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One of Many Interpretations and Meditations of our Forefathers

Interpretation of The Gospel According to St. Luke

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The Church of St. George the Martyr

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The Gospel of St. Luke

St Luke the Herald of the Good News

Introduction

- † The word “Luke” is probably an abbreviation of the Latin word “Lucanus” or “Lucuis”, which means ‘the carrier of the light’ or ‘the enlightened’. Yet we have to differentiate between the evangelist St. Luke and, and Lucuis who was mentioned in Acts 31: 1, also Lucuis mentioned in Rom 6: 21.
- † He is the only one among the writers for the New Testament who was not a Jew, but a Gentile. He was probably from Antioch in Syria. He accepted the Christian faith unhesitatingly without becoming a Jew. The scribes explain the saying that St. Paul the apostle when mentioning him in the epistle to the Colossians (4: 14), he did not include St Luke among those who were circumcised (4: 10, 11) such as Aristarches and Mark, Barabas’ nephew, and Jesus called Justus.
- † Some think he is one of the seventy apostles, and also one of the two disciples to whom Jesus appeared after His resurrection on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24: 12), and that the apostle has not mentioned his name due to the spirit of humility. The majority, those of modern studies, think that he was not one of the apostles, but that he rather accepted the faith at the hands of St. Paul the apostle. They pointed primarily to the fact of the lack of historical evidence, and secondly because this idea seems to contradict the gospel introduction. For, the writer says about the matters concerning the Lord Jesus (Luke 1: 2). Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word”. It is as if the writer has not seen the Lord Jesus, but has rather recorded what he has been handed over through the copying of the records in great accuracy, and has confirmed it by those who have witnessed it themselves. Maybe it was for this reason that one of those who studied these comments on the gospel with the words ‘it is the outcome of the collective faith, based on the copying of, and not an individual work..’
- † St. Luke was a physician (Col 4: 14) and a painter. It is mentioned in the copying tradition that he has painted the icon of the Virgin St. Mary.
- † St. Luke was attached to St. Paul, the apostle for the Gentiles. In Acts of the Apostles, they set out together from Troas to Samothracia and the next day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi (Acts 16: 10-39, the second preaching trip). at another time, on the journey of St. Paul the apostle, the third one of the preaching, on the way back he was followed by the evangelist St. Luke from Philippi to Jerusalem (Acts 20: 5; 21: 18). Moreover, he escorted St. Paul in Rome, when imprisoned (Acts 28: 30). In his last moments, St. Luke was with St. Paul, for the latter says in his farewell epistle (2Tim 4: 11) “Only Luke is with me”.

- ✠ In this way they were both bonded together, the evangelist St. Luke recorded to us a great deal about God's preaching work through St. Paul the apostle in Acts of the Apostles. He was called by St. Paul the apostle (Col 4: 14) "Luke, the beloved physician", and in Philippians he called St. Luke, the one who worked with him.
- ✠ It is said he lived a virgin, and that he worked in Achacia in Greece. He was martyred at the age of eighty four, and that the emperor Constantinos II transferred his remains to Constantinople in the year 357 AD. In the year 1177 AD they were transferred to Padua in Italy.

The traveling attributions to St. Luke

1. the church record in the first centuries certified clearly that the writer is St. Luke the herald, the writer of the Book of Acts, and that he was the apostle's escort. It is also clear, from the writings of the forefathers Justin the martyr, Irianus, Oreganus, and Tertullian, that the same evidence exists.
2. In addition to these outer evidences, the book itself carries evidence that its writer is our teach St. Luke. Among these evidences is the fact that the book is addressed to Theophilus, the one and same person to whom Acts of the Apostles was addressed. Added to this, is the introduction in the Acts of the Apostles, which came to complete the conclusion of St. Luke's gospel, since the writer is the one and the same. The two books are similar in linguistics, style in writing and thoughts. Furthermore, the accurate expressions he used in describing the diseases the Lord Jesus cured, point to the fact that the writer was a physician. As a physician who held respect to the medical profession, he did not say what St. Mark the apostle mentioned about the woman who had the bleeding **infinitely** (Mark 5: 26) "And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse". He rather thought it **is** enough to say (Luke 8: 43) "And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any".

The Time for his writing

There is no sure tradition regarding the time of this writing or its site. St. Irianus thinks it was written before the martyrdom of St. Paul, whereas St. Jerome think it was write after the martyrdom of St. Paul the apostle, based on the historian Youssprios El Kaisarry's words. Since the gospel was written before the book of Acts, and the book of Acts was written before the martyrdom of St. Paul the apostle, and no mention was made of the event, therefore many of the students believe that it was written between the year 63 and 67 AD. It was probably written in Rome, though some others believe it was written in Achacia or in Alexandria.

Its Aim

Our teacher St. Matthew the herald, being Jew, he wrote to the Jews to declare Jesus is the Messiah the King . It was He whose coming long waited for by the fathers and the prophets, so they have a share in the eternal spiritual kingdom. St. Mark wrote to the Romans to declare Christ is the servant working not through the spirit of temporary authority, loftiness, and violence, but rather through the spirit of sacrifice. He would save by means of his deeds of love, and not by means of armies and temporary powers. As for our teacher St. Luke the herald, as a Gentile educated physician, he wished to serve those of the Hellenistic concepts, and thus he wrote to the Greeks about the Lord Jesus as being 'a friend to the entire humanity! He presented

His divine deeds for salvation to fulfill what the Greek philosophy and human wisdom were unable to fulfill. This is why this gospel is called 'the gospel of God's friendship' or 'the gospel of Jesus the Saviour!' it was furthermore called 'the universal gospel' since it represents an invitation to the entire humanity to accept the call of the heavenly friend, and react with His deed for salvation through love.

This aim we shall see most clearly in our discussion of the traits of this book.

St. Luke wrote this gospel to his dear friend Theophilus (Luke 1: 3). The title 'dear' is an honorable one. This is why the majority of people think he is of honorable peers, of an Antiochan origin, such as St. Luke the herald himself. He therefore wrote to him since he was a Gentile like himself. He is not alone to benefit of it, but as the scholar Oregandes says, for the triumphant ones of the Gentiles in general to benefit of it as well.

Some have thought that this Luke was a slave to his master the Gentile Theophilus, and since he, as a physician, cured him, he rewarded him by being released from bondage. Hence, the physician Luke sent him this gospel as a sign of his gratitude and appreciation. Others said the word 'Theophilus' which means 'God's lover', is only a covered name, for one of the dignitaries in Alexandria. But this was not revealed by the evangelist, so that he would not be subjected to hardships due to his Christianity. At any rate, this book is addressed to the Gentiles in general to be blessed with the heavenly Friend, as a savior other the soul.

Its trait

1. Because the evangelist presented to us, this Lord Jesus being 'the savior, the Friend to humanity', this is why he spoke so many times of 'the Son of Man', who came to us, embodying our humanity so as to grant us the partnership of his divine nature. If the Greek philosophy has offered mere concept, yet these cannot dwell in the heart and change its depths. But as for the Son of Man, He came as a friend to man, to be accepted inwardly, and by means of this unique friendship, he would be granted tremendous abilities working in his depths, and are reflected on his behavior.
By calling the Lord 'the Son of Man', this pulls down our feeling of estrangement to God, or His estrangement to us, for He has come down to us, to escort us on our way.
2. the most important quality of this gospel, may be that it presents 'the Savior, the Friend' to the entire humanity, for it is a gospel to the universe. It is a call to everyone, and not only to the Jews. This is why we notice the following:
 - a. Due to the fact that the Jews looked upon themselves a righteous people, and all the other nations as sinners, the evangelist declares the Lord Jesus as 'the Friend to sinners'. He was the only one to say the Son of Man has come (Luke 19: 10) "to seek and to save that which was lost". Moreover, he has presented to us a big number of the Lord's sayings and His parables, showing the friendship of the Lord Jesus, and His companion on sinners, such as the particular parable of long-suffering on the old barren fig-tree (Luke 13: 6-9). Also, the parable of the lost sheep and the missing coin, and the prodigal son (Luke 15). He moreover told us of the sinful woman (Luke 7: 36-50), and the repentance of Zacchaeus the tax-collector (Luke 19: 1-10), as well as the promise to the repentant thief on the cross (Luke 23: 40-43)...etc.
 - b. He quoted the expressions and events that open the doors of hope to the Gentiles, such as Isaiah the prophet who said "every being will see the Lord's salvation". Also Elijah the prophet's message to Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that

was a widow (Luke 4: 25), and (Luke 4: 27) “And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian”.

- c. He mentioned the dispatch of the seventy apostles. If the twelve disciples represent the call to the Jews (the twelve tribes), then the number 70 point to the fullness of the Gentiles.
 - d. In the genealogy of the Lord Jesus, he did not begin with Abraham, but rather with Adam, the father of all mankind (Luke 3: 28).
3. because it is the book of the divine friendship towards man, then this friendship is furthermore offered to the children and women as well. He sanctified childhood, and uplifted the position of woman, and her positive role. He also paid special concern to the poor, the needy, those exiled and in bondage.

From the aspect of children, he was the only one to mention the birth of John the Baptist and his childhood. Moreover, he was the only one to mention in detail the annunciation of the Virgin with the birth of the Baby Jesus, and the embryo’s joy in Elizabeth’s womb when the Saint Mary came in saluting Elizabeth. Also the circumcision of the Baby Jesus, as well as going into the temple with St. Mary on the fortieth day, and His going to the temple He was only twelve years of age...etc. all for these events were mentioned in details.

From the aspect of woman, some scholars noticed that St. Luke the evangelist, since he presented the catholic universal gospel, he has given special attention to woman more than the other evangelists. In the Hellenic world, it seemed that a woman’s status socially and according to the law, was **ahead** than that of the Jews at that time. This is why the evangelist wished to prove the gospel message was unrestricted by the Jewish tradition. The evangelist was the only one to mention the widow, Hennes, who worshiped in the temple (Luke 2: 36). He also recorded to us Martha’s service, and her sister Mary’s sitting at the savior’s feet listening to His words. The evangelist was concerned about the poor, the needy and those in exile. Therefore, the good news ever sent to a poor girl in Nazareth, and the angel even concerned with the simple **modest** shepherds. The Lord also spoke of the rich man and the poor and the sick. He also said the parable of the Good Samaritan, the parable of the tax-collector, the story of the prostitute in the house of Simon the Pharisee, the parable of the prodigal son, the story of Mary Magdalene, and the acceptance of the repented thief on the cross...etc.

One of the scholars says: “He showed concern about the minorities, and the forgotten, rejected people such as the Samaritans, the lepers, the tax-collectors, the soldiers, and the sinners in general who are in humiliation. He also mentioned the Gentile shepherds and the poor – all of whom find encouragement in this gospel”.

4. Some, such as Leon-Dufour, think that the expression ‘the social gospel’ could be said about the gospel of our teacher St. Luke the evangelist, in rather a restrictive sense. This is due to the fact that he has mentioned a great deal the obligation of giving to the poor (Luke 3: 10; 14: 12-14). He declared the penalty for those who do not share in supplying their needs (Luke 16: 25). He moreover pointed clearly not to inflict injustice or betrayal. It is difficult to speak of a gospel as a social one or a spiritual one, because the life of faith is a unified entity, an inseparable one. if the spiritual work is presented, then the social aspect is not to be disregarded. Also, the opposite case, if the social work is presented, it is of a spiritual actuality. What the evangelist has pointed out regarding the

concern about the poor, the needy, those suffering, those wronged – all of these are a normal outcome of our tasting the Lord Jesus' friendship to us. He is the Friend concerned about us all, particularly those in spiritual need, materialistic need, social or physiological need. It is appropriate for us, being His friends, to repay His love with our own, and to carry His qualities in us. For what he offers us, obliges us to offer in return, in some way or another to our brethren.

5. as a Friend of us, He does not only offer us the salvation on the cross, but He also through this love that enters our daily life, we see Him showing even our having supper in the house of Simon the Pharisee, accepting the banquet of Zacchaeus the tax-collector, and responding to the invitation of the Amos disciples and their welcome to Him. As a Friend, He does not ask for violence or for fanaticism. We therefore see him rebuking John for asking that fire descends to consume the Samaritan people (Luke 9: 54). He moreover rebuked the disciples saying: "he that is not against us is for us" (Luke 9: 50). It is the 'gospel of mercy' or 'the gospel of the great forgiveness'. As a Friend of ours, He is eager that we accept His friendship, and respond to His love. This is why he often urges us to accept his friendship by drawing comparisons such as:
 - a. Simon the Pharisee and the sinful woman: the former has offered his house and the banquet but not whole-heartily; whereas the woman, despite her ?? sins, yet by means of her love she knew how to be blessed with friendship and forgiveness.
 - b. The Pharisee and the tax-collector: the former went into the temple, having Mosaic deeds that he cherishes, yet in his pride he was unable to befriend the Lord; whereas the tax-collector was able to, though in the last row, to enter the heart of the greatest Friend by means of his modesty and humility.
 - c. The Good Samaritan, the Levite and the priest: the former was able to enter this friendship and react to it, by means of his open hearted love to mankind; whereas the server of religion lost this friendship through their unloving and tight hearts.
 - d. The prodigal son and the older one: the former obtained the blessing, and enjoyed the friendship by means of his repentance and his return; whereas the elder son lost his relation with the father due to his pride.
 - e. The repentant thief and the thief that perished: the former usurped the kingdom of heaven at the last moments.
 - f. The Beatitudes and the Woes.
 - g. Though the Greek thinking prevailed over the world at that time, yet it did not offer humanity truthful people of true joy. Men lived asking each day for a new philosophy or concept unheard of before. This is why the evangelist wrote this book to announce that Christ is the Friend to all mankind, and that it is He who grants the inward joy and peace. The book includes a big number of praising hymns the church cherishes and uses in her worship and liturgies, such as the angelic hymn of the birth (Luke 2: 14), as well as Zacharias' hymns of praise (Luke 1: 46-55), and the hymn of the elderly Simon (Luke 2: 29-32).

The coming of the Friend, the Savior, created an atmosphere of joy. The book opens with the angels' words to Zacharias about the forerunner to this Savior Friend, saying (Luke 1: 14): "And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth". He also narrates how His birth has overjoyed so many (Luke 1: 58). But as for the Lord's Birth, this was accomplished by the opening of the heaven on earth, for it to be proclaimed (Luke 2: 10): "for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all

people”. When the seventy apostles returned after their preaching (Luke 10: 17): “And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name”, it was then said (Luke 10: 21): “In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight”. It was as if the preaching of the this unequalled Friend has brought joy to the Savior’s heart Himself for the sake of the meek, which is of pleasure to the Father. He even declared there would be even in heavens at the repentance of one sinner (Luke 15: 7, 10, 32).

It is an inward joy that fills the heart of the repentant sinner when he find every satisfaction in his friend, for it was said of Zacchaeus (Luke 19: 6) “And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully”. He was also joyful for the whole people, for it was said (Luke 13: 7): “and all the people rejoiced for all the great works He did”. It was also said of His entering into Jerusalem (Luke 19: 37): “the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen”.

The book concludes the ending with the joy of the Friend risen from the dead, and ascending to the heavens. It is said of the disciples when their amazing Friend appeared to them (Luke 24: 41): “And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered...”. Also, after His ascension straightaway (Luke 24: 57): “...and they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy”.

In this way, the Lord Jesus came to fulfill the Father’s pleasure and that he rejoices in the humanity saved by His blood, and the heavens rejoice with Him. This is just like His filling His apostles and His disciples with joy, and His pouring on the Church with His gladness, as well on the repentant sinners.

To differentiate between this joy and the temporary joy of the world, He gives us the parable of the foolish rich man who said to himself (Luke 12: 19): “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry”. But he could not rejoice, for he heard the godly voice saying (Luke 12: 20): “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee”.

All of this, made some call it ‘the gospel of the Mosaic joy’.

6. Because the Lord Jesus came as a friend to us, He gave us Himslef as an example, He appeared praying on many occasions, as on His baptism (Luke 3: 21), and after cleansing the leper, and before calling the twelve disciples (Luke 6: 12), also at the transfiguration (Luke 9: 28). Moreover, He prayed on the cross for those who crucified Him, and at the last moments of His life on earth. He wished to declare that ‘prayer’ is a mystery in our relationship with God and in our friendship with Him. The Lord when praying also means He carries us in Him, and through Him we are connected to the Father.

In this gospel, the Lord speaks to us of prayer more than in the other gospels. In it is mentioned the Lord’s Prayer, and the He stressed the importance of constant and persistent prayer. He gave us the parable of the friend who was in need of three loaves of bread, and how he went to his friend asking in persistence. Also, He gave us the parable of the unjust judge who heard the widow’s pleadings and answered her.

7. Some think the gospels in general, and St. Luke’s gospel in particular, did not aim at merely speaking of the life of the Lord Jesus, or His history, as much as it aimed at presenting the Church in which the Lord lived, working for its sake. It actually speaks of

Christ's church as he was tasted by her, by encompassing Him and being firm in Him. St. Luke in his gospel, shows by means of the Holy Spirit inspiration, the Church life when He was present physically on earth; whereas in the book of Acts St. Luke presents the life of the Church with her Groom when He is there on the right hand of the Father after He has ascended, and how he granted the Church his Holy Spirit.

He is the active Friend, working **unceasingly**. He worked when He was here in the body, and He is still working after His ascension until He meets the Church on the clouds.

In the first church there prevailed the feeling that the coming of the Lord Jesus drew very near, and that it would be fulfilled in the apostolic age. This issue was tackled by St. Paul the apostle in his second epistle to the people of Thessalonica. He confirmed **that** the Lord would not be manifested until after the appearance of the man of sin, and the rebounding act **is** fulfilled. Our teacher St. Luke followed the same tread, declaring in this book, as well as in the book of Acts, that the Lord's death, His resurrection, and His glorious ascension, these do not mean that His second coming would be instantly. Neither will it be straight after the desolation of Jerusalem; for some have misunderstood the words of St. Mark the evangelist (Mark 14: 62; 9: 1). St. Mark has declared the Messiah's kingdom is on actual fact that is fulfilled here, at the church first; and that it is fulfilled in the heart. Every day there are those who are saved, who come to join the church. It is as if the Lord's coming is fulfilled first by His dwelling in the hearts of the elect, and when His work is completed here on earth, He comes on the clouds.

8. Some scholars believe that St. Luke's gospel came identical to the first six books of the Old Testament, in the following way:
 - a. The new book of Genesis describes the birth of the Lord Jesus and his childhood by means of which the new creation is fulfilled, with the appearance of the second Adam, **humanity** has been released to the new world.
 - b. The new exodus has been fulfilled by the tribulation of the Lord Jesus in the wilderness for forty days, where He overcame on our account. This is an opposite situation to the maze that the people of the Israel faced for forty years after their departure, and their perpetual fall into complaints and grumbling.
 - c. The book of the new Leviticus is the establishing of the twelve disciples, and presenting the sermon which concerns their ordainment, as another book of Leviticus (St. Luke 6: 20...etc.)
 - d. The book of the new Numbers is the mission of the seventy apostles.
 - e. The special part in the book of Deuteronomy represents the major part of the gospel, since it comprises many sections of the Lord's teachings, particularly in Luke 9: 51, 18: 14.
 - f. The book of Joshua that was presented by our teacher St. Luke is the story of the Lord's suffering and His resurrection. Therefore, the acceptance of Rahab the prostitute is faced by Zacchaeus the tax-collector (Luke 19: 1, 2).
9. The evangelist St. Luke showed clearly the role of the Holy Spirit. the angel declared that John the Baptist was full of the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb (Luke 1: 15), he also showed clearly the work of the Holy Spirit in the divine incarnation (Luke 1: 35), as well as his work in the words of prophecy (Luke 1: 67; 2: 25-27), also in the baptism (Luke 3: 22). In this way the work of the Lord Jesus is linked to the work of His Holy Spirit (Luke 4: 1, 14, 18; 10: 21; 11: 13, 10, 12).

10. This book has been called the gospel of coverage; it contains a great number of stories that have not been mentioned in the other gospels, as well as so many parables. He is supported in this due to his good relation with St. Mary.
- He is singled out in mentioning the following miracles: the catching of the fish (Luke 5: 4-11), raising the widows son of Nain (Luke 7: 11), the woman who had an infirm spirit (Luke 13: 11-17), the leperous man (Luke 14: 1-6), the ten lepers (Luke 17: 11-19), and the healing of Malachi's ear (Luke 22: 50, 51).
- He is also singled out in mentioning the following parables: the two debtors (Luke 7: 41-43), the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37), the persistent friend (Luke 11: 5-8), the foolish rich man (Luke 12: 12-16), the barren fig tree (Luke 13: 6-9), the lost piece of silver (Luke 15: 8-10), the prodigal son (Luke 15: 11-30), the unfaithful steward (Luke 16: 1-13), the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16: 19-31), the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18: 10-14).
- He was also the only one to mention certain incidents, such as John the Baptist's an to the people, Jews crying overview Jerusalem, the topic of his speech with Moses and Elijah at the transfiguration, the sweat that dropped from His forehead like drops of blood, His talking to the daughters of Jerusalem, the Lord's encounter with the Amos disciples, and also certain details that concern His ascension.
11. From the linguistic aspect, we have said before in more than one occasion that the Holy Spirit works in the writer and inspires him in his writing, yet He does not make him lose his identity, He rather makes **use** of the writer's abilities, inspires him and protects him from making any errors. The potentials of our teacher St. Luke the evangelist were manifested from the point of view of the style. As a physician, he investigated meticulously into **many** of the issues. Moreover, as a physician and a painter at the same time, he was gentle in his writing style, with touches of sweet poetry, to the extent that his gospel became source for artists to be inspired when painting icons.
- Because he was a friend and escort of St. Paul on many of his journeys, there has become some similarity between their writings, which made the scholar Trinitarian say that St. Luke the evangelist was enlightened by St. Paul the apostle.
- (Revise Luke 4: 22, with Col 4: 6; like 4: 32 with 1Cor 2: 4; Luke 6: 36 with 2Cor 1: 3; Luke 6: 39 with Rom 2: 19; Luke 9: 56 with 2Cor 10: 18; Luke 10: 8 with 1Cor 10: 23; Luke 11: 41 with Titus 1: 15; Luke 18: 1 with 2Thes 1: 11; Luke 21: 36 with Eph 6: 18; Luke 22: 19, 20 with 1Cor 23-29; Luke 24: 34 with 1Cor 15: 5).

Its sections:

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Section One – Our Friend became like us

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|------------------------------------|---|
| † The good news of the incarnation | 1 |
| † The birth of the heavenly Friend | 2 |
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Chapter I – the Good News of the incarnation

The first chapter of this book came as an introduction to it to reveal the aim of the entire book, which is the proclamation of the Messiah, is His person. He is the true Friend to humanity who grants it joy, and transforms its life into a joyful hymn of praise. In this chapter we find the preparation for the unique Friend's coming. It is He who grants Elizabeth, the barren one, in her old age, a child to strip off her shame. He also opens the tongue of Zacharias the priest in praise at the birth of Jesus' forerunner. The Nazarene little girl, the virgin is blessed with the tremendously heavenly good annunciation news. Even the embryo in Elizabeth's womb gets thrilled and dances joyfully. All of these are introductory images which reveal the personality of the Lord Jesus Himself, and His work in our life as a heavenly Friend, able to strip off our bareness, and opens our tongue, and gives us back our joy.

1. An introduction to the book 1-4
2. the good news to Zacharias of John's birth 5-17
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An Introduction to the Book

Our teacher St. Luke opened his gospel with the following words (Luke 1: 1-4): "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us. Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed"

In this introduction which is written in beautiful Greek style, we notice the following:

1. These circumstances in writing, is the presence of many who wrote of sure matters concerning the Lord Jesus and His deeds of salvation. Few of the scholars think that by this he means the evangelists St. Mark and St. Matthew. The majority believe he means disloyal people who attempted to write about the personality of the Lord Jesus in wrongful thinking. But their works were **never** accepted by the first church as lawful books. The scholar Oreganus differentiates between the gospel of our teacher St. Luke, as well as the other gospels that were written by means of the Holy Spirit inspiration and given to the church, and between the human attempts to write gospels. He therefore says "The meaning of the word 'they took' is that they have attempted. This implies an inclusive accusation addressed against them; for they have attempted to write the gospels without the guidance of the Holy Spirit. But as for the heralds the good news Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, these have not attempted to compose, but they were rather filled with the Holy Spirit, and thus they have written the gospels. Four gospels are these that are according to the law and from these we drink our faith in our Lord and our Savior". The Pope St. Athanasios the apostolic says "the devout St. Luke rebukes what is of people's making, and he handed to us what is quenching to the thirst, given to us by the

saints. Every saint who is handed tradition participates without any deviation, to make firm the teachings of the mysteries. To these alone we have to listen. This is why the divine word asks us to be their disciples, for these are our true teachers. To these alone (1Tim 1: 15) “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”. These are not disciples who have heard of others, but they are rather eye-witnesses and ministers to the word, for they have heard of Him what they handed over”.

2. Our teacher St. Luke writes ‘the certainty of these things’ which are of assurance. This is why St. Ambrosios compares this book to a house built on the rock, linked to the perfect faith, firm and unshaken. This faith is based on the spiritual understanding, awareness, and the discernment between what is truthful and what is false, and not based on mere miracles.

Having the same concept, the scholar Oreganus says: “St. Luke expresses his feeling by saying ‘the certain matters that we have’. He has known the story in assured faith and mind, and he has not hesitated to believe it. This is the same case with the believer. He has attained the peak of faith as the prophet has said (Psalms 119): “O let me not wonder from thy commandments”. This is why the apostle says about the story and mighty believers, that they are well founded and rooted in their faith (Eph 3: 17).

The man, who is deeply rooted and well founded in the faith, can never be destroyed, or have its walls fall down, even if the tempest rages and the strong winds blow, and the rains fall down to flood him, because its construction is strong and sturdy. It is appropriate for us not to believe that the strength of our faith is based on the tangible visions, or the fruit of mental intelligence. Let us leave this to the unbelievers who believe my means of signs and wonders that are only apparent. But as for the smart believers, the strong in faith, he believes and thinks by means of the Spirit, discerning the truthful from the false one.

3. What St. Luke the evangelist records to us, has only been accepted through ‘the submission’ or what we call ‘the tradition’. This is the deposit or earnest that we live in the church life by means of the Holy Spirit. These are handed down the generations through the verbal or oral and written hand down documents, and by means of worship and conduct. This is what was confirmed by the evangelist’s words “Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning was eyewitnesses and ministers of the word”.

The scholar Oreganus comments on the above statement, showing clearly two major points in the church tradition: firstly, his saying ‘eyewitnesses’ does not only mean the mere physical vision; for many have seen the Lord Jesus physically, and yet have not been aware of His person, and have not been blessed with His deed salvation. Secondly, the spiritual witnessing, or the spiritual awareness, is blended with the work. This is why he said ‘ministers to the word’. There is no division between the spiritual life of meditation and work, for he says “the apostles meditated on God the Word, not because they have seen Christ the Savior Incarnate, but because they have seen God the Word”. Here he does not mean the separation of Christ into two persons, but rather confirms our commitment to realizing the reality of the Incarnate Savoir.

In seeing Christ physically only means to see God the Word, this would have meant that Pilate who has handed over Christ, has seen the Word; also Judas who betrayed him, and all those who cried out ‘crucify Him, crucify Him’ (John 19: 15). This concept is far from

him; for the unbeliever cannot see the Word of God. Seeing God the Word was made clear by the Savior's words (John 14: 9) "he who has seen Me has seen the Father". He has also commented on his words which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word saying, we conclude from these words that knowledge could be an end in itself, yet it is interestingly crowned by work. To think knowledge is enough without its application is **useless** science. Just as science is linked to its application in practical life, likewise knowledge is linked to the Word service. The word 'eyewitnesses' means the theoretical knowledge, whereas the Word 'ministers' refers to the applied knowledge. These two trends of thought of the scholar Oregaus were explicit in the writings Of St. Cyril the great and St. Ambrosios.

St. Cyril the great says, "St. Luke describes Christ's apostles as seeing the Lord'. He agrees in this with St. John, for the latter wrote (John 1: 14) "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth". It was a must that Christ be manifested in the flesh, so we could see Him and feel Him, for glory be to His name, in His nature He is not seen neither is He touched. For John also says (1John 1: 1) "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life". Do you hear how the life has been manifested to us, and thus we have touched Him with our hands, and we have seen Him with our eyes? Christ has manifested Himself so we realize that the Son has become flesh, and we have witnessed Him as a human, whereas previously, we have not seen Him for he is God.

Following the same concept St. Ambrosios says, "the disciples saw the Word of God and heard Him. The lord saw those who have seen the glory of the Word with Moses and Elijah (Matt 16: 3). These have seen the Lord Jesus for they saw Him in His glory. But as for the other Jews, these have not seen Him for they knew Him according to the flesh. It was given to the spiritual vision and not to the physical vision to see Jesus. The Jews did not see Him though they saw him physically. As for Abraham, he has seen Him, as is written (John 8: 56) "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad", although it is certain he did not see Him physically. But the Jews did not see Him (Rom 1: 21) "and their foolish heart was darkened". "When we see the Lord, we see Emanuel, and we thus realize God is with us. But he who does not see God with him, then he does not yet know the One born of the Virgin".

Therefore, our teacher St. Luke the evangelist writes through the gift granted to those who witnessed the Lord, not only according to the flesh, but they have also witnessed Him in their depths, and have realized the mystery of His coming into them, and His work inside them.

I confirm that we too, if we wish to understand the gospel we have to accept seeing the Lord in us, and encounter Him on the basis of live and physical faith, so we do not hear the words of rebuke that the Lord said to Philip (John 14: 9) "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?"

4. The evangelist has not only called the apostles the eyewitnesses of the Word, but he also called them 'ministers to the Word'! if the apostolic mission is based on witnessing the Lord in spiritual vision and thus realize His divine mysteries, yet without being separated from the work; thus in this way, knowledge is blended with the spiritual experience, and the faith by means of struggling, and meditation by means of the service. St. Ambrosios

says, “the apostles have obtained this blessing. They have witnessed; and it is understood from this how they have struggled to know the Lord, and have served, and it is also understood the outcome **fruits** of this struggle”.

5. the gospel was addressed to the dear one Theophilus, whom we have previously spoke of. The word ‘dear’ is a title attributed to dignitaries in the Roman world. It was addressed to Felix (Acts 23: 26; 24: 13), also to Festus (Acts 26: 25). The name Theophilus meant ‘God’s lover’, and for this reason St. Ambrosios remarks “if you love God, then this good news is written for you. Therefore accept it from the evangelist as a deposit and keep it in the bottom of your heart (2Tim 1: 14) “That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us”. Meditate on it perpetually and armor yourself constantly with it. The foremost of your duties is the honesty to this deposit, which is not worn out by moth, that is to say, the heresies, and is not ruined by any rust. The scholar Oreganus says, “some may assume the gospel was written to someone by the name of Theophilus, but, if you listeners all of you love the Lord, then you are all Theophilus. Theophilus is a very righteous and strong man, there is no Theophilus who is weak. I confirm that every Theophilus is a strong one, and the source of his strength and might is the Word of God”.

The Good News to Zacharias of John’s Birth

The Lord Jesus came a savior to the world, granting the world an inner people and heavenly joy. Therefore in the preparation for His coming, the barren Elizabeth brought forth ‘John’, which means ‘God is compassionate’ and as a result Zacharias’ tongue which had been dumb became full if Lord praises. Elizabeth as a woman, refers to the body, and with God’s compassion and grace He stripped the shame off her body, and it became blessed with an amazing spiritual fruit; whereas Zacharias represented the soul, and inwardly it was released in the spirit of praise and joy instead of the dumbness build on impotence.

St. Luke recounts to us the good news to Zacharias telling him of John’s birth, in a language of humility and worship, saying (Luke 1: 5-7), “There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years”

In his narration we notice the following:

1. Because St. Luke was a man of science, being a physician, he defined clearly the date of the event; that in the deep of Herod the great being of Judea, the second son to Antipas of **Edomite** origin. This man married ten women and he **killed** two of them. He had many children of whom he murdered one. He also killed the children of Bethlehem, and on the deathbed he asked the Jerusalem dignitaries be killed so that no one would be able to rejoice after his death. But he died before fulfilling his wish.

It was a very dim atmosphere, politically and religiously, for the prophecy was ceased for three centuries. Everyone lived in an atmosphere of corruption, and despite this, there lived two righteous people before God: These were ‘Zacharias’ which means ‘good remembers’, and ‘Elisabeth’ which is the Greek derivation from the Jewish word ‘also yeshba’ which means ‘God swears’ ‘God’s right hand’.

They both begot 'John' or 'God is compassionate' or 'God blesses'. It is as if in the midst of this world of corruption, when we remember God and blend in His oath and true promises, we are then blessed with his mercy and divine blessings that work in us. St. Ambrosios comments on the expression "And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless", saying, "the expression 'righteous before God' has a special purpose, for the righteous before people are not necessarily righteous before God, Man's view is different than that of God, because man looks at the appearance whereas God looks at the heart's (1Sam 16: 7). It seems to me that a man is not worthy to be called righteous, for with the Lord it is not as such, because the motive for sanctity is that of hypocrisy and not that of the humble heart. Therefore, man cannot discern what is hidden, and the perfect reward is to be counted as righteous before God, as the apostle says (Rom 2: 29) "whose praise is not of men, but of God". Blessed is he in truth who is justified before God! Blessed is the truth, who is worthy to hear the Lord telling him (John 1: 47) "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" for the real Israelite is the one who sees God and he realizes that God sees him, uncovering the hidden parts of his heart.

The scholar Oreganus explains the meaning of the expression "righteous before God" saying "There may be nothing for a man to accuse me of after investigating me, for I am righteous before people, But people's judgment is not correct' for they are ignorant of the fact that one day in sinned in secret, in my heart. They do not know that I have looked upon a woman and coveted her., and that I have lived in the heart's adultery. People may see me giving charity according to my means, but they are ignorant of the fact that I make this for the sake of God's commandment, or to ask for people's praise. Blessed is the righteous man before God, and whose praise is from God, for man is unable to judge righteously in fairness and clarity. People may praise those who are unworthy of any praise, and they may condemn those who deserve no condemnation. God alone is the just One to praise or to condemn.

He also comments on the word 'blameless' saying "Our Lord Jesus referred to the church that it is (Eph 7: 25) "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish". This does not mean that the son of the church has never sinned, but that he rather leads a life of repentance. The expression 'without blemish' means the hatred of the old man, and cesting to commit any sin. This is why he continues with the statement "that it should be holy and without blemish". The soul has inherited sin, yet it could become pure and blameless if the dirt of sin has been stripped off.

Moreover, the gospel declares their righteousness before God, and that they are blameless in particular conduct in all of God's commandments and ordinances. It is as if the secret righteousness is linked to the obedience of the commandments, and accepting God's judgments. This is the way of our righteousness by means of the Holy Spirit that grants us to be worthy of the blood, to enter the commandment and live it in obedience and joy, and that we understand God's judgment and plans, and thus we carry the Spirit of discernment in us.

Because St. Augustine has tackled the topic "the righteousness in Christ" he spoke of Zacharias and Elizabeth's righteousness. He declared the men of the Old Testament were also counted righteous in Christ, through their hope in the Messiah long waited for. He would offer His life, a sacrifice so costly for the sake of our righteousness. In his

discussion about 'nature and grace' he refers to the words of St. Ambrosios saying 'undoubtedly the men of the Old Testament have lived this kind of faith in Christ even before His death on the cross. It is only Christ who sends the Holy Spirit given to us, by whose means love is poured into our hearts, and by whose means alone the righteous men are counted as righteous'. On another occasion, St. Ambrosios confirms that Zacharias' righteousness is build on the sacrificed offering of the Lord Jesus through his practicing the priesthood and offering the sacrifice and offering the sacrifice of animals, as a symbol of Christ's sacrifice. He says, "Zacharias was used to, undoubtedly, to offer slaughtered sacrifice for his sins".

If Zacharias is regarded as being righteous, yet this does not mean he has not committed any sin. St. Augustine has repeated on many occasions the words of St. Ambrosios 'There is no one in the world which is sinless'.

2. 'Zacharias was of the course of Abia' (Luke 1: 5). The word Abia means 'my father is Yaho' this group is of Eleazer the priest's descent. it is considered the eighth of the twenty-four groups that have been divided by the priesthood category since the time of David. each course or group works for a week every six months according to its lottery. They also drew lottery so as to know who would be chosen by God to perform the incense service from the midst of the group the Jews usually used to offer the incense only in the mornings and in the evenings.

St. Ambrosios thinks Zacharias has been selected by the lottery to go into the Lord's sepulcher and give incense, which refers to the Lord Jesus since He is the bread of the priests, who alone is able to enter to the heavenly holies, to perform priesthood on our account, and intercede for us with his blood. The lottery fall refers to His mission which was not of the people but from the Father.

3. The scholar Oreganus comments on the evangelist's expression (Luke 1: 11) "And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense", saying that man, because he has a dense body, cannot see the divine and spiritual beings, neither can he feel them unless they appear to him. it is as if God's manifestations as well as those of His angels depends on God's will and His wish that we witness them. For God is present with us, as well His angels, and yet we do not see them. some of his words are the following:

'The Lord appeared to Abaraham and to other prophets according to His grace. it is not Abraham's spiritual inner eye that is an obstruction to seeing the Lord, but it is rather God's grace that enabled him to be granted with this'

'There could be an angel now next to us as we are speaking, yet we cannot see him because of our unworthiness. The mere eye or the inner could exert an effort to reach this vision, yet, if the angel does not manifest himself to us, we are unable to see him, even if we are extremely eager for it'.

'This real fact does not only concern our seeing God at this present age, but also when we depart from this world. God and His angels do not appear to everybody directly after the departure, but the grace is granted to him who has a pure heart and is worthy to witness God. but he who has a heard burdened with filth, could be present with him who has a pure heart in the very same place, and yet he who has the pure heart sees God whereas the one who has the impure heart is unable to see what the other one does'.

‘I think this happened concerning the Lord Jesus when He was on earth in the flesh, for not everyone who saw Him has seen God. For instance, Pilate saw Jesus, and so did Herod the king, and yet they have not seen Him as He is, for they were unworthy of it’. St. Ambrosios’s interpretation embodied both of the concepts: that God and His angels manifest themselves when God wants it as a divine gift, and that the pure heart witnesses God. Some of his words are the following:

‘We see the lord when He wishes for this, but we are unable to see Him in His nature as He is. He appeared to Abraham because He wanted this. But if man does not want this, then the Lord does appear to him. St. Stephan saw the heavens open, and the Son of Man on the right hand of God, whereas the people were stoning him (Acts 7: 9) and yet that people could not see God. also Isaiah saw the Lord of hosts (Is 6: 1), yet no one else was able to see Him’.

‘What is it that amazes us if no could see God in this world since He is invisible? for He will not be seen unless He reveals Himself. But in the resurrection no one will see Him except those who have a pure heart, for (Matt 5: 8) “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God”. The Lord has blessed many, but He has not promised anyone to see God except those of pure heart!’

‘We do not see God in a certain place, but rather in the pure heart. Do not search for God with your physical eye (Eph 3: 18) that you “May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height. And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God”. With God’s compassion and mercy on us, we are able to reach the full stature of Christ, so we be able to witness Him’.

We have previously spoken of ‘Witnessing God’ in our book ‘St. John Chrysostom’ But what we wish to assure you of, is that God though invisible, yet He wishes to manifest Himself, and He is eager that we see Him. this is His free gift, offered to the pure heart. For he works in us continuously by means of His Holy Spirit, so that our hearts be purified in Him, and be uplifted to witness Him, and enjoy His fatherly embrace, and sharing the heavenly glories.

4. The angel of the Lord appeared on the incense altar, that is, between the golden altar (for prayer) and the table for the Bread of life (the mystery of the Eucharist). it is as if he who wishes to encounter the heavenly hosts, has to open his hands in prayer, and hence offer the sacrifice of love and fragrant incense before God . He has to enter to the Lord’s table, and to encounter the Lord of the heavens, and carry Him in his inward heart.

From the prayer aspect, St. Augris says, ‘Know well that the saintly angels urge us to prayer. They therefore stand next to us at this time, happily praying for our sake. if we are slothful and accept foreign thoughts to intervene, they (the angels) are infuriated, because whereas they are fighting for us so strongly, we do not even wish to plead to God for our own sake. We put their service aside, and we go away from the Lord their God and so go to the defiled devils’.

As for drawing close to the sanctified table, this is spoken of by St. John Chrysostom, saying ‘It is as if man has been taken to the very heaven, standing next to the glorious throne, flying with the Seraphims, chanting the sanctified hymns of praise!’

5. (Luke 1: 12, 13) “And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard!”. To see the heavenly hosts disturbs the heart for he is witnessing an amazing thing; yet he does not

remain confused, for he finds the very heavens concerned about himself, and calls him in his own name; moreover, they are concerned about him personally. They satisfy him with inward peace, in addition to gifts and divine super goods granted to him.

St. Antonious the Great presents to us the discernment between the heavenly visions and the deceptive ones: the former one, even if it begins in fear or confusion, this is because man is unused to it. Yet they convey real peace to the soul. But as for the other one, the soul loses its peace. The former kindles the heart with what is heavenly, but as for the latter, it preoccupies the mind and confuses it with what earthly. For he says 'The appearance of these angelic spirits is peaceful and quiet, creating joy in the soul as well as courage, because the Lord is our joy'.

The thoughts that spring from these appearances make the soul unshaken till it is enlightened with this joy; and thus the soul knows what those spirits are that appear to it. God's eagerness, and the eagerness for the blessings awaiting us, these enter the soul and unite with it. These are those who fear the appearance of the evil spirits; but these good spirits put fear aside due to the love manifested, just as with Gabriel and Zacharias (Luke 1: 3). Also, as when the angel appeared to the woman at the Lord's tomb (Matt 28: 5), and as when the angel appeared to the shepherds telling them 'Fear not' (Luke 2: 10). The fear of those ones was not the result of fear, but rather as an outcome of assuredness of the manifestation of the good angels. This is the appearance of the saintly angels'. He also says, 'If we see, spirits that cause confusion and outer blows, and worldly hallucination, and threatening death, and all that we have mentioned, then we should know that this is an attack of evil spirits'.

6. Zacharias may have forgotten his request from God, or he may have lost all hope of begetting an issue; but his name is Zacharias which means 'God remembers'. Therefore God remembered him and his wife as well as their request, and gave them not only the joy of their heart alone, but also he who gladdens the hearts of many. He gives despite our forgetfulness, and He gives us more than what we ask for or wish for. He gives to assure us of His gifts, and He has even given the baby his name.

Concerning John, the gift of God to Zacharias and Elizabeth, the angel declared the following:

Firstly: he is the mystery of joy to many (Luke 1: 14) "And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth". We have said before that St. Luke's gospel is 'the gospel of joy'. God has send St. John the forerunner, to call for repentance, preparing the way for the Lord in the hearts of many, and thus the heavenly host would rejoice as much as the believers. God's aim was to regain us to His eternal wedding, and he in heavenly peace without any bitterness or hardship. Here he is preparing for this wedding, even by the good news of the forerunner's birth.

In our study of the book of Leviticus (Chapter 12), we saw the child in a period of time which is calculated ahead of time, that she is considered as defiled. This is because sin has been stuck to us even at our birth and death. But now, the sun or righteousness began to shine on mankind, and is getting to be reconciled with the heavens, therefore our life in Him has been changed into joy, and the birth is now a joyful one. As St. Ambrosios says, "There is a special joy at the conception of pregnancy with the saints, and also at their birth. The saint does only bring happiness to the family alone, but he is also a cause of salvation to many. These words teach us to rejoice greatly at the saint's birth'.

I wish we, too, if we have lived so long with a barren spirit and a spiritually fruitless body, let us accept God's heavenly promises, and be filled with God's tenderness and grace. This means 'John' is inside us, and therefore let us rejoice with God, and many will rejoice with us as well. Even the heaven itself will share us our joy (Luke 15: 7). May our life, be fruitful in the Lord, and may it give joy to many. Let it not be an infertile one, or have a deadly fruit or a killing one. Father Tadros says, "life and death in their essence are neither righteous nor evil. This is confirmed by the birth of John and Judas. One life of theirs was a useful one, and this is proved by what was said of him (Luke 1: 14) "many shall rejoice at his birth". The other one was spoken of as (Matt 26: 24) "it had been good for that man if he had not been born". Secondly: (Luke 1: 15) "For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord". John had not yet been born, and neither has his mother yet been conceived in her womb, and despite this, the angel called him 'great in the sight of the Lord'. Greatness is not counted by the big number of days of years, and neither by the physical strength and apparent deeds, but rather by the inward strong life.

The world at that time scorned and disregarded children, in a general sense. They had no human rights offered to them. But the gospel of the Lord Jesus uncovered His friendship to children, and He looked upon them as great in His eyes. This was confirmed by the Lord, later on, to His disciples when He presented to them a child to be set as their example, and to follow this example of a child so as to reach the heavenly greatness (Matt 18: 2, 3; Luke 18: 15).

Let us be as children in doing evil, and so be counted as great and mature in the Lord. But let us not behave in the weakness of childhood that is immature, otherwise we shall be counted as (Gal 4: 3) "when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world". As St. Antonious says, "it is only the spiritually mature person who could overcome the elements of the world". Let us therefore be spiritually mature in the Lord, and thus not to disregard children, as the Lord has said (Matt 18: 10) "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones".

St. Ambrosios tells us in his interpretation of St. Luke's gospel about the greatness of St. John the Baptist, saying, "Our life is not estimated according to the time, but according to levels of virtue. For John was called great not because of his physical strength, but because of his spiritual one. He did not overcome empires, neither did he plan on virtues and conquests; he rather looked up to what is by far greater. For he was the voice crying in the wilderness who defeated the physical pleasure, and the bodily lapses in his sublime spirit and its strength. He was small in the worldly matters, yet great in the spiritualities. Finally, the mystery of his greatness is that the love of the temporary life did not overrule him, which did not hinder him from condemning sin.

Thirdly: (Luke 1: 15) "and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb". After defining his name, and declaring his impact as someone who rejoices the hearts, he made clear his possibilities and abilities. From the negative point of view 'shall drink neither wine nor strong drink'. Being consecrated to the Lord, the pleasures of the world or its glamour, these will have no place in his heart or in his body. But from the positive aspect, he will not live in deprivation, but he will rather be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. He will be deprived of the materialistic wine that drunkens people, whereas he will be quenched with the joyful heavenly wine!

The scholar Oreganus says, “The archangel declared John’s birth, this person who will be filled with Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb. For in his mother’s womb John rejoiced greatly and could not stop himself when Jesus’ mother walked in; he was trying to get out of his mother’s womb (Luke 1: 44) ‘For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy’”

St. Ambrosios says, “As an embryo, he lacked the spirit of life, and yet he obtained the spirit of grace. The reality of life is preceded by the grace for sanctification, for the Lord says, (Jer 1: 5) “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations”. There is a drastic difference between the spirit of the world, and the Spirit of grace. The former begins with birth and ends with death. But latter is unrestricted by time or by years. Death does not extinguish its flame, and the womb of motherhood is not shut upon it. He who possesses the Spirit of grace lacks nothing at all. He who has obtained the Holy Spirit has reached the peak of all virtues.”

Fourthly: (Luke 1: 16) “And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God”. At this point he confirms his mission which is, to bring many of the children of Israel back to the Lord their God, by paving the way for repentance, so as to accept the Lord Jesus, the Savior of the world. The scholar Oreganus observes the world is in constant need for John’s mission which he calls ‘John’s mystery’, so he could make firm every soul in Christ. For he says ‘I personally believe that John’s mystery can still be fulfilled up to this day: For man can believe in Jesus Christ, if he has John’s spirit and his strength in himself, so he prepares a perfect congregation to the Lord. also if he has the toughness and goes through the narrow gate. Up till today, John’s Spirit and his strength precede the coming of the Lord Jesus’.

Fifthly: (Luke 1: 17) “And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah”. The Scholar Oreganus comments on this statement saying “He did not say in the soul of Elijah, but rather ‘in the spirit of Elijah and his power’. Elijah had a spirit and strength or power as all the other prophets. The spirit that dwelt in Elijah also dwelt in John, and the power in Elijah was also in John.

St. Ambrosios draws an interesting comparison between Elijah and John the Baptist in this way: “Elijah lived in the wilderness and so did John. The ravens took care of the former, whereas the latter being in the wilderness, he **tried** on all the temptations and attractions and he loved poverty and hated what was luxurious. One did not seek to win the pleasures of Ahab the king, and the other scorned the pleasures of Herod the king. The garment of the former rent the Jordan waters, whereas the latter made this water a working basis that grants salvation. The former appeared with the Lord in glory at the transfiguration, whereas the latter lived with the Lord on earth. One preceded the Lord’s first coming, and the second preceded the Lord’s second coming. The former make the rains fall on the earth after the drought has been for three years, and the latter washed the dust of the bodies in the River Jordan’s waters of faith throughout the period of three years (a year for the covenant of the Father, a year for the covenant of Moses and the prophets, then a year of the Lord’s coming, our God and our Savior).

The mystery of power in St. John is that he carried Elijah’s spirit. This does not mean his spirit as a person, but rather the spirit of power granted to him from God, or the abilities offered to him. This is why St. Augustine says “He means by Elijah’s spirit, the Holy Spirit that Elijah has accepted”.

Zacharias' Dumbness

(Luke 1: 18-20) "And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season".

In this conversation that occurred between the archangel Gabriel and Zacharias the priest inside the Altar, we notice the following:

Firstly: Zacharias the priest did not believe the angel's words, in spite of seeing the angel and listening to the angelic voice in a tangible way. It was in daylight, inside the altar, which made him blameworthy of it, particularly because the holy history mentions living examples of elderly people who begot children whereas their wives was barren, such as Sarah, Abraham's wife for not having children. He did not even mention between himself and the angel that should was barren. He did not even mention between himself and angel that she was barren. He rather began with himself, saying, 'for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years'. I say how beautiful is a caring righteous soul in its feelings. It does not hurt others' feelings even in their absence. He does not complain even to the heavens of his wife's barrenness.

Secondly: The archangel declared himself that he is Gabriel, which means 'God's almightiness'. As for the mystery behind his strength and his might, it is the fact as he said that he stands before God. He came carrying the divine promise. He came to herald the good news, but he also had to discipline with dumbness as God commanded.

Thirdly: in his love, he granted Zacharias the priest the good and joyful news of John's birth, as a free gift offered to him, and to the entire humanity. And now, the priest was blessed with the affirmed promise, and the Lord defined by the mouth of the archangel the child's name, his qualities, his mission, his potentials...but despite all of this he could not believe. This is why God allowed, in His love also, to discipline him for some time.. God in His fatherhood to us grants and also disciplines us, all for our won construction and edification.

What is amazing is that even the mistakes we make, God uses these for our own good. what happened to Zacharias because of his doubt has become a symbol to what happens to the Jewish people. They did not accept our Lord Jesus a spiritual king and Savior. This is why they fell under the discipline of becoming dumb until they accept the faith at the end of the ages. They fell under dumbness for they have rejected the Incarnate Word of God. He therefore took away from them the prophets, and the worship in the Altar was stopped.

St. Oreganus says, "The silence of Zacharias is the silence of the prophets with the people of Israel. Therefore God will not more speak to the Jews, whereas God the Word who is from the beginning, has come down. Christ has become with us, He who is never silent, but He is silent till this day with the Jews.

St. Ambrosios says, "Silence is to cease offering sacrifice, and is the silence of the prophets; for the voice of the prophet and the priest has ceased. God therefore says (Isaiah 1: 31) "I will take away the mighty, the prophet, and the judge". as for us, the Word of God has come down to us, He who can never be silent in us, therefore the Jews cannot argue with the Christian (1Cor 13: 3) "For you ask the proof of Christ who speaks in me".

Zacharias in his silence had to beckon with signs for being deprived of the gift of speaking. This also refers to the Jews who were concerned with the old law physically without ay spiritual understanding. As the scholar Oreganus says, "I believe there are actions with no words or no

meaning, that are no different than the beckoning and gestures of no meaning. We consider the Jewish doctrines as wordless for not being comprehended or interpreted. We can explain what happened to Zacharias as a copy of what is happening to the Jews will this day. Purification for them is a simple meaningless gesture. If we look upon it, we can consider it a simple beckoning and a silent action. Also the Passover and the other feasts are nothing else than simple actions and not factual realities. Up till today, the Israelites are dumb and deaf for, since they rejected the 'Word' and gone far away from Him, they have become as such.

Zacharias the priest became speechless so as to declare the need of the Word, the divine One who was missed by Israel. It is as if by this dumbness he has paved the way to declare the Lord Jesus. On the other hand, God allowed him to be speechless, as a wonderful opportunity to cease speaking with people, so as to preoccupy his heart in speaking to God, meditating on His deeds, touching His mysteries and understanding the prophecies.

Just as Zacharias the priest isolated himself from speaking with people due to his dumbness, likewise did Elizabeth his wife got isolated from people due to her embarrassment. The evangelist says. "And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying 'Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me'". They both had a spiritual chance to speak with God alone, meditating on His deeds with them, and waiting for His gift to them.

The scholar Oreganus and St. Ambrosios assumed the shyness of Elizabeth was due to the fact that she had not delivered any children for so long and she might have ceased any physical relation between her and her man, for God's men lay physically with their wives for the sake of begetting an offspring. So, if they knew they were unable to have any children their relations remained tied in matrimonial love with no physical intercourse. This is why when Elizabeth conceived, she was to ashamed to appear before others, until she met the Virgin Mary, pregnant with the Incarnate Word of God in her womb. When the embryo rejoiced in her womb, Elizabeth no longer felt any shame, for she was carrying a wonderful offspring. She was carrying he who was the greatest of those bore of women, John the forerunner.

We can say that the physical relation between the husband and wife is sanctified and pure as long as it is moderation, with no spirit of passion or selfishness in the physical pleasure, but rather in the spirit of mutual matrimonial love and giving, all in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God. The two married ones find themselves as becoming one body, living in the spirit even when they have their intercourse together. They are overshadowed by God's Spirit unceasingly, and thus become perpetually sanctified in all their actions.

The Annunciation of the Divine Incarnation

(Luke 1: 26, 27) "And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary".

Firstly: Five months before the angel brought the good news to Zacharias the priest. Now with the beginning of the sixth month he came to herald St. Mary with the good news. But there is a great difference between the two heraldries. Indeed, the first good news was fulfilled inside the altar during the group worshiping, escorted by Zacharias before all. It was spoken of by the other priests for it happened with their fellow priest; it was the good news of the birth of the greatest of those born of women, John the forerunner, the servant of the Word. As for the second heraldry it happened in an unknown house in a poor village, in a secretive way. Even the owner of the house did not feel it, St. Joseph the carpenter. It was the good news of the incarnation of the Word

Himself! The Son has given up Himself even in the heraldry of Himself. It was not fulfilled among the priests or inside the altar, or among the level of groups, It has been fulfilled with a poor girl in a simple modest place.

