not every man created in God's image? Did God not wish salvation and conversion of every single man, regardless of his position in life, and even regardless of his behavior in the past? All are called to repentance, and all can repent. There was, however, no neglect of material things in his preaching. Material goods come also from God, and they are not bad in themselves. What is bad, is only the unjust use of goods, to the profit of some, while others are left starving. The answer is in love. Love is not selfish, "is not ambitious, is not self-seeking." Chrysostom was looking back to the primitive Church. "Observe the increase of piety. They cast away their riches, and rejoiced, and had great gladness, for greater were the riches they received without labor. None reproached, none envied, none grudged; no pride, no contempt. No talk of 'mine' and 'thine.' Hence gladness waited at their table; no one seemed to eat of his own, or another's. Neither did they consider their brethren's property foreign to themselves; it was a property of the Master; nor again deemed they ought their own, all was the brethren's." How was this possible, Chrysostom asks: By the inspiration of love, in recognition of the unfathomable love of God.

In no sense was Chrysostom preaching "communism." The pattern itself may be deceitful and misleading as any other. The real thing is the spirit. What Chrysostom was preaching in the cities, monks were fervently practising in their communities, professing by deeds that God was the only Master and owner of everything. Chrysostom did not regard monastic life just as an advanced course for the select, but rather as a normal evangelical pattern intended for all Christian. At this point he was in full agreement with the main tradition of the early Church, from St. Basil and St. Augustine up to St. Theodore of Studium in the later times. But the strength of monasticism is not in the pattern itself, but in the spirit of dedication, in the choice of a "higher calling." Was this calling only for the few? Chrysostom was always suspicious of inequality. Was it not dangerous to discriminate between the "strong" and the "weak"? Who could judge and decide in advance? Chrysostom was always thinking about real men. There was some kind of individualism inherent in his approach to people, but he valued unanimity most highly--the spirit of solidarity, of common care and responsibility, the spirit of service. No person can grow in virtue, unless he serves his brethren. For that reason he always emphasized charity. Those who fail to do charity will be left outside the bridal chamber of Christ. It is not enough, he says, to lift our hands to heaven-stretch them to the needy, and then you will be heard by the Father. He points out that, according to the Parable of the Last Judgment, the only question which will be asked then, is that about charity. But again it was not just a moralism with him. His ethics had an obvious mystical depth. The true altar is the body of men itself. It is not enough to worship at the altars. There is another altar made of living souls, and this altar is Christ Himself, His Body. The sacrifice of righteousness and mercy should be

offered on this altar too, if our offerings are to be acceptable in God's sight. The deeds of charity had to be inspired by the ultimate dedication and devotion to Christ, who came into the world to relieve all want, and sorrow, and pain.

Chrysostom did not believe in abstract schemes; he had a fiery faith in the creative power of Christian love. It was for that reason that he became the teacher and prophet for all ages in the Church. In his youth he spent some few years in the desert, but would not stay there. For him monastic solitude was just a training period. He returned to the world to proclaim the power of the Gospel. He was a missionary by vocation; he had an apostolic and evangelistic zeal. He wanted to share his inspiration with his brethren. He wanted to work for the establishment of God's Kingdom. He prayed for such things in common life so that nobody would need to retire to the wilderness in search for perfection, because there would be the same opportunity in the cities. He wanted to reform the city itself, and for that purpose he chose for himself the way of priesthood and apostolate.

Was this a utopian dream? Was it possible to reshape the world, and to overrule the wordliness of the world? Was Chrysostom successful in his mission? His life was stormy and hard, it was a life of endurance and martyrdom. He was persecuted and rejected not by the heathen, but by false brethren, and died homeless as a prisoner in exile. All he was given to endure he accepted in the spirit of joy, as from the hand of Christ, Who was Himself rejected and executed. The Church gratefully recognized that witness and solemnly acclaimed Chrysostom as one of the "ecumenical teachers" for all ages to come.