Secondly: The angel was sent to a betrothed girl, espoused to a man. Why was the angel not sent to an unbetrothed girl?

1. The scholar Oreganus answers saying, the fact that there was a man for St. Mary wipes out any doubts regarding her when the pregnancy symptoms show in her. St. Ambrosios says, “Maybe so that no one thinks she has committed any adultery. The Holy Book gave her two descriptions at the same time; that she is a wife and yet a virgin. She is a virgin for she knew no man, and a wife so she be protected from what could harm her name. Her belly getting larger refers, in people’s eyes, that she has lost her virginity. In addition to this, the Lord has chosen that some may doubt His real descent rather than doubt His mother’s chastity. The Lord found no need to reveal his personality on account of His mother’s reputation.

We have previously studied the engagement process and marriage according to the Jewish tradition, and how the engagement period equaled matrimony which is present today in everything except that of physical relation. This is why St. Mary is called ‘Joseph’s woman’.

2. The scholar Oreganus thinks, according to St. Ignatius, that the presence of Joseph might make Satan doubt and get confused about the newborn regarding the divine incarnation. St. Ambrosios presented to us the same idea when he said, “there is another reason which cannot be disregarded, which is that the ruler of this world did not discover the virginity of the Virgin Mary. Because he saw her with her man, he did not suspect the baby born of her. The Lord wished the ruler of this world to be blinded of knowing of this matter. This was shown when the Lord commanded His disciples to tell no one He is the Christ (Matt 16: 22). The Lord also forbade those whom He healed to reveal His name (Matt 5: 4). Moreover, He ordered the devils not to speak of the Son of God (Luke 4: 35). The apostle also confirmed (1Cor 3: 7, 8) “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory”. This means that if they wanted I would be saved by the Lord’s death. Therefore the Lord did not reveal Himself for the sake of our own salvation. He hid Himself so He overcomes him, He hid Himself also in a tribulation, and when Satan cried out to Him calling Him ‘the Son of God’, the Lord did not confirm to him his godliness. The Lord moreover did not reveal Himself to the human rulers. Even though Satan hesitated when he said (Matt 4: 6) “If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down”, yet the issue ended with Satan knowing Him. The devils have known him when they cried out (Matt 8: 29) “What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?”. The devils knew Him, since they expecting His coming. As for the rulers of this world of this world, they did not know Him. Satan, in his cunningness, was able to uncover the written matters, but those of the world dignitaries where unable to know the work of God.

Thirdly: The evangelist repeated the word ‘virgin’, as if he wished to assure us of her virginity, to declare the Lord Jesus was not born of mankind. This is what Ezekiel the prophet declared about the door in the east (Ez 44: 2-3) “Then said the LORD unto me; This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the LORD, the God of Israel, hath

entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut. It is for the prince; the prince, he shall sit in it to eat bread before the LORD". This is why in the Byzantine ritual it was said of the Virgin Mary 'Peace be to you, you unique gate, which was crossed by the Word alone'.

She is a virgin and a bride wife at the same time, for she represents the first member in the church Virgin, the Bride for Christ.

As St. Ambrosios says, "St. Mary, the virgin wife represents at the same time the bride, the Church that is flawless. For the Church is virgin bride for Christ. The Church became pregnant with us by means of the Holy Spirit, and she delivered us with no pain. St. Mary became pregnant by means of the Spirit and not by means of marriage. In this way, she has become to represent all the churches that give fruit by means of the Spirit and grace, even though it unites outwardly under the leadership of a human shepherd.

St. Augustine says, "Just as St. Mary gave birth to He who is your Head, likewise did the church give birth to you, for the church is also a mother and a virgin. She is a mother in the innermost part of our love, and a virgin in her unwavering faith. The Church is a mother of many nations that represent one body. This follows St. Mary's example, the mother of so many and at the same time is a mother to the only One".

St. Cyril the great says, "Let us praise St. Mary the ever virgin in joyful praises, who is the very same as the sanctified Church".

Fourthly: The evangelist specified the name of the town to which the angel came to encounter St. Mary the virgin, and the name of the town was 'Nazareth'. It was a town in Galilee, north of Palestine, 88 miles north of Jerusalem, 15 miles southwest Tiberias. St. Joseph and St. Mary lived in it and Jesus Christ spent most of the first thirty years of His life in it (Luke 3: 23; Mark 1: 9). He was therefore called 'the Nazarene' (Matt 12: 11; Mark 1: 24). When he began His mission, He was rejected twice by its people (Luke 4: 28-31' Matt 4: 13, 13: 54-58; Mark 6: 1-6). The town is located on a hilltop (Luke 4: 29). It barely had any importance for it was not mentioned in the Old Testament, neither in any of the documents of the major countries before Christ's coming, nor in the writings of the Jewish historian Yousefios.

The word 'Nazareth' may mean 'track' or 'branch', and this is why Christ was often called 'the Branch'.

Fifthly: The angel saluted her (Luke 1: 25) "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women".

This was not normal greeting; it was a unique greeting that implied a joyful meaning. The Greek word 'Sherie', which is translated here as peace, has been reiterated 80 times in the 'seventies translation' in the Old Testament. Half of these were translated 'to rejoice', and the other half was used to express the joy of God's people with an exciting deed that concerns their salvation. It is as if St. Mary has obtained in the entire church's name, in which the virgin is a member, she has obtained excessive joy through God's incarnation, the Word, and His dwelling in her.

The following are some of the fathers' comments on this unusual and unique greeting:

✠ She was the only one to be called 'blessed art thou among women', for she alone has obtained the blessing that belonged to no one but her, for she was filled with the gifts of grace.

St. Ambrosios

✠ This birth is absolutely a blessing and grace. In it the unity was fulfilled, the unity of man with God, and the body with the Word. The good deeds were not the worthiness on which it could be fulfilled.

St. Augustine

✠ She was wrapped with God's blessing as a garment. Her soul was filled with divine wisdom. In the heart she was blessed with the marriage to God and she received God in her womb!

Father Theodosios, Bishop of Ankara

St. Mary heard the angel say to her 'The Lord is with thee'. Those words had a special meaning to her, for she has tasted the company of God in an unequalled way, for she carried God's Word in her womb, and has offered Him of her own flesh and blood.

"Blessed art thou among women"; as the scholar Oreganus says, "The joyful news that Gabriel sounded the trumpet with to Mary, restrained God's sorrow **against** Eve. Great as sin began with woman and then crossed over to man, likewise did the good news begin with the two women, Mary and Elizabeth".

Sixthly: (Luke 1: 29, 30) "And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God".

St. Jerome says, "She was distributed and was unable to answer him, for she had not offered salvation to a man before. But when she came to know him, she answered him. She who feared speaking to a man became able to speak fearlessly with an angel".

Likewise do many fathers think: that the Virgin Mary is a living example of the virgins who devote their lives to worshiping. They conduct themselves in great decency, and do not meet any men. They rather spend their life in their homes or in virgins' homes that do not deal with men. The Virgin Mary was exceedingly decent, and has consecrated her entire life on God's account. She was unwilling to get married, for she told the angel 'How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?' but despite this, she was the active person in the sanctified group. She was active by means of her prayers and her righteousness, and she was also active by accepting the tremendous gift of God, the incarnation of the Word in her womb. Moreover she was active in the service as well. In the first miracle of the Lord Jesus she asked Him 'they have no wine' (John 2:3). She also escorted the Lord till the cross. After the ascension, she was with the disciples, supporting them. Therefore, virginity does not mean to be passive, but rather positive in sacrificial love, declared by the means of worshiping and working within the boundaries of man's gifts, that have been given to him by the Lord. This is why St. Augustine says, "Virginity is not honored for its own sake, but because it is attributed to God".

Seventhly: God's promise came to the Virgin St. Mary, spoken out by the angel (Luke 1: 31) 'And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end".

The Virgin St. Mary was blessed with this divine conception, for the Son of the Highest has become incarnate of her. This was he who was long awaited for by the Old Testament men, as a King to sit on David's throne, and reign forever, and as a Savior, so this is why He is called 'Jesus' which means 'Jehovah, my Savior'.

✠ There is no like the mother of God, for whereas you were living on earth, you were mother to the Creator.

Paralex – the tune of blessing

✠ If the Son of God has become a Son to David, therefore do not doubt, you son of Adam to become God's son.

If God has descended to such depths, then He has not done this in vain, but rather to raise us to the highest!

He was born of the flesh so you would be born a second time according to the Spirit.
He was born of a woman, so you would become a son to God.

St. John Chrysostom

Eighthly, when St. Mary heard God's promise, in a spirit of lowliness and in faith, she was amazed because the promise was a unique one. she has never heard in the holy books of a person who has obtained such a thing; she therefore asked, (Luke 1: 34, 35) "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God".

1. From the Virgin's words, it is clear she was dedicated by a vow to remain a virgin. If she had wished to be married, she would not have said so. She would rather have said 'when will this be?' in expectation of the promise to be fulfilled during matrimonial time. It was set in her heart that she be kept in virginity to the spiritual church virginity. As St. Augustine says, 'Today, the church celebrates the Virgin with the Virgin birth. The Lord Jesus has ascertained the heart's virginity that He wants firstly for the church by means of the virginity of St. Mary's body. The church is the only one that can be a virgin when bonded to the Groom, who is the Son of the Virgin, when she offers herself in her entirety.
2. St. Ambrosios says, "St. Mary did not reject the belief in the angel's words, and neither did she apologize for not accepting its words 'How shall this be?' this does not mean she doubted the issue at all, it is just a wondering as to how this will be fulfilled. She was only trying to find a solution to the issue. It is her right to know how the miraculous delivery would be like". This is why the angel's answer to her revealed the mystery of God's work in her to have this delivery fulfilled. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God".

The Holy Spirit shall come upon her to sanctify her, spiritually and physically. Thus she will be prepared for God's work; God who will send His Son in her womb to be incarnate of her. Indeed, what a marvelous mystery of God in which God declares His love so amazingly to man, and the fact that He gives honor to man!

Before this declaration, she bent her head in obedience and said (Luke 1: 38) "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word". Zacharias the priest doubted his wife begetting an offspring, whereas the Virgin believed, and in her obedience she accepted God's work. As St. Ambrosios says, "In her faith, she was more sublime than the priest, for the priest erred and hid, whereas the Virgin corrected the error".

This is why Zacharias became dumb due to his doubt, whereas the Virgin became pregnant with the Incarnate Word, or the divine utterance that will not be silent.

St. Irenius thinks St. Mary's obedience replaced her mother Eve's disobedience. The latter complicated the situation due to her disobedience, whereas her daughter came to untie the knot through her obedience.

Scholars of the Bible think that at this moment in which she offered her obedience to God and her submission to Him, she received the Incarnation, for it was not possible to fulfill the incarnation without her will and her acceptance to receive the works, for God sanctifies human freedom.

St. Ambrosios says, "she describes herself as the hand-maid of the Lord, even though she has been chosen a mother to Him. The promise that has been fulfilled did not make her

fall into pride". St. Augustine also says, "the humble Lord Jesus did not teach His mother, when pregnant with Him, any pride but He rather brought her lowliness.

Mary's Encounter with Elizabeth

The virgin St. Mary has become a representation of the believing humanity, or a representation of the church for she has accepted the belief in God's promise, and she bent down in obedience so the Word of God comes to dwell in her. When she became blessed with the Word inside her, she could not help running (Luke 1: 39) "into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah", so she would encounter Elizabeth her cousin. This is a vivid picture of the church that carries the Groom in her, and that will not rest, but rather go in haste across the generations, just as on the hills, so she would present her Groom to every soul in the world.

According to the human logic, she was supposed to hide herself, and think things over to herself, as well as with her groom so as to plan for the pregnancy and delivery. But she has now carried in herself He who carries the burdens of the world, and He who provides for everything' she did not worry about what is hers, but rather in the receiving spirit, she hastened to the hills to the city of Judah, so as to serve Elizabeth.

If we carry our Christ inside us, we speak out with an open heart, and get out of our 'ego', is hearts full of love to all, eager to serve everybody.

We notice in this blessed encounter the following points:

Firstly: According to the human logic, the poor search for riches, the need search for he who supplies him with his needs, and the student searches for the teacher. But according to the divine logic, the elder asks for the young one, and searches for him so as to embrace him lovingly and carry him on his shoulders.

In the very same way did 'God first love us'. He has begun the initiative in love, and He came down to us for we are unable to go up to Him. He bends to carry us from the dust, and rescue us from the depths, to enter with us to the Father's embrace, and uplift us to His heavens. In this way likewise, when he dwells in we, we run in haste to those who are weak, and search for everyone to help in serve.

The scholar Oreganus says, "The excellent ones come to those who are less excellent to grant them some of the privileges. In this way did the Savoir come to John to sanctify the baptism. As soon as St. Mary heard the angel's message that she would conceive the Savior, and that her cousin Elizabeth was pregnant (Luke 1: 39, 40) "went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah; And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth". When Jesus was still in the Virgin's womb hastened to sanctify John the Baptist who was yet in his mother's womb.

St. Ambrosios says, "He who is of a higher level visits his of a lesser one; Mary went to Elizabeth, and Jesus went to John, for Jesus wished to sanctify John's baptism by Himself becoming baptized.

If we carry our Holy Christ, we are sanctified, and we hasten to every spot eager to have everyone sanctified with us!

Secondly: The scholar Oreganus says, "St. Mary deserves to be mother to God, and so she had to go up the hill country and stay up in the heights". In addition to this, St. Ambrosios says, "is it unusual for her who became filled with God, the go up in hase to what is high?"

Thirdly: Because St. Mary was carrying in pregnancy the Word of God, the Lover of mankind, her encounter with Elizabeth was gentle to the maximum extent. She was carrying the spirit of service in humility. This is why St. Ambrosios asks in his interpretation of St. Matthew's gospel that the virgins would learn from St. Mary her tenderness, her humility, and her respect to others.

We are badly in need today of obtaining God's blessings, and realizing, particularly the clerical positions, to be motivated to humble service, with no love of honor or authority, but rather in eagerness to wash the feet in gentleness!

Fourthly; St. Mary entered Elizabeth's house carrying her Groom in her womb, so as soon as she greeted her, the evangelist says (Luke 1: 41) "And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit".

I wish in our visits and encounters with other, we carry our Holy Christ which thrills their inner being and kindles His Holy Spirit in them; instead of carrying with us evil thoughts, and words of condemnation, and fill them with worries, and extinguish the Spirit in them.

Scholars have noticed the word 'leaped' in Hebrew means 'to dance'. This is the very same word which was used when David the prophet danced before the ark of the tabernacle.

✠ I ask of you to accept this conception, and to dance before Him, if not in the womb as John did, then let it be when the ark is set, just as David did.

St. Gregory el Nazinzi

✠ Undoubtedly, when Elizabeth was filled of the Holy Spirit, this was for her son's sake. John, who was till in his mother's womb, has become filled of the Holy Spirit. Because the son became sanctified, Elizabeth was then also filled of the Holy Spirit.

The scholar Oreganus

✠ There appeared on the spot, the blessings of Mary's visit and the Lord's presence, because as soon as Elizabeth heard the voice of St. Mary's greeting, the babe leaped joyfully in her womb, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Elizabeth was the first to hear St. Mary's voice, but John was the first to be affected by the blessing. Elizabeth knew of St. Mary's coming, and John felt the presence of Christ. The woman felt the woman's presence, whereas the babe felt the babe's presence. As they were speaking of the blessings and graces, the babes were fulfilling inside the divine deeds of God, so full of mercy. The babe leaped, then the mother was filled of the Holy Spirit, but she was not filled before the leaping.

St. Ambrosios

✠ When John was filled with the Holy Spirit, he became sanctified when still in his mother's womb, so he could baptize the Lord.

John did not grant the Spirit to those whom he baptized, but he preached Him who granted the Spirit, for he said (Matt 3: 11). "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance. but he that cometh after me...he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire". Why with fire? Because the Holy Spirit descended in the shape of tongues of fire (Acts 2: 3).

Concerning this, the lord said Joyfully (Luke 12: 49) "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?"

✠ This Spirit worked in Elizabeth. He knows the virgins, and is the friend also, of those who are married if their marriage is a legal one.

St. Cyril El Orshilimy

Fifthly: The babe's joy in the womb refers to the spiritual inward fruitfulness in the soul. The body, likewise, shares with the soul in this fruitfulness. This is why St. Elizabeth's tongue was released declaring what was inside her in harmony and accord with John's (Luke 1: 42-45) "And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord”

Although the entire world was ignorant of the good news to Virgin Mary, yet Elizabeth declared St. Mary’s motherhood to her Lord, though there was no apparent phenomenon for this divine event. The amazing thing is that these unusual events – such as the babe leaping joyfully, and Elizabeth being filled with the Holy Spirit, and her witness to her motherhood to her Lord – all of these things happened as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary’s salutation. It is as if the Son of God who dwelt in St. Mary’s womb has spoken Himself on His mother’s tongue, and has worked through her action.

Elizabeth blessed Mary because she has become the mother of God by means of Incarnation of the Word; and the church kept blessing her throughout generations ever since. St. Cyril the great stood before the fathers in the Ephesus assembly and said, “Peace be to Mary to mother of God, the world treasure so entirely royal, the undimmed lantern, the crown to virginity, the Orthodox scepter, the incomprehensible altar, the habitation of the unbounded, the mother and the virgin. Peace to you who conceived the uncontained in her sanctified virgin womb”.

The scholar Oreganus comments on Elizabeth’s words on her own tongue saying, “what good work did I make? Or, of what importance are the deeds I made that the mother of my Lord would come to see me?”

Am I a saint? What perfection or what inward integrity that I accordingly deserve to obtain this privilege: the visit of my Lord’s mother to me?!”

St. Ambrosius comments on the words saying, “And whence is this to me? what righteousness did I make, or what right do I have...for I feel the miracle, and I can touch the mystery”.

The Virgin’s Hymn of Praise

When Elizabeth’s tongue was released in blessings to the Virgin, because she has believed the promises and has carried the Word of God in her womb; likewise did the Virgin’s tongue began to praise God. In this way the encounter was changed into practicing a life of worship on the level of angelic hymn chanting of praise, of God’s glory, and declaring His sublime mysteries, all said in excessive joy.

(Luke 1: 46, 47) “And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior”.

The scholar Oreganus says, “Before John’s birth, Elizabeth prophesied and before our Savior’s birth Mary prophesied. Just as sin began with the woman and then reached the man, likewise did salvation begin in the world by means of woman who overcame the weakness of their nature. Let us now see the Virgin’s prophecy when she says “My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior”. The spirit and the soul have both shared in the praise” Eve has **harmed** her Creator when she distorted her soul due to her disobedience, and she ruined God’s good creation. Her life no longer gave praise to the Creator, and neither did her depths declare his splendor. But St. Mary came to carry God’s Word in her womb, by means of whom she regained her first beauty, and her spirit became joyful, for she is in God’s likeness and his image.

The scholar Oreganus says, “there is a question: how can my soul magnify the Lord? Indeed, if the Lord does not accept what is more or what is less, but rather the unchangeable, then, to what extent can St. Mary say these words? ‘My soul doth magnify the Lord’? the more the spiritual image becomes in its splendor by means of my deeds, thoughts and words, the more and the

bigger the image of the Lord becomes, and is hence praise all the more, first as the Lord's picture increases in its splendor in us, likewise, if we err, the picture becomes smaller, and fades in **??**. He concludes his words declaring our obligation not to make a man or an animal's image, as mentioned in Deuteronomy, which means we have to carry inside us God's image. We therefore should not have an image or a picture of a lion, or a fox or any kind of beast. From the words he said "when we are plunged in our own pleasures, we are wearing the mask of a goat".

As for St. Mary's words: and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior", this implies an important godly concept: that though St. Mary is of tremendous sublimity, yet she needs 'salvation' as everybody else does. She rejoices in Him, because she was born carrying the original serious sin that we have inherited from our first forefathers.

The saint has realized the mystery of obtaining God's grace for she said, "For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden". She did not say that God has looked upon her prayers or fasting or her watchfulness at night, or her justice or her wisdom. He rather looked upon the low estate of his handmaid. She has come to know the way to reach God's mercies, and take by force his gifts, which is 'lowliness'. If the adversary has lost his position due to his pride, he thus made pride an ambush by means of which he could take prey of all mankind to his dark kingdom. He would thus deprive us of our Creator, the source of our life.

(Luke 1: 48-50) "for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation". St. Mary has realized the tremendous gift she has obtained for she has become blessed with Him whom she carries in her womb. This is why all the generations, that is, all the believers throughout the ages, shall bless her because of what God did to her; and thus we find the church full of liturgies in blessing her, declaring God's deed in her and with her, by becoming the Word in flesh, the Savior of the world.

We bless her throughout the ages, not as a virgin who lived and then died, but as a virgin in whom God's tremendous work of salvation has been transfigured in her life. For every believer who looks up to her, could see God's wonderful grace that was granted to mankind. If the virgin has been blessed with the motherhood of the Lord Jesus because she carried Him incarnate in her womb, just as she also carried Him by means of faith in her heart, likewise does the soul that is blessed with the partnership in Christ is also blessed with a kind of motherhood. This is why Father Methodios says, "the church is in a state of labor until the Lord is formed and is born inside us. for every saint is blessed in the partnership with Christ, as if Christ is born in him all anew".

St. Ambrosius also says, "Be careful so as to fulfill the Father's will so you be a mother to Christ (Mark 3: 35)".

St. Cyril the great comments on the remaining part of the Virgin's praising hymn saying, "He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts". St. Mary refers to 'the arm' as to mean the Lord Jesus Christ to whom she gave birth; 'the proud' refers to Satan and his hosts that have been misled by their pride, and thus they fell into the mire of humiliation and misery. St. Mary also refers by 'the proud' to the Greek wise people who rejected to accept the Christian faith, which they claimed to be 'ignorant'. She also refers to the Jewish multitude who did not believe in Jesus Christ, and thus they got scattered all over the earth.

Christ brought down those of dignity and pride from their positions. Satan's power and his hosts have collapsed, and they no longer possessed the world front by besieging the multitudes of the

human race. The Jewish scribes and the Pharisees fell from their earthly glory because they haughtily rejected to accept the Lord Jesus.

(Luke 1: 52) “He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree”. Satan’s hosts and the Greek philosophers, as well as the Jewish scribes and Pharisees, all got drowned in the sea of false pride and vain imagination. Therefore God humiliated them, and uplifted over them people of the lowly hearts and good conscience (Luke 10: 19) for they were given “power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you”. The defiled and base conspiracies will not harm us neither will those tricks managed by the disdainful proud ones.

Haven’t the Jews has one day a very spacious country, but because of their lack of belief they shrunk to where they are today. But as for the Gentiles, their faith has strengthen them to have power of a refined level and an honorable status.

(Luke 1: 53) “He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away”. By ‘the hungry’ it is meant ‘the human bulk’, for all the people except for the Jews, were in need of God’s glory and have tasted the bitterness of hunger. These were none among the people, except for the Jews, who were able to be blessed with the pleasures of the old law, and the education of their minds with apostles and prophets’ teachings; for (Rom 9: 4) “to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises”; but their haughtiness led them to the abyss of pride and distain. They have rejected to worship the Incarnate God. It is not surprising, therefore, if they return with no faith, no knowledge, no hope, no grace, since they were cast out of the earthly Jerusalem, and even kicked out of the life of glory and grace which appeared, for they did not accept the authority of life. They have crucified the Lord of glory, and have deserted the living spring of life, and they did not value the living bread coming down from heaven. It is not surprising, thus, if they taste the bitterness of hunger like no one else did. Their tongues got burned with thirst like nothing else, for their hunger and their thirst were not to be touched materially. They were of spiritual implication, or as Amos says (Am 8: 11) “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD”.

As for atheists who became believers, they often suffers from spiritual thirst and they were heart-broken with misery, yet their souls were satisfied with the richness of God’s word, and their hearts were quenched with the healing living water, because they have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus they obtained the promises that were previously assigned to the Jews.

(Luke 1: 54) “He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy”.

The Lord did not help Israel according to the body; though Israel was distinguished by his pride, his descent and relations. The Lord rather helped Israel according to the spirit that values the name and would work to uplift it and honor it. this would be achieved by the confidence in God, and in the faith in His Son, and also by obtaining the blessing of adoption from the Lord Jesus, according to God’s promises to the prophets and popes of the Old Testament.

The verse also refers to the Jewish multitudes in the body. These are the ones who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

For God almighty be His name, promised Abraham saying that his descent would be blessed (Heb 2: 16) “For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham”.

Finally, after recording the praiseful hymn, he said (Luke 1: 56) “And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house”.

The scholar Oreganus comments on these evangelical words saying, “If St. Mary’s coming to Elizabeth and her salutation were enough to make the babe leap joyfully, and for Elizabeth to prophesy after her being filled with the Holy Spirit...if all of this happened in an hour, we can imagine the tremendous progress that John achieved in the period of three months in which St. Mary lived with Elizabeth. In one moment, or on the spot, the babe leaped in his mother’s womb, or in the words he jumped in excessive joy, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit; so how much more would Elizabeth and John increase in development in the period of three months, when they were close to the mother of God, and the Savior Himself would be present! In these three months John was getting stronger in the heroes’ arena, and getting prepared when still in his mother’s womb to an amazing birth and a more amazing education! For he lived in the wilderness until the time came for him to appear to Israel”.

John’s Birth and the Circumcision

(Luke 1: 57, 58) “Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her”.

When Elisabeth became blessed with God’s kindness and His grace in her womb (John) and when she became filled with the Holy Spirit, this was put into effect by the actual delivery of John in his due time, which rejoiced the hearts of many. In this way, likewise, we too have to put into effect what godly blessings we have in our depths, to outer fruits that rejoices those in heaven and on earth.

St. John’s birth rejoiced the hearts, and has released them towards praising God in true joy. St. Ambrosios says, “On the birth of saints, joy overrules everybody, for it is a blessing to everyone”.

When it was time for the circumcision, they wished to name him Zacharias as his father’s name. But as for his mother who was filled with the Holy Spirit she said ‘John’. Even Zacharias himself asked for a board of wax, and wrote the name ‘John’, without any previous agreement with his wife, and his tongue was released at once, and he prophesied. It is as if when the Spirit of God came to lead the situation, the two spouses Zacharias and Elisabeth had not only one fruit in common, that is John, but they also had one thought in the Lord.

We can also say when God’s Spirit takes over the leadership in our life, Elisabeth gets in harmony with Zacharias in thought and work. This means the body (Elisabeth) goes in harmony with the soul (Zacharias) so as to work together in one sanctified thought.

At any rate, though God did not deprive the parents of naming their son, for they named him out of their own will, yet the name was from the Lord and by his guidance. When God takes over our life, He takes care of us, even in giving us our name. For the Lord has previously called Abraam, Abraham, and Sarai, Sarah, and Jacob, Israel...etc.

Now that Zacharias has been blessed with God’s gift to him, in giving him ‘John’ (Luke 1: 64) “And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God” Then great fear fell on all those around, and these things were spoken of in all of Judea. So all those who heard it pondered about it in their hearts saying (Luke 1: 65, 66) “What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him”.

When we are blessed with the God’s kindness, our inward mouth is opened, and our tongue is loosened in joyful praise, blessing the Lord not in human words, but by God’s power so that God’s fear falls on all those around us. The true believer, in his touch with God, carries joy and

gladness, and his entire life is changed to an inward mouth that gives praise. This praise shakes those in heaven in excessive harmonious joy, and destroys the adversary.

John's birth became a preaching, sermon, though it had begun mysteriously, but the Lord's hand, that is, the Son the Word has become a companion to him so as to support him; for He took John to the wilderness, and there He took care of him, so that He appears to Israel at the appropriate due time.

Zacharias The Priest's Prophecy

Zacharias the priest was blessed with God's kindness and His grace, that is, by John. His tongue got loosened and he praised the Lord under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. He was able to see God's plan for salvation was not solely for him, and neither was it solely for his tribe, it rather comprised everyone.

The evangelist says (Luke 1: 68) "And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people". The scholar Oreganus comments on this saying, "when Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, he prophesied two general prophecies: the first concerns Christ, and the second concerns John the Baptist and his coming. It is clear from Zacharias' words that he spoke of the Savior as actually present in the world, then his words about John follow after".

St. Ambrosios says, "The man who was dumb for a long time has begun to prophesy! He has become filled with God's grace which made the suspicious people to praise Him! I wish every person not to lose his confidence and not to despair when he thinks over his previous sins, and that he remembers God's blessings".

He prophesied about Christ saying (Luke 1: 69, 70) "And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began". St. Jerome says, "the Horn in the Holy Book means the kingdom or authority". St. Gregory El Nazinzi says, "When we were cast down, our salvation horn was raised for our sake".

St. Cyril the great says, "The word 'horn' does not only refer to power but also to the royal authority. The Lord Jesus our Savior who came from King David's family is the king of kings and the Father's great power". The scholar Oreganus says, In truth, the peak of salvation came from the house of David. The prophecy came to reverberate the words that honor has been planted at the summit. And what summit is it? it is Jesus Christ about whom is written "and hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David; and he spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began".

(Luke 1: 71) "That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us". The scholar Oreganus says, "what is meant here are not the physical enemies, but rather the spiritual ones. And indeed, Jesus came strong in the fight so as to wipe out all our enemies, and save us from their evils, and liberate us from our enemies and all those who hate us".

(Luke 1: 72) "To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant?".

St. Cyril the great says, "Christ is the mercy and the justice, because through Him we have obtained mercy, and have become justified by wiping out our sins because of our faith in Him". the scholar Oreganus says, "I believe that the coming of the Lord our Savior has benefited Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob our fathers, by God's forgiveness to them; for it is impossible to be assured that these men who had prophesied of this day, and have rejoiced for it, have not

benefited by the Savior's coming and His miraculous birth. Why do we fear saying that His coming made our fathers benefit from it?"

The Savior's coming declared God's mercy with our forefathers and fulfills His constant promises, that have been manifested clearly in the days of Abraham, with whom God made a sanctified covenant and with an oath, for he says (Luke 1: 73-75) "The oath which he swore to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life". This covenant was fulfilled by Christ's coming, and it is of two sections: the first section is the victory over our spiritual enemies, that is, the powers of darkness, without any fear on our part. The Lord has destroyed their ambushes, and has destroyed their authority under our feet, if we only carry Him in us. As for the second section, and which goes together with the first one, it is our entry into inheritance, worshiping the Lord in holiness and righteousness. That is, we have a new nature to live by all the days of our life.

This is concerning the prophecy about the Lord Jesus. As for John the Baptist, he said (Luke 1: 76-79) "And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace".

What follows are some comments of the fathers regarding this prophecy:

✠ "And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest". I wish you also to notice that Christ is the Highest, and that John was ahead of Christ in birth and work. So what is it that denies the coming of Christ's goodness? (this concerns the Ariosites). "to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death".

John the Baptist was a shining bright light amidst Judea: (Psalm 132: 17) "I have ordained a lamp for Mine anointed".

In Moses' law one of the lamps was always lit in the assembly tent, as a symbol of John. But the Jews, after they had assembled around John's baptism basin for a while, they deserted it and departed. They exerted their utmost to blow out the brightly lit lamp. It is not surprising therefore that Christ describes John the Baptist saying, (John 5: 35) "he was a burning and shining light, and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light".

(Luke 1: 79) "to guide our feet into the way of peace"; The world was knocked about in the very dark mazes, and in shameful ignorance. The cloud of ignorance forbade the multitude of people from seeing the Lord Jesus, the redeemer. He is the God of truth and justice, the Lord of all was manifested to the Israelites, a light to them and a sun to their souls.

St. Cyril the great

✠ I think Zacharias was quick to address the words to the babe, because he knew that John would go to live in the wilderness, and that he would not enjoy his presence after that. Actually, (Luke 1: 80) "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel?"

Moses also lived in the deserts, but that was after his escape from Egypt, and he was forty years old then. But as for John, since his birth he had gone to the wilderness. It was he about whom was said he is the greatest of all those born of women, and he was worthy of the most excellent upbringing.

The scholar Oreganus

† Some may think this is exaggeration that these words he addressed to a child of eight days. But we are able to realize that this is quite possible, for the embryo was able to hear St. Mary's voice before his birth. Because John was a prophet, prophets have other ears opened by God's Spirit, and they are not opened by the body's growth, John was able to understand for he had previously leaped joyfully in his mother's womb.

St. Ambrosios

The Birth of the Heavenly Friend

The heavenly friend found no other place to be born other than the manger. But He opened the doors of heaven for the meek at heart to listen to the angelic voice congratulating them on the great joy that will reign over people. He was taken into the temple as a child, and so opened the eyes of the elder Simon who was joyfully eager to be released to paradise. He had realized the Light that would be declared to the nations. The child also made Hannah's tongue deliver praises in prophecies. At the age of twelve, He entered the temple to amaze the elders with his teachings.

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1 Our Friend's Birth:

In the previous chapter we saw God's amazing plan in His preparation for our heavenly Friend. The heaven opened to send the archangel Gabriel heralding the birth of John, the forerunner of the Lord. He also heralded the virgin girl of Nazareth of the holy conception. Elizabeth became filled with the Holy Spirit when she heard St Mary's salutation. The babe in her womb leapt in joy, Zechariah's tongue was loosened in praise and he gave thanks to God, blessing the God of Israel not for the birth of John, but rather for the sake of He to whom John was to prepare the way, Zechariah has seen the forefathers and the prophets who had been sleeping rejoiced for God's fulfillment of His holy promise concerning the Messiah, the coming Savior. Now he speaks in simplicity about Christ's birth, showing clearly how God used, even the human means such as the Roman decree dyed in the Jewish colour to fulfill his divine goal and the prophetic fulfillment. The evangelist says:

(Luke 2: 1-4) " And it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Ceasar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria and all went to be taxed, everyone into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth into Judea, unto the City of David, which is called Bethlehem: because he was of the house and lineage of David"

In the days of Caus or Octavius Caiphaz, who was granted by the assembly of dignitaries the title "Augustus" This word meant in Latin "the revered". The decree was that the entire world was to be taxed. This means, all the countries subjected to the Roman Empire, which used to overrule the cultural world at that time. This was a decree to satisfy the emperor's passion for greatness. He wishes to extend more and more his overpowering authority, so he would be supported in the tax collection. The decree was according to the Roman regime, in which it could be carried out at any site, without the necessity of each person going to the town where he was brought up. But the Romans, who wished to please the Jews, commanded that it should be performed according to the

Jewish regime, where each person would register his name in his place of origin. In this was Joseph and Mary had to go to Bethlehem in Judea to register their names as they were of the house and tribe of David.

It was quite tedious for the elderly Joseph and the expecting St Mary to carry out this mission, particularly because the town was filled with those coming; they therefore could not find any place in the inn, and they had to sleep in a manger for St Mary to have her delivery there. This apparently came to take place, based on the emperor's command to register in a Jewish fashion. But the hidden reality was that what happened was God's plan declared previously by the prophet "Micah 5:2" " But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting"

What follows are some of the comments said by the fathers regarding the above mentioned:

"Luke 2:1-3" " And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed...." Christ was born, therefore, in Bethlehem in the days of Ceasar Augustus the ruler. He had given a decree of the statistic of his country. Yet someone may ask" why has the wise writer mentioned these things?". The answer is that it was necessary to specify the time in which the Savior was born. It has been recorded "Gen 49:10" " 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". It was also to make us know that the children of Israel were not to carry this out, at the time of the Redeemer, the king of the house of David. For Judah at this age was subjected to the scepter of the Roman Rule.

"Luke 2:4" " Because he was of the house and lineage of David". The Holy Gospel referred to the lineage of Joseph, so as to observe his descent from David the King, his great forefather.

This revered reference also proves that the Virgin Mary was of Judah's tribe, to whom the house of David is attributed, because the godly law restrained the marriage of one tribe. This means the wife and the husband are not contracted in marriage unless they were of one tribe.

The interpreter of the heavenly facts is St Paul, the great apostle, who declared the rights of this tradition, for he witnessed that the Lord (Heb 7:14) "For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah".

"Luke 2:5" "To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child"

The holy evangelists say that Mary was engaged to Joseph, which is clearly evident that the pregnancy occurred in the time of engagement and that Emmanuel was born by a miracle that does not agree with acknowledged natural laws, for Mary did not conceive by means of human seed. The reason for this is that Christ is the 'Prime of everyone'. He is the second Adam as mentioned in the holy books. He has been born by means of the Holy Spirit, so he would convey to us through His spiritual birth, the grace and truth. For God wanted that we be no more called "man's children" but rather the children of God, our Savior, based on the new spiritual birth in Christ first, because he is ahead of us in everything, as the wise St Paul says in Colossians 1: 15

St Cyril the Great

+ Of what use is it to me, this matter mentioned concerning the "first decree" that the entire world is to be taxed, in the reign of Caesar Augustus? This is, when St Joseph took St Mary his pregnant espoused wife and went amidst the entire world to register in this special

registration the decree to state Christ's coming into the world. His coming pointed to a mystery, for Christ's name had to be registered in this decree of taxes. His name had to be registered with everyone, so that all mankind be saved and sanctified bestowing on them to live with Him one life! By this record He wished to register everyone's name with Him in the book of life "Phil 4: 3". All those who believe in Him, their names would be written in heaven "Luke 10: 20" with the saints.

The scholar Oreganos

+ What relation is there between the issuing of a certain matter by a human authority and that of the birth of Jesus Christ, other than the manifestation of God's provision? The human matter had the source of God's will. It had to be fulfilled in the name of the heavenly king and not the earthly one.

Here lies the work of faith in subscribing the soul, for it is appropriate for every man to be subscribed all the days of his life in Jesus Christ.

This order of decree does not spring up from Augustus but rather from Christ for the entire universe "Psalm 24: 1" "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein". For Augustus did not reign over the Goethe tribes or the Armenian people; but as for Christ he has dominions over everyone.

St Joseph together with St Mary traveled to Bethlehem, which means "the house of bread"; so that the "Bread of Life" is born there. His name was subscribed with mankind in the registration, so he shares with us everything, even in statistics and would be counted as one of us. For it was said (Is 53: 12) "He was numbered with transgressors" and thus we would be numbered in his Holy Book and counted as his friends.

In Bethlehem the Virgin gave birth, for it was said, (Luke 2:6,7) " And so it was, that while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped Him in Swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn" What follows are some of the fathers' comments on the statement "her first born son" and on his birth in a manger.

+ Here at this point, we can say that every only child is the firstborn. But not every first born is the only child. We understand that the word "firstborn" does not only mean that others follow him, but it generally means he who has not been preceded by anyone in birth. For the Lord tells Aaron (Numbers 18: 15) "Everything that first opens the womb of all flesh, which they bring to the Lord, whether man or beast shall be yours; nevertheless the firstborn of man you shall surely redeem and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem" God's words therefore, specifies the prime or firstborn is he who opens the womb. Otherwise if the word only means he who has younger brothers than himself, then it will be difficult for the priest to specify who is the firstborn until other brothers after him are born, lest no one follows him in birth, and thus he would not be called the firstborn since he is the only one.

The book also says (Numbers 18:16,17) " and those redeemed of the devoted things you shall redeem when one month old, according to your valuation, for five shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary which is twenty gerahs. But the firstborn of a cow, the firstborn of a sheep, or the firstborn of a goat you shall not redeem, that they are holy. You shall sprinkle their blood on the alter..." In this way the commandment rules we sanctify to God all that opens the womb if they are clean animals. As for the defiled animals these are redeemed and their price is given to the priest.

So, how can we distinguish the firstborn animal? Or shall I tell the priest "How can you tell if this is a firstborn? There could be others that would be born after, or there may be none to be born. Wait till the second one follows, otherwise there is nothing that I could do" Isn't this

stupidity which is not accepted because it goes without saying that the firstborn is all that opens the womb, whether there be will others or not.

St Gerone

+ The meaning of “Her firstborn” is, the first to be born, this does not mean that he is one amongst several others but rather one amongst the firstborn. The gospel uses the word “first born” or “first” in various places. The word was not meant except for one only. It was said “Isaiah 44:6) “ I am the First and I am he last, besides Me there is no God”

The word “first” has been added to the newborn to show that the Virgin had no other son except Jesus, the Son of God, as the inspiration says (Ps 89:27) “ also I will make Him My Firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth”. Moreover, the wise St Paul says”Heb1: 6 “ And again when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world he saith and let all the angels of God worship Him” How did Christ the firstborn go into the world whereas he is far away from the world by His own nature and is different than the human species in their nature? He entered the world by God becoming man. Though He is the only begotten Son of God, yet He is our Prime firstborn for we are all brothers to Him and thus we have become God’s children.

Notice that Christ is called firstborn in regards to us and he is the only begotten Son of God in regards to the Only One God. For Christ is the only Son of God because He is the Father ‘s Word. He has no brothers to share Him His childhood because the Son is united with the Father. He is one God and there is no other. But Christ is the firstborn to us because this was His will that He comes down to the level of the natural creatures. This is why you find the holy book referring to Jesus the Son of God by the words (John 1: 18) “The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father” But if the Holy Book uses the word “firstborn” then the holy inspiration interprets it in a way that shows its implication and thus it is mentioned (Rom 8: 29) that He might be the firstborn among many brethren “ It was also mentioned (Col 1: 18) “the firstborn from the dead”.

Christ is the first born from the dead because he shared us everything except for iniquity because he raised the body from corruption of death.

Moreover Christ by His nature is the only begotten Son of God, God of God, the Only from the Only, and Light of Light. But He is the firstborn with regards to us so that anyone who resembles Him is saved by Him. He is the first born and we are His brethren.

St Cyril the Great

+ Give honor to the manger, even if you have lost the sensitivity, and man has become as an animal, you will find in the manger the Word as food for you.

St Gregory the Nazinzi

+ God found man has been degraded to the animal level. Therefore He put Himself as food in the manger so that if we got rid of the beastly nature we are uplifted to the level of understanding and consciousness, befitting the human nature. By drawing closer to the manger, to his special table, we do not find any material food but rather the heavenly bread who is the living body.

St Cyril the Great

+ He was born in a manger to upright you to the altar. He came down to earth to upright you to heaven. He could find no place for Himself except in the cow’s manger so He prepares for you mansions in heaven (John 14:2) As the apostle says (2 Cor 8:9) “ that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich” For my inheritance is the poverty of Christ and my strength is the weakness of Christ.

St Ambrosios

+ You monks; the Lord was born on earth, and he did not even have a cell to be born in and no place at the inn. The entire human race has a place, and the Lord, at His birth had no place. He had no place to find among the people, neither in Plato nor in Aristotle, but He found a place in the manger, among the meek and the innocent. For this reason the Lord said in the gospel that the foxes have their holes, and the birds have their nests, but the son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.

St Jerome

2 The Shepherd's annunciation

The birth of the Lord Jesus took place far away from people's sight. The kings and the dignitaries had not heard of it, and neither did the chief priests or the scribes and the Pharisees, the Sadducees nor any people of the old law. It was in such a way that the earth received its Creator- in absolute silence. But heaven could not possibly be silent, for the angels of the Lord came to some shepherds watching over their flock by night. It may have been, in their heart simplicity, pre-occupied with their own salvation. The angel came to stand by them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them (Luke 2:9) and they were greatly afraid (Luke 2: 10-12) " and the angel said unto them " Fear not for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign to you. You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

What follows are some comments of the fathers concerning the joyful annunciation:

+ So many prophets declared the birth of Christ in the flesh, and His taking the semblance of man in the fullness of time. The heavenly hosts chanted, the joyful and awesome heraldry of the savior, the Redeemer's birth. The shepherds in Bethlehem were the first to be heralded with this joyful news. These shepherds are a symbol of the spiritual shepherds to whom the Lord Jesus Christ is manifested, and thus they preach in His name everywhere, just as the shepherds of Bethlehem were heralded in this village of theirs, when they heard the joyful annunciation said by the pure angels. As you see, it was the angels who were the first to announce Christ's birth to the world, and they glorified God, the incarnate God born of a woman in an awesome fashion.

Someone may ask " Christ was laying humbly in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes, so why did the heavenly hosts glorify Him as Lord and Master?

You man meditate in depth in understanding this great mystery. God has appeared first as you have appeared. He took the form of a slave in bondage, yet His godliness has not been divided from Him under any condition. Do you not understand that the only begotten Son of God has become flesh and that he has accepted willingly to be born of a woman? All this was due to His love for us, to cast away the curse that has befallen the first Eve; for she was told (Gen 3: 16) " in pain you shall bring forth children" With the woman's birth of Emanuel in the flesh the cursed knot has been loosened from her!

Furthermore the wise St Paul says (Rom 8:2,3) " For the law of the spirit of life in Jesus Christ hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.

What do the words "in the likeness of sinful flesh" signifies? It signifies that the law of sin embedded in the body together with the vain tendencies and corrupt passions. But when Christ became incarnate, and He took our semblance, His body became pure and

sacred. Therefore Christ has become like us, but he has none of our vain tendencies that are so corrupt. He has been freed of all the covetousness and evil impulses that lead us to commit the forbidden and rejected deeds and the despicable iniquity.

Therefore, whenever you see the Lord, the Christ Lord Jesus, wrapped in swaddling clothes, do not see Him in the flesh, but rather look attentively and meditate on His divine glory. Be uplifted in your mind, up to the heavens so as to behold His awesome glory (Is.6: 1) “sitting on a throne, high and lifted up.” You will listen to the seraphim’s signing of the glory, His worship and adoration, all to the Lord Jesus Christ who fills the earth with His awesomeness and His divine glory.

Contemplate on Christ’s glory on earth, all in brilliant light shining on the shepherds, and the heavenly hosts singing joyfully. For Moses did prophesy many centuries ago saying “Be joyful ye people His nations”

There has been born many prophets, yet the angels have not rejoiced on any of their births, as happened at Christ’s birth. This is because those prophets were human like us, ministers to God, carrying the word. But this was not the case with Christ; for He is God and Lord, the one who sent those prophets and saints. As the psalmist says (Ps 89:6) “For who is in heaven can be compared into the Lord? Who among the sons of the Mighty can be likened unto the Lord?”

For Christ was willing to bestow on us the grace of being his children, we who are under the world yoke, and are bond some by means of our nature. As for Christ, He is the real son, for He is by His nature, the son of the father, even after His incarnation. As I said before, He remained as He was before, despite taking the form of man, which He did not have before. What I am imparting to you now is thoroughly truthful for Isaiah prophesy in assurance (Is 7:14, 15) “Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel. Curds and honey he shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good.”

What does this entire mean? It signifies that Christ when still a nursing infant, has eaten curds and honey. Because He is God incarnate, He only knew what is good, and was stripped off from any of man’s sins. This quality is only attributed to God Almighty, for it is written (Luke 18: 10) that there is no one righteous except one who is God. Moreover, Isaiah prophesied (Is 8:3) Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said to me, “Call his Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (that is, “be quick and take bondsmen, and profit from the spoils) for before the child have knowledge to cry “My father” and “My mother”, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be taken away before the king of Assyria.” With Christ’s birth, Satan’s thorn was broken, and his dominions got usurped, and he has to have many supporters worshipping him in Damascus. But when the Virgin gave birth to Jesus Christ, Satan’s power disappeared and the wisdom of the adversary faded away. For even the atheists themselves knew of the morning sun appearance- the Lord Jesus. The wise men, the magicians traveled from east to Jerusalem, having no guidance to lead them on except that of the heavenly star. Therefore do not look upon the babe in the manger only as an infant, but rather look upon Him as a rich and able God, a Redeemer and a great savior, surpassing the heavenly hoists in power and magnitude. It is His tight that the angles proclaim joyfully and reverently His birth, thus it is most beautiful indeed that the angels sing in praises of His glory so sublime.

St Cyril the Great

+ Notice the roots of the birth of the church; Christ has been born while the shepherds were watching over their flocks by night. These flocks came from all the nations and

from the gentile to the Lord's fold so the beasts would not attack them. The shepherds are able to keep watch just as the good Shepherd has taught them. The flocks are the peoples, and the nighttime is the world, whereas the shepherds are the priests.

St Ambrosios

+ The angel came down from heaven and declared His birth. We can see here the Lord's angel being called to herald Christ's birth, but he did not go to Jerusalem, neither did he search for the scribes or the Pharisees. He did not go either into the Jewish synagogue, but he searched for those shepherds watching their flocks by night.

+ The Lord's angel came to the shepherds and spoke to them. Listen you angels of the churches; the Lord's angel still comes down from heaven to declare to you that today a savior who is Christ the Lord has been born to you. Indeed, if this savior had not come down, the church shepherds would not have been able to take care of their flocks all by themselves. Their case would have failed, had not Christ himself taken care of them together with those church shepherds! We are able to read what was said by the apostles "We are God's harvest" The good Shepherd is he who follows His Master, the good shepherd, and thus he works by means of God the father and by means of Christ.

The Scholar Oreganos

+ Look at how the angels sing in praises, and how the archangels sing in harmony and concord. The cherubim constantly sing their joyful and happy praises, and the seraphim keep glorifying Him incessantly.

All have united together to honor this glorious festival, looking upon God on earth, and man up in heaven. He who is of above dwells here on earth for the sake of our salvation, whereas man, who comes from earth is uplifted to the heavens above by means of the divine mercy.

Bethlehem is now on equal level with the heaven; you can hear the voices of angles praising God from the stars all around. Instead of the sun, the Sun of righteousness shines from all sides.

St John Chrysostom

+ Today the shepherds rejoiced (Daniel 4:13) and there was a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven "who could sleep on the night like this, when all the world is watchful?"

Adam brought sleep on all the world by means of his iniquity, but He who watched came down to wake us up from the deep sleep of iniquity.

+Tonight, the heavenly hosts above have united with the watchful earthly shepherds, for the watcher, the guard, to create guards and shepherds amidst the creation.

Look at this: the watchful shepherds have become colleagues to the heavenly guards. Therefore sing praises with the seraphim!

Blessed is he who becomes a violin for your praises; for your grace and blessings will be your reward!

+ The heavenly hosts have spoken of their peace to the watchful shepherds.

The heavenly guards have come to proclaim the good news to those who were watching at night! The guards have blended together, and all have come to rejoice, for the world has come to life!

St Abram the Syrinite

In this way the Lord has sent His angle to herald the watchful shepherds of the joyful news" to all the people". This angel was not a mere messenger of the good news, he was

rather a partner with humanity in their happiness, he and all the heavenly hosts. The heavens have opened for a host of angels to come down so as to share us our spiritual delight. The evangelists says (Luke 2: 13, 14) “ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host” praising God and saying “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men “ (that is, the good will power).

+ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and good will-power toward men” In the heavens above, there is no sin, but rather there is constant praising and glorifying and singing hymns incessantly. But as for on the earth, where disobedience, discord and divisions occur and prevail, then has come to be the desperate need for peace together with prayer. This does not fall on all people, but on those of good will power.

St Jerome

+ It has been mentioned the manifestation of the heavenly host who have followed the chief of the hosts. To whom do the angels give this honor except to their Lord? As it was said “Glorify the Lord from above”

St Ambrosias

+ If you wish to learn something of the cherubim or the seraphim, then listen to the hymn of His mysterious sanctification, for both heaven and earth are full of His glory (Is 6:3)

St John Chrysostom

This angelic hymn of praise has drawn the attention of the church, and thus the church was eager to use it in praise together with the heavenly host. This is why the church has made use of it in the morning prayers, as mentioned in “the apostles codes”. We still use it in the morning prayers, and thus we begin our day in joyful praise with the angels due to His overwhelming deeds in His divine incarnation.

St Augustine often commented on the expression “good will towards men”: he assures us of God’s sanctification to human freedom, so we might have the good will- power to act freely and not as an obligation. On another occasion he says, “Righteousness pertains to the good will-power”.

When the angels departed, the men said to one another” Luke (2: 16) “ Let us go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass which the Lord hath made known unto us”. They came to witness what they were imparted with, and thus they have become preachers of it, for it is written (Luke 2: 18) “ and all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told to them by the shepherds”

St Ambrosias says, “ The shepherds hastened to search for Christ unslothfully, because the shepherds believed the angels’ words”

St Abram presents to us a delightful picture of the encounter between the shepherds and the baby shepherd, for he says “ The shepherds came carrying the best gifts from their flocks” delicious milk, and fresh meat, and appropriate praise. They gave the meat to Joseph, the milk to Mary and the praise to the Son. They brought a small young lamb and offered it to the Passover Lamb! They offered the first born to the first-born son, a sacrifice to the sacrificed One, and a temporary earthly lamb to the true Lamb! What a beautiful sight to see the Lamb given the gift of a lamb.

The shepherds drew near Him, and worshipped Him, having their canes in their hands. They saluted Him in peace, saying “ Peace to the Prince of peace. Here is Moses’ cane praising Your cane, you shepherd to all, because Moses is praising you, even though his sheep have become wolves, and His flock as if they have become like dragons! You are He whom the shepherds praise for You have reconciled the wolves with the lambs in the fold!

St Mary was greatly touched by this encounter for as the evangelist says, (Luke 2: 19) “ But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart” St Ambrosias comments on this saying” From the shepherds’ words, St Mary reaped her elements of faith” He also says” If St Mary has learnt in the school of shepherds, then why do you reject to learn at the school of priests? If St Mary has kept the secret hidden, then why do you want education more than silence?

3 The Lord’s Circumcision

In our study of the book of Genesis, we have seen how every male of Abraham’s sons was circumcised as a sign of the holy covenant with God, and entering the membership in the sanctified assembly (Gen.15) Anyone who is uncircumcised his soul is stripped off from the sanctified people. But when the Word of God came in the flesh, He was not in need of any circumcision for His own good, but He accepted to bend willingly as a true friend to us, in submission to the law, just like any of us (Gal4: 4) He raised us from under the law, for he alone is the only One who did not break the law. Therefore, the Lord’s circumcision is a new step the Lord takes on the path of the cross, and His submission in giving up the old law for our sake, fulfilling every righteousness (Matt 3:15). What follows are some of the comments said by our fathers concerning the Lord’s circumcision.

+ The child about whom Isaiah spoke have been circumcised (Is 9:6) “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given” (1Cor 9:5) He has become under the law to release those under the law.

St Ambrosias

+ Now you find him obedient to Moses’ law, in other words, you find God the creator, carrying out the law. He himself has decreed! Or as St Paul the wise apostle says (Gal4: 3-5) “ Even so, we, when we were children were in bondage under the elements of the world: but when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons”

Therefore Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, we who were once slaves to the old law, and have proven absolute incapability in working according to its codes. How did He redeem us? By His keeping the commandments of the law. In other words, Christ the Redeemer has yielded instead of us, to the Father our God, in absolute obedience. As is it written, (Room 5:19)” for as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous?”

Christ gave Himself up to the law in our place, for it befits Him to fulfill every righteousness. He has taken the form of a slave and has become one of us, we who are by nature under the yoke of the law. He has paid half the shekel, which is the amount imposed by the Roman government on the people. Even though Christ is the Son of God yet there was no other option than to pay that amount, because He has accepted to take our semblance.