There is some unusual flavor of modernity in the writings of Chrysostom. His world was like ours, a world of tensions, a world of unresolved problems in all walks of life. His advice may appeal to our age no less than it did to his own. But his main advice is a call to integral Christianity, in which faith and charity, belief and practice, are organically linked in an unconditional surrender of man to God's overwhelming love, in an unconditional trust in His mercy, in an unconditional commitment to His service, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

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“He was a True Pastor”
From the sermons in Elokhovo Epiphany Cathedral in Moscow
Archpriest Vitali Borovoi
The word at the all-night vigil to St. John Chrysostom (9-Feb-77).

Dear brothers and sisters!

Tomorrow we will be brightly celebrating the memory of St. John Chrysostom, or rather the memory of carrying over his relics in 438 AD from the town of Komana, his burial place, to Constantinople, where he used to serve at the cathedra.

Every one of us can constantly hear the name of John Chrysostom during the church worship, every one of us knows that this is a renowned prelate, a great preacher, a prayer for all the offended. Every one knows that we now serve the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. But along with that how surprisingly little do we know about his real life, not the life described in the pious lives of the saints, but the one that was in history, and such as it was.

Saint John Chrysostom was born in Antioch, which is in the contemporary Syria. Antioch does not exist today, only ruins remain where in that time flourished a richer cultural city, one of the centres of then Greco-Roman world. He was born in a very rich, cultural, and prosperous, yet Christian family and already from his early days had been brought up by his pious mother Anphusa. Early he lost his father. He received an excellent education for that time: he was taught by Libanius - the most renowned philosopher of that time, who, however, was no Christian, but a conscious pagan, a pertinacious pagan. But it was one of the greatest philosophers of that time. And Christians, such as Basil the Great and John Chrysostom did not hesitate at all to be students of that pagan because from him they took his knowledge, his wisdom, not sharing though his convictions. John Chrysostom was one of the Libanius's favourite students. Libanius even wished him to be his successor at the cathedra, but John preferred to become a lawyer after the completion of the school. He was a young, talented, bright lawyer. A lawyer who, speaking in the modern language, could have made a wonderful career. But John with all his heart desired to serve the Church. It was the time when many intelligent and cultural people devoted themselves to the Church's service. And John Chrysostom began his serving in the order of a reader. In 370 AD he was ordained by St. Meletios of Antioch to be a

reader. Definitely, the then reader was not quite the same as he is today. Our today's readers only read in the church, and at that time they not only read in the church the Holy Scriptures (yes, not only liturgical texts, but the Holy Scripture as well), but were obliged to interpret them to people and under the guidance of a bishop or a presbyter explain them the meaning of the Scriptures passage they had read. For ten years John Chrysostom had been a reader. But his soul strove for the exploits of monasticism. For six years, being already a reader, John Chrysostom was in a communal monastery i.e. a monastery living in accordance with the rule of communal life where everything belonged to all, where brothers lived as one man, in obedience, fasting, prayer, and labour. Two years he spent in a wilderness in solitude. And for those two years through severe ascetic feats and hardships his health was terribly sapped that he suffered then all his life ever since.

He was called from that seclusion by St. Meletios in 380 AD, after his ten years long service as a reader, and ordained to be a deacon. The then deacons were also not the same as today. Today's deacons only participate in worship a special way: recite the ektenia and invite to prayer. But in that time deacons were also the closest helpers of bishops and presbyters in managing the community's affairs. Every parish was a community back then. And the community supported all the poor, sick, aged, orphans, people who could not earn their own bread and sustain themselves. And one of the deacon's responsibilities was to run all that: visit those in need, help them, organize hospitals, almshouses, orphanages, houses for the aged people, i.e. work at helping the needy. For six years did John Chrysostom serve the Church in the order of deacon, bringing help and comfort to all the poor. And after that in 386 AD St. Meletios ordained him to be a priest.

For ten years John Chrysostom had been a priest in Antioch and became famous as a preacher and great theologian, teacher, father, and patron of his people. In that time a great disturbance of the Antioch's dwellers had happened and the government called up the army to destroy the city. But John Chrysostom did not leave his flock. Not only in the church, but also in the streets, squares, and market places he walked, preaching, comforting, and instructing citizens, sharing the fate of his faithful. And in the end, through his influence and strength, he could manage to quiet the people and to avert that great trouble, that disaster. The glory of John Chrysostom (though he was not called Chrysostom in that time yet) spread out over the whole empire. And when in the capital, in Constantinople, bishop Nectarius had passed away, then in the emperor's palace the powerful ruler of that time Eutropius who headed the government of emperor Arcadius, had had an idea of calling to that cathedra John from Antioch. But everyone knew that John was very modest and would not wish to be a bishop in the capital as it was going against his character. Then there were sent soldiers who kidnapped and arrested him, and convoyed him down to the capital where he was made a bishop, or, as we would say today, a patriarch of Constantinople.

For six years John Chrysostom stayed the bishop in the capital. In the course of those six years simple people loved him with their very sincere, very hearty love. But during the same six years all the rich, all the powers that be, aristocrats, and all the clergy, I have to say it openly, began to hate him. For he unmasked their dissolute, licentious, splendourous, sinful life.

He was a brave unmasker. If, dear brothers and sisters, we read now some of John Chrysostom's sermons you would see how bravely he exposed the powers that be, the powers of the propertied, especially of the rich. He spoke right to their faces that anyone rich is a wolf, for the Lord created the earth and all its good for all nations, for every single man or woman. And he who for first time in history had taken a thing or fenced a plot of land and said: 'this is my thing, this is my land', he, according to John Chrysostom, was the most dreadful criminal

Also bishops and hierarchs from the same patriarchate of Constantinople and neighbouring: of Alexandria, Antioch, started hating him, for he did not give splendourous dinners, did not invite them for splendourous repasts where all the food though being lenten, nevertheless, was very rich, and where they had gotten used to eat and drink and keep pious discussions. He required from the clergy, i.e. from presbyters (priests), deacons, readers, and monks a true life, a true exploit, a true serving to the Church. He spent all money, all the church's possession not on nonsensical adornments, not on rich liturgical cloths, not on decorating churches with marble and gold, he spent them on building hospitals, refuges for the homeless, orphans, aged people, ill and weak, for the needy. And then, dear brothers and sisters, they rose against John Chrysostom, those two great powers of the then world and, properly saying, of today's world as well: the powers that be, the rich, noble, and the clergy, especially hierarchs.

You will not find it, of course, in John Chrysostom's biography. There it is said that the empress was against him. Yes, indeed empress Eudoxia was also against him, but it had not been her anger that played the key role, for John Chrysostom was exiled not after the civil authorities resolution, but according to the verdict of the church's court, i.e. his brothers - archbishops, priests, deacons. They assembled, they judged him, they ascribed him various iniquities that he never committed. They could not forgive him his holy life and the fact that he was a true hierarch, a true archbishop, a true pastor, and called them to be such. And then John Chrysostom, according to the resolution of the church's court, had been stripped of his order and cathedra, and the civil power, of course, sent him into exile.

But they did not succeed in it for the first time. For it happened that when John Chrysostom had been taken away to the shore opposite to Constantinople an earthquake occurred in the city. The people, seeing God's anger in it, arose and the authorities became scared, all bishops who judged him scattered, and John Chrysostom returned to his place with triumph. When people met him, he walked into the temple of the Holy Apostles, - the then major temple of Constantinople, - and said there his famous sermon that is preserved up until today, and it begins and ends with the words: "Glory to our God for all. For all that was good and for all that was bad, glory to our God!"

But not long was John Chrysostom a bishop again, only for six months. His enemies: the bishop of Alexandria (in today's words - the patriarch), Theophil; other metropolitans - Sevirian of Gavala, Antioch of Ptolemy, and his own metropolitans - Paul of Heraclia and others again had risen against him, again started accusing him and convicted him once more. And then civil authorities for the second time exiled John Chrysostom. And it happened that in exile, a very short exile because soon he died, the bishops of all the places he was sent to were so scared even to let him in that everyone of them tried John Chrysostom to be taken somewhere even further away. And so he was carried through whole Minor Asia, the contemporary Turkey, brought him to the final place of his exile called Kukuz that is in the today's Armenia. But they were scared of holding him even there because the people of Constantinople were very loyal to him and adored him, and loved him. Therefore he was taken further to the contemporary Georgia and having not reached the place ordered him for residence, in Komana, in the temple of St. Basilisk (near Poti, Pitsunda, Novy Aphon) in 407 AD he died.