When you see Christ in obedience to the law, do not suffer in pain, and do not put Christ the free One among the bondsmen and slaves, but rather meditate on the depth of this tremendous mystery, the mystery of redemption and salvation!

You can see He was circumcised on the eighth day. This was the day appointed for the physical circumcision according to the old law. Our Redeemer has been called “Jesus”, which means “the Saviour” of the people!

St Cyril the Great

4 The Sacrifice Offering:

St Cyril the great says: “ After Christ’s circumcision St Mary awaited the day for her Purification. On the fortieth day after His birth, Jerusalem carried the Lord Jesus, God the Word. It is He who sits at the right hand of God the Father. There He was in the presence of God in the form of man, as we are too. According to the law, He was considered the firstborn, for He has confessed the law, even before the redeemer’s incarnation in the position of the prime firstborn. He was regarded as sanctified and is consecrated to God, and offered as a sacrifice to God’s honor and glory. Indeed, how great and how amazing is the mystery of salvation and redemption! (Rom 11: 33) “ O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God” He who is the Father’s embrace, this Holy son who shares the Father in the heavenly throne, and by whom all things were created, that He submits to what the human nature requires. It is He who offers the sacrifice to His Father, the overwhelming God, whereas it is He to whom the entire creation gives worship and glorifies with this heavenly Father at all times.

And what was Christ’s offering? The law commanded every first born had to offer a sacrifice of “ a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons”. What do the turtledoves or the pigeons refer to? Let us study together this significance or reference:

The turtledoves are the most clamorous and noisiest birds of the field, whereas the pigeons are quiet and modest. The Redeemer was as such: He has manifested Himself as being so gentle and merciful. He was also as turtledove, going everywhere, filling every place with tenderness, gentleness, blessing and solace. In the book of Songs of Solomon 2:12 it is written, “the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land” For Christ has made us hear the Gospel word which is the word for salvation to the entire world.

Hence, the turtledove and the pigeons were offered, just as Christ, the Son has been offered before God the Father in the temple. In the same place you can thus see the symbol and the reality.

Christ offered Himself a lovely fragrant so as to present us to God the Father. In this way He has wiped out the animosity that has reigned in chains over the relation between God and man. This came as a result of Adam’s transgression over the covenant of the Great God. Christ has ripped off the iniquity that has enslaved us all. We were the ones to cry out in the old times, each one calling on God saying (Ps 25:16) “Turn thee unto me and have mercy upon me” St Jacob El Serougy says” The covenant of the law was given to Moses on the mount with His Father, and He came to fulfill the pre-plan that taught us His trigation of the trinity.

He came for circumcision so no one would disbelieve His incarnation, and He came with the sacrifice to show He was not any different than us.

He came with the turtledoves to form His symbol! St Mary carried the Receiver of us all, together with His offering, so as to come with the sacrifice to the holy temple according to the Law. St Joseph carried the pigeons and he came for the child’s sake and went up to the holy place to present what Moses was commanded to do.

St Ambrosias says,” This is the meaning to the words (Exodes 13: 12) “ That you shall set apart to the Lord all that open the womb, that is every firstborn...” The words of the covenant were a symbol to the true and sinless fruit of the holy Virgin’s womb. This is supported by the angle’s words (Luke 1:35) “ That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God”: For the virgin did not conceive by human means, but rather from the Holy

Spirit that has come upon her and has sanctified her. The Lord Jesus is the only One entirely sanctified and holy among those born of women.

But how can we call every firstborn made holy, whereas we notice many of them are evil? Was Ahab holy? But this is the holy One in whom is fulfilled the mysteries the law has referred to, which is the long awaited for savior, by whom alone the sanctified virgin church can give birth to a congregation of God, by means of an open womb, and to an inheritance of no sin. It is He alone who has come out of the virgin's womb. Therefore, when the Virgin offered her firstborn son as sanctified to the Lord, she has only presented Him, for whose sake the law has made every male that opens the womb holy, as a symbol of Him.

5 Praise of Simon the Elder

The story of Simon the elder as mentioned in the church tradition is summarized as follows: He was one of the seventy-two Jewish elders who were asked by Ptolemy to translate the Greek Torah (Old Testament), which was called the "Seventieth Translation". It is said that as he was in the process of translation, he wished to replace the word "virgin" as mentioned in Isaiah prophecy "A virgin shall conceive" for the word "a young maiden" because he suspected the issue. But the angel of Lord appeared to him and assured him he would not die before he sees the babe born of this virgin. And indeed, due to the Holy Spirit inspiration, he carried the baby Jesus in his arms, and his tongue uttered praises, eager to be released from this world, after he had witnessed by means of the Spirit the salvation of the entire nations and peoples.

The events of Jesus' birth have, for real, presented to us a delightful picture of the Lord's friendship with everyone. For here was a poor virgin who conceived and gave birth, and this was a symbol of the church that is blessed with the spiritual virginity in her unity with the Groom virgin, and thus the church delivered children who were spiritual virgins. The old and barren also gave birth, the silent priest gave praises, the embryo in the womb leaped joyfully, Anna the widow praised God and Simon the elder and the righteous one who was expecting the Israel solace, is led by the Spirit to carry his heavenly Friend in his arms.

Simon's name means "the listener" or "the obedient" and this may signify the obedient Jewish believers who have long waited for the fulfillment of the prophecies. They wish to be blessed with the aspiration of all the nations, the one long awaited for. When the Spirit led them to the temple, they carried the Lord in their arms and they truly wished to depart from the world, after their hearts were relieved regarding the people's salvation, and the declaration of God's glory among all the nations.

+ If the woman who touched the hem of his garment was healed on the spot, so how much more did Simon get blessed with when he carried Him in his arms in great joy and delight?

He has carried the babe who came to release those in bondage and save them from the physical ties. Simon knew there was no one to get him out of the physical imprisonment with the promise of eternal life, except this child in his arms. He addressed Him by the words "Lord now latest Thou thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word" For it has been for a longtime I have not carried the Lord Jesus, I have not embraced Him on my arms. I was imprisoned and unable to untie my bonds. These words do not concern to Simon alone, but they rather concern all humanity that awaits Him.

+ Simon did not haphazardly go into the temple, or by mere coincidence. He was rather led by the Spirit of God. You too, if you wish to take Christ and embrace Him in your arms, and be ready to get released from your imprisonment, then struggle for the spirit to

lead you into God's temple. There you will find Christ, inside the church in the temple erected of living stones.

The scholar Oreganos

+ It is the best evidence and witness that God's ministers have peace, freedom and quiet rest. When you quit the world disturbance, you achieve the city harbor and eternal security, and when we reach death, we achieve immortality.

The Martyr Cyprians

+ Simon has departed, and has been freed from the physical bondage. The ambush has been broken, and the bird flew in freedom.

St Gregory, Bishop of Nisus

+ Now that Simon the priest has carried Him in his arms to present Him before God, he realized it was not he who was offering Him, but rather Simon was presented to God through Him. Because the Son is not presented by the slave to His Father, but rather it is the Son who offers the slave to his Master. He who is released in peace to God is only being offered as an obligation to God!

St Abram the Syrianite

+ Christ was therefore carried to the temple when still a babe that is embraced. As soon as the joyful Simon set his eyes on baby Jesus, he took Him in his arms, blesses God and said "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel". The mystery of redemption was since the very old times, and before the creation of the world. But it was only declared at the end of times, and thus it was light to those dwelling in darkness. These were the ones under Satan's strong hand (Rom1: 25) "and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator" They have worshipped the dragon, the source of evil and iniquity, and have obeyed the defiled hosts of Satan, and knelt down to them just as they would worship the one God. Despite all this, God called on all these people to the light of His true Son, for the prophet says (Zak10:8) "I will whistle for them and gather them, for I will redeem them, and they shall increase as they once increased. Will sow them among the peoples, and they shall remember Me in far countries" Indeed, those who were lost in being misled, are so many; yet God has called them, accepted them and redeemed them. They have obtained as an assurance for peace, the blessing of adoption by means of Jesus Christ.

The pure apostles were sowed among the peoples, and what was the result of this? All who were far away drew neared to the throne of God, to the extent that St Paul the apostle sent them a letter saying (Eph2: 13) "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ". By the drawing close of those people to Christ, they will be gloried by Him, as God the Father has promised them. He says (Zeck10: 12) "So I will strengthen them in the Lord, and they shall walk up and down in His name". The psalmist in his joy says concerning this (Ps89: 15, 16) "They shall walk O Lord, in the light of Thy Countenance. In Thy name they rejoice all the day, and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted." Jeremiah the prophet pleads to the Lord saying (Jer 16: 19) "O Lord, my strength and my fortress, my refuge in the day of affliction, the gentiles shall come to You from the ends of the earth and say "Surely our fathers have inherited lies, worthlessness and unprofitable things."

Thus Christ was light and glory to Israel. Even though some Jews have lost the way and were ignorant of the books, and have denied Christ, yet some of them have become saved and have become glorified by Jesus. Their leaders were the sanctified apostles who with their light have let the Gospel lantern in the farthest spots of the earth.

Christ is moreover the glory of Israel, for He is attributed to them according to the flesh even though (Rom9: 5) “ who is overall. God blessed forever.”

St Cyril the Great.

We notice in Simon’s praises the following points:

Firstly: He declares the generalization of the salvation, and the collective Catholic Church. His people, Israel, of whom He has become flesh, and has come in their midst, those Israelites have become glorified. Some of the Jews have accepted the faith in Him, particularly the twelve apostles. But the new Israel has been opened in practical love on the cross for the sake of all the Gentiles. He says (Luke2: 30, 31) “For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation (the cross), which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles.”

The church in joy has adopted this spiritual outlook, for it is said:

+ He has been hung on the tree, He who combines everyone to Him.

+ Because we have lost Him by means of the tree, yet by means of the tree also, He has been declared to all. He has manifested Himself as the height, the length, the breadth and the depth. As one of our predecessors has said, He has brought back the unity between the two peoples in God by means of opening His arms. There were two arms, for there were two peoples spread out to the farthest ends of the earth. There has been found one head, for there is found one God only.

St Arianus

+ The cross is the way to the universe bond.

St Gregory, Bishop of Niscus

+ The cross is Jacob’s ladder; this tree has the heavenly dimensions, and it has been raised from the earth to the heavens, it has planted itself on eternal rooting between heaven and earth, so the universe be uplifted. It compiles together different kinds of human natures.

St Hypolitus.

Since the church in her joy of the angelic praise of “Glory to God in the highest...” has been chanting it every morning, then in her joy of this praise of Simon the elder “Lord, now lettest thy servant depart in peace”, it has begun chanting it in the midnight praise, as well as vespers.

Secondly: When St Joseph and St Mary heard this hymn of praise they were amazed, because what God had declared to them at the annunciation has become known to Simon the priest and the elder, in an obvious way. When they became blessed with the blessings of Simon the priest, this elderly person addressed his words to St Mary saying (Luke2: 34)

“Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoke against”.

If God the father has sent His son for the salvation of the world (John 3:16) through the sign of cross, yet not everyone accepts this sign and responds to God’s overwhelming love, rather some may reject the cross and find it offensive. On the other hand, the fall and rise of many refers to the fall of evil in our life so that God’s kingdom rises in us. The work of the Lord Jesus is to pull down the old man, and to build up the new one. He pulls out the thorns to plant in us the tree of life.

This concept concerns the fall and rise of many in Israel; that is, the fall of the ungrateful and the rise of the believers. It is the fall of evil in us, so God's righteousness is established inside us; this has been explicit in the fathers' writings, for it has been mentioned:

+ (2Cor2: 15) "For we are unto God a sweet savior of Christ, in them that are saved and in them that perish" Whether those who are saved, or those who perish, the Gospel does its appropriate work. Just as the light, even if it is counted as blindness regarding the weak one, yet it is still light... also; honey is bitter in the sick man's mouth, though it is naturally sweet. Likewise the gospel, that has sweet fragrance even if some perish due to their disbelief in it. This is not the cause for their perish but rather it is due to their corruption. By the savior many fall and rise, yet He remains the Savior even if mounds of people perish. He still goes on offering the cure and the healing for so many people.

St John Chrysostom

+ Here we have Simon the elder, prophesying in his turn that the Lord Jesus has come for the fall and rise of many, so He rewards the deeds of the righteous and the evil. He will give each one according to his deeds, as the real and a fair judge. He will either reward by punishment or by life.

St Ambrosias

+ I think that the Lord is for the fall and the rise of many, not because some fall and the others rise, but rather because he falls in us what is evil and builds in us what is better. The coming of the Lord is destructive for the physical passions, and constructive for the qualities of the good soul. As St Paul says (2Cor12: 10) "for when I am weak, then am I strong". In the very same person, there is what is weak and what is strong, for he might be weak physically and strong spiritually.

He who rises lets his sin fall and die, as he lives in righteousness. Rising is granted as special blessings due to our faith in Christ.

Let any evil in us fall, so we would find a better chance to rise up, for unless adultery falls from us chastity will not rise in us. Unless all kinds of distortion of the mind are destroyed our minds will not be perfected. The words "for the fall and rise of many" means what I have just said.

St Basilios the Great

Therefore the Lord Jesus is the choicest and most precious corner stone that the Father has erected in Zion, so that all who believe in Him will not be disappointed (Rom2: 9). (Luke 20:18) "Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall it will grind him to powder". This precious stone will be manifested in our inward Zion, and will destroy in us all corruption and will grind all kinds of evil, so that God's inner construction is built in correctness and righteousness. It is the rock that is built on no wrong foundation and this is why "many will fall and rise" by its means.

When we speak of the Lord Jesus we only speak of Him as being "the Crucified" for Simon the elder continues his words saying "and for a sign which shall be spoken against" As St Basilios the great says "We wisely understand that the sign in the Holy Book means "the cross" St Cyril the Great also says "As for the sign to be resisted, it is meant to be the cross". For St Paul wisely says (1Cor1: 18) "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness but unto us who are saved it the power of God". So you can see that the sign of the cross to some people is foolishness whereas to others it is mercy and life.

Once more St. Basilios the Great sees the sign resisted by the heretics is "the reality of Christ's incarnation". Some said it is heavenly incarnation thereby denying the reality of incarnation such as the Agnostics. Other said it is a body that existed before all the

ages and some others believed Christ began his existence with St. Mary, that is, they deny his divinity.

Thirdly: If the Lord Jesus who has come for the salvation of the world has become something to be resisted, then the Virgin Mary shares her son in the cross for she presents the church that carries the image of Her groom, the resisted groom. For the elder Simon says, (Luke 2:35) “yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed”. As St. Cyril the Great says “the sword signifies the tremendous suffering St. Mary went through when she saw her son being crucified, where as he did not know He was stronger than death and that for sure he had to rise from the grave. It is not surprising the Virgin did not know this fact, for even the holy disciples were ignorant of it. For unless Thomas had put his hand in Christ’s side after his resurrection and felt the traces of the nails in Christ’s body, he would not had believed his master had risen after his death. In one of the section in the ninth hour prayer there came the words “ When the mother saw the lamb and the Shepherd, the savior of the world hanging on the cross said weeping as for the world it rejoices for receiving the salvation, but as for my interior it is ablaze when I see your crucifixion which you are enduring for everyone’s sake my son and my God”.

St Ambrosias gives us another point of view for the sword that pierces the soul of St. Mary; it is “the Word of God” that we appropriately have to accept in our depths as a double-edged sword (Heb4: 12) it divides evil so it falls off, away from righteousness, which rises up in its place. “ Neither the Holy book nor any historical document mentions that the Virgin Mary was martyred. In addition to this, the material sword does not pierce the spirit but rather the body (Heb 4:12). “For the Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than two -edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit”

Fourthly: What is meant by his words (Luke2: 35) “that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed?” The sword- whether it be that of the suffering or the Word of God- when it pierces the soul of St. Mary, this reveals the thoughts and hearts of many people, such as, the scribes and the Pharisees. They pretend to know thoroughly the old law and pretend to have the zeal for the covenant. Thus, before God’s work with St Mary, they are uncovered in their inner reality, and their false hypocrisy is revealed.

6 The Praise of Anna, the daughter of Phanuel

It was essential for all the categories to be glad about the amazing Child. The evangelist St Luke presents to us Anna the widow, a prophet to glorify Him. It is as if she is performing the role of all the category of widows.

If Simon comes to the temple as a priest to minister in his shift, then this widow was constantly and inseparably in the temple (Luke2: 37) “ which departed not from the temple, but served God with fasting and prayers night and day,” for around eighty-four years. On seeing the Child she “coming in that instant gave thanks.” Despite her old age, for she was about a hundred years old, she began praising God and her mouth opened in a prophetic spirit.

St Jerome wrote to the widow (Furies) and spoke of Anna as a living example, for he says, “Do you wish to know how widows should be like? Let us read the gospel according to St Luke for he says “ and there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Panuel of the tribe of Aser.” The word “Anna” means the grace of God’s kindness.

Phanuel in our tongue means “God’s face”. “Aster” could be translated “rich” or “blessed”. Since her youth she tolerated widowhood for eighty-four years, barely ever leaving the temple. She worshipped in fasting and pleading day and night. Thus she obtained the spiritual blessings and she was worthy of the title “the daughter of God’s face”. She also obtained the portion in “blessing and riches” for she is attributed to him”.

7 The Return to Nazareth

(Luke 2: 39,40) “ And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the Child grew, and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom. And the grace of God was upon Him”. The conception with the Lord Jesus and His birth has made heaven and earth rejoice. The heavenly hosts in gladness began to bless the earth. The simple people such as the shepherds and the wise-men, the priests as Zechariahs and the elder Simon, the married spouses as Elizabeth and virgins as St Mary, and the widow as Anna daughter of Phanuel, and children as John the Baptist- all of those have rejoiced exceedingly at Christ’s birth. When he was forty days old, He went into the temple and then returned to Nazareth in a peaceful atmosphere, to practice the human life as one of us. As St. John Chrysostom says “ He did not wish to manifest any miracles in His childhood or His youth, so He would begin His service in our life, declaring the truth about His divinity. This is what the evangelist St John confirms when changing the water into wine at the Canaan wedding, proclaiming His first miracle, which He has performed. (John 3)

He has adopted our human nature and became like one of us, despite His being undivided in any way from His godliness. Due to this humanization it was said (Luke 2: 40) “ And the child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon Him”.

What follows are some of the remarks said by the fathers about this expression, as well as on the words (Luke 2: 52) “ And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man”.

+ The words “ and Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man, signify His human nature. Therefore I wish you to contemplate deeply the theory of redemption. The word of God accepted to be born a man, though His divine nature has no beginning and is timeless; for He is the perfect God who has accepted to submit to the law of physical growth and to develop in wisdom whereas He is the God of wisdom. Therefore look upon Christ now, when he has become like one of us. God has become man; the rich One has become poor, and the Almighty has become humiliated. God the Word has emptied all of what is in Himself, by accepting the human nature. God the Word had to take the body from the woman, and would thus become as soon as His birth took place, a man developed in His members of the body, fully interwoven in perfection. But if this had happened, it would have been highly imaginative. Thus the Child followed and conformed the human natural laws, and hence He grew in wisdom, in stature and in grace.

Yet do not be amazed because I have asked, “ How can God grow and develop? How can God He who grants the angels and the people all the grace, Himself be granted wisdom and grace?”

I wish you to contemplate on the expressions mentioned in the gospel, clarifying this amazing mystery for the wise evangelist did not point to the word, which is the divine nature with the two previous verses. He rather pointed without confusion or any dimming coverage, to Christ and His being born a man of a woman, and His taking our likeness and becoming a human child. Concerning this situation the evangelist speaks of Him as “ And Jesus

increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.” You can thus see that the Child’s body grew according to the laws of nature, and that His mind grew in accordance with His physical growth.

The body grew in stature, and the spirit grew in wisdom. But as for God, due to His divine nature, He is perfect for He is the source of wisdom and perfection.
St Cyril the Great.

+ The gospel words describe clearly that our Lord grew regarding his humanity.

St Gregory, Bishop of Nisus

+ The nature of God has come down to dwell in the human body, and also in a human spirit. “He grew” he has denied Himself and has taken the form of a slave (Phil2: 7). With the Almighty that He had, He denied and declined Himself and also grew in stature. With the power with which he declined Himself, He also grew and developed. He appeared as weak, for He managed in His childhood to take upon Himself a weak body, and He also managed to grow and get stronger.

The Son of God denied and declined Himself, and in the same power He got filled with wisdom, and the grace and favour of God was upon Him.

He was filled with grace in His youthful days, for He was teaching the multitudes when He was only a youth. He was amazing and awesome in everything, overwhelming in His youth and was filled with God’s wisdom.

The scholar Oreganos

+ The words are added (Luke2: 51) “ but His mother kept all these saying in her heart.” St Mary knew well these are things that surpass the normal man, and thus she kept in her heart all her son’s words. She saw him grow and get stronger in wisdom before the Lord and people. Jesus grew in wisdom as years passed by.

The scholar Oreganos.

+ The growth here concerns the body, for when he grows the godliness is manifested to those that see him. His godliness was proclaimed more and more, and thus His grace increased in the eyes of all the people. As a child, he was carried to the temple. When He became a youth He discussed the law with the priests. When his body grew, the Word manifested Himself in Him. This is why St Peter confessed Him and the rest followed him (Matt16: 16; 27:54) “You are the Son of God”

The growth of wisdom here does not mean the growth of “wisdom” itself, but rather the growth of his humanity by the manifestation of His wisdom. This is why it was said (prov9: 1) “Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars”

8 Jesus in the Temple

The holy gospel have not narrated to us the personality of the Lord Jesus since his return from Egypt as a child, may be at the age of three, till the beginning of His service at the age of thirty. Except for the story of His entering the temple at the age of twelve. This matchless story reveals to us the youth of the Lord Jesus, and tells us of the first words uttered by Him in the gospel: “Wist ye not that I must be about My Father’s business?” also the mission and goal of this youth was” I have to do what is for My Father”, and moreover, it reveals to us His obedience and His submission to the Virgin St Mary, His mother.

We notice in this story the following:

Firstly: The law commanded all Jewish men to go to Jerusalem every year to celebrate the Passover and the cake bread festival together. Those travelling used to be in two groups, one for women in the front and the other for men in the rear, whereas the children walked with either the men or the women. Thus when the first day passed in their return, both groups

drew closer; and Joseph saw St Mary and they asked each other about the Boy, for each thought He was with the other. They kept asking about Him among the men and women. When they could not find anywhere they returned to Jerusalem where they stayed for a third day. This is why the evangelist says (Luke 2: 46) “ and it came to pass, that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both hearing them and asking them questions.”

We do not know anything about the conversation between Christ at the age of twelve with the teachers. But we do know that (Luke 2:47) “ All that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers” and we also know (Luke 2: 48) that St Mary and Joseph “ when they saw Him, they were amazed”. He may have been talking with them concerning the real Passover, and thus would reveal to them the need of being released from the symbolic Passover lamb to the true One. Or, He may have been discussing with them the crossing over not from the land of Egypt to Canaan, but rather from hell to paradise. He may also have been telling them of the need for the Messiah, and uncovering to them the prophecies. At any rate, He was speaking in authority and thus the listeners were amazed. There is no doubt St Mary saw He as amazing for the evangelist says (Luke2: 51) “ but His mother kept all these sayings in her heart”.

The evangelist specified they found Him after three days in the temple, sitting amidst the teachers (Luke2: 46). As we have previously seen when studying the book of Joshua, the number 3 signifies the faith in the Holy Trinity, and it also refers to the resurrection of the Messiah from the dead. It is quite impossible for the church to leave her groom in His holy temple except it be by means of the faith in the Trinity, or the touch with the holy Trinity work in her life, and also through the life experience established with Christ. In other words, we cannot be able to encounter the Lord, and be blessed with His tremendous friendship in His sanctification unless we are blessed by the faith in the Trinity and live through His life that is established in us!

If we accept practically the faith in the trinity, and be blessed with the Father’s parental hood and let our hearts be opened to the Son’s redemption and thus obtain the partnership of His holy spirit... and if we obtain the heavenly life established in Christ...then, in that case we shall see the Lord Himself in our hearts just as He is in His temple. There, He leads all of His inward discussions, teaching us and training us as a Teacher of authority. He leads the heart with all the emotions it carried, and the thoughts with all their extensions, and the body with all of its senses. Let us see him as his mother did, and be amazed with her at His deeds in us.

Secondly: The scholar Oreganos comments on the search of St Mary and St Joseph for the young Child Jesus, saying, “At the age of twelve He remained in Jerusalem. His parents did not know of it, for they thought Him among their friends. They searched for Him among the close ones and those they knew, but they could not find Him anywhere. His parent kept searching for Him...Joseph who had taken Him to Egypt, could not find Him anywhere. We do not find Jesus when we are among relatives or friends according to the body, we do not find Him in the physical family... my Jesus will not be found among the multitudes. Look where Jesus was found, so you take St Mary and St Joseph with you in your search, and you will surely find Him. The gospel tells us that after three days they found Him only in the temple and nowhere else. He was sitting among the teachers listening to them and asking them questions: you too, search for Jesus in God’s temple. Search for Him in the church. Search for Him among those teachers who do not leave the temple, and there you will surely find Him. But if someone claims to have the gift of teaching, and yet he has not Jesus in him then he is only a teacher by name and you will not find Christ in him. We find Christ among the true teachers as the evangelist says.

The Lord Jesus was asking at times, and answering at other times. He was great in His questions. We entreat Him, so we could hear him asking us and answering us. Let us search for Him diligently, even till suffering. It is then that we will find Him. The book says, "Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing". Do not seek Jesus in negligence and hesitation as some do, for these ones will not find him. The scholar also says, "I do not think they were sorrowful for their assumption that the boy was lost or dead. It was not possible for St Mary to think as such, for it was He who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and it was He who was announced by the angel. It was He to whom the shepherds knelt down, and was carried by Simon. It is quite impossible for St Joseph to assume this, for it was to him that the angel gave the command to take the Child and flee to Egypt. It was St Joseph who has heard the words (Matt.1: 20) " Joseph thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." It is impossible for St Joseph to fear something wrong happening to the child, for he was sure that He was God the Word. Therefore, the parents' worries and their question implied another meaning the ordinary reader might be unable to comprehend.

They sought Jesus and were stunned at the thought of Him being away from them, or that He has left them and gone somewhere else, or that He may have ascended up to heaven so as He would descend at the right time.

You too, if one day you lose the Son of God search for Him first at the temple. Hasten to the temple and there you will find Jesus the Word and the Wisdom, that is to say, the Son of God.

Thirdly: St Augustine comments on St Mary's words (Luke 2:48) that "Your father and I, by declaring that though she obtained all this honor by means of the incarnation of God's Word in her womb, yet she behaved in spiritual modesty towards St Joseph, by presenting him first, then herself to follow; "Your father and I". She knew only too well He was not of St Joseph seed, but by means of her spiritual love that filled up the holy family, she considered him His father and thus she mentioned him first, before herself.

Fourthly: The first words said by the Lord, as came in the holy gospel, were (Luke2: 49) "How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business? These words reveal the true nature of the Lord Jesus and His mission, and they also specify the features of the appropriate behavior.

- (a) Regarding the Lord Jesus' nature, He does not object to His being attributed to St Mary and St Joseph, for His mother said to Him that they were seeking Him sorrowfully. St Joseph was a father to Him according to the law, for the sake of adoption, even though He was not of his seed. His mother St Mary was biologically His own mother, but yet He was the Son of the Highest. He confirms His relationship to God, declaring He is the Son of God the Father " I must be about My Father's business".

According to His human nature, He was attributed to St Mary because she carried Him in her womb, and He took from her a body. But He is not attributed to St Joseph; yet for his service to the Lord, and for his loving relation to St Mary, it was said of him:

+ The gospel mentioned the title of "His parents" referring to the Virgin because it was she who conceived and bore Him, and it was St Joseph who served Him.

The scholar Oreganos.

+ Just as St Mary was called a mother to John in love and not because that she conceived him, likewise is St Joseph called a father to Christ, not because he begot Him, but it was rather due to his upbringing and care to Christ.

St Cyril El Orshilimy

+ Due to the matrimonial integrity, both of them are worthy of being called “Jesus parents”, for they were as such according to the mind and goal, and not according to the body. If one of them was the father in the goal, yet the other, who is the mother, is his mother from the physical point of view. Both were thus called His parents according to His modesty and not due to His sublimity; according to His weakness in His humanization and not according to His divinity.

St Augustine.

But His words to St Mary confirm His godliness, for He says, “I must be about My Father’s business”.

+ At this point Christ is referring to His true Father, and He uncovers His godliness.

St Cyril the Great.

+ Christ has two prophecies: one is from the Father and the other is from St Mary. The first is a godly one linked to His Father, and the second was fulfilled by being delivered of St Mary, for He has condescended to come down to us.

St Ambrosias.

- (b) The scholars in education and psychiatrists think the Lord’s words” How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father’s business?” as similar to a new outbreak in the childhood world. For Jesus was obedient unto them, a sign of perfect submission to His parents. As St Ambrosias says, “Was it possible that the Teacher of all virtue would not fulfill His responsibilities to them? For He did not yield to them out of weakness, but rather out of love”. In such a way did this unique Youth offer us a living example of children’s obedience to their parents? As St Jerome wrote to the nun called Ostichim “ Obey your parents following the model of your Groom”. Moreover, the scholar Oreganos says “Let us learn my children, our obedience to our parents... for Christ has submitted, and He became a model to all children in their obedience to their parents or guardians if they are orphans. If Christ the Son of God has submitted to St Mary and St Joseph, should we not be obedient to the priest whom God has appointed to me as a father? Should I not be submissive to the priest elected by God’s will?”

The Lord Jesus has offered us a live and practical lesson of submission and obedience to the parents. He said, “How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father’s business?” It is therefore the youth’s right to conduct his mission according to his gifts and potentials, and he should not be a device of thoughtlessness in the hands of his parents. In other words, it is appropriate for the parents to deal with their son, not as an extension of themselves, and shape him the way they want and they wish him to be, but rather to guide and instruct him in developing his gifts and potentials. They are to treat him as a person who has an independent entity of his own, and not as a follower to them.

The civil rules and religious codes, even those of the Jewish, did not at that time give children the right of life, in the human sense of freedom. Some codes even allowed parents to kill their child, or offer him as a sacrifice to the gods, as the worshipers of Mellow did. But the Lord came to grant the child his right to practice life according to that which befits his personality, his talents and his abilities. I shall detain this discussion to a study published in the book “The family Love” with God’s will.

Fifthly: The scholar Oreganos comments on the evangelist's words (Luke2: 50, 51) " And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them, saying "They could not understand the significance of Jesus' words, "I must be about My Father's business" that is that I have to be in the temple.

Jesus' home is in the highest; therefore St Mary and St Joseph, as they had not yet reached the perfect faith level, they could not yet soar with Him in the highest. This is why the Book says" He went down with them". Jesus often went down with His disciples, and did not stay a long time on the mount".

We conclude our discussion about the Lord Jesus by adopting the words recorded by St Jerome to Laeta concerning her upbringing of her daughter Paula: " I hope she grows in wisdom and stature with her Groom before God and the people. Let her go with her parents to the temple of her true Father and let her not leave the temple with them. Let them seek her among the ways of the world and among the crowds and relatives and not find her there. Let them rather find her in the holiest part of the temple of the Holy Book. Let her ask the prophets and the apostles about the concept of spiritual marriage to which she has consecrated her Life"

CHAPTER III

Declaring the Heavenly Friend

Before telling us of the work of this heavenly Friend, particularly with the rejected and despised categories, He spoke to us of the nature of this Friend. This was declared by means of His forerunner John the Baptist, and also by means of the witness from heaven itself: the Baptism

1. The appearance of John the Baptist
2. The urge to repent
3. His witness to Christ
4. The Lord's baptism
5. The Lord Jesus' lineage attribution

1. The Appearance of John the Baptist:

Due to the important role of John the Baptist which was prophesized in the Old Testament, the evangelist St. Luke tells us of the time appearance of St. John as an actual fact which has been fulfilled. He also tells us of the nature of his work, and his witnessing of the Lord Jesus

Concerning the time of His appearance, he said, *“Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and His brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness”* (**Luke 3:1,2**).

In the annunciation of conception the divine inspiration specified the date, by proclaiming the name of the king of Judah, the time in which the event occurred (**Luke 1:5**). In the beginning of his manifestation in his mission for service, the name of the Roman emperor was mentioned, as well as the Roman ruler, and three other chiefs, each of whom ruled over one-fourth, for Judah was divided into four regions, and also the name of the chief-priest. Among all of these earthly religions and temporary leaders, not one of them was well-equipped to have the Word of God on Him except for John the Baptist, who was raised in the wilderness.

He may have mentioned these names to show us to what extent Israel has been humiliated. Israel was not only subject to the Roman empire, but the Israelite kingdom was also divided into four regions governed by Roman governors. Even the chief priest was appointed by the Roman governor! This abject humiliation is one of the signs of Christ's coming, for it was said, (**Genesis 49:10**)

In the midst of this dim atmosphere, John appeared preparing the way for the Lord Jesus, as St. Ambrosios says, “the voice appeared preparing the way to the Word”

St. Ambrosios, comments on the words of St. Luke, the evangelist, *“The Word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness”* (**Luke 3:2**) saying that the Word of

God, that is, the Lord Jesus, was working secretly in John when he was in the wilderness, before working in His church, which was a barren wilderness, He planted it with sanctified tress which He brought from among the nations; it was previously barren but has now got children (**Isaiah 54:1**).

We can say the while the Romans were governing Judah even in the religious matters, since the Roman governor removed the chief priest Annas and appointed Caiaphas instead, during that time God was planning for them what was far greater. God did not only destroy the Roman kingdom and raised Israel from abject scorn, But he prepared John in the midst of the wilderness in a mysterious way to pave the way for Israel and also for the Romans. This was to make them accept the membership in Christ' sanctified body, bonded together by the one Head on a far higher level, on the level of endless eternity.

Life may get darkened in your face, and you might think evil has prevailed and has ruined the believers. But at all times God works in the midst of the barren wilderness to establish from it a holy paradise that comprises trees from all nations, peoples, and tongues.

Regarding the site of his service, and the nature of his work, it is said, *“And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins”* (**Luke 3:3**)

The site of His work was the country surrounding Jordan. The word “country” may have meant a particular area which surrounds Jordan, because the essence of his mission was “the baptism”, preparing the way for the Lord Jesus' baptism, not only for the forgiveness of sins, but also for being blessed as God's children, as well as the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in us. This is to bless us with the friendship of the Lord, on a level of true unity and in the sharing of His glories.

The job performed by John the Baptist has not been a haphazard one; it was rather a part of God's plan for salvation. The prophet could foresee it and spoke of it, for the evangelist says, *“as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness. Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God’”* (**Luke 3:4-6**)

First: If Christ the Lord is the Word of God, then John is merely the voice that prepares the way for the Word. If Christ the Lord is “the truth” in its essence, then John is the voice resounding in the wilderness to accept the truth by means of “the ways” or “the straight paths”. He is crying out calling to be filled with hope. He was also calling for the desperate souls to the low valleys to be filled with hope. He was also calling the haughty souls as if they are mountains or the accumulated hills to become humbled. In this way everyone would be blessed with salvation.

By the “valleys” he may have meant “the Gentiles” that were destroyed by atheism, and has made them lose all hope in the Lord. The mountain and accumulated sand tops could mean “the people of Israel and Judah” who have become so haughty. The call is addressed to everyone “ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God”.

Second: The call was directed towards the practical repentance and conduct, “And the crooked shall be made straight and the rough ways shall be made smooth”. This is call to depart from every crooked way or curved way; for no one will see salvation when he is shut up in his evil and the crookedness in his life.

Third: The words “all flesh” here means in the Greek origin “body” as St. Augustine says, “the holy book is used to describe the human nature by saying ‘everybody’ . Also he does not mean a body with no soul or mind but rather ‘all flesh’ which means ‘every person’”

Fourth: St. John’s call is still there for every soul our depths will not see God’s salvation unless we hear St. John’s voice inside us filling our humbled hearts in hope, thereby destroying all haughtiness and pride. Our inward feelings, moreover, will be changed from crookedness, and make our rough ways smooth.

Fifth: Because St. Luke’s gospel is addressed to the Greeks he has adopted here the words of Isaiah the prophet which open the door of hope to all the Gentiles, for he says, “and all flesh shall see the salvation of God”. Moreover, St. Cyril the great comments on his saying “every man has seen the salvation of God the father because He has sent His son a Redeemer and Savior. This was not restrict to certain people and not to others, for the words “all flesh” is said about all the peoples of the entire world. It does not refer only to the children of Israel, but to all the peoples to the farthest end of the globe. For the mercy of our savior is limitless, and not one nation will be saved on account of the other. Christ has redeemed all the nations and has shown with His light on all those in darkness. This is what the Psalmist meant when he said, “ *all nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, oh Lord, and shall glorify Your name.*” (see **Psalm 86:9**). At the same time the remaining ones of the people of Israel will be saved as Moses declared, for he said, “*Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people*” (**Deut. 32:43**)

2-The Urge for Repentance:

“Then he said to the multitude that came forth to be baptized by him ‘o generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves ‘We have Abraham our father’, for I say unto you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire” (**Luke3:7-9**)

In this excerpt we notice the following:

First: The coming of the multitudes in great numbers did not rejoice the heart of St. John the Baptist, and he did not regard his as a success of mission, because his baptism has to be linked to the practical repentance that springs up from true faith. In Christianity baptism is bonded to the practical faith, if offered to the children, the god father or mother makes a pledge (in most cases the parents are the god parents) of raising up the children in the active Christian faith.

In the articles of St. Cyril El Orshilimy, it was mentioned to those wishing for baptism, “Have you come in because the guard has not forbidden you to enter? Or is it because you are ignorant of the appropriate clothes by entering to the banquet? Go our now in decency, and enter tomorrow when you are fully prepared. Indeed, the Groom invites everyone without any discrimination because His grace to us is so rich, and the voice of the apostles is loud, calling for all to be assembled. But it is the Groom Himself who selects those who entered with Him in a symbolic matrimonial relationship, Oh! I wish no one to hear the words recorded against them, “*Friend how comest though in hither not having a wedding garment?*” (Matt 22:12)

Second: He called them “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” He adopted this analogy from the actual environment in which he lived, since there were so many snakes in the wilderness.

He may have meant by “vipers” here their having three qualities: the first in their love of harming others, for the serpent is venomous and fatal to man. This harmful behavior of the serpents was even to the close ones. It is said that some of their kind, the little ones eat their own mother. Moreover the serpent creeps on its belly which represents the earthly and dusty thoughts.

Theses words mean the evil of the Jews that have got to be defiled by the poison of their evil hearts. Theses people are they who love the crookedness of the vipers and their hidden caves in the deep earth rather than their love to know the mysteries of knowing God. Despite the words “Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” signify God’s mercy granted them the opportunity to repent from their sins, begging them and making it clear in great integrity the fearful damnation awaiting them.

St. John meant by saying, “O generation of vipers” the Jews as a race and not as persons. It has been said, “*Be ye as wise as serpents*” (Matthew 10:16), for they were granted the natural wisdom, but they expected it thoughtlessly for themselves, disregarding their departure from their iniquity.

St. Ambrosios

He was right in calling them brood of vipers; for it is said this particular kind of animal, when being born, the little ones eat up their mothers womb and kill her and thus they go out to light. This kind of people do the very same thing, for they are killers of fathers and mothers (1 Tim 1:9). They destroy their teachers with their own hands.

St. John Chrysostom

Third: He asks them not to rely on their biological attribution to Abraham “Begin not to say within yourselves, ‘we have Abraham our father’”. It is more appropriate for them to carry on being children to Abraham through the practical conduct. As real children let them follow his example of faith and behavior, otherwise God is able to raise up children to Abraham from stones. He actually did raise up children to Abraham from stones and will continue to do so forever. In the Old Testament, He raised from Sarah’s barren womb, which is similar to stones, Isaac and his uncountable descendants, which are children to Abraham.

He still raises from the stony hearts, believing hearts, that are children to Abraham, the father of all believers.

- He warned them not to be proud because of their noble origin, but rather on the splendor of their deeds. The celebration gives no privilege unless recommended by the inheritance of faith
- God as getting ready to soften the cruelty of our hearts, so as to make a believing generation out of these rocks.

St. Ambrosios

- Of what use is the family attribution if the children do not walk in the righteous and noble way as did their forefathers and ancestors? This is why the Savior says (**Luke 8:39**), that if you are Abraham's children then do the deeds of Abraham. God wishes the relationship to be based on behavior and deeds, since it is useless to be proud of your good and holy parents, whereas you are immature in reaching their level of goodness and righteousness.
- St. John, the Baptist, the devout man, uses the word "stone" referring to the Gentiles, since they did not know Christ the Lord. They deviated from worshipping God and knelt down to the creation instead of the Creator. But Christ called them and they responded to His call and heeded His voice, and thus they became Abraham's children. They confesses their faith in Jesus Christ, and the fact that He is God the Savior.

St. Cyril the Great

God can make stones to become Abraham's sons; here He signifies the Gentiles for they were stones due to their hard hearts. We read in (**Ex 36:26**), that God could take away the stony heart in the flesh and give you a heart of flesh instead. Therefore the rocks are a symbol of cruelty, and the flesh is a symbol of gentleness. He wished to show God's power who is able to make out of the stony, hard rocks, a believing congregation.

St. Jerome

Fourth: He uses the threatening language of punishment, "*And now also the eye is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire*" (**Luke 3:9**)

- Let us follow the example of the fruitful trees, and thus our virtues develop and grow, supported by the roots of constant modesty. Let us be exalted above anything worldly, and carry at the summit the deeds of fruitful repentance, and let not the sowers' axe come forth and cut off the wild branch that is unfruitful. For St. Paul says, "*Woe unto me if I do not preach*" (**1 Cor. 5:6**), "*But as for me I say 'Woe unto me if I do not weep over my sins, woe unto me if I do not rise at midnight to thank You for Your righteous judgment, woe unto me if I scandalize my close ones, and woe unto me if I do not utter the truth'*" (**Psalms 118:12**)

Here you are the axe on the root of the tree, I wish it grows and brings forth fruits of thanksgiving and fruits of repentance.

Here the Lord stands reaping the fruits and granting life for the fruits; and He discovers the unfruitful tree that has born no fruits for three years (**Luke 13:7**). He found no fruits for the Jews, and I hope He would find fruits in us, for His intent is to cut off those who are unfruitful so they do not make useless usage of the earth. Let those who are unfruitful struggle so as to bear future fruits, for the Sower of the good earth intercedes in us, we who are fruitless and useless, so as to have opportunity. May God be forbearing and patient with us, so that we may perhaps, be able to bear some good fruits.

St. Ambrosios

The axe signifies God's wrath and dissatisfaction because the Jews have disobeyed Christ and they committed great criminal acts against the Lord. Zacharias speaks of this, "*In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Haded Rimnon*" (**Zach. 12:11**). Jeremiah too addresses Jerusalem and says, "*The Lord called your name, green olive tree, lovely of good fruit. With the noise of a great tumult. He has kindled fire on it, and its branches are broken. For the Lord of hosts who planted you, has pronounced doom against you for the evil of the home of Israel*". (**Jer. 11:16**). Moreover, you can add to these words the fig tree parable in the Holy Gospel, for when the fig tree was unfruitful, God wished its that its roots die and dry up.

Notice that John the Baptist does not say the axe has been put "inside" the tree but rather on the root source. He wished to say the branches withered and collapsed, but as for those who plant it has not been uprooted because there is a remaining part of the Israelites who have repented to God and have thus been saved and have not perished eternally.

St. Cyril the Great

What is this axe which has been put on the tree source to cut and throw into the fire other than as St. Jerome says, "the double-edged sword, the word of God, that cuts off all what is unfruitful in us. The word of God is strong and active, able to destroy in us any infertility and to establish in us with His precious blood live fruits.

Fifth: When he threatened to uproot the fruitless tree from the very roots and throw it away into the fire, He made clear that these fruits are "the active love" or "the mercy" for He says, "*and the people asked Him saying, 'What shall we do then? He answers and says unto them, 'he that has two coats, let him give to him that has none, and he that has meat, let him do likewise'*" (**Luke 3:10, 11**)

He was asked by the tax collectors and officers, and His commandment to them focused on mercy and practical love. He asked the tax collectors not to leave their job, but to work honestly and not to exploit their position, by collecting more taxes than they should for their own account. He did not ask the soldiers either to leave their job, but rather not to seize the opportunity their job offers them and thus unjustly treat others, or cheat others. They have to be satisfied with doing their job in honesty and to ask only for their wages.

John the Baptist gave only one answer that is appropriate for all human work: Mercy is a general virtue, and is the essential principle to follow in every job site, practiced by all

ages; the Pharisee, the officer, or any farmer, there is no exception to it whatsoever. The rich or the poor are no exception either, for all are invited to give to those who do not have, for mercy is the perfection of all virtues.

St. Ambrosios

Indeed he did not forbid them from service as soldiers when He commanded them to be sufficed with their wages according to their service done.

St. Augustine

3. His witnessing of Christ:

The Jewish people were strange, we see them rejecting the Lord Jesus, and they were unable to accept Him as a Savior and Redeemer, whereas we see them assuming John as he Christ. The evangelist says, “ *and as the people were in expectation, all men mused in their hearts of John whether he were the Christ or not*” (Luke 3:15). The reason behind this may have been because of what they saw in John such as the bare necessities in his food, his drink, his clothes, and his violent reproaches for sinners. Thus, they thought him able to save them from the Romans whenever he had the chance of taking a decisive leading role.

Man is truly incomprehensible; for He often rejects God’s un-surpassing love, and he disregards God’s long forbearance, yet he is attracted to the creation and not the Creator Himself. But John in his integrity did not accept to usurp Christ’s glory, for he rejected strongly and kind of inappropriate honor for himself. He witnessed for the real Christ alone, and he declared there was no comparison whatsoever between himself and the Lord Jesus, and between the Lord’s baptism and his baptism, he answered, “*I indeed baptize you with water, but one mightier than I comes, the latch of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose; He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire*” (Luke 3:16, 17)

St. John Chrysostom says, “This is the role of an honest servant; he does not only reject to attribute to himself the honor which belongs to his Lord, but he also hates it when others offer it to himself”

The scholar Oreganus says, “All the people admired and loved him, John was undoubtedly an unusual person who was worthy of great admiration by everyone. His life was totally different than that of all other people”. The peoples love to him had its justification; they even went too far in this love of theirs, for they asked if he were the Christ. St. Paul the apostle feared this kind of unspiritual love that is not in its right place, for he says to himself, “*but now I forbear lest any man should think of me above that which he sees me to be or that he hears me to be, and lest I should be exalted above measure*” (2 Cor. 12:6, 7). I myself suffer painfully when I see this excessive love in our church; for most people love me more than I am worthy of, and they over praise my teachings and discussions. Some others, though, as a contrast, they criticize our preaching and attribute to me opinions that are basically not mine. Those who exaggerate in their love to us, as well as those who dislike us, both do not conform to the law of truth. Those lie in their overdone love, and the others in their hatred.

Therefore we have to set boundaries to love, and not to be fluctuated by it here and there. In the book of Ecclesiastes it is said, ‘Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise; why should you destroy yourself? Therefore do not love any person with all your heart, with all your soul, or with all your strength. Do not love either an angel in this way, with all your heart, with all your soul, or with all your strength. Rather follow the Lord’s words and learn His commandments, *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all thy mind”* (Luke 10:27).

St. Ambrosios says, “By this comparison, St. John did not mean to prove that Christ is greater than himself, for there could be no drawing of any comparison whatsoever between the Son of God and man. St. John did not wish to compare himself to Christ, for he said, “I am not worthy to loosen His shoe latchet”. St. John may have wished to reduce the number of the Jewish people by saying, *“He must increase, so that I must decrease.”* (John 3:30).

St. Cyril the great says, “the people were amazed by the peaceful living of St. John and the glory surrounding him. They saw the awesome conduct and sublime righteousness in him. The Jewish people were so stunned at John’s sublimity and unique life as well as his teachings that they thought him the Christ who was referred to in the old law by different symbols, and the One described by many prophets and messengers. But St. John was quick to realize then assumptions, and he decisively and insistently affirmed he was only the Lord’s servant, and that all the glory, the honor, the worship and greatness are not befitting no other than Christ whose name is above all other names.

St. John knew that Christ is honest to all those who serve Him. The servant has only to declare the truth and what is righteous, since the difference is great between the servant and his Master, that is, between St. John and Christ. This is why St. John says, *“Ye yourselves hear me witness that I said I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before Him”* (John 3:28). Indeed St. John is wonderful in his mission and in his witnessing. He was so magnificent that he was like the morning star that proclaims the rising of the sun from behind the horizon.

St. John wished to openly prove to everyone that he was of a lesser value and standard than his Master, he therefore said, *“I indeed baptize you with water, but one mightier than I comes, the latch of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose”* (Luke 3:16).

Indeed there is a tremendous difference between Christ and St. John, and there should not be a comparison in the first place. This is why St. John the Baptist, the devout one, was right in saying, despite his sublime righteousness and honorable conduct, that he was not worthy to unloose His shoe latchet. The heavenly hosts, the thrones, the holy seraphim, all stand around the throne of Christ our God, offering Him the glory and praise, so who could possibly, from all the inhabitants on earth, come close to God? It is true God loves man, for He is kind and merciful to him, despite this we cannot deny under any condition, that we are nothing compared to Him, for we are just weak and ignorant human beings.

St. John Chrysostome says, “He is way too exalted above me, and I am not worthy to be counted the least of His servants; for to unloose the show latchet is the most modest of all the chores”

Father Gregory the great offers us a symbolic interpretation for the words of St. John the Baptist. He thinks the Lord’ shoes refer to the body that encompasses Him. The

unloosening of the shoe latchet only means the untying of the incarnation mysteries, since he feels himself unable to realize this divine mystery and investigating it. St. Jerome on the other hand offers us a different interpretation; this is that St. John the Baptist could not have the boldness to stretch his hand to untie the shoe latchet of his Lord, for the Lord wishes His bride, who is widowed, and He does not reject her. In the Old law, it is mentioned that the master who rejects the widow as a wife to establish an issue from her for the dead one, he takes off his shoes before the town elders and chiefs and he gives them to him who accepts to marry her; just as Ruth's Lord did (**Ruth 4:7,8**). Our Christ will not take off His shoes to give to anyone, for He wishes to possess us a bride to Him, and He wishes to buy us with His love and with the blood He shed for us.

St. John could find no comparison aspect whatsoever to draw between himself and his Master, nor was there any comparison between his baptism and the baptism of the Lord, for He said, "*I indeed baptize you with water..He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire*" (**Luke 3:16**)

- Water purifies the body, and the Spirit purifies the heart of sin. We perform the first job and pray so the second job be done, where the Spirit blows in the water and the water is thus sanctified. Water alone is not evidence of purification, even though both of them are undivided; the water and the Spirit. This is why the baptism of repentance that is John's, is different than the baptism of grace which comprises the two elements, but as for the former one, it compromises one element only.

Since the body and the Spirit both share in the sin, then the purification is essential to both of them.

St. Ambrosios

The baptism is the great basin filled with fire in which people are transformed and molded to become no more dead.

St. Yacoub El-Serougy

As mentioned in the Acts of the apostles, the Holy Spirit is fire, for He came down on the believers in the form of tongues of fire. In this way, Christ's word has been fulfilled, "*I came to send fire on the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled!*" (**Luke 12:49**).

There is another interpretation as well; we are baptized at the present time with the Spirit. Afterwards, on the Lord's day, we shall be baptized with fire, as the apostle says, "*for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by the fire; and the fire shall try every mans work of what sort it is*" (**1 Cor. 3:13**)

St. Jerome

St. John says for a second time to confirm his weakness and his ignorance, "*I indeed baptize you with water, but one mightier than I comes...He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire*" (**Luke 3:16**). This is a glorious evidence of Christ's divinity; because it is of Christ's properties which surpass every power, that He gives the Holy Spirit, so that all who accept Him are blessed with the divine godly nature. But notice that this power in Jesus Christ is not granted or sent by anyone. It is His, in Him, and it belongs to Him; for it is

mentioned, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit”, God the incarnate Word, is the fruit of the father our God. No one could object that He who baptizes by the Holy Spirit is God the Word, and not Him who came from the seed of David. Christ did not wish to divide the two sons. The Holy Book has described those people as, “these be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit”

What does this mean? We have to confirm in total and absolute assurance, regardless of any criticism or objection, that God the Word grants the Holy Spirit that is His, to all who are worthy of this gift.

Even when God the Word because He is incarnate, He granted us the Holy Spirit since He is the Only begotten Son of God who has become flesh. He and the Father are one, in such a way that is quite indescribable and the mind could barely absorb it. St. John the Baptist says, “whose shoe latchet I am not worthy to unloose”. He then adds, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” It was evident there were two feet to put the shoes on; and it is impossible for the sensible man to assume Christ put on shoes before His incarnation. This only happened when He became flesh; and when He became incarnate He never ceased to be God, and had to perform deeds appropriate to His divinity. He therefore granted the Holy Spirit to all those who believed in Him because He is the One, and One person, and at the same time He is God and also man.

St. Cyril the Great

When St. John had declared the Savior’s baptism, he spoke of Him as a judge, “*His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire*” (**Luke 3:17**)

The reference to Christ’s fan shows His authority in discerning the deeds of everyone. When he blows the wheat, He divides the chaff from the full ears, the fruitful from the unfruitful due to the breeze of air. On the judgment day, He will discern the fruitful righteous deeds and the empty deeds. The perfect ones He will call to the heavenly homeland, whereas He loathes the chaff, and He does not like the wrongful deeds. This is why, “*A fire goes before Him, and burns up His enemies round about*” (**Psalms 97:3**), but this is unharmed fire, which burns the deeds of darkness and manifests the brilliance of the deeds of light.

St. Ambrosios

I wish to uncover the reason for which our Lord carries the Fan, and also the blowing that uplifts the chaff to fly here and there, whereas the wheat which is heavier remains in its place. I think the air signifies the ordeals which reveal if the believers are chaff or wheat. For when some hardships befall you, it is not the temptation and the ordeals that make the believers either of chaff or of wheat. But rather, if you are light chaff with no faith, then the hardships reveal your hidden nature, as a contrast, if you face the ideal courageously, then it is not the ordeal then it is not the ordeal itself, that makes you loyal and patient, it rather

uncovers the virtue of patience and strength in you even though it was covered up and hidden.

When the tempest rages, it can not shake the building established on rocks. It rather reveals the weakness of the rocks by which the building was built, which is founded on the sand.

The Scholar Oreganos

St. John finds similarity between the wheat ears and the inhabitants of the earth. He compares them to wheat in a field, for both of them grow as ears of corn. Our Lord when speaking to the holy apostles showed this reality, for He told them, “*the harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth laborers into His harvest*” (Luke 10:2). You will find that we who live on earth are called the wheat ears, corn, and harvest. This harvest is controlled by God for He is Lord over all. But contemplate on the words of the devout St. John, for he describes the harvest field as belonging to Christ. It is he who cleans and prepares his garners, and gathers the wheat into His house, and burns the chaff with unquenchable fire. The wheat is the symbol of the elect who were firm in their faith and stable in their creed. As for the chaff it refers to those people whose minds are weakened and their hearts are sick and they have become worried and divided with the tempest blasts. It is not surprising therefore if the wheat is gathered in His barn, for it is worth keeping in a safe place with God’s care, His mercy, and His love. But the chaff is burnt with the unquenchable fire, for it is worth nothing.

The chaff does not destroy the Lord’s wheat, which are considered few when compared to others, yet they are a great harvest.

St. Augustine

He evangelist, St. Luke showed clearly St. John the Baptist’s major role which is that of witnessing to Christ the Lord, and the salvation mission, and His baptism by the Holy Spirit. This witnessing came blended with the pricking words of repentance, and infusing the spirit of hope, preaching to them God’s mercy. He says, “*and many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people*” (Luke 3:18)

His preaching and sermons did not concern the general public only, but it also got extended to the chiefs with no favors or flattery. He said, “*But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife and for all the evils which Herod had done. Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison*” (Luke 3: 19, 20).

We have studied previously the story of St. John’s improvement by means of Herod, who wished to suppress the breath of birth, and to tire up the Word, and order of imprisonment, the bondage and the sword. The voice was louder during the hardship, and this became a symbol of the Jews attempt to control the prophets word, of the prophet John and preventing it from being spread in its declaration of the Messiah.

4. The Lord’s Baptism:

St. John witnessed for the Lord and for His baptism. He received the multitude coming forward to be baptized and the Lord Himself also came forward to be baptized, “*Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also being baptized and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descendant in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him and a voice came from heaven which said, ‘this is My beloved Son of whom I am well pleased’*” (Luke 3:21, 22)

The following are some comments of the fathers regarding the Lord’s baptism:

He came the baptism whereas He had absolutely no Sin whatsoever, and also He was not without the Holy Spirit. It has been written of the servant and forerunner St John himself that when still in his mother’s womb, he was filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:15). If he had been born from His father, that is to say of human seed and He received the Holy Spirit when He was being formed in the womb, then what could we understand and believe concerning Christ Himself who was conceived not biologically but rather by the Holy Spirit.

St. Augustine

The Holy Spirit did not descend on the Jewish multitudes but rather on Jesus alone. If you, Jews, wish to receive the Holy Spirit, then believe in the Lord Jesus for the Holy Spirit is in Him.

St. Jerome

- ❑ Christ is born, and the Spirit is ahead of Him!
- ❑ He is baptized, and the Spirit witnesses to Him!
- ❑ He is tempted, and the Spirit leads Him on (Luke 4: 1, 18)!
- ❑ He makes miracles and the Spirit goes with Him!
- ❑ He ascends up to the heavens and the Spirit takes His place!

St. Gregory El Nazinzi

The Lord did not get baptized so the water be purified. He who is sinless has the authority to purify. In this way, all who are buried in Christ’s tomb, leaves his sins in it. The Lord himself explained the reason for His baptism, “*Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness*” (Matthew 3:15). Among His many mercies is His building the church, for after the fathers and the prophets the only begotten Son came down and went to be baptized. At this point the divine reality is manifested clearly which was mentioned concerning the church, which is: If the Lord does not build the house, then the laborers have toiled in vain, for man can not do the building and neither can he guard it. “*Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city the watchmen stays awake in vain*” (Psalms 127:1). I will be bold enough to say that man cannot go a certain way unless the Lord be with him, leading him on. As it is written, “*You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him*” (Deut. 13:4). Also, the Lord leads mans steps. Now the church has been created. He says, “allow it now oh Lord” so the church be built, for it is appropriate for us to fulfill all righteousness.

Christ has been washed for our sake, or better still, we have been washed in His blood. It is appropriate for us therefore to hurry up and wash our sins.

- ❑ He was buried all by Himself, but He raised everyone.
- ❑ He dressed all by Himself so as to uplift us all.
- ❑ He carried the sins of the entire world all by Himself, so as to cleanse everyone in His person. As the people say, “*Cleanse your hands ye sinners, and purify your hearts*” (**James 4:6**).

For Christ is in no need of purification, yet, He was purified for our sake.

St. Ambrosios

Was Christ in need of the sanctified baptism? In what way will He benefit if He goes through this process? For Christ is the Word of God, holy from holy as described by the seraphim in the various praises (**Isaiah 3:6**) and as the Old law describes Him in the various places as well as the hosts of prophets together with Moses regarding this point.

What do we ourselves benefit from the holy baptism? Undoubtly it is the cancellation of our sins, but yet Christ has nothing of this in Him. It was said, “*Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth*” (**1 Peter 2:22**), “*For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens*” (**Hebrews 7:26**).

There maybe someone whose faith got weakened, that could ask the question, “Did God baptize the Word, and was Christ in need of the gift of the Holy Spirit?” Never, by all means. Christ was only baptized for no other reason than to teach us that man who is of David’s seed, who is united with God the Son, was baptized and has received the Holy Spirit. So how could you divide the indivisible to two sons and say He was baptized at the age of thirty and has thus become sanctified.

Has Christ not been sanctified till the age of thirty? Who would agree to such words, when you are trying to change the truth into falsehood, and forge the creed with suspicions for there is, “*One Lord Jesus Christ*” (**1 Cor. 8:6**). Thus we declare untop of all witnesses, He did not get separated from His Spirit when He was baptized, because the Holy Spirit, even though He springs from God the Father, yet He also pertains to God the Son, for, “*and of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace*” (**John 1:16**). Moreover, the Holy Spirit has often been called Christ’s Spirit, even through it springs from God the Father. As St. Paul the apostle has said that those in the body cannot please God, but we are not in the body but are rather in the spirit, but God’s Spirit dwells in us. But if the Holy Spirit is for all the creation and is granted to all those worthy of Him, for He said, “*And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out ‘Abba Father’*” (**Gal. 4:6**).

Even though the Holy Spirit emerges from God the Father, yet Christ the Word is the Only begotten Son of God who shares with the Father in greatness and authority, for He is by nature a real Son who sends the Holy Spirit to the creation and grants Him to all those worthy of Him. He said, “*all things that the Father has are mine*” (**John 16:15**).

Therefore it was necessary that God the Word after He has modestly emptied Himself, to take our resemblance and to be in our image. He is our firstborn in everything and our example whom we follow in every matter. To teach us the value of baptism and the grace and the power that it has, He began with Himself and got baptized. When He was baptized He prayed so we learn that prayer is essential. Let all those worthy of the blessing of the holy baptism pray at all times.

The evangelist describes heaven as being opened, as if it had been shut before. Christ says, “*Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man*” (**John 1:51**). This is because the heavenly hosts of angels and mans issue on earth are all overshadowed by one flag and are subject to one shepherd who is Christ the Lord. The heavens opened, and man got closer to the holy angels. The Holy Spirit descended for He felt He has found this creation a second time. He descended first on Christ who had received the Holy Spirit not for His own sake but for our sake, we the humans. This is because by Him and in Him we obtain grace upon grace.

You can thus see Christ due to His love for our salvation and redemption, He bore our image. In this image, He departed as far as possible from His divine nature. How could He be poor if He does not go down to our level of poverty and need? How could He have denied and declined from Himself if He does not accept bearing the human nature?

And now, since we have taken Christ as our high example, let us draw closer to the blessing of the sacred baptism. By this we dare pray fervently and lift up our blessed hands to God the Father and hence, He would open to us the heavens.

St. Cyril the Great

These appeared as divided for our own understanding, but they are actually the indivisible trinity.

St. Augustine

Let us meditate now on the trinity mystery. We say God is one but yet we confess the Father and the Son...who declared that He was not alone by saying, “*and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me*” (**John 16:32**) and the Holy Spirit is present. The Holy trinity will never be divisible.

St. Ambrosios

5.The lineage attribution to the Lord Jesus:

In our study of St. Matthew’s gospel, chapter one, we have previously drawn a comparison between the lineage of the Lord Jesus as mentioned in St. Matthew’s gospel and what was mentioned in St. Luke’s gospel. This is why we find it enough to present a summary and some other aspects as well:

First: St. Matthew, being a Jew himself writes for his Jewish brethren, He showed Jesus Christ as ‘David’s Son’, the Messiah, the expected king. He is also Abraham’s son by whom

the divine promises and covenants were fulfilled. As for St. Luke, he wrote to the Gentiles and thus portrayed Him as Father to all humanity.

Second: We have said that the evangelist St. Matthew he presented to us the lineage before the birth events since the Word of God has declared Himself by the incarnation.

The lineage came successfully from Abraham till Joseph, St. Mary's spouse to be, but as for St. Luke's gospel, the lineage came after the Lord's baptism, where He raised us as God's children. This is why the lineage came in upward succession from Joseph to Adam's, 'God's son.

The scholar Oreganus says, "St. Matthew began by mentioning the lineage starting with Abraham to reach the words "as for the birth of Jesus it was like this..for He cared and rejoiced at Him who has come to the world. As for St. Luke, he goes up in the lineage and does not descend with it. When He spoke of this baptism he raised us up to God Himself.

St. Ambrosios says, "St. Luke did not mention the lineage at the beginning, but rather after the baptism event. He wished to show that God is the Father of us all by the means of baptism. He also confirmed that Christ came for God the Father according to this lineage. He showed He was a Son to the Father by nature, by grace, and biologically, for He came from Adam's seed, the Son of God. He made clear the divine filiations by the Father's declaration, "this is My beloved Son of whom I am well pleased".

For the same reason we find St. Matthew the evangelist separating word 'begot'. He said for instance Abraham begot Isaac. As for the evangelist St. Matthew he repeats the word 'son'. The former declares the infiltration of sin to us through the human conception. The Lord, who is sinless, came as carrying the sins of the entire generations. As for St. Luke, he raises us to sonship so as to reach 'the filtration to God'.

Third: The difference of names mentioned in both of the gospels is because one of them has used the biological lineage according to the body, whereas the other gospel is according to the old law. This is, for instance, attributing the child to his parents, who are of them, his father is according to nature, and the other according to the law does he have his attribution. In the old law, if a man having no children dies, his wife remarries her guardian. The firstborn is attributed to the deceased person according to the old law.

As St. Ambrosios explained: the evangelist St. Matthew mentioned the lineage from Solomon's side. But as for the evangelist St. Luke, he mentioned it from Nathan's side. The former wished to affirm His royal lineage, whereas the latter wished to affirm his priesthood lineage. He is the king of kings, and the Priest of priesthood, but this lineage is divine and this priesthood is awesome. For this reason also, the bull is the symbol of the evangelist St. Luke, since he spoke a great deal of priesthood.

Fourth: The scholar Oreganus thinks St. Matthew mentioned the names of sinful Gentiles women in the lineage. This is because He came carrying our sins and He is not ashamed of being attributed to anyone. As for St. Luke, he has mentioned the lineage after the baptism, and thus we can not find the names of sinful women for he wishes to uplift all above the level of weakness.

We spoke earlier of how God wishes everyone, men and women, to be men, not from the aspect of sex, but rather from the aspect of manliness, or spiritual maturity, without any women pampering on the children weakness.

Fifth: The scholar Oreganus thinks the evangelist St. Luke's words, "*Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at the age of thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) son of Joseph*" (**Luke 3:23**). He reminds us of Joseph, the son of Jacob, when he reached around thirty years of age (**Gen. 12:2**). It was at this time that Joseph was released from jail, and became Pharaoh's foreseer over the wheat barns. He was in charge of its distribution during the famine period. Likewise in Jesus Christ for it is He who carries the spiritual wheat barns from the word of the law, and the words of the prophets too. Christ overflows over His hungry disciples, to satisfy them spiritually with a new wheat without the old leaven.

Section Two

Our Friend was Tempted just like Us

Chapter IV

Our Friend was Tempted just like Us

As the three previous chapters represented “the new book of genesis”, the incarnate word of God came upon the virgin’s womb as an embryo then became a child, then a boy blessing the childhood by being amidst the children, and granting a new creation for humanity in theirs. The fourth chapter represents the new book of Exodus, in which he does not take the people into the wilderness for forty years, but he goes there himself to be tempted granting the victory to his people in him. In the older times the people were devastated in the wilderness due to the successive falls, but as for now, he presented to us by his temptation strength and salvation.

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† † †

1. The temptation in the wilderness:

In the previous three chapters we saw our heavenly friend descending and sharing everything with us, he became an embryo in the womb just like we did, obeyed the law, and went with the multitudes for Baptism even though he is sinless and unblemished, he carried us as a new creation blessed with affiliation to the father and carrying his holy spirit. What was proclaimed gloriously in the Jordan River was done for our account and in our name. In it we regained our first righteous nature and have now become worthy to enjoy paradise which was previously lost and encounter the Father with the privilege of being his children. Now by becoming like us, he confirmed this friendship in a practical way. The spirit led him to the wilderness to be tempted for forty days.....Instead of the wilderness which the Israelis

went with the spirit of constant complaint and grudge; he carried us in his body to the wilderness, in his victorious and triumphant nature.

† Let us praise the Lord and sing joyful hymns to God our savior. Let us trample upon Satan, and rejoice in his humiliating and disgraceful downfall. Let us tell him Jeremiah the prophet's words "*How the hammer of the whole earth has been cut apart and broken...you have been found and also caught, because you have striven against the Lord*" (JER. 50:23, 24)

Since the older times, and before the coming of Christ the savior of the entire world, Satan, our biggest adversary, keeps thinking viciously, maliciously spreading evil and iniquity and arrogantly trying to prevail over the weakness of the human race. He cries out "*And my hand has found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathers eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth, and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped*" (Isaiah 10:14)

Indeed, no one dared to resist Satan except the son Jesus Christ who fought Satan in the cave, and struggled severely against him, was he in our image and likeness. That is why the human nature triumphed (as previously mentioned) in Jesus Christ and has obtained the crown of glory and victory and since the older times the Son speaks through out his prophets to the vicious enemy Satan by the famous words "*Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain, which destroys all the earth*" (JER. 51:25)

Now let us see how the beloved Evangelist describes Jesus Christ in his fighting in our behalf the destroyer of all earth "*And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan*" (Luke 4:1)

Notice the human nature in Christ being anointed with the grace of the Holy Spirit, and crowned with reverence and honor. God had previously promised saying "*I will pour out my spirit on all flesh*" (Joel 2:28). This prophecy has been fulfilled for the first time in Jesus Christ not prior to that because God didn't want to grant his spirit while the people were weak in mind and spirit as it was mentioned "*And the LORD said, my spirit shall not strive with man forever, for that he also is flesh*" (Gen. 6:3) but in Christ there was found a new creation, sanctified by water and the spirit so we became no more sons of flesh and blood, but rather God the Father's sons. Now with the grace of adoption and this fatherly tenderness we have become partners in the divine nature.

It is not surprising therefore that our firstborn is to be the first to receive the Holy Spirit, even though, he is himself who grants the Holy Spirit, so he may grant it to us, we his dear brethren. St Paul the apostle referred to this by saying "*For both he that sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare my name unto my brethren*" (Heb. 2:11-12).

That is why the evangelist describes Christ "*And Jesus being full of the Holy Spirit returned from Jordan*" (Luke 4:1). And I wish that you do not deviate from the serious truth and not to feel bad that Christ the Word sanctified, but rather focus on the wisdom of redemption and salvation. *For Christ was incarnate and became man not because he wanted to avoid what*

belongs to humans but rather to share with us our humanity so he would enrich us from his richness and honor us with his glory and greatness as he shared everything with us except the sin... St Cyril the Great

† The goal of our lord Jesus Christ in his fasting and solitude was the healing of attraction of the lust, for the sake of all he accepted to be tempted by Satan so we would know how to triumph in him.

† The Lord came to be baptized cause he became for everyone everything (1Cor. 9:20-22). To them that are under the law, as under the law, so he was circumcised, that he might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, he shared their eating, that he might gain them that are without law; to them that are weak he became weak with the anguish that he bared in his body to gain them (2Cor. 8:9). Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep (Rom. 12:15), he hungered with them that who are hungry...he was generous with the rich and imprisoned with the poor (Isaiah 26:20), thirsty with the Samaritan woman (John 4:7), and hungered in the wilderness (Mat. 4:2) to retrieve with his fasting the first downfall of Adam and his lust of food. Adam was filled as to know good and evil for our misery instead Jesus hungered to our own good....St Ambrosias

“Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered” (Luke 4:1-2)

† Christ lived in the wilderness by the spirit, spiritually that is, and fasted so he didn't feed his body with the essential nurture and someone might ask “what harm would it be if Jesus dwelt always in the cities? And how did Christ benefit from his living in the wilderness? And Christ had no need of righteousness? And why Christ fasted while he had no need to fast?” This was set for the purpose of killing the pleasure and lust and to force the sin in our body and to control the different feelings in us which develop the defile lust of the flesh. Was Christ in need of fasting? He, whom the Father with, killed the sin in the flesh. Therefore The wise St Paul said *“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”* (Rom. 8:3-4)

Christ therefore has condemned the sin in the flesh and wiped the iniquity which has ruled over our human nature for long time. Christ practiced the fasting, being sacred and pure in his nature, unblemished and blameless, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning! Why did Christ fast and rejected city's life and preferred to dwell the wilderness and tolerated the toil of fasting? This great work that Christ has done was to teach us, dear brethren, for Christ has drawn for us the plan that we have to follow, and paved for us a straight way that we have to walk in, this way that the sanctified monks walk in. Otherwise how the people would love living in the wilderness, and benefit from the life of loneliness and solitariness and see in this salvation for their souls and piece for their spirits? The groups of monks desert the world, distant themselves from its rough waves and storms to liberate themselves from chaos, instability, pride and lust or as St Joseph the joyful said: “people take off what they have on so as to give back the world its belongings and

possessions. St Paul the apostle speaks of those who get used to living with Christ: *“And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.”* (Gal. 5:24) and he also added saying that the life of asceticism is necessary and that the fruits of such life are fasting, tolerance and disregarding of food, whether little or much, so by this we would defeat Satan but notice that Christ was baptized first then has been full with the Holy Spirit and then afterwards lived in the wilderness and used the fasting as a weapon for him to fight Satan and his army, and all this to teach us, to weave in his tapestry and follow his model. You have then, first of all, to put on the helmet of God and get gird with the shield of faith and hold on the scepter of salvation. At the beginning, you have to be granted the power from on high and that by mean of the holy baptism, it is then with this that you could conduct a proper life with the great God then with spiritual courage depart from the people to dwell in the wilderness, then you fast a holy fasting so you would suppress the lust of the body and defeat Satan if he tried to tempt you. In Christ therefore, we find every weapon that strengthen us.

Certainly, Christ manifests amongst the warriors and thus rewards the prize and crowns the victorious with crowns of triumph and victory.

Now let us contemplate the struggles of Christ with the devil *“Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered”*

How Christ hungered though he is the one who fills us with his richness of grace? Is it not Christ, he the heavenly bread which came down from heaven so no one who feeds on him hunger? Christ fasted and “hungered” because he has accepted to be like us, for that he had to bear what any human being should bear....St Cyril the great.

† He draws to us a comparison between the temptation of Adam in paradise and the temptation of the second Adam in the wilderness. Let us ponder how the first Adam was expelled from paradise, and know how the second Adam returned from the wilderness to paradise. Let us also ponder how the repair was done and the plan by which it was fulfilled. Adam was born from the virgin earth, and Christ was born from the virgin. Adam was created in the image of God but as for Christ he is the essential image of God.

The first had dominion over all animals and the second have dominion over everything. Eve was characterized by hesitance; the virgin was characterized by wisdom.

The tree brought death, and the cross brought life.

The first was in paradise, while Christ was in the wilderness but came to scatter the fault of the guilty and bring him back to paradise...

It was not possible that God retract his judgment and thus the sentence of death was fulfilled in one instead of the other.

If Adam felt, was he in paradise, for not having a Shepard, then how could he have found the way in the wilderness without a Shepard to lead him? For in the wilderness increases the temptation....and it is easy to fell in the sin....

What Shepard could help us against the tricks of this life and the deceptions of Satan *“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the*

rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:11)?! Would God send an angel though some Angels have fallen! ...Would he send one of the seraphim, such as the one that descend on earth in the midst of a people of unclean lips (Isaiah 6:5), he could not purge but the lips of one profit with the live coal? Therefore it was necessary to search for another Shepard that we all would follow. Then who is he, that great Shepard, that is able to prepare goodness for all, but the one who is above all? Who raise me above this world except he who is above this world? Who is he, that great Shepard, that is able with one command to Shepard the man and the woman “*Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.*” (Col. 3-11)?

The traps are many wherever we go, traps of the flesh, and traps of the literal law, and traps that are set by Satan on a pinnacle of the temple and on a high mountain, and the traps of philosophies, and traps of desires, for the adulterous eye is the trap of the sinner (Pro. 7:22) and the traps of loving the world, the traps of religious hypocrisy, the traps of the life of chastity as despising the secret of marriage...but the best way to destroy this traps is to put a bait for Satan to pounce on his prey so that the trap catches him, it is then that we can say: “*They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves*” (Psalm 57:6). What is this bait other than the body? For the Lord has taken the body of our weakness and humble to give the devil the opportunity to struggle with him so he would defeat Satan...

Now Christ in the wilderness leading the man, teaching him, forming him, training him, anointing him with the holy anointment, and when he sees him strong, he leads him to green and fertile pastures...Finally leads him to the garden during the sufferings, as written:” *When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples*” (John 18:1)...Finally the return of man with the strength of God , assure us the truth that St Luke has mentioned amongst all evangelists with these words that the Lord has spoken to the thief “*Today you shall be with me in paradise*” (Luke 23:44)

† Christ being full of the Holy Spirit returned to the wilderness to challenge the devil. If he was not tempted by the devil he would not have triumphed for my sake in a secretive way, liberating Adam from the bondage.....St Ambrosius

† “Jesus was led by the spirit to the wilderness”, the Holy spirit that is, neither obliged nor captivated, but led eagerly to the battle in which he would struggle....St Jerome

† Jesus our leader allowed himself to be under temptation, to teach his children how to struggle....St Augustine

A. The temptation of the bread

Because Christ went to the battle in our behalf, to win in our name and for our account, the temptations started with the temptation of the bread, for Satan asked from Christ to command the stone that it be made bread for him to eat in his hunger.

From one aspect, this temptation corresponds to Adam's first temptation when he felt in disobedience by eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil...so the Lord came fasting resisting the devil, and overcoming him, refusing to listen to him despite his capability to make the stone bread as he did at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And from another aspect, God has permitted this temptation to declare Satan's deceptive fatherhood to the sinners, for a true father do not give stone if a son shall ask bread as Christ saying in (Luke 11:11), but this adversary, gives stone instead of bread for man to eat, and so carries in his intestine hard stone!
I wish we reject every stone offered by the devil to us so we would not eat it as bread and so grow as hard-hearted without love and kindness!

The scholar Oreganos sees that the stone offered by the devil is the heresies that are offered by the adversary as fake bread so we would think it is the filling word of God...
St Luke the evangelist says:" ***And the devil said unto him, if you are the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread. And Jesus answered him, saying, it is written, that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God***" (Luke 4:3-4)

† Satan jumped to where Christ was and looked to the stone and addressed Christ saying: "*if you are the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread*" (Luke 4:3) as you can see, Satan approached Christ as a man, as one of the saints, although he is suspecting Christ. But how did Satan seek to investigate the divinity of Christ?
He knew that he can not change the nature of material to other nature totally different in essence unless it be by divine power. It is either that Christ changes the material so Satan would become confused in his matter, or he would be unable to perform such act so Satan would be pleased as he wouldn't find in him other than a weak person that is possible to resist.

Christ knew what went on in Satan's mind so he did not change the stone and consequently didn't state his inability to change it. Christ rebuked the devil by saying:" *man shall not live by bread alone*" (Luke 4:4) and this means that if God gives human the power, he would be able to live without food and live just like Moses and Elijah lived for forty days in strength without tasting a thing, so if Christ can live without food why would he make the stone bread. But Christ never said "I can not do that" as he would be suspected to be human and not God and he did not say "I can do that" as he would be left and his business by Satan as Christ wanted to teach us other lessons as well.

Notice, dear brethren, how that the nature of Christ rejected Adam's greed and gluttony, so by Adam's eating we were defeated, and by Christ's asceticism we became victorious

The body feeds on what the earth produce of goods but the nurture of the wise soul is the eternal word of God. The bread, that the earth produces, nurtures a body with its elements as those elements of the earthy bread, but as for the heavenly bread sent by God from above on high nurtures the remaining soul. This is the same heavenly bread that the multitude of angels nurtures with.....St Cyril the great

† We discover from this temptation that the devil has three arrows; he is accustomed to use them to hurt the heart of human: lust of food, the glory in vain and the greed!!

Begins from the devil's victory, likewise my victory in Christ should begin from my defeat by the devil in Adam....

He says: "if you are the *Son of God*", the devil absolutely knew that the Son of God should come, but he didn't think that he would come in weakness, thus he wanted to make sure and then tempted him....

Look at Christ's weapons by which he triumphed for your sake and not for his own sake, for he is able to transform the elements, as at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, but he is teaching us neither to obey the devil in anything nor to show your strength.

We also knew from this temptation Satan's deceiving cleverness as he tempts to be sure from the truth in order to penetrate human and tempt him....the Lord didn't use his authority as God or we couldn't have benefited but he rather used the general ability which was the using of God's words.....St Ambrosius

† "*Command this stone*", what stone was that? It was without a doubt, the stone that the devil was showing him demanding to make bread. What is the temptation then?

Satan, the deceiving adversary, presents stone instead of bread (Luke 11:11).this what Satan wants, that the stone be made bread, so the people would grow not on bread but on stone showed by Satan as bread. And I believe that Satan still showing to us the stone, saying to everyone: Command this stone that it be made bread....if you see the heretics eating their false teachings as bread, then know that their arguments and teachings are the stone that Satan is showing to us so we would eat it as bread....

Let us watch, therefore, and not to eat Satan's stone thinking that we are growing with the Lord's bread.....The scholar Oreganos

† The body yields to the temptation of hunger so as to give the devil the chance to tempt him.....St Jerome

† Be certain that the adversary attacks the heart by means of filling the stomach...Father John of Cronstadet

B. The temptation of the No-Cross

In the previous temptation, the devil wanted to offer the Lord the stone as bread, but the Lord refused to make the stone bread offering himself "*the living bread from heaven*" filling his believers. Now the devil knew that the coming Messiah reigns forever through the cross and the pain, He showed him the kingdoms of the world to reign but not through the cross but through the easy way and the wide door which is "worshiping the devil himself"

With Christ strongly rejecting this easy wide way, he opened to us the door to also reign with him through his suffering not through evil

† The son of God wants as the anti-Christ does which is to reign, but while the anti-Christ wants to reign for our destruction, Christ reigns to save with the cross. He who is honest amongst us, let Christ reigns over him with his words and wisdom and justice and truth; but if we favored the lust than God, we let the sin reign over us, as the apostle says:” *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body*” (Ro. 6:12)

Then two kings wanting to reign, reigning of the sin or Satan over the evil ones, and reigning of justice or Christ over the righteous.

The devil knew that Christ came to take over his kingdom and make those who were previously submissive to the deceiver, yield to his power and authority, “***showed unto him all the kingdoms of the world***” and all the world’s inhabitants, showed him how he reigns over one with lust and the other with miserliness and other with the love of the glory in vain and he detained others by the attraction of beauty.... It is as if Satan is saying to him: Do you want to reign all over the creation? And he showed him the countless multitudes that are subjected to him; the truth is, if we accepted to know in simplicity our misery and realize our disaster, we would discover that Satan do reign over the majority of the world, that’s why the Lord call him “*the prince of this world*” (John 12:31, 16:11).

And when the devil told Jesus: do you see all this people subjecting to my authority? He was showing him this “***in a moment of time***”, as the present time is counted as a moment compared to eternity...then the devil said to the Lord: Did you come to fight against me, and take over all those under my authority? No, don’t try to compare yourself with me, and do not expose yourself to the hardships of such a battle. Look, all that I ask of you, “**If you worship before me, all shall be yours**”

Without a doubt, our Lord and savior wants to reign but with justice and truth and every virtue....He does not want to be crowned as king without toil (the cross).....

The Lord answered and said unto him:” *you shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve*” (Deut. 6:13). My will is that all would be mine, serving me and worshiping no one but me. This is the royal wish of God. Do you want me to sin, me who came to wipe the sin and free the people from it?

Let us rejoice and cheer, we who became his, and let us pray for him to kill the sin which reigned in our bodies (Rom. 6:6) so he would reign alone over us.....The Scholar Oreganos

† “***showed unto him all the kingdoms of the world***” (Luke 4:5)

How dare you, you despicable Satan, to show the Lord the kingdoms of the world and speak to him saying:” *All this power will I give you and the glory of them.....If you will worship me*” How would you promise something not yours? Who proclaim you as an heir to the kingdom of God? You have usurped these kingdoms by fraud and deception. Return, what you have robbed, back to the incarnated son, lord of the entire world, and listen to what profit Isaiah said against the devil and his troops: “*For Tophet is ordained of old; yea, for the king it is prepared; he hath made it deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it*” (Isaiah 30:33) so how you approach, you devil, Christ with reigning while your portion in the deep hell where you reign? And how the Lord worship you while the seraphims and all the angelic hosts do not

stop for a blink of an eye to praise his name cause it is written :” :” ***you shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve***” (Luke 4:8)?

Truly, this verse has fatally hit the devil, for before the coming of Christ, Satan was deceiving all those under the blue sky, and every knee used to kneel before him, but now that Christ has come, with his mercy, reclaim the people that are lost in their sin and give worship and serving and reverence to him.....St Cyril the great

† The fault not in the authority itself but rather in the greed in vain, for that the establishment of authority comes from God, and who use it , become an ambassador of God as he is God’s servant for goodness(Rom. 13:3,4). The work itself is not evil but the problem in who execute such work.....we have to distinguish between the good work of authority and the bad work..... St Ambrosius

† Showed him the glory of the world, from the top of an high mountain, that which perishes, but the savior descended to the lowest places to defeat the devil with modesty.....St Jerome

† The Lord has declared that Satan is a liar from the beginning, and there is no truth in him (John 8:44), and being a liar and no truth in him, he does not speak the truth but a lie, when he said:” *All this power will I give you, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it*”.....St Irinaeus

† Satan lied in the beginning and kept his lying till the end, for he is not the one who establishes the kingdoms of this world but God does “*The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord*” (PROV. 21:1) and as the word says through Solomon “*By me kings reign, and princes decree justice, By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth*” (PROV. 8:15-16)St Irinaeus

† The Lord has exposed the devil and revealed his true identity, for he said:” *Get thee behind me, Satan*” (Luke 4:8).....Showing this from calling him by his real name, as the word “Satan” means “apostate” in Hebrew.....St Irinaeus

C. The temptation in the Sanctuaries

First, the adversary of goodness, the devil, has tried to tempt Jesus to make the stone bread, and failed, as Christ has offered himself as the true bread that refresh the soul, wiping its stony nature, and in the previous temptation wanted to destroy Christ’s target by opening an easy and short way to reign without the need to the cross but the Lord insisted of not accepting other way than to enter the circle of the cross. As for the temptation, in our hand, it affects the worshipping itself, as it happened in Jerusalem on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him a verse from the bible:” ***He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone***” (Luke 4:10-11) asking him to cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple.

This temptation is mostly subjected to by pastors, servants and the religious people, for the adversary of goodness fight them in Jerusalem in the temple of God, presenting words to them from the Holy Bible that are either deviated in some words or its understanding trying to transform their worships to pretences and shows and hypocrisy, asking from them instead of this to elevate themselves to the heavenly matters and cast themselves down from the pinnacle of the temple, as bring them down to pretence or hypocrisy instead of their true purpose.

† Let us Notice the beginning of this gospel, which we heard today, and let us enlighten the hidden matters in it: “**he brought him to Jerusalem**”, it seems unbelievable that the devil leads the Son of God and as, he follows him, he is like the wrestler who goes to the temptation and does not fear, and does not get scared by the unbearable traps of the very deceiving adversary as if the Lord is saying to him: You will find me stronger than you. He led him to the top of the temple and asked him to cast down himself from hence, and this suggestion was under the cover of fulfilling the glory of God...

Satan speaks depending on the Holy Bible.....but hopefully he does not deceive me even if he uses the Holy Bible...

Contemplate the sentence that the devil presented to the Lord:” ***For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone***”. Look, how he is so deceiving even in choosing his words, as he trying to diminish the glory of the Lord, as if Jesus in need of the angels’ help, as if he would be practicing something wrong unless he is supported by the angels. By this, Satan adopts a sentence from the Bible which does not fit Christ and try to apply it to him, for it could fit the saints in a general term.... Christ does not need the angels’ help as he is far greater than them and inherits a greater and more sublime name:” *For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?*” (Heb. 1:5-7), (Psalm 2:7)...

After saying:” *He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone*”, Satan stopped short from completing the sentence which was:” *Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet*” (Psalm 91:13).so why you did cross this verse with silence, Satan? Because you are the adder and the king of all kind of snakes. You know well, that you carry on your sides another hostile power called “the lion” in which you are trample under the feet of righteous, that’s why you didn’t want to speak about this matter.

You are the lion and the dragon, for it is written:” *Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet*”, hence you become silent and state nothing against yourself, if we read the Bible uprightly; we totally realize that we have the authority to tread upon you with our feet, that authority was not only granted to us in the old testament as in this psalm when was hymned by, but also in the new testament also. Has not the savior said:” *Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you*” (Luke 10:19)

Let us depend on this power and take our armor, and tread with our behavior on the young lion and the serpent.....The Scholar Oreganos

† ***“If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence”*** (Luke 4:9)

As for the third temptation, its focus was on the pride and showiness:” ***cast thyself down from hence***” to prove your divinity to the public but Christ answered him:” *You shall not tempt the Lord your God*” (Luke 4:12) for God does not help, he who dares to tempt him .Christ has never given a sign to anyone who came to tempt him, as it has been mentioned:” *An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas*”

It is not surprising then, that the devil retreats against Christ after three of these temptations, for the victorious Christ presents to us the crown of victory and triumph as he truly said:” *Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you*” (Luke 10:19)

” ***For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee***” (Luke 4:10)

Look how the devil quotes from the divine chapters to help him using it to shoot his deceiving arrow, cause this verse that was mentioned in the psalms does not refer to Christ, because Christ is not in need of angels. As for the pinnacle of the temple, this referred to the high building that was built next to the temple.....St Cyril the Great

† This is the devil of the glory in vain, for when the human being thinks that he has soared higher, he is more eager to do great deeds and so fall in hell.

He said to him:” ***If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence***”. These unspeakable words only spoken by Satan that is trying to cast the human soul down Whenever it gets exalted by its virtues? Can anything be more appropriate to Satan other than giving the advice of casting down?

Satan can not harm anyone except the person, who cast himself down, that is, he who leaves heaven and choose the earth.....St Ambrosius

† These are always the words of the devil that wishes the downfall of all....St Jerome

The evangelist concluded his words about the temptation by saying:” ***And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season***” (Luke 4:13).

For Satan does not get tired of struggling even with his bitter defeat in every temptation, as it was written:” ***he departed from him for a season***”so in the remaining of the chapter, showed a constant struggle between Christ and the devil in every way, whether directly or throughout his servants. It is appropriate for us then not to be deceived if the adversary has departed from us, so if he did, he left us for a season and will return to struggle with us again.

† When the devil heard the name of “God”, he departed for a season, for he came afterwards not to tempt him but to fight him openly. And the Holy Bible let you know that you are at war not with flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:12)

Look, the supremacy of the Christian who fights the rulers, the devils of this world, for even though he is living on earth, he extends his spiritual strength against the spiritual wickedness in high places. And we don't get rewarded with earthly matters in our war for him but our reward is spiritual, it is the kingdom of heaven and the inheritance of Christ.

It is appropriate for us to strive with every resistance the devil, for the crown is prepared to us, and we should accept to enter a war with him. No one will be crowned unless he conquers, and he could not conquer unless he fights (2Tim. 2:5). And the crown gets greater as much as the suffering grows, because for strait and hard is the way that leads to life and few there be that find it, and for broad is the way, that leads to death (Math. 7:13)

It is appropriate for us not to fear the temptations of this life by any means, as it is a giving opportunity to conquer and a matter of triumph.....

The deceiver increases wounding the striver, and yet, the striver in his courage does not let his heart be troubled.....

If you are exposed to temptations, then know that the crowns are being prepared!

Joseph was put in prison as a fruit of his chastity, but he would not have shared the ruling of Egypt if he had not been sold by his brothers.....St Ambrosius

2. Jesus in Galilee:

“And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all”

The Lord, Christ, didn't carry “the power of the spirit” as a new power wasn't in him before, but as he left the cities and was in solitude in the wilderness and fasted there and was tempted by the devil and conquered him after he had been baptized, and so he returned to the cities of Galilee offering all that he did in the name of humanity so it would carry through him “the power of the spirit”. In other words, what the Lord Jesus did by being in the wilderness and practicing of the fasting and conquering the devil is a credit for any one who wants to be his disciple, it is not therefore appropriate that someone would start his service without this credit of victory and triumph in the Lord.

The scholar Oreganos comments on this sentence:” ***he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all***” by saying: “Beware of praising those who used to listen to the words of Christ, and judge yourselves as if you are deprived from his teachings....for the Lord didn't only speak in the older days to the Jewish synagogues, but also up to this day speaks in our assemblies, Not only amongst us but also in other assemblies all over the world. Jesus teaches and demands tools that he can use, to transmit his teachings. Pray, that he finds me ready for this and that I hymn to him....

Today, Jesus is glorified by everybody, further more, because he is not only known in one place namely the Jewish people.....The scholar oreganos

3. **Jesus, the rejected by his own people:**

St Luke the evangelist presented to us a live picture of the work of this amazing friend as he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, to serve. Even though that everybody testified for him and were amazed from the graceful words coming from his mouth, yet they were offended in him because they thought that he is Joseph's son.....and when he began speaking to them about his open friendship towards all, even the gentiles, they decided to cast him down from the brow of the hill but he passing through the midst of them went his way.

This picture that was done in the beginning of his service represents the bigger picture. What the people of Nazareth did, was in fact more severely done by the Jewish people as a whole, for they have rejected the one who came unto his own and they have given him up to be crucified in order to get rid of him. What the people of Nazareth did, was a part of the entire plan of the crucifixion and the cross.

Christ has been brought up in Nazareth, he who has granted the salvation and life to the world, whereas his own city has condemned itself with death and destruction.

Now, we mention some fathers' comments on the biblical verse:

“And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read” (Luke 4:16)

† It was necessary for Christ to appear to the Israelis so they would know the reality of the incarnation which they were oblivious. And since Christ was anointed by God the Father to be the savior of the entire world, it was necessary for all of this, that Christ shows himself to the Jewish nation and other nations as well, and reveals his work of redemption to all nations but Christ has chosen to give the great privilege to the Jews of Nazareth of visiting them where he had been brought up as human amongst them.

So when Christ came to the city of Nazareth, he went into the synagogue, and stood up for to read a chapter pointing to the redemption and how Christ, the word, would be revealed to the world as human in order to fill and save it. And we truly believe that there was no other way by which Christ would be anointed the sacred anointment, other than to come to the world as human and become the nature of human.

Christ is the incarnated God, as God he grants the Holy Spirit to the entire creation and as human he receives the Holy Spirit from God his Father. Christ sanctified the whole creation whether it be by his marvelous dawning from above on high, where God the Father is or by granting the Holy spirit to the heavenly world by which he will judge with and the earthly world that confesses his incarnation.....St Cyril the great

“And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor” (Luke 4:17-18)

† This did not happen by chance but according to the divine grace, as Jesus opened the book and found the chapter that prophesized about him....He read the passage that concerns “the secret of Christ” accurately :” ***The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor***”. The passage speaks of Christ, and it did not come accidentally, but according to the divine will and grace.

Notice these words and how Jesus has applied them on himself in the synagogue.

“He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor” truly, they were the ones to be poor as they possessed nothing, neither God nor a profit nor the justice nor any virtue, and for that reason, Jesus has been anointed for the sake of those poor.....The scholar oreganos

† The Lord himself assures us that he is the one who has spoken in the prophecies as he had been anointed by the holy anointment and the heavenly power....to release the captivity of the spirit and to enlighten the darkness of the thought and to preach the law of the Lord that extends throughout endless ages and offers the human being the continuity of the harvest and the eternal rest. As he has enriched and embraced all professions and did not despise a certain profession but we the lowly race saw his flesh and rejected the faith of his divinity that has been declared throughout his miracles.....St Ambrosius

† ***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor”*** (Luke 4:18)

We deduce from theses words that Christ has abdicated himself from the heavenly glories showing his love for our salvation, because the Holy Spirit within his nature in Christ, so how it then would come down on the Lord from above? also in Jordan River the Holy Spirit has come down to anoint Christ for no reason other than Christ has prepared himself on fulfilling the grace of salvation for us and offering the Holy spirit to us, because we were in lack of the grace of the Holy Spirit as the words of inspiration said:”*My spirit shall not always strive with man*” (Gen. 6:3)

The incarnated Christ has spoken these words because he is true God of true God, and was incarnate without being altered by any alteration and was anointed with the oil of joy and happiness, and the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him. We know that kings and priests were anointed in the older times to be sanctified partial sanctification, but Christ was anointed with the oil of spiritual sanctification receiving this anointment not for his own sake but for our sake because we were previously deprived from the Holy Spirit, as the cloud of grief and sadness had covered the face of the earth.....St Cyril the great

“He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18-19)

† We were captives in the devil's captivity and imprisonment, and then Christ came to preach deliverance to the captives, the sight to the blind, as his words and preaching makes the blinds recover the sight....

The human was guilty and murderer and captive before obtaining the deliverance and Jesus cured him.....The Scholar oreganos

† Christ preaches deliverance to the captives by tying the feet of Satan by chains as Satan had been a terrible oppressor and tyrant ruler that rules over the neck of the people and stole from Christ his pasture and creation. Christ therefore has returned what the devil had stolen unjustly and forcefully.

Christ was sent to guide hearts that have been lured by Satan, in which he pulled a curtain of pitch-darkness, but as for Christ, he scattered the pitch-black cover and his pasture has been able to walk in the bright light and shine as mentioned in St Paul the apostle's first epistle to the people of Thessalonians:" *You are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness*" (1The. 5:5)

The blind has been able to see and the roads have been lightened and the hills have been paved and that by the coming of Christ the savior and the redeemer:" *I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles*" (Isaiah 42:6)

Christ came and declared a new covenant to his brothers, the Israelis, but the Jews didn't monopolize this shining light, but the wonderful light of Christ has shine brightly on the gentiles and so has delivered them that are captives and has set at liberty them that are bruised, and all of that prove that Christ is God in his nature for he is true God of true God.

What is the meaning of the words:" *to preach deliverance to the captives*"? This verse refers to the crowds of depressed miserable ones that the devil had made them fall in his traps

And what is the meaning of:" *to preach the acceptable year of the Lord*"? This verse refers to the joyful glorious news that announce the coming of the Christ, this is the acceptable year which Christ had wanted to be crucified at in our behalf because by his crucifixion, we have accepted God the Father as we were distant from him, as mentioned:" *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me*" (John 12:32). Indeed, Christ rose on the third day, triumphant over the power of death, and so says:" *All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth*" (Mat. 28:18)

Is it not this year is an acceptable year as we have joined Christ's family, and the flag of Jesus has blown on top of us, and we have been sanctified by the sacred baptism, and have participated in the divine nature of Christ by obtaining the Holy Spirit?

It is an acceptable year then, this that in which Christ has manifested his glory with astonishing miracles, and we have joyfully and happily accepted the grace of salvation and

redemption as the wise St Paul's saying: " *behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation*" (2Cor. 6:2).

Indeed, he is acceptable, for in him the gentiles have won the treasure of the heavenly gospel and have obtained the joyful message of heaven cause in the past they were distant from the grace of salvation, had no hope of being salved and had no God to turn to in the world, but now, we are members of the Christian kingdom, and partners of the righteous hosts of saints, and the heirs of graces and blessings that no mind is able to comprehend and no tongue is able to describe " *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him*" (1Cor. 2:9)

And the phrase: " *the brokenhearted*" refers to the weak hearted people who are hesitant in faith, those who can not resist the lure and the lust and so relax the knot on their defiled emotions and by doing so, they face severer strangulation and harder imprisonment. But Christ has promised those captives their deliverance and calls unto them saying: Come back unto me, and I will heal you and forgive your sins and iniquity.

As for those who blinded their vision, Christ grants them the light and brightness. They are blind because they have worshiped the created not the creator: " *Saying to a stock, Thou art my father; and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth*" (Jeremiah 2:27).

Those people were oblivious of Christ's divine nature and so their minds were deprived from the true spiritual light.

And there is no objection on referring these matters to the Israelites as they were poor, brokenhearted and captives roaming about in the dark-pitch night : " *They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one*" (Psalm 14:3)

Christ came and preached the Israelis first before any other nation, as for the gentiles they were not less than the Israelis in their blindness and foolishness but Christ has enriched them with his wisdom and has disciplined them with his knowledge, so they did not remain weak minded and oblivious in thoughts but became correct in their faith and strong in their principles.....St Cyril the Great

"And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him and he began to say unto them, this day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:20-21)

The words of Christ came interpreting this attractive prophecy, because it was not abstract but it was a divine work fulfilled by his coming and that's why he is saying: " ***the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him***"

† When Christ spoke these proving verses, the listeners were amazed and they wondered between themselves from where did he get all this profound wisdom while he didn't study the Jewish literature? Because the Jews were accustomed to interpret the prophecies concerning Christ as it were fulfilled either in their kings or in their profits because they were

deviated from the right and correct way and they have adopted a crooked and scornful conduct.

To avoid the mistake that the Jews have persistently fallen in and to prevent any confusion they might turn to, Christ has said unto them in perfect frankness:” ***this day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears***” (Luke 4:21).

Christ has told them frankly that he is the one that the prophecy referred to, because Christ is the one who has preached the word of salvation to the heathendom nations as they were poor and dispossessed with no God, no law and no prophets and so he primarily preached people who were deprived for a long time from the spiritual gifts and set at liberty the captives that tolerated the bitterness of chains and degradations, and has enlightened the way of truth and righteousness for the cloud of pitch darkness blocked the openings and the ways, that’s why the Lord said:” *I am come a light into the world*” (John 12:46). Christ has destroyed the chains of inequity, and has declared the judgment of justice and has finally preached with the acceptable year which is the sign of his first coming and the flag of his salvation and the logo of the whole human race.

“And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth” (Luke 4:22)

The Israelis didn’t realize the position of Christ’s status, and didn’t know that he is the Lord’s anointed, God of hosts and miracles, and so deviated from his teachings and spoke in vain against him, and even though they valued the words of wisdom that Christ proceeded out of his mouth, they tried with the spirit of skepticism and confusion and they said:” ***Is not this Joseph’s son?***” (Luke 4:22). Did this question block the bright light of miracles? And why didn’t Christ has been greeted with respect and dignity besides being Joseph’s son? Did not the Israelis see the miracles?

And did not the sin buried in its grave and the devil got imprisoned in hell and his army got defeated in a humiliating defeat?

The Jews praised the stream of grace that proceeded out from Christ’s mouth but they treated him fully with hatred because he is related to Joseph. It is the ultimate ignorance as truly said the inspiration words:” Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not” (Jeremiah 5:21).....St Cyril the Great

† ***“And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him”*** (Luke 4:20)

Till the present time, this could happen, in our assemblies and meetings, our eyes may fasten on the savior, directing deeper looks, pondering in the only Begotten Son of God, the wisdom and the truth.....How I wish for such assembly.....where all listeners and believers, men and women and children, have their eyes, of the soul that is not of the body, to be engaged fastening on to Jesus because looking at him makes his light reflects so your faces become brighter.....The Scholar Oreganos

“And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country and he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country” (Luke 4:23-24)

As if they were saying to him: “You who have uplifted yourself in a foreign country through making miracles, go ahead, and make miracles among your own people and relatives in your own country”, as they thought that Christ was asking for present glory or honor from human beings.

† ***“Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself”*** (Luke 4:23)

This proverb was well-known among the Jews and was called on the physicians and the scholars, so if a physician fell sick, they would tell him:” Physician, heal yourself”. Christ made it clear to the Jews that they demanded from him to make various miracles before them especially because his city where he has been brought up is more worthily than others with these miracles and wonders. But Christ has explained to them that the accustomed is rejected, evidently still after they heard the words of wisdom and grace that he has spoken, they offended him saying:” *Is not this Joseph's son?*” so it is not surprising, therefore, that they kept shutting their eyes from seeing his teachings:” *Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country*” (Luke 4:24).....St Cyril the Great

Christ did not refuse this proverb but he has explained that it is not applicable to him. It is appropriate for every teacher then to affirm his teachings through his life before his words or this proverb would permissively apply to him for he would be as a doctor who claims his ability to cure the sick while he himself is suffering from the same sickness.

St John the Golden Tongue says:” With this, the Lord himself has set the rule that the work should come before the teaching.....He who is unable to teach himself and tries to correct the others finds himself mocked by many, indeed, such a person lack the ability to teach whatsoever, because his deeds show against his sayings”

This proverb then does not apply to the Lord Christ since his deeds were a stronger witness of his words.....but the secret of their real offence in the Lord, came from their rejection of him merely because he is from their own country and so the other proverb would apply to them:” *No prophet is accepted in his own country*” (Luke 4:24)

† ***”No prophet is accepted in his own country”***

If Anathoth, Jeremiah’s homeland (Jer.11:21), did not accept him well, and also Isaiah and the rest of prophets got rejected by their own, the circumcised people.....but as for us, who were not attributed to the covenant but were aliens to the promise, have accepted Moses and the prophets who proclaimed Christ, we have accepted them from all of our hearts more than the Jews who rejected Christ and didn’t accept to be witnesses for him.....The Scholar Oreganos

Christ has seized the opportunity of being rejected by his own people and has declared his friendship on the level of humanity assuring that the unity of the divine work has its roots even in the old testament, as he said:”

“But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian”

(Luke 4:25-27)

These words were hard for the Jewish ears to hear, as the Jew thought that he is God’s preferred person, the possessor of the law, the covenants, the promises and the prophecies and out from his race would come the Messiah....but the Lord Christ has revealed the true nature of his love for humans without discrimination, as in the days of Elias, the widow of Sidon was blessed with what no many Jewish women did, and the gentile’s leper, Naaman the Syrian, obtained what no Jewish leper did.

(1Kings 17, 2Kings 5)

† We can see that the prophet didn’t heal his brothers nor his citizens nor his own people but rather a foreign nation who had no law and did not believe in his religion. Is not that a proof that the medicine does depend on the will and not on the human race, and that we enjoy the divine blessings according to our fervent hearts and are not offered to us according to our birth, so let us learn how to pray diligently asking for whatever we are eager to have, for the fruits of the divine blessings are not given to those who are lukewarm.

The widow to whom Elias was sent to was a symbol of the church; that church that has its congregation from the gentiles those who were defiled before being baptized in the holy river. They were cleansed from the defilements of the flesh and the spirit and they were no more leprous but rather have become chaste and pure virgins without any sin or blame (Eph. 5:26). That is the reason why Naaman was honored in the eyes of the Lord for he revealed to us the picture of salvation for the gentiles, as he was advised by a good maidservant that was captured by the enemy after the defeat of her people in the war to ask for his salvation from the prophet, and so Naaman was healed not by a royal command from an earthly king but by the generosity of the divine mercy.....

Elisha refused the gift, for he had a faith which he learned in the school of base deeds. You too, walk on what you have learned from the Lord’s principles following the footsteps of the prophet:” *freely you have received, freely give*” (Math. 10:8).

Do not be delayed in serving but give it freely, as it is not admissible to you to evaluate the blessings of God with money. And it is not appropriate for a priest when performing the sacraments to think in getting rich but rather to think in serving....

Teach your slaves this and encourage them, so if you have been served by someone and you caught him loving the money like Gehazi, kick him out like the prophet did, and let the money that he had received from a wicked way be counted as a defilement to the soul and the

flesh, saying:” *Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever*” (2Kings 5:26-27).....St Ambrosius

Anyway, Christ introduced this widow to the Jews as being blessed with what not so many other women did in the days of Elias. This widow has attracted the hearts of so many fathers, as St John the Golden Tongue has spoke of her:” This woman had offered generosity more than our father Abraham”. If Abraham prepared a meal for strangers and thereby entertained the Lord and both of his angels, he was giving from the abundance of his wealth. But this widow had given her penury to the prophet of God and endangered her life and the life of her son to the death. We do not mean to devaluate the deed of our father Abraham but we do not deny the sublime act of this gentile widow whom St Ambrosius has spoken elaborately of, especially in his article about widows, as he saw in her a symbol of the church which was not blessed with Elias’s gifts but with the blessings of the messiah who has opened the heaven to rain with the abundance of his divine secrets.

† The famine was everywhere but yet this widow was not in need. What are those three years then? Are they not these in which the Lord has come to earth and did not find the fruit on the fig tree, as written: “*Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none*” (Luke 13:7)

Surely, this widow is the one whom was said about:” *Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD*” (Isaiah 54:1). She is the widow whom was said about:” *For thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more for thy Maker is thine husband*” (Isaiah 54:4-5)

She may have been a “widow” because for real she lost her husband at his physical suffering, but she accepted him in the judgment day the son of man whom it appeared that she had lost him, he therefore says:” *For a small moment have I forsaken thee*”, He forsaken her so her faith would become deeper in more glory.....

The church is a virgin, a wife and a widow, the three of them together in one body in Christ. This widow then was the one who for her sake, there was a famine for the heavenly word on earth, the matter that the prophets have referred to. She was a barren widow but she was conserved to give birth in the right time....

Who had opened for her the heavens other than Christ who gets out food from the sinners for the growth of the church? As it is not in the authority of man to say:” *The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth*” (1Kings 17:14).....it is the Lord, who always grants the heavenly secrets, it is he who prepares with his grace the spiritual joy that never ends, preferring the basis of life and the seals of faith and the gifts of virtues.....St Ambrosius

The Jews were filled with wrath as they saw him breaking their pride, so they thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong, and as St Ambrosius says:” this is the inequity of the Jews that the prophet has prophesied of.While the Lord was spreading out his mercies on the multitudes, they were throwing insults to him. It is not surprising therefore that they lost the salvation and put out the Lord who was yielded to their wills giving himself to them.as he has suffered willingly, for the Jews did not arrest him, but it was him rather who has given himself up to them when he wanted to be arrested by them. When he wanted it, he felt under the cross and was crucified and nothing stopped him from fulfilling the work.