Soon the glory of St. John Chrysostom spread all over the world. His enemies were ashamed and actually it happened that they justified him themselves. And then it was decided to carry his relics with solemnity over to Constantinople where a capital's bishop was supposed to be buried. And in 438, 30 years since his death, emperor Theodosius, the son of Eudoxia, who was baptised by John Chrysostom, whom John Chrysostom often held upon his laps, gave order to solemnly transport the relics of John Chrysostom. He was met already as far from Constantinople as in Khalkidon, - by the emperor, senate, government, and other authorities of that world...

So it always happens in life: one is being persecuted during one's lifetime, driven to death, and in posthumousness, - praised and glorified.

He was buried in the temple of the Saint Apostles with solemnity, at the great confluence of people. And the memory of that event we are celebrating this evening and tomorrow.

Dear brothers and sisters, here we all time speak about John Chrysostom. But we should not only speak about him; we should also try to imitate his life. First of all, our hierarchs, our clergy, - we, priests, deacons, monks, readers. Here is the example that John Chrysostom gave us: how to serve the Church not only during the worship, but how to serve the Church, serving the people of God, preaching the word at every opportunity. For John Chrysostom was not only a great theologian and a great preacher, but a great missionary as well. He was sending people, missionaries to preach the word of God in Arabia, in the far away Syria, in Asia, in Africa and he himself preached the word of God not only to his Constantinople flock. Near Constantinople there was a settlement of Germanic tribes, the Goths, who were Aryans, heretics. And for the sake of preaching to them John Chrysostom had learnt the Goths' language and came there, to those people, and served there, and preached in their language.

Dear brothers and sisters, the way to the revival of our church, the way to that our church again would have had influence among the people, again would enjoy the people's love, this way is shown to us by John Chrysostom. This is the way of prayer, the way of exploit, the way of theology, but along with that, this is the way of preaching the word of God, in time and in timelessness, at any occasion, at any opportunity, and the way of serving the people, serving one's neighbour that this serving would be the true serving God.

Let us, dear brothers and sisters, pray that through the prayers of St. John Chrysostom God gave us strengths to be His faithful witnesses, as such a faithful witness was Saint John Chrysostom himself!

Amen.

“Glory to God for all things”

The Life of St. Sergius of Radonezh

In the middle of the 14th century the famous Troitze-Sergievski monastery was established. Its founder, venerable father Sergius (Bartholomew in the world) was a son of Rostov boyars Cyril and Maria who moved closer to Moscow and settled in the village of Radonezh. At the age of seven Bartholomew was sent to school to learn reading and writing. All of his soul aspired for literacy, but he still had difficulty in learning. Grieving over it, he was praying to God day and night to enable him to open up the doors of book literacy. Once, while looking for horses that had gone astray in the fields, he came across an old monk whom he had never seen before. The monk was praying under an oak tree. The boy came up to him and told him about his woe. Having listened to the boy with sympathy the old man began praying for his enlightenment. Then having produced a small piece of communion bread and blessing the boy with it, he said, "Take it and eat it, this is given to you as a sign of God's grace and for understanding of the Scriptures."

And the boy was truly endowed with God's grace of memory and understanding, and he began to easily learn literacy.

After that miracle young Bartholomew's desire to serve only God became still stronger. He wanted to seclude himself like the ancient ascetics, but his love for his parents kept him in the family. Bartholomew was always modest, he was quiet and reticent; humble and kind with everybody, he never got irritable and obeyed his parents in everything. His usual food would consist of bread and water and he completely abstained from food on fasting days. After his parents died, Bartholomew gave up his inheritance to his younger brother Peter and together with his elder brother Stephan, settled to live in a wild forest near the Konchora river 10 miles away from Radonezh. The Brothers cut wood themselves and built a hut and a little church. The church was blessed in the name of the Holy Trinity by a priest sent by Metropolitan Pheognost. Thus a famous cloister of Saint Sergius was founded.