He went up into the hill but he passing through the midst of them went his way, as his hour was not yet come.and also because he wanted them to be healed not to be destroyed so that if they saw him in the midst of them and failed to cast him down, they would repent. Christ passing through the midst of them with the power of his divinity, was it there any possibility for anyone to be able to catch him, he whom the multitudes could not arrest?

St Cyril the Great says:” Christ passing through the midst of them went his way not because he was afraid from the suffering but because his hour was not yet come. Christ was in the beginning of his preaching of the gospel and it was not logic to leave the field of work before spreading the word of salvation and truth”

St Augustine says:” When they came to arrest him after Judas the traitor sold him, for he thought that he was able to betray his Lord and master, the Lord showed that he is suffering willingly and not forcibly, as when the Jews came to arrest him Jesus said to them:” *Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he.... As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground*” (John 18:4-6)

4. Jesus, working with authority:

“And came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power.” (Luke 4:31-32)

The friend stretched out his hand to his people and relatives in the city of Nazareth, but because it was built on high hills that of ego and selfishness didn't accept his friendship and their people led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong.so the Lord came down to Capernaum which means:” the city of rest”. As for the secret of its rest that it was under the sea level, holding the spirit of modesty and so has accepted the friendship of her groom and his work of salvation in her.

† Christ addressed the people on the day of Sabbath and they were astonished at his doctrine for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. The Jews were puzzled and astonished because they saw before them a Master not only speaking as a prophet but also as a great God to whom the spirit preceding the body worships him, the Lord of the law. And so he spoke of principles that surpass the law according to the word of inspiration:” *And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have*

given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people” (Isaiah 55:3-4, Acts 13:34).....St Cyril the Great

† Ponder the mercifulness of our savior’ Christ as he did not get angry because of the insult nor was he affected by the injustice up to leave the Judaism but he forgot her inequity and did not think about other than his mercy, therefore he was sometimes teaching and in other time saving from the evil spirit and in some other time healing, as he was searching how to soften those stiff hearted people.....St Ambrosius

The Scholar Tertelian presents to us many meanings to the evangelist’s description:” ***for his word was with power***” (Luke 4:32). As from one angle, it was not just words, but it contains the power of work and its effectiveness, and that is why he says to the followers of Mercian:” Pull, pull all the words of the Christian, as his deeds talk”and as Christ himself said:” *Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do;*” (John 4:11-12). So his authority was not a manifestation of his unity with the Father through performing miracles with authority but through his work in us and the authority working in our lives.

From another angle, his word was with power for he has fulfilled the law and the prophets, and as the Scholar Tertelian in the same excerpt says:” His divine speech has showed authority and grace, indeed he was building the essence of the law and the prophets and not tearing them down”

And from a third angle, his authority was so manifested in his speech that Satan was horrified for Satan can not bear even his words:” He absolutely knew that Jesus is the Son of God who would judge and revenge and hard on Satan and not only a righteous person”

The Lord Christ came as a practical friend to human not only teaching with authority, not as the scribes and Pharisees did, but also working for his account with authority. For that reason we found a man who had a spirit of an unclean devil in the synagogue, whose the spirit as humans’ adversary could not bear the presence of this friend saying:” ***Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God***” (Luke 4:34)

The evil spirit was horrified from the holy one and felt that he is working with power and authority and was aware that the dark kingdom of evil is falling apart before him. But as for the Lord Christ, he did not accept that Satan testified of him and rebuked him saying:” ***Hold thy peace, and come out of him***” (Luke 4:35). And so the attendance realized how he commands even the unclean spirits, with authority and power and they come out!

† Christ has cast out the unclean spirits which felt the astonishing power of Christ, and did not find a flee, as they suffered the failure and defeat, other than to ask cunningly and deviously from the Lord to leave them alone for there is no relationship whatsoever between the Lord and the unclean spirits and this was a deceitful and lying twist.

The unclean spirits acknowledged that Christ is the “***Holy one of God***” (Luke 4:34).

They thought this would put out the flame of pride and arrogance, and so the Lord would be fascinated with the greatness in vain and the false aspirations and stop rebuking and disciplining them. Indeed, Satan is full of deceit and cunning but despite this he is undoubtedly a prey of his own deceit for God can never be deceived and that is why Christ has rebuked them and has commanded them not to speak a word.

It is not surprising therefore that the crowd of audience were amazed that Christ was performing the miracles without asking with prayer power from above for he is God himself, he is the Word of God the Father whom all things were made by him, and through him the thorn of Satan was destroyed and the tongues of the unclean spirits were shut.....St Cyril the Great

† [His comments on fulfilling the first healing and casting out the devils on a Sabbath day] The Lord began the miracles of healing on the Sabbath day to declare that the new creation begins from where the old one ends and to point from the beginning that the Son of God does not yield to the law but he is the Lord of the law, came not to destroy the law but to fulfill it. The world was not made by the law but by the Word as written:” *By the word of the LORD were the heavens made*” (Psalm 33:6). Christ then did not mean to destroy the law but to fulfill it, to renew the fallen man, thereby the apostle says:” *ye have put off the old man with his deeds and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him*” (Col. 3:9-10).

The Lord began the work on the Sabbath to show that he is the creator linking between the deeds and fulfilling the work that he started himself. This is like a worker who arranges to fix a house so he starts with the broken parts, begins with the smaller piece to reach out for the bigger one.....St Ambrosius

† [His comments on the confession of Satan: I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God?]

It is appropriate that there would be a difference between our faith and the faith of Satan. For our faith purify the heart but their faith makes them sin and commit evil, as they say to the Lord:” What have we to do with thee?”.....St Augustine

5. The healing of St Peter’s mother in law:

The healing of the man who had a spirit of an unclean devil in the synagogue was publicly and now he heals St Peter’s mother in law in her house when St Peter invited him to eat.....he is an active friend working for our account wherever he may be and under any circumstances, working in the public synagogue as well in the private house.

We have previously mentioned this healing in our study of St Mathew’s gospel (8:5) and St Mark’s gospel (1:31)....and we saw how Simon Peter did not ask anything for himself as he did not invite Christ to heal his mother in law but rather to eat so the Lord has given him what he did not ask.

St Peter did not ask anything for himself or for his family but the surroundings of the Lord “*They besought him for her*”. A living picture of the working unity of love and the intercession of the members’ one to another before the one head our Lord Jesus!

† St Peter's mother in law may represent our bodies that have been struck by the fever of different inequities and have pushed him into many lusts. This fever is not any less than the one that strikes the body, as it burns the heart while the other burns the body.....St Ambrosius

St Ambrosius commentates on this visit to St Peter's mother in law by saying:" He was not ashamed of visiting the widows and entering the small rooms in the poor houses"

Many heard of what the Lord Christ was doing but they did not dare to carry the sick to him until the sunset (Luke 4:40) when the day of Sabbath ends and Sunday begins. They were afraid not to break the Sabbath by doing so.....as if keeping the Sabbath in their eyes is more important than the man and his healing!

Anyway he did not admonish them in anything but declared the authority of his love by laying his hands [probably in the sign of the cross] on every one of them, and healed them.(Luke 4:40)

† I also wish that you notice the power of his sacred body when touches anyone, this power wipes different sicknesses and diseases, and defeats Satan and his hosts, and heals multitudes of people in a moment of time. And even though Christ was capable to perform the miracles with a word of him, just by a gesture of him, yet he laid his hands on the sick to teach us that the sacred body which he took as his temple was the power of his divine word. May God the Word link us to him and may we be engaged to him in partaking the mysterious body of Christ, and by this the soul could be healed from its sicknesses and prevail against the attacks of the devils and their enmities.....St Cyril the Great

When Simon Peter invited the Lord Christ into his house not only his mother in law was healed but his whole house became a vivid center in which the sick and the weary of the unclean spirits would come to, to be blessed with the work of the Lord Christ in them.....and so, as soon as the Lord enters our hearts many are blessed with us with his rest and peace.

St Cyril the great sees that these multitudes which were blessed with his work symbolize the human life with all of its energies and emotions and capabilities as being blessed with the healings and the peace in him.

Anyway the devils were crying out, and saying:" ***Thou art Christ the Son of God***" (Luke 4:41) and he rebuking them suffered them not to speak. St Cyril the Great says: [Christ did not allow the devils to acknowledge him because it is inappropriate for them to usurp the right of the apostolic occupation. It is not permissible also that they speak with unclean tongues about Christ's mystery of redemption. Indeed, these evil spirits must not be believed even if they were saying true because the light can not be revealed with the pitch darkness's help, as the apostle of Christ mentioned to this by saying:" *and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial?*" (2Cor. 6:14-15)

And St Ambrosius says: [the nature of Satan acknowledges Christ but yet he denies him with his deeds]

And St John the Golden Tongue sees in the forbiddance of the Lord to the devils from speaking that while he was healing the bodies of the sick and those who had evil spirits, he wanted to heal their soul so he was teaching them that he is not making this to show off or asking for a timely glory.....and so it is not appropriate for them to ask for a timely glory.

6. His preaching in the synagogues of Galilee:

Christ has performed many healings at sunset, in the beginning of the day of Sunday, and we do not know how many hours did Christ spend with the coming multitude asking for cure, but the evangelist informs us that “*When it was day*” (Luke 4:42), the early morning that is, went to a desert place, pulling the hearts of honest servants to the secretive meetings with the Father so the goal would not be lost from them.....

Anyway, the multitude did not leave him alone so they sought him, and came to him and stayed him, that he should not depart from them.....and in tremendous love, he declared:” *I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also*” (Luke 4:43). And we could say that whenever the servant was all by himself with God, his heart would mostly burn with the salvation of the world, as the true contemplating life is the one who opens mostly the heart and burns him to wishing the salvation of everyone.

† † †

Our Friend feels our Pain

Chapter V

Jesus Supports the Weary

The Lord Jesus began His mission in serving the weary; He filled up the nets of those who kept toiling all night long without catching anything. He cleansed the man full of leprosy, and corrected the Pharisees, as well as the teachers of the old doctrine inner concepts. He attracted the tax collectors from their sites, and He declared the new life He grants His flowers. He supports anyone who accepts Him, giving him fruits, chastity and sanctification to the thoughts and conduct in his new life.

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1 The Fish Catch

In our study of the two evangelists (St Matthew 4:18) and (St Mark 1:16-20) we saw how the Lord Jesus chose His disciples beginning with those four fishermen, all of whom were Gentiles! Simon Peter represents faith and the rock of faith. St Andrew is the symbol of manhood and seriousness, St James represents the constant struggle and persistence and St John is the symbol of God’s love and His grace. The Lord selected them to preach not by means of the world’s philosophy and wisdom of that time but rather by God’s grace working in them. We have said that these four represent the horses carrying the church as God’s speeding chariot ascending to heaven, which is the faith with what is anew, and the struggle tied to God’s grace and His love.

It seemed those men at first followed the Lord but not on a constant basis. They would return to their fishing, until the Lord commanded them to solely follow Him. They therefore left everything behind and followed Him forever.

At any rate, our teacher the evangelist St Luke gives us the encounter between them and the Lord, when they were emotionally and physically worn out. They have toiled all night long and have caught nothing (Luke 5:5) It was as if some impelling command made not one fish get into the nets of both boats all through the night until the sun of righteousness dawned on them, namely our Lord Jesus Christ. He went into one of the boats and commanded them to sail in the middle of the day into the depth, to cast one net, which caught enough to fill the two boats.

If we follow carefully this event as mentioned in St Luke’s gospel, we notice the following:

Firstly (Luke 5:2) “ And saw two boats standing by the lake, but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.” St Augustine says, “They were two boats from

where the four disciples were called. They refer to the two peoples when they cast their nets and brought a big catch, so much fish that the nets were almost torn. The two boats refer to the one church and the two peoples who united together in Christ, even though they were of two different origins. Regarding this point we find two wives who have one man who is Jacob. They were (Gen29: 23-28) “Leah and Rachel” who were the two symbols. For the very same reason there was found two blind men as two symbols, who sat on the roadside, and Christ gave them their sight (Matt20: 30) if you meditate in the Holy Book you would find the two churches are actually one church, these have been symbolized in various places. The cornerstone has come to serve them and bind them together thereby making them one.

Secondly: The men were washing their nets, since all night long has proved to be fruitless. They would spend all the next day in bitterness and resume once more a new night. Those fishermen did not realize that this failure of theirs was with God’s permission for the sake of their eternal and earthy success. The fact that the boats had been absolutely empty of any fish catching, this was mainly not to make the fishermen to be preoccupied in collecting and selling the fish. It was rather that they would welcome the Master in the boat so He uses it as a platform for His teaching; which means, He would catch the fishermen as well as some of the multitudes. At that He would not deprive them even of the fish catch for He asked them to throw their nets for fishing and both boats got so much filled with fish that they began to sink.

When all doors seem to be locked in our faces, and we think we have bad luck- an expression that is not appropriate for believers to use- then let us open our hearts to the Lord, and offer him the boats of our life to provide us according to his good will. He rewards us with the joy of our salvation, and He offers us spiritual fruits without deprivation of the necessities of the earthly needs.

Thirdly: The disciples experienced the joy of good fishing, which is known to those who love to go fishing. Now He is exalting them to a deeper pleasure, which is that of catching the souls to pull them out of the sea of this world and thus live. This experience would not have been felt if the Lord Himself had not caught them in His net and took them into His boat, the sanctified Church. Concerning this St Cyril the Great says, “Let us praise the way by which the disciples have become fishermen for the entire world. They surrendered to Christ, the Creator of heaven and earth. Though the disciples were asked to catch the other peoples, yet they were caught in the safe net of Christ, so that when they in their turn cast their nets, they would catch crowds of believers to the real fold of Christ. One of the saintly prophets has prophesied of this (Jer16: 16) ‘ Behold, I will send for many fishermen says the Lord, and they shall fish them; and afterwards I will send for many hunters and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks.’”

In the above verse the “fishermen” means the church leaders and ministers. St Ambrosias says, “ What are the apostle’s nets he was ordered to cast in the deep sea other than the sermon and the power of conviction which allows no one to escape from the hunting? It is pleasant to have the nets as the equipment used by the apostles and disciples. These do not kill those who are hunted, but they rather keep them and bring them out of the abyss to the light. These raise the ones in the deep sea to the top of the mountains.

This experience was lived by St Paul the apostle who was hunted by the Lord’s merciful net; he did not stop casting the net in his turn to fish with God’s grace. He says (2Cor4: 1) “Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy we faint not”

Fourthly: The divine command was issued (Luke 5:4) “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught”. If this order had come from an ordinary person, the

fishermen would have considered it offensive to their self-respect, for they were experienced fishing for a very long time. They knew fishing was much better at nighttime and is almost non-existent at midday. They also knew that fishing is at shallow waters and not in the deep.

Simon's answer had two meanings: One of the old human experience implying a lot of failure and despair, as well as a new meaning dividing it from the above by the word "but!" He leaves the mere human experience to (Luke 5:5) the experience of faith in the active Word of the Lord.

St Augustine noticed the Lord Jesus did not tell the fishermen to cast their nets on the right side for the righteous one to enter alone, and neither did He say on the left side for the unrighteous ones. He rather said to cast it in the deep sea to carry both of them together. The invitation is for everybody to enter the church nets so they may be blessed with the biblical life. He also noticed the fishermen did not bring the fish to the shore, they actually emptied the nets in the two boats, for He wishes everyone to be blessed with the new life inside the church, and not out of it.

Fifthly (Luke 5:5) "And Simon answering said unto Him "Master we have toiled all the night and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down my net." The apostle St Peter thought what man did, such as struggling in the service with relying on God, and holding on to God's Word and His promises, is only toil and hard work in the dark night and yet it is fruitless. But on listening to the Lord's Word, man casts his net and thus brings forth fruit. Concerning this St. Ambrosias says as if he were St Peter "I too, Lord, know very well the night darkness envelopes me when You are not there as my leader. I am thus surrounded by the dark when I saw the seeds of the false word which springs from myself"

St Ambrosias goes on to declare that Simon Peter's struggle all night long, and yet fruitlessly, represents him who preaches eloquently in human power and mere philosophy. It is therefore extremely urgent that preaching be at daylight, when Christ the Sun of Righteousness shines, offering His active Word that fills up the nets of the church with the live fish. He says, "They have caught nothing up till now, but yet, when they obeyed God's word they obtained a huge amount of fish. This is not the fruit of human eloquence, but rather the work of heavenly seeds. Let us then leave the human conviction and let us cling on to the work of faith by which the nations believe".

Sixthly: (Luke 5: 6,7) The tremendous catch:" And when they had done this, they enclosed a great multitude of fishes, and their net broke. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came and filed both the ships so that they began to sink.

We are used to the Lord Jesus making miracles in compassion, such as with someone who is sick, or with someone possessed by an evil spirit, or He raises a man for the sake of a suffering widow, or feeding the hungry multitude. ...But this miracle happened not to satisfy some physical need or to declare compassion to a wreck soul. It rather happened to declare the work of the Lord Jesus in His future church of Jews and gentiles, so as to fill the church with the fish enjoying a blessed new life.

When studying the symbols, we saw "the fish" symbolizing the Lord Jesus Himself as well as His believers. It is as if the church is filled with the elect. These are the fishes that live constantly in the baptismal water, clinging to the Fish who grants life.

St Cyril the Great comments on this tremendously big catch saying, "Their nets were filled with fish miraculously. This is to make the disciples confident that their preaching mission will not be in vain when casting their nets on the unbelievers and lost people. But notice the inability of Simon and his colleagues in pulling the net. They

stood in fear and shock silently. They waved to their brethren on the shore asking them for help. This means there were many who helped the saintly apostles in their field of missionary work. They are still working hard and diligently, particularly in absorbing the sublime verses of the gospel, whereas there are others, teachers and shepherds of the people who have become remarkable in understanding the correct doctrine of Truth.

The net is still cast, and Christ is filling it up with those people who serve Him in the deep sea of the world, so tempestuous and rough. In the psalm it is said (Psalm 69:14) “Deliver me out of the mire and let me not sink, let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters.”

Seventhly St Peter’s Response to the Divine Work

Our teacher St Peter the apostle saw the huge and gigantic catch, he was not so much concerned about the catch itself, but rather his deep enlightenment was attracted to the personality of the Messiah, the One of authority over heaven and earth and the seas (Ps8:8) He therefore knelt on his knees and felt grace overwhelming him from his very depths. He discovered his inward sins before the Lord of heaven and earth. He therefore cried out saying (Luke5:8) “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man O Lord” He was not strong enough to realize this extreme Light and he felt unable to draw closer to the Holy One, and he confessed his sins

He cried out “Depart from me” because he felt an awesome reverence overwhelming him. In his modesty and his self-realization of his weakness, St Peter was worthy of the Lord’s entry to the depths of his heart and establishing His kingdom in him. As St John Chrysostom says, “Nothing is as pleasing and as acceptable in God’s sight as when a man regards himself to be last of all. This is the foremost basis for any active wisdom. St Peter the apostle’s humility was not mere words or emotions. It was rather an interaction with the positive and live work. It was said about him and his colleagues (Luke 5:11) “And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all and followed Him.” They left everything so as to devote all their hearts to the one they loved, in true worship and missionary work. It is as if humility is not only a feeling of disability, but it is also to throw yourself restfully in the heavenly groom’s embrace, so man could live with all his heart and potentials for the account of the groom and his abilities.

St John Chrysostom comments on their leaving everything behind, saying “Tell me what great thing did St Peter leave behind? It was only a broken net (Luke 5:6,11) and a rod with bait. Despite this the Lord has opened to him the houses of the world, and He laid before him the land and sea, and everyone invited him to his possessions. They even sold all what they had and put it at his feet and not even in his hands.”

St Ambrosias comments on St Peter’s humility blended with his work leaving everything behind “St Peter was amazed at the divine gifts and blessings pouring on him. The more he received, the more his humility and surrender increased.

You too say “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man O Lord” and Christ will answer you “Fear not”. Confess to the Lord for it is He who forgives your sins. Do not hesitate to give Him back what is yours. Leave everything behind, for He too, has given you what is His. Contemplate on God’s love that has given man the authority to take life.”

2 The Cleansing of the Leper

The Lord Jesus came to us humans as a friend. We have toiled all night through without fishing anything, yet with His word he granted us a gigantic amount of fish coming from the deep sea, and filled up the two ships. The two ships are the body and soul. We thus carry not the materialistic fish, but rather the multiplying spiritual fruits for the spirit and the

body together. Now we can see Him stretching His hand, without any restraint to heal a leprous man whom everyone fears to touch or even touch his clothes or belongings lest they become defiled according to the law (Lev.13)

We have previously seen in our study of St Matthew's gospel (ch.8) and St Mark's gospel (ch.1) that this leper represents a true picture of him who says a sincere prayer. He is blessed with his Master's hands that purify him. We have also seen the reason for which the Lord sent him to the priest to offer the oblation according to the Law of Moses. In our study of the book of Leviticus (Ch 14) we got to know the real concepts for the leprous purifying rituals.

St Ambrosias thinks that the cleansing of the leprous is a symbol of the cleansing of the believers whom the Lord was not disgusted to touch. The Lord did not cleanse one leper only but all those to whom he said (Luke 15:2) "You are now pure because of the words that I told you" If the cleansing of the leper has been fulfilled by the word of the Lord, then the scorning of God's word is the leprosy that blights the spirit.

He comments on the Lord Jesus touching of the leper when he was healed, saying "He touched the leper not because He is unable to heal him without the touch, but to prove He was not a prisoner of the law, and that He does not fear contagion, since He will never be infected by it".

At the time He touched the leper without fearing the defilement of the leprosy according to the old law. He asks the leprous man to fulfill what was mentioned in the law after being healed. The Lord wishes to declare He was not a breaker of the law.

The scholar Trithemius speaks of the Lord Jesus sending the leper to the priest in obedience to the old law, saying "Because the Lord hated any human glory, He commanded the leper not to tell anyone about him being healed. But to honor the covenant, He asked him to do according to the commandments. The Lord wishes the symbolic relationship to the covenant to be fulfilled for the sake of the prophetic role. These symbols mean that the man who was a sinner and has been purified of all defilement by God's word, he has to perform God's obligation in the temple. This means prayer and thanksgiving at the church in the name of Jesus Christ who is the Priest Father to the whole universe.

The Lord added the words "a testimony to them" By so doing, the Lord testified He was not a breaker of the law but rather the One to fulfill it. Moreover, He testifies He is the One about whom was prophesied that he carries our infirmities and weakness.

St Ambrosias says "The old law commands that the leper comes forth to the priest not to offer an outer sacrifice, but that he offers himself a spiritual sacrifice to God, and thus it wipes out his previous iniquity. He thus becomes consecrated to the Lord as a pleasing sacrifice. (Rom 12:1) "I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable unto God."

The leper resorted to prayer and pleaded the Lord Jesus to obtain healing. The evangelist St Luke wishes to take us from time to time to the life prayer as a source of a sanctified life. He presents to us the Lord Jesus Himself, our representative and delegate, as praying. He accepts all prayers, for the evangelist says (Luke 5:16) "and He withdrew Himself unto the wilderness and prayed."

The multitude were eager to meet Him, and many were blessed with being healed by means of touching Him or hearing a word from His mouth. Despite this, He used to withdraw Himself to pray, so as to show us the need of a constant contemplative active life. In love, our hearts are big enough to work for the account of our brethren. In the same love we meet God in secrecy so as to be blessed with His work in us. In other words, there is no division between work and contemplation, between preaching, service and worship.

St Cyprian's comments on the prayer of the Lord Jesus saying, "If He who is sinless prayed, then how much more would it be for sinners to pray? The Lord prayed continually,

staying up all night in incessant pleading, so how much more should it be for us to stay up every night in constant and fervent prayer?

The Lord does not pray or ask anything for Himself, for what will he ask for, He who is without sin? He only asks for our sins as when he said to St Peter (Luke 22:32) “ But I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not”.

If He has toiled and stayed up and prayed for our sake and for the sake of our sins, then how much more should we constantly pray? Let us pray and entreat the Lord Himself, and by his means, so that we please the Father.

We have the Lord Jesus Christ our God who is our defender and intercessor for our sins, if only we repent for our past sins and confess realizing our iniquity by which we disobeyed the Lord. Let us be preoccupied with our conduct in His path and in the fear of His commandments.

3 The Healing of the Paralytic

Because the Lord Jesus was now in one house, being surrounded with the Pharisees and the scribes of the old who came from all over Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem (Luke5: 17) the Lord began to teach them. He saw a paralytic let down by four men from the rooftop. He stopped His words to tell the paralytic that his sins were forgiven and He healed his body. It is as if in his friendship to us He does not like teaching for its own sake, as happens with many teachers, the Lord is only asking for human rest for the soul and the body together. We discussed the paralytic miracle from the actual books of some of the fathers (St Matt 9, St Mark 2). This is why I shall be brief in my explanation here:

This miracle was performed in the Lord’s city, that is, in Capernaum (Mark2: 1), which means the “place of rest”. This is because wherever the Lord Jesus is; He grants the place rest for the soul as well as for the body.

Some of the Pharisees gathered round Him. The word “Pharisees” is an Aramaic word, means “the elect”. They have selected themselves from the public so as to live an aristocratic and religious life, basically a life of pride and arrogance. This was their system which ruined their life, and which prevented them from the true encounter with the Lord Jesus, even though their creed was a correct one. As for the teachers of the old law, these were the “Hakham” who focused their interest on the “Talmud” and who led a virtually fatal literal life.

The Pharisees and the hakhams came in pride relying on their religious knowledge and their human wisdom. But as for Jesus, He was in their midst teaching and healing in power and authority.

There were crowds of people in the house; and so those carrying the paralytic went to the stairs out of the house until they reached the rooftop. They uncovered it and let down the sick one with his bed between the bricks till the middle part where Jesus was (Luke5: 19).

When they uncovered the roof by removing the bricks, they let down the sick paralytic in the middle in front of the Lord Jesus. These represent the church with all its members and ranks, such as bishops, priests, deacons and congregation. They removed the bricks, which are the earthly thoughts and earthly confusion, so as to uncover the rooftop and thus see the Lord sitting, just as in the evening, giving His boundless blessings.

The Pharisees could not stand seeing the picture; the church is represented by those men bringing the paralytic to Jesus without them. They felt the collapse of their authority and the loss of their honor. They therefore were ready to find some fault with the Lord. When He said to the paralytic “Your sins are forgiven” they accused Him of blasphemy. The Lord cared not only to disappoint them, but He also proclaimed Himself so as they might accept Him and believe in Him.

We have spoken about this paralytic (Matt9, Mark2) by mentioning the father's writings about him. Therefore enough said, except for the following excerpts:

+ Christ saw the faith of those who carried the paralytic and that of the paralytic himself. It so happens that someone could be healed due to the faith of others. It could also be that Christ admired the faith of the paralytic himself and He thus healed him of his disease. It is also possible that the spot from where the paralytic was let down was opened to fresh air, and thus the paralytic's friends found no difficulty in letting him down in the middle.

Christ said to the paralytic "Man, thy sins are forgiven". Christ meant by this to address the entire humanity, because all those who believe in Christ their souls are healed from iniquity, and their sins are forgiven. In other words, Christ speaks to the paralytic saying "I have to heal your spirit before healing your body. But if I do not do so, you will physically be able to walk on your feet, and you will return to the life of iniquity and vice. Even if you do not ask for the spiritual healing, then it is I, God and Lord, who is able to perceive the soul's sickness and disease, and how these have made you come to such a state of direness.

There were crowds of scribes and Pharisees, and there was a need of performing a miracle so as to teach them, this was due to their scorn for the Lord, thus Christ performed an overwhelming miracle.

Before Christ there lay a bed-ridden man, overcome by palsy, having no cure or medication to relieve him. The physicians themselves admitted they were unable to heal a man so much overcome by such a disease, to the extent that even his own family lost all hope. But they suddenly saw a beam of hope shining from afar. They hastened to where Christ, the physician, was. He was the One who came from above, from heaven. They presented to Him their patient, and Christ accepted his faith. Thus faith scattered and dispersed the cloud of sickness, for Christ addressed the paralytic by the well known words "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee"

Someone may ask "The paralytic was in need of physical healing, then why does Christ declare to him his sins were forgiven?" This is to teach us that God witnesses man's silent deeds and He sees the way he heads in his life, for it is written (Prov.5: 21) "For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He pondereth on all his goings." Because God is so good, and He wants everyone to be saved, and to come to know Him, therefore God often heals the one who commits sin and evil by means of torturing his body with an overcoming disease that makes him bedridden. As the inspiration says (Jer6:8) "Be instructed, O Jerusalem...lest I make you desolate, and land not inhabited".

In the book of Proverbs it is mentioned, "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, neither be weary of His correction. For whom the Lord loveth He correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth,"(Prov3: 11,12) It is so good that Christ declares the wiping of the sins and iniquity, for all of these are the sources of sickness and disease. When the sins are wiped out, man is healed from the physical ailment that has swallowed him up.

(Luke 5:21) "And the Scribes and the Pharisees began to reason saying "Who is this who speaketh blasphemies?"

As we have mentioned previously, Christ declared the forgiveness of sins with His divine power. But this declaration provoked the Pharisees, and they were a party of ignorant and envious people. They argued among themselves "Who is this who speaketh blasphemies?" You could not have asked this question; you Pharisees, if you had only comprehended the holy books and read the prophecies of the Holy Book; and then you would understand the mystery of the incarnation so immeasurably great and indescribable. Instead of studying the prophecies, you have accused the Lord of the sin of blasphemy and judged Him to die. This is because the covenant of Moses put to death anyone who blasphemed. It was said (Lev 24:16) "And whoever blasphemeth the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death." Christ addressed the Pharisees saying (Like5: 22) "What reason ye in your hearts?"

The obvious meaning of these words is “You Pharisees confess there is no one to forgive sins except God.” But know well, that no one but God knows what is on man’s mind. He alone uncovers the depths of the heart. He knows its secrets and intentions, for the words of the prophecy said (Jer 17:10) “I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways.” King David refers to this saying (Ps 33:15) “ He fashioned their hearts alike, He considereth all their works”. Therefore God who fashions the hearts is the same God who forgives the sins and iniquities.

(Luke 5:24) “ But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power.”

Christ wanted to disperse the doubt and suspicion that over shadowed the scribes and the Pharisees. Christ did not only forgive the paralytic his sins, for man is unable to see the forgiven sins with his materialistic eyes, but Christ also commanded the disease, and so it departed from the paralytic’s body. The man got up to walk, whole and sound, pointing to the greatest divine power that healed him of his infirmity. The words of Jesus were soon said to the paralytic (Luke 5:24) “ Arise and take up thy couch and go into thine house.” The man stood up at once and went to his house healed and whole. Indeed the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

To who does this verse refer? Did Christ speak about Himself or about us? Actually this verse speaks of Christ and of us because the Lord forgives sins since He is God the Incarnate, the Lord of the old law and it is He who has put it. We have received this tremendous power by means of enthroning man’s nature in great honor, for Christ has spoken to His saintly apostles saying (Matt 18:18) “Verify I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” At another place it was mentioned (John 20: 23) “Whose so ever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

St Cyril the Great

+ (Luke 5:20) “When He saw their faith.” Great is the Lord who forgives some for the sake of others’ request; He accepts the pleadings of some for the sake of forgiving others’ sins.

God’s minister has the right to ask for your sake, and he has the link, so he is answered.

You sick patient, learn how to plead, and if you are not eager for the forgiveness of sins, then go to him who intercedes for you. Go to the church that prays for your sake, and by its means He will grant you the forgiveness.

St Ambrosias

+ Some say this man was forgiven merely for the sake of the faith of those who were carrying him. But this is not true, because the words are “ When Christ saw their faith” this does not refer to their faith alone, but also to the faith of the one they were carrying. Why? You may ask “ Hasn’t he healed anyone for the sake of others’ faith?”

In my opinion, I do not think so; unless in the case of immature minors, or severe weakness to such an extent that this person does not have the ability to believe.

Do not think carelessly of the phrase that says that they let him down from the rooftop. Just contemplate on how a patient can have the persistence and strong will of being let down from the rooftop. You know that patients are so weak hearted that they refuse the treatment they receive when they are on their beds. They are unwilling to stand the pain of their treatment, and instead they prefer to bear the pain of their sickness. But as for this man, he had the persistence of getting out of the house, and be carried in the marketplace, to be looked at in the midst of the crowds, although usually the patients would rather die on their deathbed than expose their personal misfortune. This sick one did not only do this, but also when he saw the crowded place that obstructed his reaching Jesus he yielded to being let down from the rooftop. He considered this as an honor for many to witness his healing.

We admire his faith. Moreover, when he was presented to the Lord, He told the sick man to be assured his sins were forgiven. When he heard this word he was not infuriated or

complained nor did he tell the Physician “ What do You mean by these words? I have come to be healed physically and now You are telling me something different.” The paralytic did not think about this, nor did he utter it. He rather waited for the Physician to adopt the way of healing that He wanted.

For this reason also the Lord Jesus did not go up to him, but He waited until the paralytic came, so as to declare his faith before everyone.

St John Chrysostom

+Why hasn't He offered the paralytic the healing, but said unto him to be assured his sins were forgiven?

He did so in wisdom; because this is the usual case with the physician, to uproot the source of the disease before doing away with the disease symptoms.

St Paul confirmed this to the Corinthians when blaming them for a particular sin saying:

(Cor11: 30) “ for this cause many are weak and sickly among you.”

Therefore the Lord Jesus has wiped away the cause of evil, and He said, “ Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.” The Lord has uplifted the soul and raised the paralytic, because these words of His were enough. Nothing creates joy and brings back confidence as much as being freed from the inward torture. When there is the forgiveness of sins there is the filiations. Thus we cannot call God the father unless it is after our sins are washed in the pool of the holy water, that is, the baptism. Consequently we may say, “Our Father who art in heaven.”

St John Chrysostom.

4 **The Call to Levi, the tax collector.**

It is here that the evangelist St Luke presents a vivid side of the friendship, which Jesus has for humanity. In His selection of His close ones He brought them from various places. Some were from among the fishermen, simple as they are, whereas others were from among the tax collectors who were scorned by the Jews and were accused of disloyalty and working for the account of the Roman Empire.

The Lord Jesus invited and called upon Levi, who later became the evangelist St Matthew. The call was brief indeed (Luke5: 27) “Follow Me.”, but it was strong and effective, for (Luke 5:28) “ and left all, rose up and followed Him.” He also prepared a great feast in his own house for the Lord, so the other publicans would enjoy the sweet encounter with the Lord Jesus.

St Jerome says that some of those who resisted Christianity thought lightly of Jesus' followers for they followed Him as soon as He called them for the first time. They thus accepted Him naively, without much thinking. This is answered in two ways:

Firstly: These people may have heard or witnessed the many wonders and miracles the Lord performed before calling them.

Secondly: The Lord possesses such a charisma being the Lord of all creation so as to attract all those around Him.

St Jerome also noticed that St Matthew the evangelist is the only one who mentioned his name when the Lord called him (Matt 9:9) As for the other two evangelists; they did not mention his name. They thought it enough to mention his second name “Levi” in respect to their colleague St Matthew the evangelist (Matt9: 9; Mark 2:13,14).

+ St Matthew followed Solomon's principle: the just one begins by blaming himself; and so he called himself “: tax-collector” to show the reader no one should lose hope in saving himself as long as he returns to a better life, as he was changed from a tax collector to an apostle.

St Jerome

+Levi was tax collector eager for money that showed his endless materialistic greed. He would hide behind the law of justice and correctness, so as to possess what is not his.

With these ugly qualities the tax collectors came to be known. But Christ took one of them who were deeply soaked in the sea of sin and vice. He called him, rescued him, and gave him salvation. It is mentioned, (Luke 5:27) “And He said unto him, “Follow Me” and he left all, rose up, and followed Him.” Indeed St Paul, the devout one, was true is describing Christ (1 Tim 1: 15) Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. “Don’t you see how the Word of God, the only begotten Son has taken a body so as to regain to Himself Satan’s slaves and his possessions?”

St Cyril the Great

+ When Christ chose His personal apostles so as to preach His gospel, he chose them from among the sinners who were worst of all, to show He has not come to call righteous but sinners to repentance.

Father Barnabas

The scribes and the Pharisees could not bear to see Jesus meeting the tax collectors. They therefore told his disciples, (Luke 5: 30,32) “ Why do you eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them “They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick, I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

+ Why do the Pharisees blame the Savior for eating food with the sinners? This was due to the old Law of Moses, which differentiated between the sanctified and the permitted things, and between the defiled and the chaste (Lev. 10: 10)

The Pharisees believed it inappropriate to combine what is holy with what is defiled. Thus they asked Christ to keep the covenant of Moses. But their critical accusation of the Lord was not based on the zeal for the covenant, but rather based on envy and malice. They often flared up in Christ’s face to make Him fall in a trap they plotted. But Christ escaped from them, returning evil with goodness. He informed them He did not come now as a judge to condemn, but rather as a physician to heal. He was therefore obliged, being the Physician, to draw closer to the patients so as to heal them of their infirmities. St Cyril the Great.

The Scholar Trithemius has a pleasant comment on the words of the Lord Jesus (Luke 5: 31,32) “They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinner to repentance.” In the second century some heresy appeared that defiled the body, and debased it, and it was considered an enemy that had to be destroyed. The scholar Trithemius declared that the body, though corruptible, yet it is close to us, and it shares the soul in its life. You have to love it as much as you love your neighbor, particularly because the Lord Jesus carried our bodies, that are sinful, and has thus become close to it. He has blessed His nature in the body. Even though our bodies have become stained with the disease of iniquity, yet the Lord Jesus came not as a judge but as a Physician healing the body and the soul together.

We can feel the sacred outlook of the first church regarding the body. Some of the scholar Trithemius’s words are “Christ asks us to love our relative after our love to Him. Here He is practicing what He commands us with, for He loves the body that is very attached to Him. He is His relative, and He loves the body in spite of its frailties, for His strength is fulfilled in weakness (2Cor. 12: 9). He loves it despite the troubles on our bodies, for the healthy ones do not need a physician, but rather those who are sick. Even though our bodies may seem dishonorable, for we give more honor to the incomplete members that have less honor (1Cor. 12: 23). He honors the body though it is damaged, for He says, (Luke 19: 10) “ For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” He honors it though it is sinful, for He says that He wishes the sinner’s

salvation and not his death. Also He says that though he is under the judgment yet he hurts and Heals (Deut.32: 39)

5 The Declaration about the New Wine:

The Pharisees could not resist the Lord's friendship to humanity. When they objected to his eating with the tax-collectors and sinners, whereas the old law discerned between the sacred and the defiled, he assured them He did not break the law, but that He has rather fulfilled it at its deep essence in His love to mankind, and His gentleness with the weak ones. He has come as a physician to those who were sick, and not a judge to the sinners. Now they were attacking Him through His disciples, saying (Luke5: 33) "Why do the disciples of John fast often and make prayers and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees, but Thine eat and drink?"

The Lord answer came not only as a response to the question but it revealed His mission as well. This focuses on two points:

Firstly: He came as a groom getting betrothed to humanity His bride. Now the time is inappropriate for fasting, but it is for the declaration of the Groom and rejoicing in Him. But whenever He is uplifted to heaven, then they ask for Him by means of fasting and pleading. It is as if the goal of worship is not that of fasting and asceticism, but rather in being blessed with the heavenly Groom through these fasting and asceticism if offered in the spirit and the truth.

Secondly: He has not come to put more load in worshipping. He came first to wipe out what is old and establish what is new. He is crucifying the old man, and is granting a new and spiritual one.

We have previously mentioned some comments of the fathers regarding the answer of the Lord Jesus in our interpretation of St Matthew's gospel (9:14) and St Mark (2:21)

Chapter VI

The Teacher Friend

The Greeks loved to hear perpetually analyzing new that satisfies the thoughts, yet it was all in vain. But as for the heavenly Teacher, before offering the new teaching He offered the new capabilities. He has uplifted man above the fatal literacy by declaring Himself that He is Lord of the Sabbath. In it the believer does not bend to the wordiness of keeping the Sabbath in a dry way, but rather by carrying the power of the Spirit. Moreover, He healed the man with the withered right hand, so as to release it for spiritual work. He also chose the twelve disciples for the missionary preaching work, at this point offered His sermons and doctrine.

- 1- Christ is Lord of the Sabbath.
- 2- The healing of the Withered right hand.
- 3- The Call of the Disciples.
- 4- His Teachings:
 - a) a personal speech to the Weary.
 - b) a call of tremendous love.
 - c) The need of building on the Rock.

1-Christ is Lord of the Sabbath:

The three evangelists St. Mathew (12:1), St. Mark (2:43) and St. Luke, mentioned how some of the Pharisees formed a party of opposition against the Lord. When they saw the disciples in their hunger picking corn ears, and eating than after rubbing them in their hands, they thought this as breaking the law. They considered them as if they did the process of harvesting and grinding on a minor scale. This is why they objected saying 'Why are you doing that which is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?'

We have previously spoken about this in our study of the gospels of St. Mathew and St. Mark. We have noticed the following:

Firstly: The evangelist St. Luke mentions (Luke 6:1) "And it came to pass on the second Sabbath after the first." What does he mean by saying this?

Scholars have interpreted this differently, but we may summarize their views in the following:

- a) By the first Sabbath he means the Jewish Passover. The Sabbath after means the feast of Prime hood of the Passover, which falls on the sixth of the month of Siwan, which is June.
- b) This translation is derived form the Greek one 'the second Sabbath after the first'. This is why some think he means the second Sabbath after the feast of bread or cake. This is known as the Sabbath after the Plentitude.
- c) By the 'first Sabbath' he may have meant the Saturday of the first month of the Jewish year, whereas the second Saturday is the Saturday of the second month. Or, it could mean the first Saturday that falls as the beginning of the civil year in the month of October or in November, whereas the second Saturday is when the religious year begins in April.

- d) Some think the second Sabbath means the first Sabbath that falls in the previous year after the jubilee year.
- e) It is most probable, to many Christians, that it is the second Sabbath directly after the Passover.
- f) Some of the fathers interested in the spiritual interpretation, think the first Sabbath refers to the Moses' Sabbath in the Jewish literal understanding. The second Sabbath here means the new, when the Lord took us from the physical literal rest to the real rest in Him by means of His Gospel. Therefore, what the disciples did when they were walking in the fields actually refers to taking them to the fields of the Old Testament books, to pick the symbol ears and prophecies, and to rub them with His Holy Spirit. In these symbols and prophecies, or ears of corn, they would find the spiritual food of the Gospel that supplies us with the real satisfaction.

We can also say that what the disciples did was in the name of the entire Church, since it enters by means of the Holy Spirit, to God's altar. It would receive there the corn ear of the **Eucharist** as a divine gift on which the church lives so as to reach perfection, and thus be ready for the eternal Crown, Jesus Christ. St. Anabrosius thinks the Lord Jesus led His disciples just as if it were the field of today's world, so as to enjoy the fruits of the Church, which is the outcome of His Holy Spirit by means of the apostolic service. The disciples have got hungry for mankind's salvation, and they wished to enjoy the Spirit's harvest, a matter rejected by the Jews.

Secondly: the Phariseas asked (Luke 6:2) "Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the Sabbath days?" as we mentioned before, this was not due to their zeal for the covenant, it was mentioned by their envy and disruption of the service of Christ the Lord. The answer that the Lord Jesus gave them was not to put them to shame, but rather to reveal the New Testament **nugoteries**, as they might realize the Truth and come to Him. By His answer, the Lord wanted to raise them up to the new spiritual age. Instead of the literacy of the Old law. As St. Paul the apostle says, (Heb. 8:8,13) "For finding fault with them, He saith 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. In that He saith, ' A new covenant, He hath made the first Old, new that which decayeth and waxeth old ready to vanish away.

The apostle adopted this prophecy from the book of Jeremiah which was in their hands(Jer. 31:31).

St Cyril the great says, "But we can see that the scribes and the Pharisees totally lacked this new covenant, for they shut their eyes from seeing the holy books whereas they glared at the divine teachings of Christ, as they may find a missing part or find fault with Him. They therefore wished to pounce on the Savior's disciples, and thus they said to Him, "Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the Sabbath days?" The old law prohibited people from working on the Sabbath, and they were supposed to rest on that day. But they saw the Lord's disciples picking the corn ears, rubbing them with their hands and eating them. But tell me, you who object to this, don't you break your bread to eat on the Sabbath? Thus don't blame others for what you yourself are doing? They were so ignorant of the holy books that the Lord answers them the following :

(Luke 6:3) " and Jesus answering them said, 'Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was a hungered, and they which were with him?' " Even though David acted contrary to the old Law, yet we honor and revere him mightily, for he is a saint and a prophet. And since the law of Moses commands us to judge rightly between one man and his brother, then why do you consider David a saint and a prophet whereas you blame My disciples and whip them with your sharp tongues, even though they did nothing worse?

We have to notice that the oblation offering mentioned in David's story, refers to the bread coming down from heaven that which we see on the holy table at the church. Moreover, all the table vessels we use in the service so mysteriously sanctified are only a symbol of the divinely extreme treasures.

It was permissible for David to break the old covenant literacy, and he ate with his men the showbread that is offered on the Sabbath, which was only eaten by the priests alone. There was new showbread to replace it, which David and his men have eaten on the Sabbath as mentioned in the Words of the Book (1 Sam21:6) "So the priest gave him holy bread; for there was no bread there but the showbread which had been taken from before the Lord, in order to put hot bread in its place on the day when it was taken away." " How much more appropriate is it for David's Lord to allow His disciples to eat of the new corn ears on the Sabbath? Indeed, King Saul was provoked against the priest Akimelek who had offered the showbread to David and his men, and he sent to kill him as well as the priests. Here was the adversary provoking the Pharisees against the Lord Jesus, David's Lord and His disciples because the Lord allowed His disciples to enjoy new food.

Thirdly: (Luke 6:5) "And He said unto them 'That the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath."

As they were accusing Him of breaking the Sabbath, He declared 'the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath.' He, on one hand, called Himself 'the Son of Man' , because even though He is the One who set the old covenant of the Sabbath and its law, yet it was for man's sake that it was made, and not man for the sake of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). If the 'Word of God' has become the Son Of Man for man's sake whereas He is Lord, so how much more is it befitting that the Sabbath be for man's service?

The Lord Jesus did not degrade the covenant, neither did He break it. He rather exalted it by calling himself ' the Lord of the Sabbath'. For sure, He is the Lord of the Sabbath, the One responsible for this covenant, or this weekly feast. He put it not to demolish it or destroy it, but rather to take us into new and deeper concepts for this feast, by freeing us from the fatal literacy of the Sabbath, to the happy Sunday feast for the soul. The Lord has offered Himself a 'Sabbath' to us, since He is the secret behind our rest. He is our feast in whom we are blessed in the resurrected life, and we are rejoicing in the reconciliation with the Father.

2-The Healing of the Withered- Right- Hand:

On the new Sabbath the Lord Jesus went with His disciples amid the fields so as to grant them the new corn ear, the **nuptery** of spiritual satisfaction to them. He gave them a new concept for the Sabbath, as being the secret inward peace and deep satisfaction that fills the soul in its encounter and unity with God. Now, on entering the synagogue on a different

Sabbath, He wished to reveal that the Sabbath is not a day for slothfulness, but it is rather a day of rest through the true spiritual work. Thus He met the man with the right hand that was withered, so as to give it back the life by which it could be active in the Lord.

St. Augustine thinks the left hand refers to the material work, whereas the right one refers to the spiritual work. Therefore the man with the withered right hand refers to the Jewish synagogue itself for having its right hand withered and performs no spiritual work, and just observing the adamant literacy. The Lord therefore came to get rid of this withered hand, granting the Sabbath a new spiritual concept.

In our interpretation of St. Mark's gospel (3:1-6) we have seen St. Ambrosius speaking of this man as representing the first Adam. It was Adam who in disobedience to his Creator, has stretched out his hand to the tree. Thus it has withered in iniquity, and it needed the Lord to come and heal it, so that it stretches and practices the righteous life, through the love to the close ones and the rescue of those who are wronged (1 Kings 13:4-6) "Jeroboam's hand withered when he wished to make incense in worship to the idols, and he stretched it out when he prayed. We have seen St. Cyril the great in his remarks about the miracle, how the Lord Jesus was concerned not only to heal the withered hand, but also to argue with the Pharisees concerning the Sabbath, for they might accept the healing of their literal withered thinking.

The evangelist says "and looking round about them all, He said unto the man 'Stretch forth thy hand.' " The Lord looked at them but He was sighing inside Himself for their hard heartedness. Instead of being concerned about the healing of their brother's withered hand, and enjoying an active life, they were concerned about being critical, waiting for the chance to pounce on the Lord and accuse Him. Even when the man was healed, instead of sharing him his joy (Luke 6:11) "they were filled with madness and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus."

As St. Cyril the great says, "Wasn't the miracle enough to plant the spirit of faith? They could see Christ working in divine authority, healing the sick in marvelous power, and despite this, they faced His mercy mercilessly and harshly because of their envy and spite.

3- The Call of the Disciples:

The Lord Jesus came as a Friend to mankind. His friendship is not based on mere emotions, but rather through His active love. We have seen Him taking us to the fields to offer us Himself the new corn ear that has been shed on the cross. We eat it as the mystery of our satisfaction in the real restful Sabbath. Moreover, we see Him taking us to His holy place 'the synagogue', since He is Lord of the Sabbath He heals our withered right hand, transforming our life from the hard literacy of the old law to the evangelical life working through Him and in Him. Now, we can see Him, in our name and our account, going out to the mountain to pray, spending the entire night in loving conversation with the Father. As a Friend to us, He declares that 'prayer' is the road to friendship and a vent to the Lord of the heaven.

In the introduction to this book, we said it is the book of 'divine friendship' that is established through prayer this is why the Lord Himself is manifested as a Teacher to us in prayer, and not in the commandments concerning the practicing of constant prayer and eloquence, but rather His appearing on more than one occasion when praying. We have seen the difference between the prayer of Him who is sinless, and our own prayers we who are so sinful, for He

prays and intercedes by His blood for forgiveness of our sin (reverse interpretation of St. Luke 5:16).

St. Cyril the great comments on the evangelist's words (Luke 6:12) "He went out into a mountain to pray " saying "all what Christ did was for our construction for the benefit of the believers in His name. Christ did everything to present to us a sublime model for the spiritual life so that we worship Him in truth.

Now, let us study the real vivid model that Christ presented to us when pleading for something from God Almighty. We have to pray secretly so no one sees us (Matt. 6:6) "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in secret." The objective of prayer is not to ask for glory or ostentation, but when we stand we have to lift up our pure hands (1 Tim 2:6) and ascend up to heaven to God's dwelling place. Take a place that is quite, away from the hubbub of the world, its cares and its worries. Let us do all of this in **actuity** and pleasure, not in worry and in weariness. Let us do this eagerly, jealously and patiently worthy of praise and admiration. For you read that Christ did not only pray, but He spent all night long in prayer. Though He is born of God the Father, and he has been humbled till He denied Himself of so many issues, so He would be a brother to us, similar to us in everything, except that of sin. Christ shared us our human nature and was tender to us. He is not ashamed of us or of our nature. He rather took our form so we follow His footsteps and are woven in His image.

St. Ambrosios comments saying, "Not every climber goes up the mountain in prayer, for some prayers are considered sin (Ps. 108:7). He who learns how to pray is exalted above earthly riches up to the heavenly riches. He keeps climbing until he reaches the summit of heavenly solitude. But he who is concerned about the world riches, does not climb mountains, and he rather covets what is his brother's, such as earthly possessions. He who looks up to God's friendship, asks for God and so he keeps climbing. Likewise are the strong souls that climb the mountains. The prophet advised no one to climb mountains, but he says (Is.40:9) "O Zion, you who bring good tidings, get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, you who bring good tidings, lift up your voice with strength, lift it up, be not afraid. "Climbing the mountains is not on foot, but by the sublime acts. If you follow Christ, you yourself become one of the mountains that surround you, (Ps. 124:2). St. Ambrosios goes on to say, "The Lord prays not to ask anything for Himself, but it is for us that He prays. He is our Intercessor. Do not think that Christ asks out of weakness, so as to take something He is unable to achieve, for He is the Founder of every authority. He rather forms us by his righteous leadership. We also have One Intercessor with the Father (1 John 2:1) He does not ask out of weakness, but out of His love for us. He spent the entire night long in prayer, showing us a model and a pattern in leadership for us to follow.

When the Lord Jesus spent the entire night in prayer, He called his disciples, twelve in number, in the daylight. We notice in this selection the following points:

Firstly: St. Augustine says, "He chose the disciples of humble origin, illiterate, having no prestige, so that when they become remarkable, practicing admirable works, that would be due to His presence in them, and how He acts in them. "As St. Paul the apostle says, (1Cor.27-29) "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are mighty; and things which are despised, hath

God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence."

He not only chose them from the poorer category that have no earthly prestige, but also from among the sinners so they would be patient and forbearing with their sinful brothers.

Secondly: The disciples felt the Lord's favour to them, and as He said unto them (John 15:16) "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that yorn fruit should remain; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you." They had no favour in being chosen, it is due to God's grace that they were chosen. He was responsible for them; He supports them and brings forth fruit in them by means of His Holy Spirit in them so as to fulfill his mission, but without any passive attitude on their part.

They rather had to respond and interact with His graceful work in them, as well as to work by His means and for His account. This is what St. Paul the apostle confirms; he was aware he has been selected for work when he was still in his mother's womb (Gal.1:15). He is committed to the divine work of God, for he says (2Cor. 6:1) "We then, as workers together with Him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain."

St. Cyril the great comments on the choosing of the disciples, saying, "They took power from Jesus and thus they amazed the world with their deeds. But we have to notice the humility of the evangelist, for he did not say 'The saintly apostles were elected'. He just went on mentioning their names in extreme simplicity, so that no one would consider himself among the selected apostles. St. Paul said regarding this point (Heb. 5:4) "And no man taken this honour unto himself but he that is called of God." Even though the saintly apostles were selected by God, each in his name for this sublime mission, yet there are some people who from time to time they are mad enough and daring enough to push themselves in among the apostles, and claim a name they were not given.

The saintly apostles referred to those usurpers saying (2 Cor. 11:13,14)"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness."

Thirdly: When mentioning the names of the twelve disciples, they were in two by two, so as to stress the life of partnership shared among them. The mysterious power in the disciples is the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus, 'the true love' in their lives, being declared in their inward personal life, just as in the live partnership life.

We have often mentioned that number two refers to love, which makes the two become one, as if it is a mission of love that unites the hearts in the Lord. It combines all the souls together through reconciliation with the Father in His Son by means of His holy spirit.

Fourthly: what follows gives the meaning of the disciples' names:

- a) Simon which means 'the listener' or 'the obedient'. The Lord Jesus called him Peter which means 'the rock' since he was the first to declare the faith in the Lord Jesus, the Son of God.
- b) Andrew, which means 'the serious' or 'the strong' or 'the brave'.

- c) James which means 'the persistent' or 'the struggler'.
- d) John which means 'God is compassionate' or 'God blesses'.
- e) Philip which means 'the horse lover' or 'the lantern mouth'.
- f) Bartholomew which means 'the sewer's son'.
- g) Mathew which means 'the gift' or 'a donation'.
- h) Thomas which means 'the twin'.
- i) Judas which means 'to thank' or 'to confess'.