Soon Stephan left his brother to become Father Superior of Bogoyavlenski monastery in Moscow and a confessor of the great prince. But Bartholomew, who was baptized Sergius when taking the monastic vows, stayed in the forest alone for about two years. It is hard even to imagine how many temptations the young monk had to go through during that time. Whole packs of wolves would pass by his hut and bears would come too, but none would cause any harm to him. Once the holy anchorite gave some bread to a bear who came to his cell and from that time on the animal began to frequent Venerable Sergius, who shared his last piece of bread with him.

Despite all Saint Sergius's attempts not to attract attention to his life he became famous and other monks were coming to seek salvation under his guidance. They asked Sergius to be ordained their priest and Father Superior. Sergius did not agree for a long time, but then taking their insistence as a sign from above, he said, "I would much rather obey than command, but fearing God's judgment I give myself into the Lord's hands." It took place in the year of 1354, when Prelate Alexei became Metropolitan of Moscow.

The life and work of Venerable Sergius have a special place in the history of Russian monasticism, as it was his cloister that served as an example of secluded ascetic life out of town limits and organized as a community. Starting from scratch the monastery of the Holy Trinity was at first in great need of everything; chasubles were hand painted, sacred chalices were made of wood, they had to burn splinters instead of candles for light in church; but the devotees were zealous. Saint Sergius was a model of asceticism, deepest humbleness and staunch faith in God's help. He was a true leader in work and services and the monks followed his example.

Once the monastery was completely out of bread. Father Superior himself built an entrance-room in the cell of one of the monks in order to earn some loafs of bread. But at the times of sheer destitute, through the prayers of the monks, lavish support was unexpectedly granted to the cloister. In some years after the monastery was founded peasants started coming to settle nearby. As the monastery was situated not far from a big road to Moscow and further to the North, it started doing better and better. Following the example of the Kiev-Pechora monastery, it began giving alms generously, and provide shelter and support to sick and traveling people.

Saint Sergius became renown as far abroad as Constantinople, and Patriarch Philophius sent him his blessing and a written endorsement that decreed the new rules of community cloister life established by the founder of the Holy Trinity monastery. Metropolitan Alexei loved Venerable Sergius as a friend, he entrusted him important tasks like peacemaking between rancorous princes, and was planning to make him his successor. But Sergius declined this honorable offer.

One day Metropolitan Alexei decided to award Sergius with a gold cross for his work and devotion, but Sergius said, "Since my youth I have never decorating myself with gold, the more so in my old age I wish to remain poor," and he resolutely refused the award.

Great prince Dimitry Ivanovich, called Donskoi (of the Don river), who revered Venerable Sergius as his father, asked for his blessing to struggle against Mamai, a Tatar khan. "Go fearlessly, prince, and believe in God's

help," - said the Holy old man and delegated his two monks to accompany and help him. They were Peresvet and Oslabia, who died as heroes in the battle of the Kulikov field.

Even in his lifetime Venerable Sergius was working wonders and had the blessing of great revelations. One day he had a vision of Mother of God appearing to him majestically together with the Apostles Peter and John and promising to keep his monastery in her benefaction. Another time he saw wonderful light and a multitude of birds filling the air with beautiful singing, and he had a revelation that his monastery would host many monks. 30 years after his blessed repose, his imperishable relics were opened (September 25 1392).

The Troitze-Sergievski monastery gave rise to many new monasteries. It spread the network of cloisters covering the whole of the northern part of Russia and linking it to the clerical and administrative centre of the country - to Moscow. Before St. Sergius's repose the following monasteries had been built by him and with his assistance: Kirzhachski monastery (near the Kirzhack river in the Vladimir county), Golutvin monastery (in Kolomna), Simon monastery (in Moscow), Visotski monastery (near Serpukhov), Borisoglebski monastery (near Rostov), Dubenski monastery (in honor of the Kulikov battle), Pokrovski monastery (near Borovsk), Avraamiev monastery (near Chukhloma). After venerable Sergius entered into rest, his disciples founded some other monasteries, such as Savvin-Storozhevski monastery (near Zvenigorod), Zheleznoborski monastery (near Galich), Voskresenski (on the Obnora river in the north of the Jaroslav county), Pherapontov monastery, Kirillov-Belozerski and others. Saint Stephan, the elucidator of the Perm region, was one of saint Sergius's friends.

A Short History of St. Sergius Cathedral - Cleveland, OH

Looking at the beautiful building and rich frescos of the present church, one might be tempted to think that St. Sergius parish has always been rich in such blessings. But in fact, as is the case for so many of our Russian immigrant communities, our parish has humble origins and owes its present spiritual riches to God's mercy and to the self-sacrifice and steadfast faith of its parishioners, past and present.

St. Sergius parish dates back to July, 1950, when the Russian community in Cleveland received a blessing to hold services in a small converted garage near the waterfront. Our first pastor was Archimandrite Anthony (Medvedev), the late Archbishop of San Francisco and Western America. A full cycle of services was held on that site week in and week out until 1952, when the community moved into a new church building on Superior and East 67th Street. There our numbers grew; and in 1975, His Grace Alypy (Gamonovich), current Archbishop of Chicago and Detroit, was ordained vicar bishop of Cleveland.

In the 1970's, many of our parishioners began moving out of Cleveland proper and to suburbs like Parma and nearby Seven Hills. It was therefore decided in the late 1970's to move the parish yet again. A search for suitable property began, and the current location on Broadview Road in Parma was found in 1979. Construction of the current cathedral soon began, and the building was sufficiently completed by 1981 for regular services to begin. This cathedral, much like the first church, was built primarily by the parishioners.

Work on the interior continued for another 6 years before the cathedral was fully completed and ready to be consecrated. That event was greeted with great joy by the parishioners of St. Sergius and was widely reported in the media as a significant happening in the city. The blessing of the church took place on October 11, 1987, and was attended by Metropolitan Vitaly, three bishops, and numerous other clergy.

Frescos cover the entire interior of St. Sergius Cathedral and are among the building's most significant and beautiful architectural features. The frescos are the work of Archbishop Alypy, whose mastery of iconography is widely acknowledged by artistic and religious authorities. Icons of saints of the early Church line the ceiling of the nave, some of which are rarely encountered on church frescos. Another noteworthy feature includes the icon of All Saints of Russia which include the Royal and New Martyrs, glorified by the Russian Church Abroad in 1981. This fresco constitutes one of the few (and certainly earliest) instances where Tsar-Martyr Nicholas II and his family are depicted on frescos. Other frescos to note are the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior (north wall), the Nativity of Christ (south wall) and Final Judgement (west wall). In addition to these frescos, the north and south walls of the nave are adorned with icons of the Feasts of the Church and of saints to whom the Russian people are particularly devoted. These icons, which are hung at eye level so the faithful may venerate them, were written by Fr. Theodore Jurewicz, a former rector of the parish who now serves in the Old Believer parish in Erie, PA.

St. Sergius is today a thriving and active parish. The current Dean, Fr. Ilia Marzev, serves a community of approximately 150 families. Our church school is active, providing our younger parishioners instruction in theology, liturgics and the Russian language. We have an active sisterhood that supports a variety of charitable and community events. Our choir is under the direction of Reader Alexander Petrovsky.

We praise and thank God for granting us His great and tender mercies! Welcome to St. Sergius Cathedral!

Web links

Russian Orthodox Church Abroad

www.russianorthodoxchurch.ws

Diocese of Chicago and Detroit (ROCOR)

www.chicagodiocese.org

Saint Sergius Cathedral, Cleveland, OH

www.saintsergius.org

Saint Vladimir Church, Ann Arbor, MI

www.stvladimiraami.org

Saint Herman of Alaska Church, Lake Odessa, MI

www.stherman.net

Information and links to information about St. John Chrysostom

www.chrysostom.org

Notes