We have mentioned some of the father's excerpts concerning this point when we were studying the book of the evangelist St. Mark(3:15).

4) His Doctrine:

The Lord Jesus, in His friendship to us has taken us to the fields so as to satisfy us with Himself and with his holy place which is the 'synagogue'. This is to heal us of our right hand so as to work spiritually. He appointed the disciples so as to call for the heavenly reconciliation. At this point the Lord Jesus comes forth to us as a teacher and a Friend speaking of His heavenly doctrine by which we live.

a) A personal word to those who suffer:

He is a Friend, a Teacher, who descended in the midst of our suffering to speak to us in an actual and practical way. He is in our midst supporting us in our toil, for the evangelist says (Luke 6:17 -19)" And He came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of His disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear Him, and to be healed of their diseases; and they that were vexed with unclear spirits, and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for there went out of Him virtue, and healed them all."

When the Lord prayed all night long, He was in solitude on the mountain, for no one is able to realize the mystery in the unique unity between the Father and the Son. But He came down to the plains so as to meet the disciples and the Jewish people as well as the Gentile ones. They all came to hear Him and touch Him so as to obtain the virtue coming out of Him! With this the Lord appointed His ministers. Even though it was appropriate for them to ascend up the high mountain so as to enter into a spiritually deep mysterious partnership with God, yet they are ministers and servants to the people, and are labourer for mankind so as to make them restful.

Our Lord Jesus has come as a Friend and a Teacher so that all who came to touch Him was granted power. He gave tremendous gifts to the tortured souls who remained in the plains, unable to ascend up the mountain so as to meet Him. St. Ambrosios says, "Mediate closely on every word said; how He descends to the multitude, for where else can everybody see Him to the mountain heights, thus it was He who came down

to the weal since they are unable to go up. The sick ones obtained healing on the plains, so as to develop in strength bit by bit, and thus would be able to climb mountains. The Lord comes down to heal our wounds so He makes us share His nature in being united with Him."

Now when He has given power to those who touch Him so as to raise them from the plains to the righteous mountain tops, He began to speak to them personally about 'the blessing of suffering' for the evangelist says, (Luke 6:20) "And He lifted up His eyes on His disciples and said, 'Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.'"

To encounter the people so as to heal them, the Lord came down to the plains. But when He speaks He lifts up His eyes to heaven so they too, would be uplifted towards heaven. He blesses the poor not because He takes away from them the temporary deprivation or the suffering, but rather to exalt them amidst the pain to His divine kingdom.

Our Friend came in suffering, living amongst those who suffer to carry them in the midst of suffering to share His glories.

He presents a personal blessing to His listeners by saying 'Blessed are yon....' He describes them as poor and hungry, weeping and despised by people, and persecuted wrongfully by them. Then He begins His 'woes' to those who have the contrary qualities to the rich, the fully satisfied, those who laugh now, those who are praised by everyone. We have previously spoken of these beatitudes in our study of the gospel of our teacher St. Matthew (5:2-12). We notice the following in these beatitudes:

Firstly: He began with His blessing and not with the woes. When blessing, He addressed the listeners, but with the woes He addressed those absentees. In this way the Lord Jesus, the real Friend, the Teacher, presents to us a live picture of the teaching process. It focuses on encouraging the listeners, and **wiges** them to hope in Him. He expects His listeners to be obedient to Him and be blessed with His divine blessing. When He warns them He assumes they do not commit any mistakes. He is positive in His teachings.

Our teacher St. Paul the apostle embodies the same Spirit of his Master. In his epistles he describes those he addressed as saints, elect, and invited to the kingdom....etc. After the encouragement, he blames strictly without hurting their feelings.

Secondly: St. Cyril the great comments on the divine words (Luke 6:20) "Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God", saying, "These are the Savior's words the day He opened the treasures of the new testament. He led them on the gospel way when they were ready for the sacred missionary vocation. We wished to know who are these poor ones Christ referred to in the above verse, and those to whom He promised the kingdom of heaven? St. Matthew says regarding this point 'Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (Matt.5:3). This means that he who is poor in the spirit is he who is humble and is not puffed up, and has a modest tender heart, far away from any pride or showing off, releasing himself from any arrogance and self admiration.

A person of such qualities is praiseworthy indeed for he is a friend of God almighty. He has been described by the prophet as someone to look up to, to the miserable and the humble in spirit, and the one who fears God's words (Is.66:3). King David the prophet (Ps.51:17) says "a broken and a contrite heart O God, thou wilt not despise." Christ Himself says, (Matt. 11:29) "learn of Me for I am meek and lowly heart."

In the lesson before us, we see the verse promises the poor every heavenly blessing without adding the word 'in spirit', as a description of the miserable one. But we have to know that the evangelists do not contradict each other, they are just dividing the story among them. Sometime they all mention the detailed narrative, and at other times one mentions what the other missed out, so that the believers would not miss anything Lord Jesus did that benefited the disciples and renewed them.

You therefore find in the above verse that Christ wished to say that the 'poor in spirit' is the one worthy of the blessings and grace. It is he who does not care about the riches, and the one who despises greed, covetousness, and scorns the despicable gifts, and it is he who turns his back to the malicious love of money, and has exalted himself in not being lived to the life appearance and the pride of money.

Indeed, the wise St. Paul guides us to the correct principled road in saying (Heb. 13:5) "Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have." He furthermore adds, (Tim. 6:8) "and having food and raiment, let us be therewith content." "He who wishes for Christ's redemption and His salvation, despises the fleeting money and girds himself with the lofty permanent deeds. By saying to despise money, we do not mean to touch the rich ones whose income gains have overflowed with capital money, but rather, our words are attributed to those people who have tended whole heartedly to money making, and have eagerly desired it. Who are those people? The Savior referred to them by the words (Matt.6:19)"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth."

St. Ambrosios says, "The evangelists began their beatitudes by this phrase, for it is the first according to the arrangement, and it is the mother that begets all other virtues. By scorning the possessions of this life, you deserve the eternal possessions. But if you are imprisoned to the passions of the world, then it is quite impossible to float on the top." He also adds, "Not all the poor ones are blessed, for poverty is a negative process, for these are righteous poor people and others are evil ones. Blessed is he who is poor in iniquity and malice (John 14:3) "For the prince of the world cometh, and hath nothing in Me." (2 Cor.8:9) "Blessed is he who follows his Master", "who though He is rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye though His poverty might be rich."

St. John El Tebeisy says, "If man does not primarily deprive himself, then he will not be able to come close to sorrow and lamentation; because our life can never remain for long in spiritual health if we possess in ourselves something obstructive. For man cannot have God's love if the love of possession survives in him, as it is written (Mark 8:34) "Whoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." Man cannot carry the cross unless he resigns the world. He has to be far away from everything, for the outer sympathy hinders him from what he possesses. The truth can never be firm in man unless he first amputates from his conscience the source of the love of money. Also Christ's love cannot dwell in the conscience unless

he first resigns the love of money. O you man, do not be regretful of sorrowful when you are poor and needy for God's sake, because the hope for your comfort is in the heavenly kingdom. Let not your spirit be belittled if you suffer from hunger or lack of clothing. Do not be frustrated, but rather rejoice and be glade in the hope assigned for you.

St. John Chrystom speaks of misery and poverty as being the humility and the head of every righteousness. He says, "it is the golden altar, and it is the place of the spiritual sacrifice, for the crushed spirit is God's sacrifice (Ps.61:17). Modesty is the father of wisdom. If man has this virtue, then he has the rest of all other virtues."

Thirdly: (Luke 6:21) "Blessed are ye that hunger now, for ye shall be filled."

- ❖ It is mentioned (Matt.5:6) "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." In St. Luke it is only mentioned "Blessed are you who hunger for you shall be filled." It is definitely sure that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, those ones perform an honorable and worthy chore, for they persist seriously after goodness, as well as their search for food and drink.

By this verse, it is also meant the blessing of those who deserve the life of poverty not obligingly or forcefully. This blessing nurtures their mind, and promotes their will power, and thus they follow the instructive apostolic life, and are not desirous of any false gains. They do not care about gold or silver, and neither do they care about expensive clothes of luxury. They have nothing except a little food, not enough to feed a stomach.

Such people who have resigned the worldly life with the replacement of the eternal one, are comforted with the Lord Jesus' promise to them, and thus they are not depressed or regretful, for Christ has declared openly that they are not depressed or regretful, for Christ has declared openly that they will be filled by the treasures of blessing spiritually and mentally.

St. Cyril the great

- ❖ When someone is blighted by some serious disease, he does not feel any hunger, for pain has swallowed up hunger. But what is this hunger for righteousness? What are those blessings the righteous one is hungry for? Are they not these blessings spoken of (Ps. 37:25) "I have been young, and now am old; yet have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."

He who feels hungry wishes his strength to be nurtured, and righteousness to be strengthened."

St. Ambrosios

Fourthly: (Luke 6:21) "Blessed are ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh."

Because the Lord Jesus asks us to weep and to pour tears, the church has been preoccupied from the very beginning to live a life of true repentance in incessant tears. But this has to be in wisdom and discernment, without losing the inward joy through the sublime hope and peace of the mind. It is not surprising to see St.

Eklimedos El Sekendery, urging us to weep, saying 'It is a good thing to weep and be sorrowful for the sake of justice. In doing so, you are carrying a testimony to the strangest covenant.'

He confirms it not to exaggerate in tears just as in laughter. In the same concept St. Cyril the great speaks of the Lord Jesus blessing those who weep and promising them a joyful life to come. But this is not for all those who weep; for there are unbelievers who weep due to their worries and depression. Let us weep tearfully here, but in wisdom and in hope for the sake of our salvation, and our brother's salvation. Let our weeping be before the Lord Himself, so He fills us with the comfort of His holy Spirit.

- ❖ It befits you to weep over the world, but to rejoice in the Lord. Be sorrowful for repentance, and rejoice in the grace. This is why the Master of everyone commands the perfection, when we cry with those who are sorrowful and rejoice with the joyful ones.
- ❖ Who would possess this great joy except it be him who weeps a lot? It is as if he has obtained the glory of grace that is to be, for the price of his tears.
St. Ambrosios
- ❖ "For weeping, there is a time; for laughing, there is another. The time for weeping is the time of suffering, as the Lord says (John 16:20) "Verily, verily, I say unto you that ye shall weep and lament." As for the laughter, this concerns the resurrection for He says "but your sorrow be turned into joy."

Fr. Dionysius El Sekendary

- ❖ The present time is the valley of tears. This world is the place of sorrow and not any joy. The world to come is the joyful world, but now it is the battlefield for struggle and tolerance.
- ❖ In the present world there is no eternal joy, it is only a transient joy.
- ❖ He who does not weep in the present would, will pour tears in the life to come.
St. Jerome
- ❖ The persistent prayer and fervent tears attract God to be merciful.
- ❖ Weeping by itself leads to blessed laughter.
- ❖ Jesus wanted to manifest in Himself all the beatitudes, for He said, 'Blessed are those who weep; He Himself wept so as to set firmly the basis for this beatitudes.

The scholar Oreganus

- ❖ In the commemoration of St. Gregory, the bishop of **Niscus**.

When I recall the fervent tears He shed, I myself begin to weep, for I can never cross the ocean of His tears with dry eyes. There was no day nor night, neither

was there a portion of the day or night, not even a very short moment where His watchful eyes were not wet with tears. Sometimes He wept because of the general misery and foolishness in which everyone falls. Sometimes He wept because of certain vicious traits as He mentioned. You would find Him weeping and lamenting not only when He spoke of repentance and conduct and life provision, but also when He was praying in praise and thanksgiving.

St. Avraam the Syrian

- ❖ The soul is dead when in iniquity. It asks for sorrow, for tears and weeping, and bitter sighing for the evil it made that promoted it to perdition.

Be sorrowful and weep, return the soul to God!

Observe the mother who suffers because she has lost her son, and who has been buried in the grave. She weeps over her loved one. It is all the more urgent to weep more for a man whose iniquity has separated him from God, and thus he loses his loving image of righteousness. God is sorrowful when man loses this image, because the soul to Him is more precious than all the other creation. With sin, the soul dies; and you sinner, don't you ever think of this? You should all the more be grievous over this God who grieves over you. Your soul is dead by its malice, weep fervently so as to raise it, make God joyful with your own resurrection.

St. Avraam the Syrian.

We wish to clarify that when we weep in this world over our sins, those tears do not mean we lose our hope. As St. John Chrysostom says, that when we sincerely repent, our sins are forgiven due to God's love to us. But let us remember those sins continuously so as not to fall in them. They have been absolutely forgiven, yet we still say with the psalmist, that our sin is before us at all times. Father Bevnoutious, St. Macoruis' disciple said that he often repeated the words of the elderly man 'when I was little, I used to eat with the other kids. They were used to going and stealing some figs. When running, one of the figs was dropped, and I picked it and ate it. Whenever I remember this I would sit and weep.'

This weeping is not for our sins only, but for others' sins as well. St. Basilios the great answered the question asking if it were appropriate for man to laugh, particularly when he sees many who have broken the law and have drawn closer to death due to their sins. It is more appropriate for us to grieve and weep over those ones." He also says in his sermon about the martyr Yolita.

"When you see your brother lamenting in repentance over his sins, weep with him. By the mistakes of others you win yourself from making any sin. He who weeps fervently for his neighbor's sins, he himself is cleared of his own sins for sharing the grief of his brother. This follows the words (Ps.119:53) "Horror hath taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake the law." St. John Chrysostom say, "Let us weep for them not for one or two days, but for our entire life."

St. John El Tebeysy speaks of practical training that supports the believer in weeping and being blessed with tears. Among these are: to remember the Savior's suffering, the questioning in accountability of the soul, remembering the judgment to come, the expectation of death and asking God for tears. Among his words are: "Our happy and

blessed forefathers used to weep readily at time of pleading and prayer, because they constantly grieved over the Lord's suffering and they meditated on it. Judge yourself, how many nights have you been up for the sake of tears? Or, how much did you offer God so He would be kind enough to make you grieve in tears? The amount of sad tears is a gift from God that grants the fervent requests to the one praying.

Fifthly: (Luke 6:22) "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you."

As a true Friend, the Lord came into our life and He shared us our suffering. We therefore do not see His words as bright words of philosophy, but as an experience in life, offered to us in our hardship time. He came among us as a poor One, as a hungry and thirsty One, and He wept so as to bless the miserable ones, the hungry and the sorrowful. Now He accepts to be rejected by the people, so that the rejected and despised ones may find a place in Him.

The poor in spirit, or the lowly and meek ones; these are the head of every righteousness, and the beginning of every true beatitude. To tolerate the hatred of people, their mocking and their ill treatment, to face these with a loving heart for the sake of the kingdom, this is the end of the beatitudes, for in this the believer reaches spiritual manhood or true maturity. In other words, what the Word of God aims for from us in our joyful tolerance of others, which are the qualities of the Lord Jesus who suffers for the sake of His enemies. In that case we are truly counted as mature members of His body. For this reason St. Jerome summarized the beatitudes in both the old and the new Testaments in one sentence "Blessed be the man, not every man, but he who reaches the perfect manhood in "Christ Jesus."

❖ (Luke 6:22) "Blessed are ye when men shall hate you."

The Lord showed the apostles clearly what was awaiting them such as persecution and difficulties while teaching the people. The evangelist portrayed by means of the prophecy, the dire hardships that afflict the apostles while preaching the Redeemer's mission, and their advise to the Jews to depart from the worship of the old law and the seeming robe of the perfect model life. The apostles also attempted hard to light the right truthful way to the unbelievers, so they uproot themselves from the vulgar and vile life.

But the adversary does not accept instruction or advice; he wages war against the peaceful and careful ones. To make the apostles aware when preaching the gospel word, and how they are not to be confused or disturbed, the Lord Jesus showed them their spiritual portion, and blessed them with the heavenly clothes in case of people persecuting them, and the vicious people's hatred to their guidance and instruction. Christ told them all what the malicious sinners do to them such as devastating them, exiling them, hating and persecuting them... all of this is to be disregarded and not to worry about. By standing all these tortures and ordeals they will be spiritually joyful and heartily blessed. The Lord moreover, taught His disciples that their future persecution to come is not something new, for many prophets and men of God have been persecuted before them. It has often happened that prophets were killed and sawed, and some were stricken by the sword and perished, it is not surprising that the fabric of the apostles is in the footsteps of

their good predecessors, those who have patiently borne the life of degradation and humiliation for the sake of the true and just victory. This is triumph to them and victory for they go ahead in the heavenly crown, sharing the glory of the saints so bright.

St. Cyril the great

- ❖ He who wishes to resemble God let him be modest and peaceful as much as possible. Let him accept patiently what encumbers him from others.

If you are exposed to severe humiliation, quite unbearable, and you are thoroughly infuriated with it, just remember Christ's humility and meekness so you and your enemy obtain great benefit, for by your modesty you will make him righteous.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ Pray that I am not granted a bigger gift than of coming forward to God, as long as the altar is still prepared. When assembled together in love, sing to God a hymn of thanks to the Father in Christ Jesus

I ask of you not show me affection at the wrong time. But allow me to be food to the fierce beasts, by means of which I am granted to reach up to God. Let me be grinded by the teeth of beasts so they be a grave to me, and that they leave nothing of my body, so that if I do not die, I would encumber no one. When the world no longer sees my body, then I will truly be a disciple to Christ.

Entreat the Lord Jesus for my sake, that I be prepared in this way so as to be a sacrifice to God.

The Martyr Igonatuis Elthiophorus

Sixthly: After the Lord had spoken of the four beatitudes, He mentioned the four woes that concern the rich, the satisfied and those who laugh and those praised by everyone. What does He mean by those categories?

Undoubtedly He means by the rich, those ones who rely on their money, and those blinded by their capital from witnessing God and their brethren. The satisfied are those ones who are filled, and thus they are not in need of God, and they do not ask for God's work in them. By those who laugh, He means those who are kindled by the passions of the world, away from the road of repentance. As for those praised by everyone, He means those who seek false glory, not the inward hidden glory.

Concerning the rich, St. Ambrosios says "Excessive money may call for a lot of things some of which are evil, but it could also call for virtue. It is true that virtue does not need a lot of money. The little that is offered by the poor is better than the great offered by the rich. But the Lord does not condemn he who has 'money', but He condemns him who misuses it."

St. Ambrosios also thinks that the rich who have fallen under the curse are the Jews and the philosophers. The Jews have been enriched by the symbols, the prophecies and the promises. But in their wealth, they refused the simplicity in the faith. Also the philosophers have become enriched by human philosophy and thus they rejected the faith.

St. Clemendos the Alexandrian recorded in his book 'Who is the Rich who is Saved?' the Christian concept of the rich. He made it clear how money represents a talent that has to be kindled on account of God's kingdom. St. John Chrysostom thinks the same way in many of his articles: that the rich one is his person is neither good nor bad. But man can use it in righteousness or in vice. St. Cyril the great confirms that there are some from among the rich folks who have compassion on the poor, and who have mercy on the poor Lazarus, and thus they obtain the heavenly crown, for they fulfil the divine commandment of God (Luke 16:9) "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitation."

As for those satisfied, He means those, like the one to whom it was said (Rev. 3:17,18) "Because thou sayest 'I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowing not that thou art wretched and miserable and poor, and blind and naked. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and while raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear and anoint thy eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see.'" It is as if those satisfied ones have thought themselves rich, relying on themselves and their personal abilities, not on God's Word that is like pure gold granting real riches, and not on the Lord Jesus Himself who is fit for us to be clothed with. For by doing so, He will cover our weakness and our shame with His own fresh righteousness, and neither did they rely on the holy Spirit who opens the inward vision as the eye liner.

The ones who laugh are they who live in the world carelessly, who do not care about their own salvation and their eternal inheritance. They live their days as if entertaining themselves with laughter, instead of being diligent in practicing their repentance.

Finally, there are those who love people's praise; these are enslaved to themselves and not to God. They wish to please others on account of the truth. They are happy to hear temporary words of praise rather than the eternal glory.

b) An Invitation of Tremendous Love:

The Lord wished to exalt us as a Friend, so as to be blessed with the beatitudes, and be cautious of the woes. He takes us to His quality 'the tremendous love', and thus love becomes an inward exploding overflow in our depths. We therefore love event the enemies, we love practically and not only in words. This is why His commandments came as follows:

(Luke 6:27,28) "But I say unto you who hear: love your enemies, do good to them which hate you. Bless them that curse you, and pray or them who despitefully use you."

The Lord asks us to have an overflow of love springing from the inside, and unconditional love, for He says 'love your enemies.'

We thus have to return love to enmity. This love is to be interpreted to lovable and merciful deeds: 'do good to them that hate you,' and this is based by means of the blessed and sanctified life that blesses others, and that curses no one. 'Blessed them that curse you, which is blended with worship, and we are eager to obtain the

salvation of those who hurt us. We wished them to share us the glory by means of praying instead of them so they repent. In other words, the commandment of love came as being linked to all our being in the Lord. This love is so deep in the soul, interpreted to conduct and deeds, blended with the sanctified life, and linked to our worshipping.

(Luke 6:27) "Love your enemies."

The wise St. Paul wrote in sincerity (2 Cor.5:17) "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, "because everything has been renewed in Christ and by means of Christ. Observe how the life system of those apostles has been changed. These apostles were entrusted with spreading the word of salvation to the entire world. Observe how the Lord commands them to face the evil of their enemies to them. The plots of their persecutors were so intense, and their malice was merciless and pitiless.

He asked the apostles not to take revenge on their enemies so as not to hinder the word spreading. He advised them to control their minds in patience and peace. They should not escape from their tolerance and sufferings, but they rather have to surrender happily to any harm that afflicts them, and follow the example of Jesus Christ in His patience and His forgiveness. For the Jews have scorned Him, whether they were old or young, and despite this He prayed to God the Father saying (Luke 23:34) "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." The devout St. Stephen knelt before God whereas the stones were falling around him. He asked God Almighty to forgive those who were stoning him, and cried out in a loud voice (Acts 7:60) "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." The wise St. Paul says concerning this (1 Cor. 4:12) "being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it."

Christ's warning was therefore necessary to the saintly apostles, and useful to us, we believers, so as to live in correctness and in propriety. In this warning there is a deep philosophical meaning; for in us there are rebelling psychological tendencies which makes the road difficult to walk in according to the Christ's warning to us. But Christ has previously explained to us the necessity for battling our corrupt tendencies, and drawing a division between the eager workers and those disobedient ones, for He said (Luke 6:17) "But I tell you your listeners." St. Peter the apostle also adds to Christ's endurance and His tremendous patience and long-suffering saying (1 Pet. 2:23) "Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously."

- ❖ But one of you may object to this saying, "Christ is God, but I am only a weak person, of a poor mind, and I also have emotional tendencies which stand against putting out the covetous spirit and overcoming." Know well, man, that God did not deprive you of His merciful Spirit and His love, for He is not only near you, but He is inside you as well. He is in you by His holy Spirit, for we are His dwelling place, and He dwells in the souls of His lovers and those who want Him. He is the One to support you with His right hand, and thus you will not be moved. He will hold you so you do not fall or stumble. Therefore (Rom.12:21) "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

St. Cyril the great

- ❖ He forbade us to love the malice that is in animosity, and its be bonded in natural love with Him.

St. Augustine

- ❖ If you can, do not make an enemy to yourself. If there is someone who hates you, do not grieve, for you are not the only one to be despised, but you Lord has been despised before you.

You can benefit from your enemy as much from your friend. You can make of your enemy like someone useful to you, because due to him, your love to God is made perfect. By your suffering for Him, your profit increases, because our Lord's commandment is fulfilled by this in him. If your enemy has harmed you, and you have been unable to benefit from him, then know your own drawback, and search for whatever cause you have not been able to benefit. For, how could your sincerity to your Lord be known if there is nothing to contradict your restfulness. You will then be as a person of no struggle.

St. John El Tebeysy

- ❖ Remember the meek Lamb, and how much His patience was. Though sinless, yet He stood the curses, the strikes, and other suffering till death.

St. Barsnophius

- ❖ There is a way of answering evil for evil, not only through acts, but also by means of words and inward intention. At times, man causes disturbance to his brother through his inward tendencies, or his actions,

or his looks, voluntarily so as to answer evil for evil.

Father Dorotheus

(Luke 6:29,30) "And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid him not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again."

We have previously studied these commandments in the interpretation of St. Mathew's gospel (Matt. 5:39-42)

These commandments declare the interpretation of the love potentials into a practical one. If man is hurt in his temporary honor, such as, being slapped on the cheek, or is harmed in his private possessions, he has to be willing to bear more and more for the sake of winning his brother who is hostile to him. On the other hand, if he takes after his Master's qualities, he has to love giving more than receiving. He gives him, who asks of him, and he who horrors from him, should not be asked to return the debt. It is as if the goal of these commandments are two things: to win others and to practice giving, this is what the fathers have confirmed in their remarks.

- ❖ It is appropriate for the righteous man to be ready to tolerate patiently the harm from those he wants to become good.

This is to increase the number of the righteous ones instead of himself being assed to the vicious ones, for taking his revenge on the harm done to him.

St. Augustine

- ❖ It is appropriate for us not struggle with others, and not to be eager to follow the example of the wicked ones; for He urges us to lead people patiently and to be gentle as to any shame and love of malice.

St. Justin

- ❖ Give anyone who asks of you, for you will know who is the good One to reward the prize.

St. Clemendous the Alexandrian

At any rate, the essence of these commandments is the love with which you not only disregard the cheek that was slapped, but also in the big heart he has that makes him ready to offer the other one so as to win his brother for the account of the eternal kingdom. He will not only give up his garment but also, quite willingly, the cloak he has on. He loves to give, and he does not ask the debt be returned so his brother is not embarrassed. As St. Augustine says, "The Lord forbids His followers of resorting to the law in the worldly matters against others."

(Luke 6:31) "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."

This is the actual love with which man is released from his ego, and thus loves his brother as much as he does himself. He wishes eagerly for him what he wishes for himself. He also offers him what he wishes for others, and he offers all of this to him.

St. Cyril the great remarks on this statement saying "It was probable these sanctified apostles would think they did not have the ability in carrying out these commandments from mere thoughts to a practical life. Christ knew their thoughts, and He relied on the instinct of loving of one-self as a judgment among people together. He thus commanded each one to do to others what he would like them to do to him. For if we would like others to deal with us mercifully and compassionately, then we too, have to deal with them the same way. Jeremiah prophesied previously that a time will come when believers will no longer be in need of written commandments, because this doctrine will be engraved on the hearts; for it has been said (Jer.31:33) "I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts."

Though mature love, He asks us not to deal with our brothers in the same way, but rather to give them what we desire for ourselves, regardless of what they do to us. We love for God's sake, that is, for love itself, since love has become in our nature. We thus offer love unconditionally towards others. He says, (Luke 6:32-34) "For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? For sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? For sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? For sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again."

It is as if He is telling them 'Do not think My commandments are too difficult; for I offer you what is appropriate for you as children of the Kingdom. I am asking you for a perfect life of human nature, for I work with you and in you.'" He goes on to say (Luke 6:35) "and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest. "When the world asks for the wages, at least it will be of equal value, but as for you, your great wages will be your **filiation** to the Almighty God, which obliges you to follow the example of your heavenly Father.

With the same concept the Lord Jesus says (Luke 6: 36) "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

- ❖ Nothing makes us equal to God except when we do good and merciful deeds.
- ❖ Christ is the Teacher, and so is His Father.
- ❖ Let us bring ourselves and our children and all that we have to the school of mercy. Let man learn this before anything else, for mercy is man.

Let us count ourselves as if not alive, if we still show no mercy.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ This is God's work: He has created heaven, earth and the sea. These are so great and are befitting to His wisdom! But none of these has the authority to attract human nature to Him, as His mercy and His love to mankind does.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ Merciful love is the most sublime kind of, as it were, manufacture, and is a defense to them that practice it. It is dear to God, standing constantly next to Him asking Him for the sake of those who want it, if we practice it in a way that is not wrongful.

It intercedes even for those ones who hate. Its authority is so great, even with regards those who make mistakes.

It unleashes the bonds, and scatters darkness, and puts out the fire. It kills the worms, and snatches away the grinding of teeth.

Before mercy, the doors of the heavens are open in a great guarantee. As a queen she goes in, and none of the guards dare ask her who she is, but everyone welcomes her at once.

Likewise is the state of mercy. For real, she is a real queen that makes humans like God. It has wings and is light; it has golden wings with which it flies and makes the angels very joyful.

St. John Chrysostom

If mercy promotes us to be similar to God Himself; then, when we ask for mercy we have to be merciful to our brethren and not to judge them (Luke 6:37) "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned.

The fathers, particularly those of the wilderness, were concerned about not judging. They thought nothing angers God as much as this does. It detaches His grace from him who commits it, and His mercy is put aside from him until he is merciful to his brother, and he obtains the divine grace of God and His mercies. Father Pomin and Father Moses think that he who judges his brother gets preoccupied with others' sins and not his own. He is like someone who cries over the dead one of others, and leaves his own dead one. Father Doretheus says, "We lose the power of correcting ourselves, and keep looking constantly towards our brother." 'Nothing angers God or dismantles

man, or pushes him towards his perdition such as judging and condemning his brother, or scorning him. It is a serious thing to pass judgement on someone due to one single sin he has committed.

This is why Christ says, (Luke 6:42) "Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of **thine** own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye.

" He compares the brother's sin to a mote, whereas your quick judgment is counted as a beam. The most difficult sin to heal is to judge our brother, this is probably the most serious of sins. Why don't we, rather, judge ourselves and condemn our evil that we know perfectly well and accurately enough, and the one we are held accountable for before God? Why do we usurp God's right in judgment? It is only God who judges; He is to justify or to condemn. He knows the condition of each of us, our abilities, our deviation, our talents, our situation, our willingness... He alone is to judge according to His unique knowledge. He judges the bishop's deeds in a certain way and the master's in a different way. He judges the father of the monastery or a disciple of his in a different way. The old person who has his own experience and knowledge is different than the one asking for monasticism, the sick one is different than he who is in good health. Who could comprehend all of these judgments, except Him who has created everything, who formed everything, and who knows everything?"

Father Dorethus goes on to say how not to judge, giving us a story he remembers of a ship that was carrying slaves on board. A saintly virgin came up to the ship owner, and she bought a small girl that she carried with her to her room, and trained her to live a righteous life, as if she were her own daughter. Soon after, a troupe of dances came to buy this small girl's sister, so as to train her in entertainment and a corrupt life. Father Dorethus stops in amazement; both girls were abducted from their father; one was blessed with the fear of God under the leadership of a loving saint, and the other quite unwillingly was abducted to lead a corrupt life. At this point, the father asks: Is it not for God alone to judge the girls in a way hard for us to understand? We are hasty in our judgment, but as for God He knows the secrets, He is forbearing and patient, He alone is able to justify or to condemn.

St. Cyril the great comments on the Lord's words for not judging, saying, "We are asked to look into ourselves deeply so our conduct would be according to God's commandments and His teachings; but we find some who are preoccupied with interfering in other people's affairs and their work. If they observe any mistake in other's conduct, they insist on gossiping spitefully and maliciously against them. They were not aware that in the same measure they measure others, they would be measured themselves. For they have drawbacks not any less than those others in shame and degradation. This is why the wise St. Paul says (Rom.2:1) "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgment another, thou condemnest thyself: for thou that judgest doest the same things." It is our duty therefore in such a situation to have compassion on the weak one who has fallen a prey to his own vain lust, and he has no other way to get rid of the evil and sinful entrapings. Let us pray for those who have fallen so miserably, and let us give them a helping hand. Let us seek not to fall as they did (James 4:11) "He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law." This is nothing more than that the One who put the law, and the Judge of the law in One.

It is supposed that the judge of the evil soul is much more superior than this soul. But we were unable to assume for ourselves this judging quality due to our sins, so it is our duty to resign from performing this job. For, how could we, being sinners, judge

others and condemn them? Therefore, no one should judge his brother. If you are told with in yourself, to judge others, then know well that the law did not appoint you a judge and a ruler. Therefore, your claiming such a job makes you fall under the verdict of the law, for you are usurping its reverence.

It is not for everyone's whims to capture the drawbacks of other, and he should not think busily with their frailties and offenses. He just has to meditate deeply about his own frailties and drawbacks. This was the case with the devout psalmist, describing himself with the wise words(Ps. 130:3) "If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" at another place the psalmist reveals the weakness of man and asks for forgiveness, for he said (Ps.103:14) "for He remembers that we are dust."

(Luke 6:41) "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thy eye?"

The Lord has previously shown the danger that results from boiling others in sharp tongues, saying 'Do not judge so as not to be judged.' And now the Lord has mentioned many examples and motivating evidence urging us to avoid judging others and condemning them according to our own pleasure. It is far more important to us to inspect our hearts, and void them of the disruptions kindled between our ribs, asking our God to cleanse us of our iniquities and mistakes. The Lord cautions us of a familiar bitter truth, telling us 'How could you criticize others, revealing their flaws and vice, and inspecting their infirmities and sickness whereas you yourself are vicious, sinful, sick and infirm? And how could you see the mote in others' eye, whereas your own eye has a beam preventing your eye from seeing anything? You are daring indeed if you are able to do so. It is more appropriate for you to take away your infirmities, and quench the roots of your frailties, and then afterwards, you will be able to judge others. You will see they are less guilty than your own crimes.

Do you wish to shout out all by yourself, announcing evil in the absence of others? The Lord was going about, working in the healthy fields, and His devout disciples picked some corn ears, rubbing them in their hands, ate its fruits so sweet. But the Pharisees were quick to notice the disciples, and thus they drew near to Jesus saying 'look how your disciples work on the Sabbath what is not lawful to do.' The Pharisees said this whereas they were the ones to dishonor the holies, and have disregarded His commandments and orders, as Isaiah said of them (Is. 1:21) "How the faithful city has become a harlot! It was full of justice; righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers. Your silver has become dross, your wine mixed with water. Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; everyone loves bribes, and follows after rewards. They do not defend the fatherless, nor does the cause of the widow come before them."

Despite these adversities so shameful, committed by these people, they extended their shameful and malicious behavior, and accused the blessed disciples of the Lord with desecrating the holy Sabbath. But Christ answered their wickedness, saying (Matt.23:23,24) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a **guat** and swallow a camel."

The Pharisee, as you can see, was a deceptive hypocrite, accusing people of vain accusations, whereas he allows himself to commit the most shameful despicable deeds, and the worst of crimes. It is not surprising that the Savior called them (Matt.23:27) "whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness." This is the same case with the hypocrite when he condemns others with the most despicable malice and infirmities, whereas he himself is blind, for he cannot see anything because of the beam in his eye which obstructs the light from him.

We therefore have to carefully inspect ourselves before we sit on the judgment pulpit to judge others, particularly if we occupy the job of a teacher or an instructor. If the teacher has a good report and respectable history, and knows not only the lofty virtues, but he also behaves accordingly, then such a person has the right to be a good model to be followed. In that case he has the right to judge others if they are deviated from the serious truth and correct path. But if the instructor is negligent and careless, he should not judge others since he has the same downfalls and weakness that he sees in others. The devout apostles, likewise, advise us saying (James 3:1) "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation." Christ says when crowning the righteous with the holy crowns, and punishing the sinners in various ways of discipline, (Matt.5:19) "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Furthermore, Father Isaac El Syriany says, "When the soul is full of the fruits of the Spirit, it is absolutely strengthened against any depression or hardship. Those fruits of the Spirit open in its heart the door of love to all people. They expel any thoughts that make it believe this is good or bad, this is righteous or wrong. The inner sense are arranged, and reconciled to the heart and the conscience lest any of these move in wrath or jealousy against any member of the creations. As for the barren soul that has no fruits of the Spirit, then this one is clothed in envy continuously; in addition to fury, depression, grudges, confusion, and constantly condemns others whether they're good or bad."

Also, some of the indelible words regarding not to judge others are:

- ❖ Beware of blaming anyone lest God hates your prayers.
St. Anba Anthony the great.
- ❖ He who judges, has demolished his fence by the lessening of his knowledge.
St. Anba Moses the Black.
- ❖ The man who unleashes his tongue with whatever is good or bad, is not worthy of God's grace.
Father Mar Isaac El Seriany.
- ❖ Do not judge anyone, and do not disgrace any man, and God will reward you with peace and serenity in your cell.
Anba Beeman.

- ❖ It was said one brother sinned and was thus expelled and Fr. Bisarioun as a result of this went out with him saying, "I, too, am a sinner."
St. Palladius.
- ❖ If you disregard your sins, then you fall into your brothers' sins.
Anba Isaiah
- ❖ In the story of the **adultren** woman, Jesus judged iniquity and not man.
St. Augustine

(Luke 6:37) The Lord Jesus, our heavenly Friend, spoke to us of love carried out in practical life by means of giving and covering up the frailties of others. By this He presents to us the keys of entering in God's presence so as to be blessed with His love. It is as if the Lord Jesus is offering us the keys of His divine treasury, for He says (Luke 6:37) "forgive and ye shall be forgiven."

St. Augustine called these two acts: the covering up for others, and the **givings** are the two wings of prayer which carry it up to God's throne without any obstruction. Among his words "The first righteousness is practiced in the heart, when you forgive your brother his sins. The other is **prachsed** when you give the poor one bread. Offer both righteous acts together, for without one of these wings, your prayers will be motionless. If you wish to be answered when you ask for forgiveness; forgive and you will be forgiven, give and it shall be given unto you."

Finally, the Lord Jesus confirmed that when presenting His commandments about love, He asks for the changing of the heart form the inside. He asks of the believer to be a righteous tree producing righteous fruit. He says, (Luke 6:43-45) "For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speakeht."

The followers of **Valentiers** depend on these words and similar ones, so as to declare the difference of the souls' nature. In their opinion there are naturally good souls that cannot be corruptible, whereas there are naturally evil souls that cannot be corrected. The former is the righteous tree that produces forth righteous fruits, whereas the latter is the corrupt tree that produces maliciously.

Many fathers exerted a great effort contradicting this concept, confirming the freedom of man's will power and his capabilities in the Lord Jesus in correcting their lives. If it were a corrupt tree it keeps producing bad fruits until it tunes to a good tree in the Lord. This is what St. Augustine confirmed in his selected sermons on the new Testament.

In the second century B.C, the scholar Tritilian says, "It is impossible these excerpts from the Holy Book do not agree with the Truth. The bad tree will not produce forth good fruit unless it is **purred** with the righteous nature. Neither will the good tree produce forth bad fruit unless it gets corrupted. For even the very stones could become children to Abraham, if they become disciplined in Abraham's faith. The blood of vipers could present fruits of repentance if they reject their deceitful nature.

This is the power of God's grace that is in truth way more effective than the nature itself.

If the human nature is led into doing what is good or what is bad involuntarily, and that there is no hope of any change, the Lord Jesus would not urge us 'to make the tree good', and the entire discussion would have been of no avail. The Lord speaks to us so as to accept His work in us; and thus to carry out His commandments is not only by means of our outer behavior alone but by the change in our old nature as well. For He says that the good and righteous man out of the treasure of his righteous heart he gets out what is good.

c)The Need for Building on the Rock:

The Lord resumes once more to assure us of the goal of His commandments: which is a natural outcome of the new heart on which it is built. The Lord compared our life to a construction fit to be established on the Lord Jesus 'the Rock of Ages' , and thus no tempests of whatever circumstances could demolish it.

Our faith in Christ is the inward rock, by means of which we accept the Lord Jesus Himself as the mystery of our strength. He works in us by His holy Spirit so as to raise us to His Father's embrace.

But he who is not built on the 'real Rock', and his construction is tossed back and forth by the fluctuating adversary currents, then he will not rest till the construction is entirely demolished.

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Chapter VII
The friend to All

In the previous chapter, the evangelist showed clearly the Lord Jesus as an instructive Friend. He wishes to uplift us with Him to His heavens, so as to live by the heavenly law. Lest some may think that He has come for a certain category, as many Agnostics believed, (For they used to disregard scornfully the simple and the commoners so as to establish aristocratic thinkers around themselves) the evangelist reveals this heavenly Friend, and how concerned He was to attract strangers with His love, such as the centurion. Moreover, the Lord was much concerned about the widows, such as the raising up of the Nain widow's son, and His patient gentleness with sinners, as in the case of the sinful woman. The Lord wishes to offer His friendship to everyone, regardless of his race, or his possibilities or his present conduct. He wants to uplift everyone with His Holy Spirit to the true membership in His holy body.

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1- The Healing of the Centurion's Servant:

In our study of St. Matthew's gospel (Ch.8) we saw the centurion sending messengers to the Lord, begging Him, since he was of a foreign race, to come and heal his servant. In this situation, the centurion represents the Gentiles who were suffering through this servant who was bonded to the adversary. The Gentiles have manifested greater faith than what the Jews had, even though the Lord did not appear physically among them as He did among the Jews. The Lord has come among them as one of them by His incarnation from St. Mary. In faith full of humility, this stranger was worthy of hearing praise from the Lord's mouth which the owners of the law and of the prophecies and of the promises did not hear.

At any rate, if the Lord Jesus has declared His friendship by His incarnation from the Jewish St. Mary, He has also declared to the Gentiles His praise of the centurion, of the strange race. He opens His arms to the entire world, to enclose everyone in His loving embrace.

Some may ask why has the evangelist St. Matthew mentions that the centurion encountered the Lord on the road, and spoke of his unworthiness for the Lord to enter his house? He showed his faith in how the Lord's word is able to, in authority, to heal without the need of the Lord's entering into his house. But the evangelist St. Luke mentions that some of the Jewish elders went to ask the Lord to heal the centurion's servant; and that other messengers have come before the centurion did, speaking in his name announcing his unworthiness for the Lord to enter his house, and that the centurion for faith in the authority of the Lord's word in healing his servant.

St. John Chrysostom explains that the three encounters happened the Jewish elders, the centurion's messengers, and that of the evangelist St. Matthew when he thought it sufficient to mention the third encounter. As for St. Luke, he thought it sufficient to mention the first and the second encounters. He explains this in that the centurion has the faith in the Lord Jesus, and therefore he wished to go to Him asking for his servant to be healed. But the Jewish elders came in with the urge of envy, lest the centurion declare his faith before the

multitudes. They therefore went to Him themselves to bring Him to the centurion's home, under the cover of doing mercy. They said (Luke 7: 5) **“For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.”** But the Lord who knows the heart's innermost secrets waited until the messengers came, and the centurion himself came, so as to praise him because of his faith!

We notice in this encounter between the Lord and the centurion, or those who came to represent him, we notice the following:

Firstly: Even if we assume the good intention of those Jewish elders, and their speaking on behalf of the centurion, this reveals their concern about their “ego”, for ‘he loves our nation’. They focused on the visual affairs ‘he built us a synagogue’. But as for the Lord Jesus, He praised the centurion for his heart's faith, hidden and full of humility.

Secondly: The centurion refers to the Gentiles coming to the Lord Jesus in faith so as to heal the servant. That is to say, it was their souls that have been enslaved to the adversary for a very long time, till they were almost eternally dead.

As St. Ambrosios says. “The centurion's acceptance refers to the acceptance of all the categories to the faith, for the Roman rulers and officers were known for their extreme violence and despotic conduct; some even questioned if the Christians of the first century would keep a ruler or officer in his position after being converted into Christianity. They doubted if such a person may live as a Christian when still maintaining his position. Therefore the Lord's acceptance of the centurion's pleading, and His praising him before the people, declaring He has not found in Israel such faith as this..... this reveals the possibility of life in partnership with the Lord, whatever the believer's job or position may be like. The scholar Trifilian says, “Some officers came to John and accepted of him some provision for their septem (Luke 3: 12, 13), and the centurion came to be a believer... therefore, even if anyone is seemingly unlawful among us, as long as man does not do something unlawful.”

Thirdly: St. Ambrosios comments on the concern of the Lord Jesus about healing the centurion's servant, and His going to the house to grant him the gift of health, saying “Contemplate with me how the Lord of heaven had such humility. He was not disgusted or disregarded visiting the centurion's servant, but He rather expressed His divine, merciful deeds and His compassion. His going to the centurion's house was not because of His inability to heal the servant from afar, but to show you a model of humility to follow, and to teach you how to respect the poor as much as you do the honorable ones.”

Fourthly: St. Ambrosios pointed out the role of the centurion towards his servant. He has believed and struggled through this faith by sending messengers to the Lord, as well as his going himself, “The servant was healed by means of the centurion's faith, which interceded for the servant not only by faith alone, but through the struggle as well.” In this way we are put to shame by the Gentile's faith in the Lord, in addition to his struggle for the sake of his sick servant.

Fifthly: St Cyril the great compares between the faith of the Jewish elders who came on behalf of the centurion, and the centurion himself, saying, “You can therefore see the Jewish elders begging the Lord Jesus to visit the centurion at his home just as he wished. They thought the servant could not be healed except in this way, whereas you can see from another angle a man declaring openly before everybody that Christ could heal his servant from afar! If He only says a word, the boy would be healed. The centurion asked for nothing more than that the Lord would only utter a word. He wished the Lord would only accept his wish, to

utter the words so sublime, to manifest His wish and His hope. This is why this centurion is worthy of Christ's praising words to him by the remarkable words that He has not found, not even in Israel, such faith as this. The man's behavior is an evidence of his good faith and the strength of his creed. The Lord has rewarded him bountifully and healed his servant instantly, and has saved him from the grip of death; after death had taken a firm grip of him, almost getting his soul out of his ribs.

2- The Raising of the widow's son in Nain:

The Lord has opened His heart to strangers and so the Roman centurion came forth for his servant's sake, so that due to his faith, he became of foremost importance in the Lord's eyes. He is thus counted as a closer friend to God than the children of Israel themselves. Now we see Him having compassion on the widow who has lost her only son. It is as if the Lord in His friendship to us, has met the widows and the poor ones, as much as He did to strangers. His friendship is all inclusive, combining all humans.

On the other hand, the centurion refers to the church that comes from among the Gentiles, as many of our fathers say such as the saints Cyril the great, St. Augustine and St. Ambrosios. These Gentiles have obtained a great deal of temporal and earthly matters, but yet they were absolutely helpless in front of the sickness of this boy servant. They are unable to heal their inner souls, captured by the adversary as a poor slave, destroyed by sin as a disease pushing it towards death. But as for the widow, she refers to the humanity in general. She was a widow, and here she was again losing her only son being carried in his coffin on the way by men. It is humanity that has become as a widow by losing God Himself her real Man. as for her dead son; this refers to every soul that has lost its life because of sin. The soul has died, carried by the body which sin has corrupted. The body is like the men carrying the coffin. It has gone out on the road for there is no place for the soul anymore in the Lord's house, or in paradise, the first home for man.

In the raising of this young man, we notice the following:

Firstly: In the days of the Lord Jesus, there were undoubtedly many who have died, such as the children of Bethlehem, St. John the Baptist who was martyred, and hundreds if not thousands of men, women, elderly and children. We do not know if the Lord has raised many, or if He found it enough to raise those three mentioned by the evangelists: Lazarus, the widow's son of Nain; and Jaru's daughter. For the Lord did not come to take away from us the physical death, but He came to destroy the soul's death, and to raise us above the power of death. We then cross over with Him overcoming victoriously, so as to encounter Him eternally face to face.

The Lord did not promise us to kick away death from us, for He rather has died with us and instead of us. He has transformed death to a crossing bridge for us to crossover to paradise awaiting for the great day of the Lord. This is why we hear of St Gregory El Nezinzi's mother, that she got dressed in the feast's clothes when she attended her son's burial caesarius by name.

The church is concerned primarily by the resurrection of the soul. The body will surely rise; and if the soul is blessed with the resurrection then it is glorified in the eternal glory. This is why St. Augustine says, "It is more of a miracle that someone rises to live forever, than that he rises to die again." He moreover, says, "The widow mother rejoiced when the youth was raised; and here we find people who rise everyday by the Spirit, and the church, being a mother, rejoices with them. This one was indeed dead physically, but these are dead in the spirit. His apparent death begot apparent weeping; and their invisible death was not a point for others' questions, and neither was it something for them to be concerned

about. The one who knew they were dead sought them. It is only He who knows them as such, and He is able to grant them life. If the Lord had not come to raise them, the apostle would not have said (Eph.5: 14) “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give these light”. No one could wake up someone else from his bed easily, as much as Christ raises he who is in the grave.

Secondly: if the church focuses on the soul’s resurrection in the first place, in an invisible manner, yet the church does not disregard the raising of the body as well. This issue was denied by some heretics in their scorn of the flesh. The Lord has raised those three so as to declare He is the One to grant the resurrections for the soul as well as for the body. St. Cyril the great says, “Those dead ones who were raised by Christ are the biggest witness of the resurrection from the dead.

The saintly prophets have referred to this truth, for it was said (Is.26: 19) “Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust.” The rising up is the life of Christ that He gives with the power of the Holy Spirit. The psalmist also referred to this in words that God addressed to the Savior of the world (Ps. 104: 29) “Thou hidest they face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.” Adam’s disobedience was the cause of hiding our face form God’s sight, and sticking it to the dust, because God judged the human nature by the words (Gen3: 19) “for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.” But at the end of the world, the surface of the earth will be renewed, because God the Father grants with His Son, life to everyone in the universe. Death has bought about on people the old age and corruption. But as for Christ He is the life-Giver and the One to renew, because He is the life.

Therefore, the raising of Christ to those dead ones, this was a declaration of His present work by the rising of our souls by means of being united with Him, for He is the Life. The raising of our bodies in the great day of the Lord will be one in essence, appropriate to the eternal heavenly life.

Thirdly: In our study of the raising of Jaruis’ daughter (Matt. 9: 18-26), we saw how He raised those three Lazarus, these are symbol of the work of the Lord Jesus to the souls, in the stages of committing the various sins. Or as St. Augustine says, “These three kinds of dead people are actually three kinds of sinners that Christ still raises up to this day.” The young girl is a symbol to him who sins inwardly in the heart. The youth is the symbol of him who commits evil openly and in a practical way. Lazarus means the one in whose life sin has become habitual, and Christ has thus come to raise everybody!

Fourthly: The evangelist showed a major point in the raising of this young man, for he says (Luke7: 13) “**And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her.**” It is as if the Lord did not raise the youth so as to show off His power over death, and His ability as a life-Giver, but He rather came forth because of His compassion. God deals with us on the level of authority and dominion, even thou He is the Creator and Lord of all. But He deals, despite all of this, with man on the level of love and mercy, since He is the Father, the Bridegroom, the Friend and the Beloved to every man who receives Him.

St. Ambrosios says. “We believe the divine feelings of God were touched by the mother’s tears of this widow, more out by the pain and sorrowful death of her only child. The people’s sharing of her sorrow did not compensate the void made by her son’s death, and her deprivation of motherhood. But yet, with her tears she obtained the resurrection of her young son, the only one she had.”

I wish we could be like this widow for we lose or man that we chose, due to our disobedience, that is to say Satan who has pushed our only son, that is to say, ourselves to

death; she has become carried in the body as if in a coffin, outside of the divine home, in a lifeless state. Then we meet the Giver of life; for it is He alone who has compassion on us. He takes away the death weight and gives us back our souls, all alive in Him; and our sanctified bodies by means of His Holy Spirit.

Fifthly: St. Ambrosios remarks on the evangelist's words, (Luke7: 14) “**And He came and touched the bier, and they that bare him stood still.**” And he looked upon the wooden bier or coffin as the tree by the means of which we were carried to the grave. The Lord touched it by His being up high on the wooden cross, so we have the mystery of life. It is as if the wood that has been a coffin to us and that has carried us to the abyss, has now become by Christ Jesus our Lord ‘God’s power (1Cor.1: 18).

Sixthly: St. Ambrosios sees in this picture a vivid image of the church that has not stopped weeping for our sake, pleading to her Christ to give her back her only One to speak the word of life. It has been said (Luke7: 15) “**And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And He delivered him to his mother.**”

St. Ambrosios says, “If you commit a fatal sin which you are unable to wash away with your tears, then let your mother weep for you, that is, the church. The church intercedes for every son of hers, just as the widow wept for her son’s sake. The church shares in the suffering spiritually. This is a normal thing for her when she sees her children driven by death in deadly matters, for we are her very entrails begging for mercy. Indeed there are spiritual entrails, just as those of St. Paul the apostle. Had, who said (Phil.20) “Ye, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord; refresh my bowels in the Lord.” We are the bowels of the church, for we are members of her body of flesh and blood. Let this compassionate mother weep, then and let all the people share her her sorrow. At this point you will be raised from the dead and get out of the grave. The carrier of death in you will stop, and you will speak the words of life. As a result, everyone will fear this awesome thing, and will bless the Lord who has offered us such a remedy that saves us from the pangs of death.”

Seventhly: St. Cyril the great poses the question about the touching of Christ Jesus to the bier, even though He was able to raise him with a word. He answers it saying ‘It was, dear brethren, so as to tell you that Christ’s body had a special impact for man’s salvation; because the Word body, the marvelous Christ, is the life body clothed in power and dominion. Just as when iron touches fire, it is clear you see the fire effect on it and is transformed to the fire properties likewise is the body of Christ the Word, where life was glorified, and He had the authority to eliminate death and corruption’.

In this way the Lord showed the abilities His body had to give life, by means of the eternal unity of godliness and humanity. By this He has uplifted the body of man that used to be scorned previously, and He blessed our nature in Him.

3- The Messengers of John Sent to Christ:

St. John the Baptist has leapt in his mother’s womb joyfully welcoming the coming of the Savior incarnate in the Virgin’s womb, and has declared His mission as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John1: 29). He saw the Holy Spirit descending on Him, and the Father testifying of Him at the baptismal moment. Now we see John sending messengers to the Lord Jesus saying (Luke7: 20) “**Art thou He that should come? Or look we for another?”**

John did not doubt the person of Christ the Lord, but he wished to give the Lord Jesus the opportunity for Him to bring disciples for Himself. For St. John did not wish to have disciples for himself wording for his account. He only wished in his discipleship to others to send them to his Savior, motivating them to the 'divine friendship of God'. He thought not to begin a discussion with them concerning the Savior, but rather to send Him messengers, so that the Lord would Himself attract them to Him, and thus they would in their turn bring the other disciples to follow.

How successful the shepherd in who urges God's congregation to encounter the Lord Jesus Himself to attract them to Himself, and be blessed with the divine friendship. In this way the shepherd's job is merely to bring the people of God to the Savior Himself. Such a shepherd does not work for his own honor or his popularity, but he rather works for the account of God's kingdom.

St. Cyril the great speaks elaborately the reason for these messengers "Do not think therefore that the devout Baptist was unable to know the Word of God, Christ the incarnate. He was actually very sure of Christ and His personality. His question about Christ was given to him by the Spirit of wisdom and smartness, so as to make out of the question, a useful lesson to his disciples. Those disciples did not know about Christ, and they were not aware of His glory and His dominion. They even became jealous when they heard of His surpassing miracles, more powerful than those ones performed by their master John. Their bad intention was obvious when they drew close to John the Baptist asking him about Christ, saying, (John.3: 28-30) "Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond' Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the Same baptizes, and all men come to Him." John answered and said, 'A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before Him. He that bath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stand and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease."

We do not say that John the Baptist has decreased in his importance, whereas Christ has increased in His glory, for being surrounded by so many people. By John's decrease and Christ's increase, we wish to say that John was only human, and he had to reach a certain point that no more increase could be added. But as for Christ, He is God incarnate, who has no end to His growth or His greatness. This is why the Baptist says, 'He must increase, but I must decrease'. He who stands on the same level, decreases. This is to him who has no obstruction in growth and development. The Baptist to show that he was right in speaking of Christ thus, he referred to Christ's godliness and he proved to them that He should surpass all others, for he said (John3: 31) "He that cometh from above is above all; he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth."

Who is He who has come from above? Who is He who surpasses all people? It is clear He is God's incarnate Word, just as the Father is, and in essence with Him. Due to His love, He descended and humbled Himself to become like us. Christ therefore, surpasses everyone on earth. The Baptist, being one of the world inhabitants, and was like them in his humanity, he had to be surpassed by Christ our God.

We do not deny St. John was wonderful in his qualities, unequalled in righteousness and nobility. He has reached a wonderful status in righteousness and goodness, praiseworthy in every way. The Lord described him by the well known words, (Matt.3: 1) "For none of women born is greater than John the Baptist." Yet, despite all of this, the Baptist was not from above, but he was of the earth, just like us.

The disciple of John, therefore, as their hearts have not yet been purified from the drastic Jewish diseases, they described to John what they saw in Christ and His divine power. But they actually meant ill for Christ. But as for John, he was aware of Christ's sublime

status, and was over happy to refer to the great glory of the Lord. So as to cleanse the hearts of his disciples of any suspicious or doubts, and to draw them close to the sun of Righteousness, the Lord of glory Jesus Christ, St. John accepted to be disguised under the cover of ignorance and naivety. He sent his messengers to Christ so as to ask Him “Are you the one, or should we wait for another?”

Now we are asking; Why did the evangelist St. Luke mention these messengers, he had mentioned the healing of the centurion’s servant, and the raising of the widow’s son of Nain?

The centurion represents the strangers embraced by the heavenly Friend in His love, separating them from the sinful death. The widow represents the acceptance of the Lord Jesus to the widows and the needy ones, and how He gives them back their joy of salvation. Now, because the Lord has met John’s disciples, He embraced them in the met of His love, and He declares His eagerness to embrace the Jewish people to become His disciples. John represents the old law, and his disciples, or the messengers refer to the follower of the law, or those under the law. St. John sent his disciples to declare that (Rom.10: 4) “For Christ is the end of the law.” He sent two disciples of his, because the number 2 refers to ‘love’, for we will not meet our Christ through the law without love.

St. Ambrosios says “John represents the old law. It was normal that this old law that speaks of Christ, and that has become imprisoned in the believers’ hearts, and was enclosed for so long, that it would be in need of the light. It has suffered behind the bars from lack of understanding. This is why it could go till the end as a witness to the divine plan of God unless it is supported by the Gospel’s good news. For this reason St. John sent two of his disciples so as to increase in knowledge, because Christ is the perfect fulfillment of the law. The two disciples were symbols to two nations; the first one believed because they were of the Jews, and the other one believed when they heard of it because they were of the Gentiles.”

The Lord Jesus’ attitude towards these messengers was focused on revealing the deeds of His tremendous love, and He left His deeds to answer every question. St. John Chrysostom says, “Because Jesus knew St. John’s aim, He did not say ‘It is I’, but He left them to learn of it through His works. Naturally, they counted the testimony of His deeds as of more assurance. And above all doubts than any other testimony of words. St. Ambrosios says, “Man believes most faith fully by the manifestation of deeds, way more than any claiming words.”

St. John, being the representative of the old law and the prophecies, has sent the two disciples. But as for Jesus Christ, He took them to the essence of God’s work, so they may say, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life.”

The Lord presented to them the deeds the have for so long been prophesied of by the prophets. He told them (luke7: 22, 23) “**How that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me.**” As St. Ambrosios says, “This is the full testimony by which the Lord can be known due to the prophecy concerning His person and to no one else (Ps.146: 7,8) “Who giveth food to the hungry. The Lord loosens the prisoners. The Lord openeth the eyes of the blind, the Lord raiseth them that are bowed down.” He who does this reigns forever. The divine authority, then, is not by the oral good news. It makes the night darkness which never ends, be despised from the light is poured on the wounds of their empty eyes. He also makes the deaf to hear, and the withered hands and shaky. Knees rise, and the dead are attracted to the light and the power of life is evoked in them.”

The Lord warned them ‘Blessed is he who is not offended in Me’, because the cross cometh forth. It is this cross in which so many are offended, as St. Paul the apostle says

(1Cor.1: 18) “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” If the Lord has come to open the eyes of the blind to see His mysteries, and the ears to hear His divine voice, and to release the souls from the bondage of sin, and cleanse it from the inward filth, and to raise the souls from death, then, the price for all of this is ‘the cross’ which is ‘for the Jews an offense, and for the Greeks foolishness,’ (1Cor.1: 23).

4- His Testimony of John:

Because St. John rejoiced he was decreasing whereas the Lord Jesus was increasing (John3: 30) he sent his messengers so as to withdraw all his disciples to become disciples at the hands of the Savior Himself. This work did not lessen in any way the job of St. John the Baptist, but rather, the Lord Jesus Himself praised him and spoke of him to all the people in this way (Luke7: 24- 26) “**What went ye out to see into the wilderness? A reed shaker with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they who are gorgeously appareled, and live delicately, are in kings’ courts. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet.**”

In our study of the gospel of our teacher St. Matthew (11: 7-14) we presented a lot of comments said by our fathers in this divine praise. This why I think it enough to mention some of the other comments, completing what was written before:

Firstly: We have seen that the Lord Jesus did not praise St. John in the presence of his disciples, but rather after their departure so He would not seem hypocritical. I wish we, likewise, not be concerned about praising others in their face as much as praising them in their absence. This will indeed show us to be loving to them, without any hypocrisy or temporal aim to obtain some social or monetary reward.

Secondly: St. Cyril the great explains to us why the Lord Jesus praised St. John the Baptist, and concludes by saying that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is. He says that the Lord Jesus has selected this saint for being the greatest to obtain the righteousness of the law. St. John is the best born of any woman from among the Jews. He is a prophet that has surpassed all other prophets, and was prophesied of by Malachai the prophet (Mal.3: 1), that he is the Lord’s angel. In spite of all of this, if this greatness in the Old Testament is compared to the good news of the gospel, then it is counted as nothing. In the old law, however much man struggles he is still ‘of woman born’. As for the gift of the New Testament, it raises us above flesh and blood to obtain the filiation to God.

What follows are some excerpts from the words of St. Cyril El Sekendery regarding this point:

The purpose of Christ the Savior of the world’s words was, therefore to show what privileges and favours there were in the old law. But despite those privileges and properties, there was nothing of spiritual construction to draw it close to Him. But as for the blessing of the faith in Christ, this is the assurance of blessings and good. In it there is the strength that crowns endless beauty and attraction.

This is what we learn from studying the words of the devout St. Paul. He declared that he has been released concerning the righteousness is the law, and was thus blameless. In spite of this, he cries out saying (Phil.3: 7) “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.” St. Paul regarded the Israelites blameworthy by saying,

(Rom10: 3) “For they, being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth, “On another occasion he says (Gal.2: 15) “We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles. Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”

Accordingly, all who believe in Christ will obtain glories that surpass the glories of righteousness granted by the old law. For this reason the Baptist was regarded as in a place of lawful righteousness no one else has come close to. But on the other hand he was considered much less than the least of men in the kingdom of heaven. What is meant by the kingdom of heaven, as we mentioned before, is the grace of the faith in Christ. By this we are worthy of all spiritual blessing coming from God above, our Father. It is this that liberates us of all blame, and gives us the right of becoming God’s children, and makes us share in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and heirs to the heavenly treasure.

The Lord describes St. John that from among all those born of women there is no prophet greater than John the Baptist. But yet, the least in God’s kingdom is greater than he is. How can this be? The answer is this: John was like all others who preceded him, his birth being attributed to a woman. But those who have accepted the faith in Jesus Christ, are not sons of women, but are rather sons of God as said by the wise evangelist (John1: 11, 12) “But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name; which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” We have become the sons of God Almighty (1Pet.1: 23) “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, that liveth and abideth forever.” Therefore, all those born not of corruptible seed, but rather of the abiding word of God surpasses those born of a woman.

There is, moreover, another reason that makes those born of God’s Word superior to those born of women: this is because these ones have earthly fathers, but the other ones have a heavenly Father, for Christ is a brother to them. They have thus become, by the grace of brotherhood, children to God, for Christ has declared openly (Matt.23: 9) “And call no man your father upon earth; for One is your Father, who is in heaven.” The wise St. Paul says in assurance of the above theory (Gal.4: 6) “And because ye are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts crying ‘Abba, Father’. “This is because when Christ rose to destroy hell, He granted the filiation grace to all who believed in His name. On the head of the list were His saintly disciples (John 20: 23) “He breathed on them and saith unto them ‘Receive ye the Holy Spirit, whose soever sin ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained’. “And since those disciples have become partners in the divine nature for being granted the great gift of the powerful Spirit, so awesome, they had to have godly power. This is by means of forgiving sins to some people, and retaining them to some others.

Thirdly: When we concentrate on the words of the Lord Jesus in His praise of St. John, we find Him beginning like this (Luke7: 24) “**What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for the see? A man clothed in soft raiment?**

The Lord looks upon the world as if it has become a barren wilderness without any fruitful trees, because sin has destroyed the creation and has transformed it from a fruitful and glorious paradise to a fearful barren wilderness. This wilderness became filled with reeds shaken by the wind, bending back and forth.

As for St. John the Baptist, even though he was raised in the wilderness of the world as a reed, but in his belief in of the Messaiah the Savior, he was not a reed shaken by the winds of heresy, and has was not destroyed either by the tempests of earthly lust. He is indeed this reed the Lord Jesus held to make out of which a skilful pencil. This was the custom with scribes in the old days in using a reed in writing after preparing it in such a way fit for scribing. likewise was St. John in the hand of the Savior- the pencil with which He writes in calling all to be blessed with His salvation.

Concerning this St. Ambrosios says, "The Lord draws the similarity between this life with the wilderness, uncultivable and unproductive and has no sign of any fruit.

The Lord warns us of copying those who are puffed up, and whose thoughts are tied to all what is earthly. These are they who have no hidden virtue, but they rather show off the glory of this temporal word. These ones are exposed to the winds of this life and are confused with its fluctuations. This is why the analogy is drawn to the reed because they are fruitless in doing no real righteousness, yet they have the worldly ornaments.

But if you uproot the reed from the earth, and clean it thoroughly; that is, if you uproot the old man and his deeds (Col.3: 9) and you hand it to a skilful scribe's hand to write with it smartly, if you do so, this pencil will freshen up the Lord's commandments in your heart to the very depths, on flesh boards of the heart (2Cor.3: 2).

It was said about this pencil (Ps.41: 2) "My tongue is a skilful pen writer."

If we are rooted in the wilderness as bruised reed shaken back and forth by the wind, then let us hand over our life to the hand about whom it is said (Is.42: 3) "A bruised reed He will not break." He will uproot us from the earth of this life, so as to plant us in Him as members of His body. He changes our life to a skilful pencil in His hand. He soaks us in His pure blood, and sanctifies our spirits, our souls and our bodies. We became in truth, the written message of Christ, not in ink, but by God's living Spirit (2Cor.3: 2, 3).

For a second time He says, "But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment?"

St. Ambrosios says, "The Lord does not speak here of clothes even though many copy women in being adorned in soft raiment. But it seems that the Lord here is referring to other clothes, if I am not mistaken, which are the human bodies put on by the spirit. This is why Joseph's gown was stained with blood (Gen.27: 31) as the body of Christ was."

The soft raiment are the deeds of passion and its habits. This is why the apostle urges us to get rid of the old man so as to put on the new one (Co.3: 9).

St. John did not put on the soft raiment as those who live in castles. That is, he did not give over his body to passions, pleasures, and abject habits as those enclosed in Satan's palace. His body became sanctified, as well as his spirit for the account of God's kingdom.

The Lord Jesus goes on in His praise saying, "But what went ye out to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. This is he, of whom it is written 'Behold I send My messenger before. Thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.'"

In this way the Lord Jesus confirms that St. John is not only a prophet, but that he is among the greatest of all the other prophets. As St. Cyril the great says, on behalf of the Lord, "Yes, because he is a saint and a prophet. He is even way ahead of the other prophet in status and nobility, because he not only proclaimed My coming but he referred to Me as well and cried out (John1: 29) "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world".

St. Ambrosios says. "Yes, and greater than a prophet; for with him ends the age of the prophets. He is greater than a prophet for many have desired to see (Matt. 13: 7) the One about whom St. John has prophesied, seen and baptized.

He is greater than those whom he equaled in birth, but as for the Lord's nature, this is unique, and cannot be compared to any human birth. There is no comparison to be drawn whatsoever between man and God."

When the Lord Jesus praised His angel St. John the Baptist, He showed the power of the Gospel preaching. Even though St. John has reached such a marvelous status, for he was called ‘the greatest of all born of women’, yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is.’ St. John represented the age of the old law, but the Gospel message offered the ‘filiation to God’ by means of which the believer is blessed with what is greater than what the men of the old Testament have ever obtained.

At any rate, St. John the Baptist came as representing the old law, extremely severe, so as to lead mankind to the Lamb of God. The Messaiah, the Lamb Himself has come as a Friend, gentle to all people. The Jews then rejected this and that. This is why the Lord rebuked them saying (Luke7: 31-35) **“Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? And to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, ‘We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept’. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and ye say ‘He bath a devil’. The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say ‘Behold a gluttonous man, and wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of all her children”**”.

What follows are some remarks said by our fathers concerning these divine words.

+ The Lord here does not speak of dancing the accompanies entertainment and pleasure. It is rather the spiritual dancing, in which man is exalted above the passionate body, and does not permit its members to enjoy the earthly pleasures.

St. Paul danced spiritually; for it is for our sake that he looked forward, forgetting all the past, seeking what is ahead of him, all for Christ’s sake (Phil.2: 13, 14).

This is the mystery, then: that we piped for you the song of the New Testament and yet you did not dance, that is, you did not hear with your souls by means of the divine grace of God.

‘We mourned for you but you did not weep, that is to say, you did not repent, when St. John came to you calling for repentance by the grace of the Lord Jesus. It is the Lord who gives the grace, and St. John spoke of it being a servant to Him. As for the church it deeps both of them, so you realize the grace without separating repentance from it. Grace is the gift from God; He alone can grant it, and repentance is the remedy for the sinner.

St. Ambrosios

+ The Jews did not believe either in the prophets’ praises or in their inheritance.

+ ‘We piped for you but you did not dance’; Moses sang hymns when he crossed the sea and the waters divided (Ex.15). Isaiah also sang hymns by the song of the Beloved Vine (Is.5: 1). He points to the Jewish people that have previously produced many virtues but it would become a block of malice.

The three youths sang praises when their feet got soothed, for the fire was transformed to dew drops. For, whereas everything inside and outside kept burning, the fire was gentle to them, it neither harmed not burnt them (Dan.3: 24).

Habakkuk proclaimed a hymn of praise prophesying about Christ’s suffering, as a source of comfort to believers (Hab.3), This relieved the people of their sorrow.

In this way the prophets sang spiritual hymns, that was exalted to the preaching of salvation to all. Furthermore, the prophets wept so as to win over the Jewish stubborn hearts by their sad singing.

The Holy book teaches us to sing hymns to the Lord (Ps.46: 8), and to dance in wisdom, as the Lord said to Ezekiel to clap with his hand and stomp with his feet (Ez.6: 11). God does not ask for funny gestures performed by a rebelling person, and neither does He ask for women’s clapping. But there is the discreet dancing, when the spirit dances by the body’s exaltation in doing the good deeds, when we hang our trumpets on the willow trees.

The Lord commands the prophet to beat with the hand and the foot, and to sing; because He could see the Groom's wedding in which the church would be the bride and Christ would be the Beloved. It is a beautiful wedding in which the Spirit unites with the Word, and the body with the Spirit.

This is the wedding that David the prophet attempted to fulfil, and to which we are invited. He is urging us to hasten towards this happy sight (Ps.81: 2, 3) "Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery." Can you imagine the prophet dancing? Can't you hear the sound of those beating the timbrel, and the stomping of the dancers' feet? It is the wedding! You too take a timbrel so that if you are blessed with the touch of the Spirit, your inner chords would respond with the echo of the good deeds. Hold on to the timbrel so the harmony could be fulfilled between your words and your works. Take the harp so the Spirit would give you the gift of chanting by means of your physical inner instrument.

St. Ambrosios

It seems that the Jewish children had fun of that sort, so they formed two teams. They confused those around them, saying the two teams were contrary to each other. Some of them played on the harmonious devices whereas the other team cried out in pain and misery. Those sorrowful ones did not share their happy friends their pleasure and entertainment. Those of fun and entertainment were confused about the sorrow of their friends. Their misery and broken hearts intensified, and this is shown when some blamed the others saying that they played music for them and yet they did not dance, whereas the other group answered in their turn that they lamented for them and yet they did not weep. Christ declares openly that the Jewish people and their leaders represent this role. They appear on the stage as the street kids do. For John the Baptist did not come to eat bread or the drink wine and yet they said he had a devil in him. The Son of man came to eat and drink and then you would say 'Here is a gluttonous man and a wine bibber, a man who loves publicans and sinners.

What could make you believe, you ignorant Pharisees, in the true faith in Christ? What means could be used to attract you to the Lord? You look upon all issues through dark glasses. There is nothing you have that is praiseworthy. As St. John the Baptist said, to repent for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand (Matt.3: 2). His verdict on them was true indeed, for according to their own words, he was a model of nobility and courage, of great intellect and sublime virtues. Has he not lived in the desert, slept in the open and was covered by the sky, eating honey and locusts, and wore rough and cheap clothing? How can you say he has a devil in him, when it was he who by his asceticism and abstinence from any food, has killed the law of sin that is embedded in our flesh and entrails? He fought the miles of the intellect, and was an awesome champion and captivating warrior! Is there anything greater than the life of asceticism and renunciation? It is this by which we suppress the sinful pleasures and bridle malice and evil. The Baptist was most loyal to Christ; in him there was no tendency for any physical passions. He deserted all the pleasures of the world, and departed from the world and its enticings so he would reach the goal he aimed for, which is that of paving the way to the Redeemer Lord.

Tell me, you people, if you think such a person could have a devil in him? Whereas it was he who never bent his back to any sin or vice?

We do not deny the Baptist did not reach this lofty level except through Christ; because it is the Lord who debases Satan's status, and broke his teeth so the position of saints be raised.

Are you not ashamed, then, you people, when you attack the Baptist so fiercely, whereas he is the messenger who was distinguished by his patience, courage and crown of glory? So why are you so envious of him, and attribute all evil and malice to him? You deny

him the healthy mind and clear intellect, and accuse him falsely he is a madman who is unaware and thoughtless of anything?

Now let us study another personality the Jews saw, quite contrary to that of the Baptist's. Christ did not live in the desert, but it was in the city that he lived, accompanied by His saintly apostles. He did not eat any locusts or wild honey, and was not clothed with camel's hair, nor did he have a leather girdle round his waist.

As you see, Christ lived a city life unlike the life St. John led. So do you Pharisees blame Christ for leading such a life? Do you despise His easy friendship with others, and His loving care to people, and disregarding this or that kind of food? No, it was not for any of these reasons; but you rather attacked the Lord by stabbing words, saying He is a gluttonous person, a wine bibber, a lover of publicans and sinners. You said so because you sometimes saw Christ eating freely at ease, and you thus accused Him of greed and drinking too much wine. And how do you prove your accusations? Hasn't Mary with her sister Martha once invited Christ in Bethany, and when the Lord saw one of them overdoing in His service, He stopped her and commanded her to do only what is necessary. The Redeemer addressed her saying (Luke10: 41) "**Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful.**" This was the way of Christ, He knew what He came to, and where He was going.

Do you accuse Christ of gluttony and greed, because He went with the publicans and sinners? Is this all what you can accuse Him of? But tell me what harm happened to Christ when He blended with the sinners? Was Christ not above the level of humans? So what harm could touch Him, whether it be vicious or malicious? The Lord spoke and His words are truthful (John14: 30) "For the prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me." In such a case, nothing sinful could be attached to the Lord Jesus.

But someone may ask (Ex23: 32) "You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods." Let us study, then, the purpose of the Jewish law, and come to know the purpose for which the law forbade the Israelites of talking to evil people, and getting in touch with the deceitful ones. The purpose was not showing of before sinners; but the purpose was that you have a weak mind, and that you can easily fall into iniquity. So, lest you are attracted towards the corrupt pleasures, you were forbidden to mix with those who are corrupt so you would be safely harbored against any vice. (1Cor.15: 33) "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners." The law was thus set to keep you from any downfall due to your weakness or disability. But if you are well-equipped with the lofty virtues, and are firm in the fear of God, then the law will not stand in your way between you and the weak sinners. Your closeness to them will be something good to them, and a motivation for them to copy you. They will then walk in big steps towards the desired perfection and the attainable truth. So do not be puffed up against the miserable weak one, and depend on the Law of Moses mentioned above; so no one should blame Christ for mixing with the publicans and sinners.

St. Cyril the great

5- The Story of the Sinful Woman:

We said that the Lord Jesus, being a heavenly Friend, He opens His heart to strangers, such as His concern over the centurion, and His concern over the widows such as the raising of the widow's son in Nain. He attracted the disciples of St. John the Baptist, as being representatives of the Old Testament, so they get in touch with His loving and awesome deeds. Now we can see a sinful woman, who, in the eyes of the Jewish people was worthy of being stoned; she barges into this friendship, and meets our Lord Jesus Christ as a heavenly Groom for her in the house of Simon the Pharisee without any proper invitation given her. The encounter of this sinful woman has attracted many souls to repentance. God's true

friendship to sinners has been manifested, as well as His love to every soul, and His eagerness to save everyone. Many fathers have expressed themselves concerning this encounter, among whom is St. Avraam the Syrian. He recounted this meeting in a beautiful narrative style that I have translated and published before, having the name 'Love and Tears' in the series 'The Christian Story'.

With the fatherly spirit we can mention the following comments about the story of the sinful woman:

Firstly: St. Augustine says, "The sinful woman went to the banquet without being invited, because the Physician was at the table. In sanctified courage she asked Him for health. She came to know only too well the cruelty of the disease she was suffering from. She also realised the One she was coming to is able to grant her this health. This is why she began the way in all keenness and strength. She drew near to His feet and not to His head. It was she who had led an evil life for so long, now she was at His feet in steps of righteousness."

It is as if this woman, who represents the wicked and filthy soul, has found in the feet of her Savior the mystery of going the righteous way, in being released by Him and in Him to the Father's embrace, and be blessed with the divine friendship forever.

Secondly: One of the Pharisees asked the Lord Jesus to dine with him. The Lord entered his house, but not his heart. The man had prepared a banquet, which probably cost him a lot, and many envied him for having the Master at his house. But the woman barged into the house, urged on by her love, and met the Lord as a Groom to herself. The Pharisee represents the soul that hides behind outer appearances without any depth. This soul hosts the Lord in the house but not in the heart. As for the woman, she symbolizes the serious soul seeking salvation. She is careful to meet the heavenly Groom secretly.

St. Ambrosios says in one of his writings about the Pharisee and the sinful woman, saying:

A) The Pharisee did not offer water so as to wash the Lord's feet. But the woman offered tears to wash them. The former represents the Jews or the unbelievers who have no water to wash the Lord's feet, He who wishes to dwell in their conscience. How can anyone wash his conscience if he does not accept Christ's water? As for the church, it has this water, the baptism, and it also has these tears of repentance."

St. Ambrosios comments on this washing at another place saying, "She washed away her sins by washing the Savior's feet with her tears. Dear Lord Jesus, allow me to wash Your feet with what has stuck on to them by Your walking in me, even though they have never got to be filthy or defiled. But how can I bring to You the water of life by which I may wash Your feet? Because I have no such water. I offer my tears. When I wash Your feet I shall be sure of my own washing, because you have loved a lot."

On a third occasion he says, "Confess your sins in tears so the divine justice of God tells you, 'She washed My feet with her tears and she rubbed them with her hair. The tears of our love can not only wash away our sins, but they can also wash the steps of the divine Word of God so they be fruitful in us! These are useful tears that assure the rising of sinner as well as being food for the righteous. Righteous is the one who says (Ps.41: 4) "My tears have become bread to me." If you are unable to draw close to Christ's head, then touch His feet with your head."

b) The Pharisee had no hair by which he could wipe the Lord's feet, for he was not vowed to be given to the Lord. But as for the church, she has her hair, and she asks for the vow. St. Ambrosios sees this hair that the woman has wiped the Savior's feet with, as referring to wealth that is of no value unless it is offered to the poor, the Savior's feet that is, that washes their wounds and suffering.

On another occasion he says, "Loosen your hair, and at all your physical gifts yield to it." For our physical abilities, our gifts, our potentials and our emotions, all remain as the hair that is of no value unless it is sanctified by being used in rubbing the, Savior's feet, that is to say, in serving His little brothers.

c) Concerning the sinful woman's kissing, this was not done by the Pharisee. St. Ambrosios says, "The kiss is the sign of love. This is why the Jew, the unbeliever, could not kiss, for he does not know Christ's peace and he does not accept it. It was said of him (John 14: 7) "My peace I give unto you." This is why the Jewish synagogue has no kisses, but it is the church that has been expecting Christ and has loved Him, that has those kisses, saying (Song of Sol. 1: 2) "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." The church wished to put out the blaze of her long eagerness in expectation of the Lord's coming, with His kisses, and to quench her thirst with this gift." The saint goes on to say in the same letter "The church alone is the one to have the kisses, since the kiss is the earnest of marriage, and is a special privilege to the wedding."

The church kisses are sincere and truthful, for they are the bridegroom's eager kisses of love towards her groom. This was not experienced by Judas when he offered his deceitful in giving his Master over. This is why St. Ambrosios addresses him saying, "You who do not know the secret mystery of a kiss, you have offered a kiss. What is desired is the hearty kiss of the soul and not just the lips. Where there is no love or faith or emotion, how can there be any sweetness in the kisses?"

Thirdly: St. Ambrosios, when he compares between the woman who poured fragrant oil on the Savior's head when she was at the house of Simon the leper in the village of Bethany (Matt. 26), and between the woman mentioned here, he sees they were two different cases though both of them offered fragrance. The former one represents the soul that enters into the divine friendship, and is sublimed in the perfect life in the Lord, and she thus pours the fragrance on the Savior's head, and she reaches a lot of God's divine mysteries. As for us, we follow the latter case, for we feel our sins, and come to Him from behind, and we weep fervently, eager to reach His feet. But we are not deprived of offering the fragrant oil, for the saint says, "Even though she was a sinner, yet she had the fragrance."

If we are sinners, let us go the way of repentance. I wish we go into the house of Simon and meet our Lord wherever He may be, and offer Him fragrant oil on His feet. This is the fragrance of repentance, so true and full of hope through His holy blood that is coming out of His wounded side.

Once again in his interpretation of St. Luke's gospel, St. Ambrosios thinks this oil poured on the Savior's feet, concerns the church alone. He says, "Blessed is the man who is able to rub the feet of Christ with fragrant oil, something that Simon did not do! Fragrance is the essence oil of many flowers, and so there comes out of it various beautiful scents. Perhaps no one could pour this fragrant oil except the church alone, since it owns so many flower fields of variable fragrance. It is here that the image of the sinful woman is blended with Christ who carried the image of a slave, and was carrying a similar sinful body.

Fourthly: The Pharisee did not profit anything by his meeting the Savior, due to his insistence on pride; but as for the sinful woman, she gained a lot because she has loved much through her humble spirit. With pride, man loses every spiritual blessing, whereas with love full of meekness man is blessed with the Savior's love, and the forgiveness of sins.

+ The Lord of humility sat in the haughty Pharisee's house, called Simon. In spite of being in Simon's house, yet the Son of man had no where to lay His head in Simon's heart (Luke 9: 51)

St. Augustine

+ Love a lot, so you be forgiven a lot.

St. Paul committed a great deal of mistakes, and persecuted the church. Despite this, he loved a lot, and persisted till he faced his martyrdom, and his many sins were forgiven; because he did not spare his blood for the sake of Christ's name.

St. Ambrosios

+ The woman did not get lost in the straight way; whereas the foolish Pharisee got lost, for he said within himself 'If he were a prophet, he would know who this woman who touched Him was, that she was a sinful woman'. The Pharisee was therefore proud of himself, and admired his own sect, weak in his mental abilities, and could not realise the real situation. He had to tame his life, and ornament it with what is more sublime; he did not have to judge the sick and the infirm, and condemn him of what he was innocent of. The Pharisee left all of this, and clung to the margin of the adamant old law; he asked the Lord Jesus to obey the covenant of Moses. This covenant commanded the saintly people to avoid the defiled and wicked ones. God blamed all who were chosen as rulers of the Jewish synagogue, and who squandered his rights by drawing close to the debased evil and despicable little things. It was mentioned by one of the prophets that they do not distinguish between what is holy and what is despicable. But Christ came not to subject us under the curse of the law, but rather to redeem the sinners by His mercy that has surpassed the law; because the law (Gal.3: 19) "Was added because of transgressions." This is to make the entire world under God's rule, because by the deeds of the law every body is not justified before Him (Rom.3: 19) "that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God."

Christ came to pay the debtor his debt, whether it be big or small. He came to have mercy to all people, big or small; so that no one be deprived, however he may be, of sharing in the correction Christ gives. The Lord gave us a clear example of His mercy in releasing this sinful woman of her evil by telling her 'Your sins are forgiven.' These words can never be said unless by God's mouth alone; for it implies authority above any other authority. This is because when the old law judged the sinner, then who could uplift himself above the level of the law except it be Him who set it and commanded it? The Lord instantly released the woman, and drew the attention of the Pharisee and those around the table to more lofty matters. They learnt that Christ the Word is God, and therefore He is not one of the prophets. He is above everyone, even though He has become flesh and of mankind.

Do not worry and despair if you feel the weight of your previous sins, because Christ's mercy is boundless. Even if your sin is great, yet Christ's mercy is even greater. With His grace the sinner is justified, and the bondsman is released. But know for sure that the faith in Christ is what equips us for these redeeming blessings, because faith is the way of life and grace. In it we go to the heavenly dwelling place where we inherit the kingdom of the righteous saints, and become members in Christ's kingdom.'

St. Cyril the great

We finally conclude our words about the sinful woman, that she has revealed the depths of God's tremendous love to mankind. As St. Irianus says, "As the physician is recommended and spoken of by his patients, likewise is God declared by means of people."

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Chapter VIII
The Incessantly Active Friend

In the previous chapter we saw the Lord Jesus opening His heart to everyone to embrace into His friendship the aliens and sinners. Now we can see Him being escorted by many women who served Him with their own money, and He was not reluctant to accept this (Luke8: 1-3). He has not only accepted the sinful woman and praised her before the Pharisee, but He also sanctified the women's gifts and capabilities as a live member in His holy body. We can see Him in His friendship making no distinction between the men or women. He is also not partial to biological relations according to the blood (Luke8: 19-21). He is asking for everyone's friendship, and working incessantly for the sake of the disturbed ones (Luke8: 22-25), for the sake of the exiled and even the lunatics (Luke8: 26-39), cleansing the defiled (Luke8: 43-48) and the raising of the dead.

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1- His Concern about the Women's Ministering:

the evangelist says, (Luke8: 1,2) **“And it came to pass afterward, that He went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with Him, and certain women.”**

The banquet of Simon the Pharisee pointed to the manifestation of the Lord Jesus amidst His Jewish people, in the house of Simon, whereas His own people due to their haughtiness, they rejected His friendship. The gentiles, represented by the sinful woman, accepted this friendship, due to her love springing from a humble heart. The Lord then left Capernaum to preach in the city and village with the twelve, as well as with some women. It is as if He left the gentiles and went ahead to the entire world through His church, declaring His kingdom.

At this point we have to stop a little to see that previously St. John the Baptist had preached the drawing near of God's kingdom. But the Lord Jesus has come into our midst “The kingdom of heaven is inside you” (Luke17: 21).

He began His mission, and the twelve were with Him as well as some of the women. St. Luke the evangelist stressed on this point saying (luke8: 2,3) “And certain women, who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils. And Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who ministered unto Him of their substance.”

St. Luke the evangelist was writing to the Greeks, and he stressed on the Lord's concern about women. We notice the following regarding the above except:

Firstly: Those women escorting the Lord Jesus, was based on their working experience of salvation. Mary Magdalene was saved from seven devils, and the others became blessed with the sweetness of God's Word. This company lasted for long, for these women kept following

the Lord till the moments of the cross. Some of them were ahead of the disciples at the burial time, and their visiting to the Lord's tomb. They have thus become preaches of the resurrection. Those women were with the disciples in their worship, and were blessed with the Pentecost as mentioned in the book of Acts.

At any rate, even though the Old Testament did not totally disregard the role of woman, yet the New Testament exalted her status. It was said of this age (Joel2: 28) "And it shall come to pass afterward that will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." The church looks upon girls and women as members in Christ's body, sharing men in their membership. Their hearts are an altar to the Lord, and a temple to the Holy Spirit.

Secondly: Their service to all Lord was not temporal; the expression came as 'were ministering unto Him' which means the work went on for sometime.

Thirdly: The Lord, the Creator, became impoverished for our sake so as to enrich us. He was not mindful of being taken care of by the money of those women. This is tremendous love, to accept being ministered to by human weak hands, whereas it was He who satisfied the souls and the bodies.

2- His Work as a Sower; the Parable of the Sower:

As a real Friend, He compares Himself to the Sower, who never ceases to sow His loving seeds in every soil for it may accept Him. It may sprout, grow and be fruitful with no obstructions in yielding fruits of love that never stop. We have previously spoken of this parable with some comments of a number of fathers in our study of St. Matthew's gospel (Matt13: 10) and (Mark 2: 4), I wish you revise it.

I find it enough at this point to stress the following points:

Firstly: Father Theophlectius says (the Bulgarian Patriarch 765- 840) that the Lord Jesus spoke in parables so as to allure the listeners. People were used to being interested in mysterious matters, and at the same time to keep the mystery going on to those unworthy ones, that is, those disinterested in saving their souls.

Secondly: Our heavenly Friend did not come to condemn the people, but He came to sow their hearts with excellent seeds. He is the sower who sows the seeds Himself. He Himself is moreover the seeds that are sowed in the heart. He is not miserly in giving us Himself. He does not offer us outer seeds as did the men of the Old Testament; He rather offered us Himself even if we are a way filled with stones and thistles, for He loves everybody! Father Theophlectius says, "The Son of God does not cease to sow the Word of God in our souls. This is not only because He teaches us, but also because He creates the good seeds that are sown in us."

St. Gregory El Nazenzi assures us that the different kinds of soil mentioned in this parable does not mean there are different natures among people that are not to be changed as some heretics said, thinking that man is led according to his nature. This came as an expression to what the Lord said "**was given to you**" (Luke8: 10) to declare the parable was said to those who have will-power, and who are able to be blessed with the change in the Lord.

3- He Grants the Light:

The Lord Jesus throws Himself in us as seeds working inside our heart, so as to show the fruits of the Spirit in us. It is then that we shall be as light to others. He says (Luke8: 16, 17) "No man, when he hath lighted a candle covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they who enter in may see the light. For nothing is

secret that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad.”

We have previously commented on these divine words in our interpretation (Matt. 5: 15) (Mark4: 21) and we find it enough here to point out the following:

Firstly: What is the lighted lantern other than the heart ablaze with the fire of the Holy Spirit? It is this that we have obtained in the mysteries of baptism and the ‘mairon’, the holy ointment of the fiery Holy Spirit, that is able to make out of us servants to God, all kindled in fire. The Lord has assured us “I have come to set fire”, and He has actually set fire to our inner life. This will be ablaze in us if we respond to the Holy Spirit of God working in us. We will be counted as bright and lighted lanterns. But if we are covered with a vessel, or put under the bed instead of being set up on a candlestick, then we shall lose this light. This is why the apostle says (1Thes.5: 19) “Quench not the Spirit.”

If the apostle has called the body a vessel carrying God’s power in it as an invaluable treasure (2Cor.4: 7), then to hide the lantern inside the vessel means to isolate the Spirit’s work through the physical lust, instead of sanctifying the body by the fire of the Spirit! In other words, I wish we do not delete the work of the Spirit in us through the physical deeds. Let us accept the sanctification of the body in all its potentials and senses by the fire of the Spirit.

If the vessel represents the body, then the bed represent the life of dormancy and sleep. There is nothing to ruin our spiritual life more than slothfulness and carelessness. In other words, I wish we do not destroy the sanctified fire in us, by means of the bed of our carelessness and slothfulness. Let us rather respond to it by means of watchfulness and struggle.

As for the candlestick, this refers to the life of preaching and testimony to the Truth. The Light in us is more ablaze during the spiritual ministering and witnessing to the Lord crucified.

Secondly: What is this hidden that will be manifested, and the suppressed that will be declared and be known, other than the life of Christ Himself that He offers as seeds in ourselves, when it sprouts and grows as a tree of life that fills the heart with spiritual heavenly fruits that cannot be hidden. The Lord Jesus is declared in us by means of our inner life, such as love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance (Gal.5: 22). These will be manifested in our apparent behavior and action. What we accept and receive in our secret life and our personal worshiping, this is declared through our conduct.

Thirdly: The Lord Jesus presents to us a basic principle in our spiritual life (Luke8: 18) “**For whosoever hath , to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.**” We can call this principle ‘the dynamic partnership with God in His Son’. This means if we are honest, we receive ‘the life of Christ in us’ in honesty. For this life is not stagnant or slothful, it rather grows constantly in us. When we have ‘the life in Christ’, He gives us the constant growth, for we might reach the full stature of Christ’s. Christ grants us what is His, so we possess Him as Ours; as live seeds that yield in us, and increase the fruits continuously. But he who has not, that is, he who does not accept God’s work in him, then what he assumes to be his, such as natural talents and hereditary blessings, even these things will be taken away from him!

In other words, our life in Christ is an incessant motion. Also evil is an incessant motion. He who responds to the Lord, grows non-stop, and he who accepts evil, slopes down in it boundlessly.

4- He Asks Everyone to draw closer to Him:

The Lord Jesus, as a true Friend, works constantly in us. The evangelist wished to show the level of His friendship, and how it is not partial to any physical relation. He wants everyone to be related to Him, members in the heavenly family. This why when His mother and His brothers (His cousins) came to ask for Him, and could not reach Him because of the crowds, He answered saying (Luke8: 21) **“My mother and My brethren are those who hear the Word of God and do it.”**

The Lord Jesus did not mean to scorn family relations, but He loved His mother and was concerned about her even till the last moments in His crucifixion. The Lord Jesus wants to raise us to the level of being united with Him, not only through hearing the Word, but also through carrying it out, (revised Interpretation of Matt. 12: 46, Mark3: 31).

+ He did not say this like someone who scorns his mother; but rather to declare her honor that is based not only on her conception of Christ, but also for her being blessed with every virtue.

Father Theophlactius the Bulgarian Pope.

+ Cannot you see that on every occasion He never denied the biological relation? But He added to it what is by means of the virtue.

St. John Chrysostom

+ It is appropriate for Him, being a Teacher, to present the Lord Himself as a model for others. He commands, and carries out what he has commanded. He commands unless a man leaves his father and his mother, then he is not worthy of having the Son of God (Matt. 10: 37, Luke14: 26). He wanted to be the first to submit to this commandment, and not to resist the befitting honor given to a mother. He has previously said that he who does not honor father or mother, he should die (Ex.20: 2, Deut.27: 6). He knew well He had to do to His Father more than His feelings towards His mother. For the ties of the Spirit are of more sanctification than any physical ties.

Those asking for Jesus should not have stood outside; because the Word is close to you, in your mouth and in your heart (Deut.30:14; Rom.11: 8). You can hear the Word from the inside, and the Light is also inside. This is why it is said (Ps.33: 8) “Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.” If He does not know His family when they stand outside, their how can He know us if we stand outside?

Christ was not too lofty for His mother here, for He knew her when He was on the cross (John19: 26). He just wanted to discern the divine commandments from the physical relations.

Christ refers to His family, that He will prefer the church that believed in Him more than the Jews from whom Christ came according to the body.

St. Ambrosios

5- The Calming down of the Tempest:

Now that Christ has shown clearly His friendship that works non-stop, so that He makes everyone enter into a family relation with Him through the listening and practicing of His commandments, He began to show His power to work in us so as to fulfil His purpose in us. In manifesting His authority over nature, He orders the tempest and the waters, so they obey Him. He therefore declares His power in working in us even if nature seems to resist Him. He is of authority, coming into our hearts just as into the boat, so as to command the inner winds to calm down, and the tempest to cease. He establishes His superb peace to the mind inside our hearts, (revised Interpretation to Matt8: 23, Mark4: 35).

The evangelist says, (Luke8: 22) **“Now it came to pass on a certain day that He went into a ship with His disciples; and He said unto them ‘Let us go over unto the other side of the lake’. And they launched forth.”**

When His relatives stood outside, He left the place and launched with His disciples in a ship towards the other side of the lake. This is a symbolic picture of His divine work as God, when the Jews insisted on not believing in Him. He launched with His disciples through His church, or His cross which is the ship, to the Gentiles on the other side of the world lake. Up till now the Lord Jesus is launching constantly through His minister in his church, in a non-stop action, eager to renew the life of everyone.

(Luke8: 23) **“But as they sailed He fell asleep; and there came down a storm of wind on the lake.”** This is the only time in which it is said that Christ fell asleep. This may be because the evangelist wished to confirm His incarnation: that He ate, He drank, He fell asleep, He suffered...etc. This word ‘slept’ could also refer to ‘rest’, because the Lord, when He enters with His disciples into a ship, and He launches with them to the service, He finds rest in them. It is not the sleep of laziness, but it is rather the rest concerning them. The word ‘slept’ here seems to be a symbol of the tempests waging against us so that the ship of our life gets filled, whereas the Lord seems to be sleeping, and does not care about our perishing. He is in control of everything, though, and all that happens is with His permission. His sleeping means the delay of His appearance so as to suppress the ordeals. He leaves us to struggle with His grace, until we cry out to Him, and with Him we overcome and are triumphant.

St. John Chrysostom thinks the Lord slept so as to give the opportunity to His disciples to discover their fear, and His coming to their rescue. As for St. Augustine, he thinks the Lord’s sleeping is a symbol of our sleep in faith inside us. It is with faith that the Lord Jesus dwells in our hearts (Eph.3: 17). If this faith sleeps and cools, the waves rage against us, and it is extremely urgent we cry out to wake Him up. That is, we recall His words that have their impact on our life. As for St. Ambrosios, he comments on the Lord’s sleep during the crossing over of the lake, saying, “No one could cross over this world without Christ. Those people who have Christ with them, probably go through a lot of ordeals in facing life’s troubles. Christ has dealt in this way with His disciples only to draw your attention so you are aware that no one is able to launch from this world without being obstructed by hardships, and thus he is exalted in his faith.

If we believe God has a purpose for these tempests, then let us wake up the pilot! If even the commanders of the ship are exposed to danger, then to whom do we resort other than to Him who is not controlled by the storms. It is rather He who commands them, it is He about whom it is written He rose and rebuked the winds!

He was asleep physically, yet in His divinity He was taking care of them.

Everyone was afraid, and it was only He who was sleeping undisturbedly. He not only shares us our nature, but He is also with us amid the danger, even if He is sleeping physically, for He works by His divine and godly nature.

They were blameworthy, for He told them (Matt.8: 26; 14: 31) “O you of little faith, because thy were sore afraid though Jesus was with them. They were not aware that he who is firm in Him will never perish.

The Lord made firm their faith, and brought back their peace by ordering the tempest to cease. This is the wind to which the Archangel Michael said “The Lord rebuke thee” (Jude9).

May the Lord rebuke in us these roaring tempests; so do not fear any drowning, and may our confused life be calmed down!

If the Lord is not sleeping now, yet I wish we be watchful lest we see Him sleeping in us, when our bodies fall into the sudden sleep.

6- The Healing of the Gadarene Lunatic:

We have spoken of the comments said by the church fathers about the healing of the Gadarene lunatic (interpretation Matt.8: 28; Mark5: 1). We wish to confirm at this point how the evangelist St. Luke portrays the character of the Savior as a Friend who works continuously. He works for the sake of one or two people, even though they might be lunatics, rejected, and living in the tombs. Also, even if His work with them destroys thousands of swine, or would cause Him to be driven out of the city. It is in this way that the Lord Jesus evaluates the human soul, and gives it great esteem. He works in the soul, however much this cost might be! He is ready to regain it on account of His creation, and on account of many favours done to Him.

Who is this madman who has been naked, with no clothing at all, for such a long time? Who is he who has no home to live in, but rather lives in the graves? Who is he who is chained, and is unable to work or think? He represents the humanity that has stayed such a long time subdued and enslaved to the adversary. It has been chained with the bonds of sin and evil, and is unable to work for the account of God's kingdom for its construction, and neither can it think of what is heavenly! It has been out of the city, out of the paradise established for its sake, homeless, since it has deprived itself of dwelling with God in His real holy place. This soul has unclothed itself of the divine grace, harming itself with its own hands, running towards the wilderness, since it cannot stand love and partnership with God and people.

St. Ambrosios comments on this man, saying:

“The naked one is he who has lost his first nature and his goodness.”

The man who has the devil refers to the Gentiles who are covered with their vice and are naked by means of their ignorance, and whose clothes have been taken off due to their sins.

St. Matthew made sure it is mentioned that he lived among the graves, because these souls seem as if they dwell in the graves. For the unbelievers' bodies are only a kind of grave where the dead souls are buried, because the word of God does not dwell there.

He rushed to the deserted places, that is, to the places which lack the righteousness of the Spirit. These souls have avoided the law and got separated from the prophets, and thus they got rejected by grace.

It was not only one devil that tortured him, but rather legions of them that attacked him.

It is in such a way that humanity has become not only a toy in Satan's hand, but in the hands of many devils as well. These devils play with the soul, trade in it so as to degrade it. The Lord went out to release it from this adversary. He wanted to give it back the royal robe, and the divine house, and grant it mentality and wisdom, and bless it with the partnership of the Lord.

What is amazing is that the enemy once he realises man's salvation at the Lord's hands, he counts this salvation as perdition to him. The enemy finds his pleasure in our misery, and his torture in our salvation. Satan has said, (Luke8: 28) “**I beseech Thee, torment me not.**” He might have realised that on the fulfillment of the salvation work, he falls under the condemnation, since his cup would be filled.

At any rate, Satan's apparent cruel violence on that man was very obvious before his being healed, and also on the herd of swine that perished on the spot. But before the Lord, he was weak indeed, unable to go into even one of the swines. As St. John Chrysostom says, ‘unless the Lord allows him to.’

I wish we would not be like swine in our spiritual life, wallowing in the filth of sin, lest the adversary drift us and slides with us into the abyss, and all of us drown and perish.

Finally, when the man asked the Lord to accompany Him to be amidst the multitudes, He told him (Luke8: 39) “**Return to thine own house, and show how great things god**

hath done unto thee.” As St. John Chrysostom says “Let us withdraw from all worldly matters, and devote ourselves to Christ. Then we shall be counted as equal to the apostles according to His words, and thus enjoy the eternal life”. In other words, I wish we are not attracted with outwardly appearances, but would rather withdraw to our new home, which is ‘our life in Christ’. We shall exercise our right in worship and witness, and thus Christ will be glorified in us, and His deeds will be manifested as light shining in this world.

7- The Healing of the Bleeding Woman:

We have previously mentioned this woman (Interpret of Matt.9: 18; Mark5: 22). But we wish to make clear here that the healing of this infirm woman came on the way between Jaruis’ meeting with the Lord, and the raising of Jaruis’ daughter, as the Lord was on His way to Jaruis’ house. This was fulfilled for a certain purpose; this is for the fact that Jaruis, though he was a ruler of the synagogue, yet his faith was weaker than that of the centurion. The former asked the Lord to come to his house so as to heal his daughter who was on the verge of death. As for the latter, he believed the Lord was able to heal his boy with only a word, and that there was no need for the Lord’s coming up to his house. He also thought he was not worthy the Lord enters his house.

Jaruis’ heart was very disturbed, and the moments fled by as long years. He was eager the Lord hastens so as to save his daughter lest she dies. He did not yet believe the Lord was able to raise her from the dead. Who can express the emotions of Jaruis when the Lord Jesus stopped the whole procession and say, “Who touched Me?” whereas Jaruis was trying to be as quick as possible? At any sat, the Lord gave this ruler a lesson in faith; how this unknown woman usurped power by means of her touching the hem of His cloak. She obtained what none of the crowds was able to obtain. The Lord showed Jaruis the possibility of being blessed with the Messaiah’s work and His power.

The Lord may have wished to offer Jaruis as well as the multitudes, on His way to Jaruis’ house, the ruler of the synagogue, a lesson in ‘His active and working friendship’. This lesson is, that though He is concerned about the ruler of the synagogue, yet He does not forget the unknown women, defiled according to the law. The Lord works for the account, and for the sake of everyone.

We said He is the real Friend who works continuously. He works for the account of the ruler of the synagogue who came entreating Him for his daughter’s sake. He also works for the sake of and unknown woman. He works openly by going to Jaruis’ house, and He works secretly, for He say that power has gone out of Him! On the other hand, He wished to assure us there is no specific time for work, but that rather all of His time is for work. He heals and grants health and power on the way to raise a daughter.

This woman has lost all her hope in human effort. She has spent all that she had on physicians. But she did not lose her faith in the savior. She touched Him and she thus obtained what none of the crowds has been able to obtain. This is why the Lord wished to be glorified in her, and He declared of the power that went out of Him. But as for the woman, she came in hear (Luke8: 47) carrying her fear of God in her. She worshiped Him, because she knelt in her fear, and testified of the truth; for she made known before everyone the cause for her touching Him, and how she was healed instantly.

The Lord did not want to question her; He rather praised her, and thus she has come to represent the church that embodies the fear of God, and the one to worship in truth, the witness to the fear of God, and the one to worship in truth, the witness to the deeds of her Christ.

Before this scene that touched everyone, the greatest Friend overpowered her with His love, for He said to her (luke8: 48) **“Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made**

thee whole, go in peace.” She believed; and He increased her faith all the more by His words ‘be of good comfort’. Faith is the gift of God for whoever asks for it, and the growth in faith is a gift to whoever practices the faith. He grants us the faith if we ask Him, and He increases our faith if we kindle what He has given us.

He granted her the growth in faith, and He declared the gift of filiation by His word ‘Daughter’. This is the gift that surpasses all others, or any other talent.

She believed and she obtained, and so she praised Him with her faith. He, too, praised her by saying ‘Your faith bath made thee whole’.

Finally, He gave her, the gift of peace, spiritually and emotionally ‘Go in peace’.

How amazing! As a Friend, He was concerned about her body, and so He healed her. He was also concerned about her soul, and so He gave her peace; for her spirit as well, for He made her a daughter to Him, that shares Him His heavenly glories.

8- The Raising of Jaruis’ Daughter:

Jaruis saw this sight; he might have become filled with faith after he had been confused at the beginning for he feared the Lord’s delay. The woman with the infirmity has thus become a teacher to the synagogue ruler in his path of faith.

The Lord, moreover, wished to increase Jaruis’ faith all the more, and He allowed a more bitter ordeal to happen to him; for one of his household came to say, (luke8: 49) “Thy daughter is dead, trouble not the Master’. Before Jaruis had time to say anything, he heard the Master say (Luke8: 50) **“Fear not, believe only, and she shall be made whole.”**

We have previously discussed the raising of Jaruis daughter (Interpretation of Matt.9; Mark5).

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Chapter 9
Our Heavenly Friend and
The Disciples

We have seen our Lord Jesus the loving Friend to all mankind, working unceasingly so we receive His friendship to us and in us. This chapter offers us the purpose of this friendship, which is His manifestation in His believers and in His ministers so as to declare His heavenly nature in our life.

He has become impoverished for our sake, and has experienced the suffering of ours so as to carry us to His riches and heavenly glory.

The Lord didn't offer His manifestation all at once, but when He chose the twelve disciples, He was manifested in their life bit by bit; this is to declare the dominion of His kingdom by means of sending them without any temporal provision, but yet they were carrying His authority in the healing of souls and bodies.

He granted them to touch His manifestation and His heavenly capabilities by means of seeing Herods fear of Him from afar, He fed the hungry multitudes, and the Father's declaration of His personality to **Sunion** Peter, Finally after speaking to them of the cross, He look with Him three of His disciples who witnessed with their own eyes His transfiguration on Mount Tabor. After this visible transfiguration, He feared their pride, and so He told them of the commitment to the cross, and to conduct themselves in a modest spirit, together with the serving of others throughout the narrow road.

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1- The sending of the Disciples

We have previously discussed this mission in the interpretation of St. Mathew's gospel (10:1), Mark's gospel (6:7). We find it enough here to point out the Lord Jesus as a heavenly Friend who cause down to our earth and dwelt among us. He chose His disciples from among the illiterate people, and He was transfigured and glorified in them, declaring himself through His capabilities, which He offered them, these capabilities are:

Firstly: "them He called His twelve disciples": This call an invitation is divine for disciples. It doesn't imply any obligator to be accepted forcibly.

It is merely an offer of love from God towards His loved ones. But in the eyes of those who accepted it, it represents an agent who works in the name of his Master, for His account and using His capabilities, by means of this call, the disciples accepted a

new position, which is the agency, and works as agents to God's mysteries.

Secondly: (Luke 9:1) "and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases". Since He appointed them as agents to His mysteries, He wasn't miserly in granting them His power and authority over all devils, as well as curing diseases. Many have authority by means of their positions, such as kings or governors or prestigious people or judges. Yet they possess no power visible to them, as a result they disrepute their positions as well as degrade themselves, but as for the Lord Jesus, He gave them authority together with power. This power is not based on apparent temporal means, but it is "His Holy Spirit" who dwells in them and works by their means.

Satan has claimed power for himself, supported in this by the human weakness that bent before him so he reigns over it.

Satan was thus called "the ruler of this world". He also claimed to have strength, and thus was called "the strong one". But his authority was based on his deception to people, and his strength was by means of misleading and deviation. It was necessary for the disciples to cope with this enemy, to possess the authority supported by God's power.

Thirdly: (Luke 9:2) "and He sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick".

This ability is "the power of preaching the kingdom". This is not philosophical discussion, neither is it a virtuous conduct only; it is the gratification of the kingdom inside the soul. In other words, the apostolic preaching is a gift offered by the Holy Spirit when He transfers the soul from darkness to the kingdom of light, so as to be blessed by means of the baptism water by the filiations to God, and the changing of the inner site to a sanctified heaven to the Lord.

Fourthly: (Luke 9:3) "and He said unto them, "Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither

money, neither have two coals apiece”. He is asking His disciples to leave and to give up yet not to live in deprivation, but to wake the Lord Himself all in all. What is amazing is that He offered them the power and the authority, and He granted them the power of preaching, and healing before asking them to give up anything. They were to take Him with all His dominion and power, and thus reject the earthly matters with all its trifles.

He asked them not to carry anything, neither staves, not scrip, not bread, not money, and not to have two coals apiece, this is a commandment appropriate to him who enters the sepulcher or a holy place of God’s. He is not carries anything with him of this world, so he would not be confused or preoccupied with anything other than God. This is appropriate to the disciple to have their enters life as if it is to be existent with God in His holy place. They are to feel constantly, whenever they may be, as if they are in God’s holy place.

May God grant us this feeling that fills the heart with the fear of God, and raised the soul so as to live as if dwelling in heaven? The soul should not be disturbed in carrying life problems, and wouldn’t be in need of a stave, or food, or money, and wouldn’t ask for two cloaks.

Fifthly: (Luke 9:4) “and whatsoever house ye enter into, there abide, and thence depart”. The Lord also granted them the gift of membership with each other in one body. When the apostle finds the believers’ homes open to him as they were his own, he then stays at any of their homes without any hospitality favours. He is to live as one of the family members, sharing them their normal daily food, and he is to stay there till he leaves the town.

This commandment is also offered to the minister or servant to be committed to his job seriously. He is not to make use of people’s love to him in Christ, and thus change it to favours. In that cose his life would be changed to banquets in instead of concentrating on spreading God’s word and preaching His gospel.

When you don't keep moving from house to house, this takes away from families the spirit of rivalry in hospitality. This is a well-known trait in the East p till this day.

Finally, the Lord may have wished this hoe the seed for establishing a church in the town, when the believers would be used to meeting the apostles there. There, they practice worshipping the mystery of partnership, or the Eucharist or the first day of the week. In this way, if the first house is opened for apostle, that house will obtain the blessing, as a combast, (Luke 9:5) "And whosoever will not receive you, when ye go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet for a testimony against them".

It is in this way that **barnabas(page 04)** and soul did when they left Antioch (Acts 12:51). The Lord may have meant by this that the earthly temporal matters, however lofty they may be, yet they are like dust that has no place except the feet. When the people reject the spiritual word from him, the servant **kbewise(page #305)** rejects from them even the most trivial temporal matters. The church doesn't ask for money, it rather sweeps it away as dust from her feet. The church only asks for the souls! The church has come to be strict with the bishops and priests not to accept gifts from the unrepentant wicked ones. It is as if the church sweeps away the dust from their doorstep as a testimony against them so they would repent!

St. Ambrosius thimbles this dust refers to the drawbacks that are appropriate for the shepherded to carry for God's people, as the apostle say (2 Cor 11:9) "For that which was lacking to me...the brethren supplied". He should not allow the weakness to cling to him, but should rather throw them under his feet, for he say "It is the duty of him who preaches the gospel to take upon himself the physical weakness of the believers, and he has to carry them for away, and crush them under his feet. These are idle deeds that are similar to the dust".

2- Herod's Disturbance and Confusion

If the Lord has grouted His disciples the heavenly capabilities to work for the amount of their heavenly Friend, it is because He wished to reveal to them step by step His dominion and power. Here the evangelist St. Luke narrates to us how Herod got disturbed on hearing the news about the Lord Jews and His deeds. This did not end with his disturbance only his thoughts and outlooks also changed, because he was a Sadducee who didn't believe in the resurrection from the dead. But due to the current events he said (Luke 9:9) "John have I beheaded; but who is this of whom I hear such things?". He began to doubt the matter, and think what people might say: is it John, or Elijah, or one of the old prophets that has risen? His conscience was roused in him. He didn't attribute John's death to Herodias' deception, or to her daughter, or to the swordsman, but it was to himself that the responsibility of John's killing was attributed. He said: "I have beheaded him", and he was eager to see Jesus. This has been fulfilled when Herod heard of the deeds of the Lord Jesus without anyone speaking to Herod blaming him with a single word.

Neither did anyone herald him with the joyful news.

We can also say that St. John the Baptists' voice, the forerunner of the Lord preparing the way before Him, this voice has not suppressed even after his death. It actually kept terrifying Herod's heart, so how much more would the word of Christ Himself, and its being preaching by Him through His disciples? It is only a word that is unbounded- as St. Paul the apostle say.

3- The Disciples and the Feeding of the Multitudes

The disciples obtained the incitation and were blessed by strength and authority, they saw with their own eyes, and heard

with their own ears that Herod was experiencing great disturbance.

Now the Lord was declaring to that He is the one to feed the hungry multitudes for a long time.

We have previously spoken of the feeding of the multitudes (Matt 14, Mark 6), thus we think it enough to point out the following:

Firstly: The Lord wished to be all by Himself with the disciples in the city of Sidon. But when the multitudes heard of it, they followed Him. He therefore, accepted them, this word originally meant He welcomed them warmly. The disciples were in need of the Lord being alone with them. But even this meeting of singleness, was for the people's sake, because the Lord came to meet them, warmly and happily. His rest as well as the disciples rest was in making the weary restful, and the feeding of the hungry souls.

Secondly: This miracle happened after the selection of the disciples and their mission, so as to declare the purpose of the mission, which was to feed the hungry humanity.

St. Ambrosius comments on the site of this miracle among the events happening at that time, saying "What is the reason for the evangelist to mention the death of St. John the Baptist? Because Herod points to his death (Luke 9:9)? This may be because of the gospel that feeds the hungry multitudes began with the end of the old law. He has offered the food after the healing of the woman bleeding with the infirmity, as the church symbol, and after sending the apostles for preaching God's kingdom.

Contemplate on who were the ones to be blessed with the banquet? The slothful, on those living in the city, as the ones in the synagogue or those asking for the world dignitaries, those blessed with it are they who seek Christ in the wilderness. These are accepted by Christ, and the Word of God speaks to them, not about the world, but rather about the kingdom of heaven. If some

of them are covered by physical bruises, then the Lord Jesus gives them the medicine.

God has provided to save from these ones He has healed of their painful wounds. He gives them the spiritual food, since no one could be blessed with the heavenly banquet have been healed first. He who was crippled obtained the strength to walk so as to come to the Lord, and he who was deprived of his eyesight didn't enter the Lord's house, except after he has **regained** his vision. In this way the Lord works us a sanctified good provision at all times, for He gives first the forgiveness of sins, and the medicine for the wounds, then the preparation for the heavenly banquet.

The hungry hearts for the firm faith is not satisfied except it is by the body and blood of Christ.

Thirdly: The evangelist says, (Luke 9:11) "and healed them that had need of healing", for not all those who were sick were healed.

It is only those who felt they were in need of healing, and thus asked for the physician so as to be healed. Our physician is generous and is able to heal, but He doesn't grant His gift except it be to those who asked Him. These ones feel their need of Him, so they don't take lightly the gift given them, and scow it.

You might ask, "I don't feel my own sickness, so what should I do?" Do what the multitudes did by following Him so as to hear Him. You will then hunger for Him, and you feel the need of being fed, it is at this point that even if you don't ask if Him, the disciples will do so.

The Lord Himself will be responsible for satisfying their needs. We are in need of sitting with them, and hearing His voice by means of His gospel, and thus we will feel the need of being healed and satisfied. St. Ambrosius says, "When man begins to listen, he feels hungry, the disciples see his hunger, and though they don't fulfill his needs, but it is Christ who satisfies him.

Fourthly: out of human emotion, the disciples asked the Lord (Luke 9:12) “Send the multitude away that they may go into the towns and country round about, and lodge and get victuals: for we are here in a desert place”. The disciples’ feelings were merely human, and their calculation was also human, for they thought the situation needed a lot of money to purchase food for the multitude. As St. Ambrosios said “They have not yet understood that the food for believers is not sold. But as for Christ, He know He has to fulfill the redemption for us, and that banquet is a free one”.

Fifthly: St. Ambrosios comments on the food the Lord offers us so we don’t faint on the way, and don’t reach the Father. He declares that the Lord’s food is strong and is of support to those on the way. If few faint, then the cause is because of us. In our carelessness we squander the strength that He has given us. Elijah was able to walk for forty day, supported by the on meal given him by the angle. He didn’t faint as happened previously, and how he fainted on the way. As for Christ’s meal, this supports us all the deep of our life.

Finally: we have previously studied the symbolic concepts of men who were satisfied. These were 5000 men, and the few loaves and two fishes ... etc. But what we wish to make clear here, is that the disciples when they received the blessing from the hands of the Savior, this didn’t only feed everyone, but what remained were twelve baskets full of fragments. To each of them then is a basket, as a practical evidence of God’s deed to them. When the believers offer others, they get satisfied, and their hands are filled with the Lord’s blessings. This means that the giving increases the Lord’s blessings in our life.

4- The Disciples and their coming to know Him

(Luke 9:18) “And it came to pass, as He was alone praying His disciples were with Him; and He asked them saying, “whom say the people that I am?”

When the multitudes met Him and He talked with them, and healed their wounds, and after He had offered them food to satisfy them, He went with His disciples in solitude. They might realize His unique relation with His Father when they saw Him pray.

He prayed and they were with Him, so as to teach them that prayer is the way to be blessed with the mysteries of the Father and the Son. This is why the question followed next “Whom say the people that I am? “So He would ask them “and you, whom do you say that I am?”

With the multitudes we are blessed His amazing deeds, and are satisfied and quenched. He also wishes us to encounter Him in solitude so as to be blessed with His godly mysteries, because He wants to introduce Himself personally to us. We could then say with St. Peter the apostle “Christ the God” as St. Ambrosios say “This name implies everything, and express His nature, and contains all righteousness”.

We have previously spoken of these words in details (interpretation of St. Matt 16:13, St. Mark 8:27) in addition to the fathers’ comments on them.

5-The Disciples and the Cross

On St. Peter the apostle’s declaration of his faith in the Lord Jesus, He rebuked them and commanded them not to tell this to anyone (Luke 9:21), (Luke 9:22) “Saying, ‘the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and Serileis, and be slain, and be raised to third day”.

It is clear that the purpose of this commandment to His disciples is to delay the proclamation of His identity until the events of the cross and the resurrection take place, because (1

Cor 2:8) “for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. “He didn’t want to hinder at the time He wanted to declare Himself to His disciples so they wouldn’t be offered by His crucifixion, He still wished them to be silent about it and not to declare His identity until the crucifixion is fulfilled.

Actually, the revelation of Himself has been blended with the Cross. There is no value for the Cross sacrifice unless the crucified one is declared as being the Son of God, the only Begotten, and His sanctified Christ. We can never be blessed with the Messiah as being the Son of God, and be graced with Him, away from the Cross.

It the Lord Jesus is the heavenly Friend, then He has come to carry us in His love to His Cross. It is there that we will all the more come to know Him, receive Him, be firm in Him as members of His body, and go with Him into His Father’s embrace.

In addition to this, we can’t recognize His cross unless we carry it with Him as a daily test of righteousness. This is why His words about His crucifixion blended with His words about our own daily crucifixion with Him, or caring His Cross, and being blessed in sharing His suffering.

The evangelist goes on to say (Luke 9:32) “And He said to them all ‘If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me’”.

He reveals Himself so we are not offended in His Cross. He attracts us to His Cross so we bend with Him in sharing His suffering joyfully every day, and thus be considered worthy of sharing His glories. This is the heart’s aspiration of every apostle and every believer (Phil 3:10) “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering, being made conformable unto His death”.

St. Jerome says, “His Cross the column of humanity. When I say the ‘Cross’ I don’t think of the wooden tree, but of the pain and suffering. This cross is found in Britain, in India, and in all the universes. And you, if you are not willing to carry the Cross-as the case is with Christ, then you can never be His disciple. Blessed is the man who carries in his heart the cross and the resurrection, and thus he will be the site of Christ’s birth and His resurrection! Blessed is he who has Bethlehem in his heart, and thus Christ will be born in Him everyday. Christ is crucified in us everyday, and we are crucified for the world. Blessed is he in whom Christ rises everyday, for He rises if the sinner repeats of his sins, even the most trivial ones”.

The Cross doesn’t wreck our life so long as we carry it with Christ, the One who overcomes death, in other words, as long as Christ who dwells in us carries it. Away from Christ, the Cross-is a wreck to the soul; but in Christ it is the way of salvation and the resurrection. This is why the Lord Jesus say (Luke 9:24) “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it”. This means that he who wants to save his life, that is, to glorify it by its eternal resurrection, then he has to make it perish by its carrying the Cross with its Savior. For through the Cross-carries the image of perdition from the outside, yet it is if heat grants the salvation.

This divine expression has withdrawn the thoughts of many people of modern education, in their researches in child-upbringing. It revealed to them the concept of the true parental love.

For no one could save his children unless or their ego in their own children. They wish to from their children according to their own whims and tendencies and aspirations, and not according to their children’s thoughts, their gifts and potentials. Actually, they are imprisoning their children in the ‘ego’ jail

that is quite difficult for the parents to release them from it. But we are able to say that when we are crucified with Christ, we deny and renounce ourselves. This is to live as living members in Christ's body. It is here that we don't put in jail our own children in the 'ego' but we rather feel them as persons and members with us in the same body.

They have their independent personalities, their talents, their abilities, their potentials, all kindled by the Holy Spirit of God Himself. But as for us, we serve them; instruct them in true love with us selfishness whatsoever.

Therefore, the cross is the mystery in the life of every member in his personal life, and in his family relations, in the church and social relations as well. He lives a life of giving in the Lord, asking nothing for himself, and yet he receives everything. As much as he denounces himself, his soul grows in love for heaven as well as for earth; this is why St. Augustine confirms we have to let ourselves perish so as to gain ourselves.

For another time he speaks to us of the Cross-in a different manner, saying (Luke 9:25) "For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?" here he doesn't mean by 'the world' its inhabitants, but rather the issues of this world materialistically and emotionally. As St. Augustine says when man lives in a selfish spirit and focuses on himself alone, he seizes the world opportunities for his own account. He wants the entire world to submit to his own pleasures, and work for his wealth account or his honor or his physical pleasure. He then loses his love for himself, because he destroys it. But he who accepts the crucifixion with Christ because he denounces himself, and he goes out of the ego circle so as to die in love for the sake of others, his heart accepts to tolerate and serve everyone, then he gains everything for himself! Let us die so as to live! Let us be buried with the

seeds, and then we shall yield thirty, sixty and hundred fold! The errors in gain and not as a loss, as long as it represents a partnership with the crucified.

In this way the Lord Jesus speaks of own crucifixion with Him, a matter that is difficult for the ordinary man to accept. This is why he says (Luke 9:26) “For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and His Father’s, and of the holy angels”. As the scholar Tritilian say, “I shall be in safety if I’m not ashamed of my Lord. The Son of God has been crucified: I’m not ashamed even if people are ashamed of Him. The Son of God has died, and I believe in this in every way”. To be ashamed of the Lord Jesus and His Cross, could be with words as well as with deeds. He who doesn’t carry the qualities of the Lord Jesus and conducts himself in His Spirit, and accepts His suffering, this one would be ashamed of Him and of His Cross.

In this way we are urged to accept the Lord Jesus, the crucified, in our daily life so we experience His glories, and be counted with Him as God’s heirs, honored before the heavenly host. This experience of the glories which we reach through the Cross, is not an eternal experience or a final one that we taste of only in the world to come, but it is a live experience that we are blessed with as an earnest now. For this reason the Lord concludes His words about the sufferings that grant the glories, saying (Luke 9:27) “But I tell you of a truth, there is some standing here, who will not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God”.

The Lord may have meant, by saying these words, the three disciples He took to mount Tabor to witness His glory in the moments of His transfiguration, because the discussion about the transfiguration come after saying these words

directly. He also may have meant the disciples who saw the kingdom of God declared among the Gentile people.

St. Ambrosios, though, thinks those people are the believers, some of whom witnessed the heavens, such as our teacher St. Paul the apostle. We even moreover say this divine promise of God touches the life of each and every one of us when God's kingdom is transfigured inside the soul, sweeping away its death and its corruption, and giving it heavenly beauty in the Lord.

Some Christians, of Jewish origin, think these words refer to the Jews who remain left in this world till the kingdom of God is declared to them at the end of the ages, by their return from their rejection of Christ.

(Revise also interpolation of St. Matthew 16:18, St. Mark 9:1).

6- The Disciples and the glory of the Transfiguration:

We can say, with no exaggeration, that the aim of the gospel is our being blessed with the Lord's transfiguration in His church, and in every church member, that is, in the depths of our souls. This is to make us prepared in declaring His perfect glory in the great days of the Lord. If the Cross, the resurrection and the ascension refer to one perfect work that centralize on our faith, then the Lord Jesus in His crucifixion and His ascension, He wishes to give us the spiritual vision to witness Him transfigured in us. We shall thereby experience Him amidst our suffering, as crucified in our place. He offers us the overwhelming joy of His resurrection and the glory of His heavens in our innermost depths.

In other words, when we struggle, it is only to declare through faith, Jesus Christ being transfigured in us, so we see Him face to face transfigured in fully perfect glory in the great day of the Lord.

We have previously discussed the transfiguration (interpret. St. Matt 17, St. Mark 9) quite elaborately, in addition to our fathers' comments on this topic. We think it enough to mention at this point the comment of St. Ambrosius, who says, "St. Peter and those with him saw this awesome blessing even though they were so sleepy, because the immeasurable glory of God crushes us. If the sunbeams are impossible for the human eye to be looked at in focus, then how can the physical body be able to see the glory of God? This is why in the resurrection; the body puts on a more pure and delicate form, getting free from its drawbacks.

This is why St. Peter wished to be blessed with the resurrection picture after this rest of heavy sleep. When they woke up, they saw His awesome glory. It is appropriate for us, [lebarise\(Page #314 line#29\)](#), to get up and see the awesomeness of Christ, St. Peter was overwhelmed because for all the attraction of that age, it could not divert him from the magic of the resurrection. This is why he said, "It is good for us, Lord, to be here", (Phil 1:23) "Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is for better".

In the transfiguration, we notice the following:

Firstly: Due to the unimportance of the transfiguration, the three evangelists St. Matthew, St. Mark and St. Luke spoke elaborately of it. But as for St. John, he spoke of it very briefly but with assurance and strength, for he says (John 1:14) "We beheld His glory". The transfiguration may not have left St. Peter's mind and heart all his preaching days, thinking that the transfiguration is an honest and truthful landmark in the Messiah's message. He liked the transfiguration with the powerful glory of Christ and His coming, for he says (2 Pet 1:26-18), "For we haven't followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For

He received from God the Father honor and glory, when there comes such a voice to Him from the excellent glory. This is my beloved Son, in whom I'm well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount".

Secondly: The transfiguration happened on the eighth day after the Lord spoke with His disciples about the crucifixion, but until the moments of the transfiguration Moses and Elijah were speaking with Him about (Luke 9:31) "His death which he should accomplish at Jerusalem". It is as if the Lord's transfiguration in us, or our being blessed with the partnership of His overwhelming glory in us, is the fruit of our accepting His Cross in our life. The subject of the Cross-, then, remains our concern even in the midst of His transfiguration glories. In other words, we shall not be blessed with the Lord's transfiguration in us in this world, and neither the manifestation of His glory to us on the last day, unless we accept the commandment of being crucified with Him. And when we are blessed with His transfiguration here and there, then the Cross remains our joyful subject, and our everlasting praise. Thus the Cross-is blended with the glory, and the glory manifests and declares the power of the Cross-and His godly mystery.

Thirdly: The church lays a lot of stress on the transfiguration, and so it celebrates it as a major feast for the Lord, since it is a true witness to His unseen godliness under the cover of the body. The Lord has declared it to some of His disciples as much as they could stand. This is to make them realize how much the church will be blessed in eternity in an unutterable and tremendous way.

In this transfiguration, we can see what the Lord gives us as a gift when He changes our bodies of dust to a spiritual body. He raises us from our corruption to incorruption by

means of our unity with Him, and our being blessed in His eternal inheritance.

As the apostle says “He will change our humble bodies to be in the uniage of His glorified body”. But the Lord’s transfiguration is a declaration of His reality that is hidden from us due to our weakness. He offers this to us as much as we could stand. As for our own glory, this is a free gift that He gives.

Fourthly: the evangelist says (Luke 9:29) “And as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistering”. As we mentioned earlier, St. Luke’s gospel is the gospel of prayer. But the prayer of the Lord Jesus is the speaking in partnership with the Father, the One with Him in godliness, and it is not the words of Him whom God has adopted as a gift. At any rate, our Lord Jesus carries us with Him on the mount. In our place, He also prayed. Even if wish to change our form, and he blessed with the Lord’s transfiguration in our depths, we have to go up the mount with Him to pray; since then is no other way for the transfiguration except by prayer.

7-The Disciples and the Casting Our of the Evil Spirit:

The Lord Jesus took with Him three of His disciples to the holy mount to proclaim to their His nature as a heavenly Friend, witnessed and testified of by the Father Himself that He is the Only Son in whom He is well pleased. In Him the prophecies are fulfilled and the old law has come true. This is why Moses and Elijah were overwhelmed at His coming, and spoke of His, and spoke of His crucifixion or His going out. Those who struggle rejoice, and ask to stay with Him on the mount forever; and those who have departed rejoice, such as Moses. It is a matter of peace on earth and in heaven, and their being reconciled together by His blood.

For He has come down to the plains to be transfigured in a different way, through His divine work of casting out the evil spirits that have ruined man's life. He has come down to carry mankind to His transfiguration and in being blessed by His glories; but this will not be fulfilled unless it is freed from Satan's bondage and his hosts. This is why the Lord come down to the plains, so He sees a son being overcome by the devil, tearing him and striking him (Luke 9:42). This son has become a bitter burden on his father, relatives and all those around. He has come to save him, he and all those around.

We can say that our heavenly Friend, the only begotten Son, by His being high on the mount, and by His transfiguration, He declares in some way or other humanity and how it has blended with Him so as to be blessed in **sharmy** His glories. As result the Father rejoice, and also the heavenly hosts in it the Word of God is fulfilled and the prophecies have come true. As for the son in the plains, Satan has imprisoned him, and thus he stands for the state of mankind that has gravid the Father's heart. It has also lost its partnership with the heavenly hosts due to its disobedience.

The father complained of he bitterness he lives in because of his son, saying (Luke 9:38) "Master, I beseech thee, look upon my son, for he is mine only child". These words were strong words and full of wisdom. On one hand, he asked for nothing from the Savior other than to 'look'. This request implies faith in the Savior's love that can't bear to see anyone suffering, or any father tortured because of his only son. On the other hand he declares his tender fatherhood, but it is so helpless, for 'he is mine only child'. In his words he showed some blame, saying (Luke 9:40) "and I besought thy disciples to cast him out; but they could not". In addition to his asking the inability of the disciples.

Now what did the Lord Jesus do?

Firstly: He rebuked the disciples saying (Luke 9:41) “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you, and suffer you?” the Lord was eager to have a believing generation that has the authority that scares devils.

Secondly: He offered a call to the father (Luke 9:41) “Bring thy son hither”. He wishes every believer to look upon the **booken (page #318 line# 7)**- hearted souls and those souls that are imprisoned as His own children. He offers these to the Lord as His own sons by means of prayer so as to obtain the salvation.

Thirdly: He rebuked the evil spirit and healed the boy and handed him to his father (Luke 9:42), that is, He kicked out the usurping every from the place of his occupation so the young boy goes back to his father. It is not enough to get rid of the every, but it is necessary to give back the site to its owner. In other words, the aim of our Christ is not only to release us of Satan, but also to bring us back to our Father’s embrace so as to be with Him, and be blessed with His divine love.

This is the aim of our heavenly Friend to bring us back to our Father in the absolute and true freedom.

8- The Disciples and the Handing Over of the Son of Man:

For the second time the Lord Jesus speaks with His disciples about His crucifixion, saying (Luke 9:44) “For the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men”, after Moses and Elijah have spoken to Him concerning this topic. For, whereas the multitudes got amazed at the Lord’s power and His authority, for He has saved the boy of he evil spirit, He wished the disciples hearts not be withdrawn to temporal glories, but rather to the Cross as a proclamation of His dominion in saving mankind.

Even though the Lord's words about the Cross-were clear, yet they were unable to understand these words. In a divine way of providing things, He hid from these the mystery of the Cross-till it be fulfilled.

9- The Disciples and Humility:

The disciples could not understand the Lord's words concerning being delivered to the crucifixion as the way for His heavenly kingdom. On the contrary, they began to think who is the greatest among them. Then the Lord look a boy (Luke 9:48) "He took a child, and set him by Him. And said unto them, whosoever shall receive Me, receiveth Him who sent Me, for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great".

As a heavenly Friend, He rules not through the temporal greatness, and the self-esteem, but rather by means of love that is filled with humility. Thus He wanted His disciples to take after His qualities so as to reign with Him in the Spirit of humility.

Father Ogris warns us of pride, in his discussion about 'Against the concepts of the Eight Passions' saying, "The spirit of vain pride is the most malicious of all thoughts, and it is ready to grow in the virtuous souls and those who seek virtue. This bad spirit bads them to show off their struggle so as to gain praise from people. They believe within themselves they could heal women, and that they scare devils, and that crowds of people come just to touch their clothes. The devil of pride is the pretext for wrecking the soul altogether.

Father Dorotheus urges us to be meek and humble saying, "Let us too be humbled, and thus be saved. If we are unable to tolerate the many hardships because we are so weak, then let us be humbled. I am assured that the little work when done in humility, makes us, with God's mercy, be in the same spot attained by the saints after so much toil as true servants to God.

Indeed, we are weak and unable to practice many deeds, but cannot we be humble? Yes my dear brothers, blessed are the man who has true humility”. (Revise the bathers’ words also in the interpretation to St. Matt 18:1, St. Mark 9:35).

10- The Disciples and Serving Others:

(Luke 9:49, 50) “And John answered and said, ‘Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us’ and Jesus said unto him, ‘Forbid him not; for he that is not against us, is for us’”. As we mentioned (in the Interpretation of St. Mark’s gospel 9:38) that the evangelist St. John did not stop this person out of jealousy or envy of him, but he wished him to be with them in following the Lord Jesus. It is clear from the Lord’s answer that this man was not against Christ by his mouth or by his heart, and neither did he do any individual thing of his own; but maybe his circumstances was not appropriate for him to be a follower with the disciples in an apparent way. But he was with them in the faith.

At any rate, our heavenly Friend by saying these words, He presents to us a new concept of the sanctified people, it is not a mere physical meeting, and it is actually a unity of life and faith. The Lord wished His disciples to have a big and loving heart, and hat each one practices his talents, and so all world work together for the account of God’s kingdom without any fanaticism, but rather in a unity of faith, and a unity of thought that is spiritual and **conect**.

11- The Disciples and the Fire from Heaven:

(Luke 9:51 – 56) “And it came to pass, when the time was come that He should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem. And He sent messengers before His face. And they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to

make ready for Him, and they did not receive Him, because His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, ‘Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elijah did?’ But He turned and rebuked them, and said, ‘ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them, and they went to another village’.

Firstly: The evangelist says, (Luke 9:51) “When the time was come that He should be receive up”, using the same expression ‘received up’ that was used when Elijah was received up (2 Sam. 2:9-11).

Also this expression was used when glorifying the suffering slave (Is 42:1), and at the assumption of the Lord Jesus (Acts 1:2). It is as if because the days of the Lord Jesus drew near to be glorified by entering the sufferings as a slave, so as to cross to His glories, ascending to the heavens, He looked ahead going decidedly towards Jerusalem, the center of the judgment place and the plotting for His crucifixion! For the Lord has come for this particular how to suffer in our place, and thus He glories us with Him, by Him and in Him.

He went ahead to Jerusalem, as it hastening the events all the generations have been waiting for, since it is the salvation work of God, by which the believers are glorified.

Secondly: One of the Samaritan villages rejected Him. The Samaritans as we know, are strangers that have swept from Babylon so as to dwell instead of the abused Israelites in 721 B. C. Their worshiping was a blend of Jewish and atheist worship. They did not accept from the Old Testament, any books other than the books of Moses, the Jews could not stand the Samaritans and neither did the Samaritans the Jews.

The village rejected to accept the Savior, and so James and John asked the Lord Jesus if they would ask for fire from

heaven, as did Elijah (2 Sam 1:10, 11) and thus they would be consumed.

The Lord could have called them 'Boanerges' which means 'the sons of thunder' (Mark 3:17) due to this reason. But the Lord refused this, and He rebuked them, for he did not come to condemn, but to save. He is so patient and tolerant, awaiting the repentance of everyone; and in fact, Samaria accepted the faith later on (Acts 8:5- 25).

The Lord Jesus did not come to capture the souls for **afally** (Page # 321). It was rather in love and long suffering that He did so; because he, who accepts the faith in fear, quickly departs from it. But he who accepts it through love, he stays firm in it. St. John Chrysostom says, "It is appropriate for us to be gentle in eradicating the disease. For he who corrects a situation due to fear of another one, he quickly falls into evil".

The two disciples asked that fire falls because so as to consume. But the Lord offers Himself as a heavenly Friend, so mild, He offers His fiery Holy Spirit that kindles the heart in love and not in vengeance.

12- The Condition for being a Disciple to the Lord:

Our heavenly Friend opens His embrace in love and eagerness to bring everyone to Himself, so as to be blessed with the partnership of His glories. He does not send fire to consume those who reject Him. At the same time, not everyone is fit to be His disciple; it is only those who respond to Him that carry His thoughts and His traits. St. Luke the evangelist mentioned three examples of people who met Him having the aim of becoming His disciples. In the study of St. Matthew's gospel (8:19) some of the father's comments were mentioned concerning the first two persons; the scribe who asked to follow Christ, but it was an insincere offer. The Lord answered him, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have their nests, but the

Son of man has nowhere to lay His head'. It is as if the Son of man did not find a place for Himself to dwell in. as for the second example, it is that of a sincere man of good inattention, **easier** for disciples. But there was one family responsibility, necessary in people's eyes; this was to be concerned about his father's burial. At any rate, the evangelist St. Luke added a third person who was keen on becoming the Lord's disciple and His follower, but he was not absolutely serious or mature enough for it. He wanted first to bid farewell to those in his home. The Lord's answer was thus (Luke 9:62) "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God".

In those three examples we notice the following:

Firstly: Our heavenly Friend knows the inner heart. The first and the third asked to become His disciples, but He could perceive their hearts: the first was not pure in his depth and in his aim, and the third was negligent and not serious as for the second one, he did not ask with his own lips; it was the Lord who heard his heart's request, and so called Him for His discipleship. But when he told the Lord raised him above the temporal duties for the sake of the eternal preaching job. The first and the third thought they were zealous and for the Lord called him for it. In other words, I wish we ask to become disciples to the Lord, not with our lips but with the purity of our hearts and its inner fire. It is then that the Lord calls us Himself, and bandage the wounds of our weakness, and prepare our life as testifiers for Him.

Secondly: St. Augustine comments on the first man, saying, "When this man wished to follow Christ, the Lord was sure that he was only asking what was for himself, and not what was for the Lord Jesus (Phil. 2:21) for He says (Matt. 7:21) "Not everyone that saith unto Me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven". Likewise did this man not know himself,

and realized he was full of hypocrisy and wiles, he would know who he was speaking to. This is why He said to him (Luke 9:58) “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath nowhere to lay His head”, which means He has no place in your faith. For in your heart you will find foxes that have holes, since you are full of cunningness. In your heart, too, the birds of the air have nests because they are sowing high in pride. You are filled with cunningness and pride, and therefore do not follow Me. For how can the cunning one follow the simple one?

We can also say that this man was tied to the love of the world. He has asked to be the Lord’s disciple, not for the Lord’s sake alone, but for the purpose of earthly honor or temporal benefit. This is way the Lord declared to Him the nature of the Teacher; for the foxes that live in the wilderness(page # 323, last line) have holes to which they are linked, and in which they rest.

The birds soaring in the air have nests to which they return from time to time. But as for the Son of man, He is heavenly and so He finds no rest in what is temporal, and finds not settlement on earth. Therefore, you are not fit to be His disciple unless you absolutely free yourself from what is earthly, and let your soul fly up towards the heavens.

Our Friend is of heaven; He wishes His disciples to have the qualities of heavenly thinking, and to live the life of tremendous sublimation.

Thirdly: St. Ambrosios offers us an explanation close enough to that of St. Augustine’s concerning the first man. He say, “Despite his continuous obedience and service yet he did not gain God’s pleasure. For the Lord does not care about the apparent service, but He cares far more for the purity of the heart. This is why He said previously ‘Whoever accepts this child in My name’ declaring to us that simplicity should

not be for a certain purpose love, too, should not be envious; and giving should be without any wrath. The Lord refers here to the adults who should have the hearts of children. It is appropriate for you to be blessed with true simplicity, that is, to possess this nature through much struggling. Thus the Lord said, “Whoever accepts this child in My name, has accepted Me; and he who accepts Me, accepts Him who sent Me”. Indeed he who accepts a follower of Christ, accepts Christ Himself’ and he who accepts God’s image, accepts God Himself. But because we are unable to see God’s image, the Word came to dwell among us by means of incarnation, so as to bring godliness closer to us, even though He is way higher than us.

‘Foxes have holes’; Satan is as deceitful as the fox. He sets traps and lives in cunningness. He searches for a prey inside the house of man himself.

The Lord also compares the heretics to foxes, and for this reason He keeps them away from His harvest. (Song of Sol. 2:15) “Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines”, for they are able to harm the tender vines, not the big ones. The birds of the air often refer to the evil spirits that build its nests in the wicked hearts. Thus the Son of God cannot find among those hearts, a place to rest His head.

Cunningness leaves no place for simplicity, and not any site for divinity in these hearts. But when the Lord sees a pure heart, then He rests in it His great deeds, that is, the overwhelming sublime gift that is [powred\(page # 325, line #7\)](#) in the righteous hearts.

Fourthly: St. Augustine speaks about the second person who did not ask to be a disciple with his lips as the first one did. He rather spoke in the purity of his heart, and was therefore ready for discipleship. But because of a family commitment towards his father, he asked for some postponement, for St. Augustine

say “The faith in this man’s heart declared itself before the Lord. But his feelings and his family duty made him to postpone it. But Christ the Lord, because He was preparing mankind for the gospel, He wanted no excuse due to any temporary physical emotion. Indeed, the divine law has commanded these commitments, and the Lord Himself rebuked the Jesus because they broke this divine commandment (Matt. 15:5). St. Paul the apostle wrote in his epistle (Eph. 6:2) “Honor thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise”. So, this young man wished to obey God and bury his father. Indeed, it is necessary to honor the father, but God has to be obeyed first. It is necessary to love those who gave us birth, but they are not to be preferred to He who has created us. It is as if the Lord is letting him, “I have called you to My gospel; I need you to perform another job, greater than the one you wish to perform. Let the dead bury their dead ones.

The drawback for the first one was his human enthusiasm when he said ‘ I will follow you wherever you go’, whereas his heart was elsewhere with the world. The second one’s drawback was his words ‘let me go first bury my father, thereby making the burial of his father come in the first place, whereas it is God who has to come first. St. Augustine moreover say, “In the book of the Song of Solomon we have a lesson set for us, for the church says ‘He prepared love for me, (the seventieth translation). This means let love be in the appropriate plan, offered to everyone as befitting each one. So, don not place the love that should come in the first place, at the very end. Love your parents, but put God in the foremost preference. Notice the mother of the Macabeans, for she says, (2 Macc. 7:22). In this way she commanded them, and they followed her commandment”.

St. Ambrosius says, “But how could this man be forbidden of burying his father, even though this is one of the virtuous deeds

to be done? The Lord teaches us that He comes first, then man comes next. This work is good, but inappropriate, lest the student divides his concern about his love of preaching, and so his growth is delayed. It is appropriate for us to go first for the preaching mission, so we are not obstructed. This is why when the Lord sent His disciples, He commanded them not to greet anyone on the way, not because love brothers him, but rather due to the concern about the growth in the service, which pleases God all they more.

St. Ambrosios continues his words saying, “But how can the dead bury their dead? Here He is referring to the dual death of the physical and the death of sin. There is also a third death by which we die of iniquity and live to God, just as Christ died from sin (Rom. 6:10) “The death He died, He died to sin, one for all; but the life He lives, He lives to God”. There is death that divides the body from the spirit; this death is not to be feared or scared of, for this is the beginning of the release, and it is not a punishment. The strong ones are not scared of it, and the wise ones desire it, and the unfortunate ones aspire it, for it is written (Rev. 9:6) “And in those days people will seek death but will not find it”. There is furthermore, another kind of death that puts an end to the world pleasures where the body does not die, but it is seen that dies, we experience this death when we are buried with Christ and die with Him in the baptism (Rom. 6:4), Col. 2:22). We die of the issues of this world, and forger our former life. This death was desired by Balaam so he would live to God, when he prophesied (Numb. 23:11) “Let me die the death of the upright, and let my end be like his”. The third death is carried by Christ by means of the Cross-for our life, for we know that He is the eternal life (John 17:3). The righteous ones see it now as if it were a puzzle, but they finally see Him face to face because (Lament. 4:20) “The Lord’s anointed, the breath of one life, was taken in their pits the one of whom

we said ‘Under His shadow we shall live among the nations’”. David’s hope was living under the shadow of His wings (Ps. 56:2). The church desired eagerly His shadow so as to set under it (Song 2:3). If your shadow Lord Jesus has as much benefit as this, then hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory”. This is an amazing life that knows of no death! The Lord does not forbid us from crying and burying our dead one, but He places the religious righteousness in the first place, then the family ties follow it. Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead ones, but as for the elect let them follow Him”.

Fifthly: As for the third person, he was not so serious in following the Lord. He was of a divided heart; he wished to follow Christ, and at the same time he tends towards the world. Such a one would make a start and not carry on. This is why he was told “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God”.

God wants all of the heart, and it would be His without looking behind, so he would not become a pillar of salt as Lot’s wife died. She was saved by getting out of Sodom with Lot and her girls; but she did not continue all the way, for she regressed with her heart and thus she perished. Due to this, the commandments were strict in that we should not only begin, but to patiently go on till the end so we be saved. Among the words for our Lord Jesus (Matt. 24:17-18) “The one on the house top must not go down to take what is in the house; the one in the field must not turn back to get a coat”. Likewise, he who is exalted in the Lord to the rooftop would see the heavenly mysteries, and he would not go down to the bottom where what is temporary dwells there. He who starts the field of preaching does not return from the service.

St. Jerome wrote to Paula asking her not to overact in sorrow due to Blaesilla’s death. He says, “Indeed, now that we

believe in Christ, and carry Him inside us, because of the ointment oil that we have received (1 John 2:27) it is therefore appropriate for us not to depart from His **tabernacle**(Page # 328), that is our Christian work. We should not get disturbed as the unbelieving Gentiles. We rather have to remain constantly inside, as obedient servants to the Lord's will". It is as if He is asking her, since she has devoted her life to God's service and the gospel work of worship, that she does not regress due to her sorrow, and leave her work because of someone's death. She rather has to continue in her way of struggle till the end.

St. John Casian says, "it is evil indeed that whereas you have to embody the foremost principles and initiatives so as to launch forward towards perfection, you begin to fall into what is much worse matters. The lesson is not about those who begin these matters, but it rather concerns him who is patient till the end and thus gets saved (Matt. 24:13) "He also urges us to go on in our spiritual struggle unceasingly, and without any regression. He says, "There is an accusation addressed in a hidden way in the book of Deuteronomy to those who say they have rejected this world whereas they are defeated in their faithlessness for fear of losing their property on earth. It has been said (Deut. 20:8) "Is anyone afraid or disheartened? He should go back to his house, or he might cause the heart of his comrades to melt like his own". What testimony is more clear than this one? Is it not evident that the Holy Book affects us in not advancing in this covenant at its first stages, or carry its name, lest they become a **bad model**(Page #329) to follow, that attracts others to get deviated and not to fulfill the holy gospel.

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Chapter 10
The Second Mission

If the first mission that concerns the twelve disciples represents the Jewish service, then the second mission that concerns the seventy apostles represents the Gentile service. Our Lord Jesus Christ sends to the Jews just as to the Gentiles and asks for their friendship without any discrimination. For this reason, we can see the Lord Jesus rejoicing in the Spirit for the sake of the meek being blessed with the grace of knowledge, whatever the race may be for those simple folks. He also presents to us the parable of the Good Samaritan, so as to declare the concept of brotherhood to the entire humanity. We are also offered the story of Martha and Mary so as to reveal to us His acceptance of all kinds of service and worship.

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1- Appointing the seventy apostles, and their preaching:

In the first mission, the commandment of the Lord Jesus to the twelve was (Matt. 10:5) “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”. But to the seventy the

commandment was not preaching to a certain people, or a certain nation; for He said (Luke 10:8) “Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there and say to them ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’”. The words ‘eat what is set before you’ means not to reject the food set to you but the Gentiles, and not to fear being defiled according to Moses’ law. They were to eat what was offered then by those Gentiles so they may be able to, due to their broad mindedness, to tell them the preaching word of the kingdom of heaven without any hindrance. This was not the time for lawful or unlawful food to eat, but rather, to withdraw the souls from everlasting perdition.

The second mission probably meant the preaching to the Gentiles. It is known that the inhabitants of the wilderness to which Jesus went, after the Galilee, these were of the Gentiles. The evangelist St. Luke himself could have been one of these seventy apostles.

At any rate, when St. Matthew the evangelist, one of the twelve wrote to the Jews, he did not mention this mission whereas St. Luke the evangelist when writing to the Gentiles, he referred to it.

If the twelve represent the twelve sources, then the seventy represent the seventy palm trees in the new Elim (Ex. 15:27). If the twelve stand as foil to the twelve tribes, then the seventy stand as foil to the seventy elders chosen by Moses (Numbers 11:16-25) or the seventy members in the Synhedrim **assembly**.

He might have chosen the seventy apostles before the ‘Coverage Feast’ in which the Jews offered seventy sacrifices. It is as if He wished to offer the world a new feast, in which the apostles are offered as a sanctified and living sacrifice pleasing

to God (Rom. 12:1) on the altar of love through the preaching to the entire world.

We notice the following in this mission:

Firstly: (Luke 10:1) “After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of Him in pairs to every town and place where He Himself intended to go”.

Some of the fathers such as St. Ambrosios think the apostles’ number was seventy-two, and that the evangelist mentioned the round figure. He sent them two by two as He did before when sending the twelve (Mar 6:7) for “two are better than one”, because they will receive good wages for their toil. For, if one of them falls, the other colleague raises him. But woe to him who is by himself, for if he falls there is no other one to raise him (Ecc. 4:9-10). As St. Amrosios also said, tat member two refers to the love to god and to people. It is as if His mission was not verbal preaching only, but the preaching of love and partnership with God and man.

He sent them before His face, so they pave the way for Him, and so they work before He does. Hence, they would be under His care while they would be taking care of others.

Secondly: He assured them that the preaching was essential work of His. It was He who has appointed them, and it is He who supports them by sending laborers to work with Him for the account of His harvest. For He says, (Luke 10:2) “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest”. As St. Augustine says, “It is the Lord Himself who sows, for He dwells in the apostles. It is He who also harvests, and without Him they are counted as nothing. For the Lord says (John 15:5) “Without Me you can do nothing”.

Thirdly: He commandment to them was as follows: (Luke 10:3) “See, I’m sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves”. These words reveal Him as the Sender ‘I am sending

you'. This is to show He is the One working in them, and is responsible for them. His mission for them is not as easy one, a path full of flowers, but it is rather a small mission of lambs thrown amongst wolves. As St. Augustine says, these wolves devour up the lambs and so the wolves are transformed into lambs. It is a mission not to devour His apostles, but to convert the wolves into lambs by means of the meekness of His lambs, that is His apostles. As St. John Chrysostom says, "He is above all the one who knows the nature of things: that ferocity is not put out by other ferocity, but by gentleness".

St. Ambrosius comments on this commandment saying "The Good Shepherd is not concerned about His flock from the wolves, therefore He did not send His disciples to be the prey, but to preach the grace. The care of the Good Shepherd does not allow the wolves to harm His flock. But He sends the lambs amongst the wolves so these words are fulfilled (Is. 65:25) "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together".

The Word of God has become a lamb for our sake. He was spoken of by John the Baptist (John 1:29) "Here is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world". He was described, moreover, by St. John the godly (Rev. 7:17) "for the lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd and He will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes". It is no surprise He makes **out** of His church a small flock that the Father is glad to give the kingdom (Luke 12:32). If the Lamb of God has appointed us to be lambs to embody His qualities in us, then He is the Sender of lambs, and the Father is happy to grant them His eternal kingdom.

Fourthly: (Luke 10:4) "Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals". Prior to this, He has given this commandment to the twelve disciples, and we mentioned some comments said by the Fathers (Luke 9:3, Matt. 10:9, Mark 6:8). We made it clear

they are not deprived of anything, for He has offered Himself as the source of satisfaction to them before asking them to resource these temporal issues. We add some more of these comments: St. Ambrosios says, “To avoid the wolves, the Lord commands us ‘Do not carry any purse, nor bag, nor sandals’”. By ‘purse’ He means not to carry any silver or money (Matt. 10:9). If the Lord forbids you to carry gold, then what does it mean for you to steal Him and rip Him? If He has commanded you to give your money, then how can you store up what is not yours? You are the one who is teaching not to steal, do you steal? You who say not to commit adultery, do you commit it? You who scorn idols, do you rob the altar? You who is proud the law, do y trespass against the law by scorning God? Because the name of God is blasphemed against because of you (Rom. 2:21-23). St. Peter was the first to carry out the Lord’s commandment, making clear that the Lord’s commandment was not given in vain. For when the poor man asking for alms, he said (Acts 3:6) “Silver or gold have none”. He is proud to say he has no silver or gold; and are you ashamed of not possessing what you desire? It is as if he is telling the poor one, ‘You can see me, a disciple of the Lord, and are you asking of me gold?’ He has granted me other things of far greater value than gold, and this I give unto you: ‘In the name of Jesus of Nazareth rise up and walk’.

The saint goes on to say, “No pusses and no bag”. Usually those two are made of dead animal skin, and the Lord does not want for us anything that dead. This is why He tells Moses “Take off your sandals for the place where you are is holy” (Ex. 3:5). He commanded him to take off the sandals of death and earthly matters at the moment He sent him to save the people. The servant who is responsible for this job should not fear anything whether it is death or any other earthly matters. He is not to regress in his mission that has been given

him due to his fear of death. Previously, Moses ran away from his mission due to his fear of death, and he escaped to the Median land. The Lord knew of his intention and realized his weakness, therefore He saw first to release his spirit and his soul from the dead links”.

St. Augustine says, “What does it mean not to carry a purse?” It means not to think yourself wise enough, but to accept and receive the Holy Spirit; thus there will be a spring of water in you, and not a purse by the means of which you spend money on others, without it running out. The same thing applies to the bag. But what are the sandals? We use shoes, made of the skin of dead animals, so as to cover our feet. In this was he tells us to reject the dead deeds. This was what the Lord (Ex. 3:5) “Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground”. What is the holy ground other than God’s church; reject our dead deeds”. The scholar **Oreganus(Page # 334, last line)** thinks the taking off shoes, refers to the dead leather of which shoes and drums are made. We, thus, should not ask for the dead issues, and not be concerned about the outer appearance as the drums that are so noisy, and do no work.

St. Clemendouds the Alexandrian thinks the shoes here refer to the confusion due to the horses and slaves carrying the loads of weight in their constant joinery. In his opinion these are like shoes carrying his body and his belongings.

Fifthly: (Luke 10:4) “And greet no one on the road; by this He means the preacher is not to be disturbed by too many favors that have no spiritual goal.

St. Augustine says “This is not to be understood in the physical sense; and thus He does not mean purse, or sandals or bag. Above all of this, if we practice in simplicity and with no investigation that we say greeting to others on the way, then we fall into pride. We can simply understand this as to fulfill what

we were commanded with in haste. It is as if He is telling us ‘Leave everything else till you fulfill what you have been commanded to do’.

St. Augustine thinks the word ‘Salutation’ as derived from the word ‘Salvation’. It is as if it is appropriate for us not to offer the salvation on the road, that is , in a haphazard way, but to offer it by means of loving deeds.

St. Ambrosios comments on this commandment saying the Lord does not forbid us from greeting peacefully, but not to offer it on the road. This means it should not delay us in doing the job, as Elisha the prophet ordered his servant (2 Kings 4:29) so as to hurry and get the job done. “What is meant concerning this matter is not to forbid the greeting but rather to avoid the obstacles? Greeting is a pleasant habit; but to fulfill the divine deeds is even more pleasant. This requires the haste, and its delay most probably begets discontentment.

Sixthly: (Luke 10:5-7) “Do not move about from house to house”. The Lord wished them to get rid of the appearances of the scribes and the Pharisees at that time. They used to spend most of their time in honorable feast. On the other hand He wanted them to feel themselves as members of that household where they budged. (Revise interpret. Of St. Luke 9:4)

Seventhly: The rest of these words were previously discussed, and you can refer to it. Concerning their getting rid of the dust clinging to their feet regarding those who rejected them, this refers the rejection of all what clung to them as the dust that deserves only to be got rid of under their feet (Revise the interpret. Of St. Mark 6:11). Also, regarding Sodom, it will not be punished in the same bitter way, under which Corzin falls, and Bethesda. Because the strangers are not punished as the close ones. For those who know little, their judgment will be less.

St. Augustine comments on the Lord's words here, "Whoever listens to you listens to Me, and whoever rejects you rejects Me, and whoever rejects Me rejects the one who sent Me". He says, "the Lord came in the personalities of the disciples, and He speaks to us through them. He is present in them. By means of this church, He will come: and by her means He speaks to the nations.

We refer here to the words He referred (Matt. 10:40) "He who receives you receive Me". St. Paul the apostle also say (2Cor 13:3): "since you desire proof that Christ is speaking in me".

Eighthly: (Luke 10: 17-20) "The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord' in your name even the demons submit to us, He said to them 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, so not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven'.

The apostles rejoiced when they saw Satan fall before man through the preaching of he kingdom. The Lord Jesus confirmed the downfall of Satan, that has fallen by mean of the Cross-from heaven as a flash of lightning. The Lord moreover confirmed the authority man has through the Cross. But what rejoices us is not the downfall of Satan, neither is it the power to perform miracles, but rather our being blessed with the heavenly kingdom through the righteous life we obtain by God's grace. As St. Anthony says, "We rejoice for our names have been written in the kingdom of heaven, which refers to the righteous like in the Lord. As for casting out devils, this is a gift from the Lord, which the devious person can obtain but he will perish as a result of it.

- ❖ Now my beloved, Satan has been slaughtered, this despot who is against the entire would. Death will reign no more,

and instead like will reign over death; for the Lord says “I am the life” (John 14:6). Everything is now filled with joy and gladness, as it is written, “The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice”. Now that death is obsolete, and Satan’s kingdom is destroyed, everyone is filled with joy and gladness.

St. Athanasios the

Apostolic

- ❖ Satan has reigned over man in authority during man’s regression. This authority is lost once man returns a gain to God.
- ❖ During His suffering, the Lord ascended to the heaven, and gave man gifts (Ps. 68:18, Eph. 4:8). He granted those who believe in Him power to tread on serpents and scorpions and every power of the enemy, that is, authority over the ruler of regression.

St.

Irianus

- ❖ What debasement is there more than Satan’s getting so puffed up? And what loftiness is there more than when man is humbled? The father has come to crawl on the earth under our feet, whereas the latter has soared up with the angels in the highest.

St. John Chrysostom

- ❖ We have to rejoice for being members in the kingdom of heaven, or for being members in the body, and not because we have come to obtain authority over the devils. It is better if you are a finger in the body than to be an eye out the body!

St. Augustine

- ❖ Christ’s coming has poured on the greatest gift of parental grace.

- ❖ When it was necessary to destroy the dragon's heads, the Lord came down in the water and tied the powerful one (Matt. 12:29), so He might provide us with the authority by which we tread on serpents and scorpions (Luke 10:19).

It is not a small beast, his sight is enough to scare anyone. No fishing boat can sustain one whip of his tail, and before him there is terror, and he crushes all who draw close to him (Job 41:13).

Like has shone on us so as to choke death, so we who are saved would be able to say (1 Cor. 5:15) (Page # 338) "Where, O death, is your sting? Where O death, is your victory? "For by baptism the sting of death has been crushed.

St. Cyril El

Orshimy

- ❖ The Lord warned them of their joy for their having authority over Satan, and their making wonders. He told them rather to rejoice for obtaining the kingdom of heaven.

It is the Lord himself who has granted them their authority for making wonders and miracles and lest they be puffed up, He warned them against this overrejoicing.

We should not ask that the devils yield to us, but rather that we have the boring features that the apostle described.

- ❖ This is not fulfilled by their own power, but by the name they use. This is why Lord warned them not to ascribe to themselves any glory concerning this matter, for this is fulfilled only by God's authority and power. As for the inward purity that concerns their life and heart, it is due to this that their names are written in heaven.

Father

Nastosious

2- The Lord Jesus rejoicing in the Spirit:

In the words similar to the ones we are dealing with (Matt. 11:25-30), we saw the Lord Jesus eager to offer the real knowledge to every soul. It is only the simple-hearted ones, like children, who enjoy this heavenly knowledge through our Lord Jesus Christ the only begotten Son, who is simple-hearted as well. He wishes no one to be deprived of this knowledge. But those who thought themselves they were knowledgeable enough (the **aeppnosties**) and wise enough these cannot encounter Him so as to know the divine mysteries.

❖ Finally, the Son of God reveals the heavenly mystery, declaring His grace to children and not to the wise ones of this age (Matt. 11:25). The apostle St. Paul mentions this in details (1Cor. 1:21) “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decides, through the foolishness of our proclamation to save those who believe”.

He who knows how to be puffed up, say clamoring words of wisdom, then he is wise according to this age. But as for the child, he says, (Ps. **13**:1) “O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me”. This manifests a small one, not in age or in thoughts, but rather in his modesty, by being away from any praise. This is why he adds, “But I have calmed and quietened my soul, like a weaned child with its mother”. Contemplate on the greatness of such a one in the apostle’s words (1Cor. 3:18) “If you think you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God”.

St.

Ambrosios

❖ (Luke 10:22) “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the

Father, or who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him”.

The words ‘all things’ shows us His greatness, and how He is not any different than His Father. The words ‘handed over’ do not mean ‘obtained as a gift or grace’ but it is taken naturally through the unity in the essence.

St.

Ambrosios

- ❖ He speaks here of a certain kind of knowledge, through the knowledge of the unity in essence, that is owned by no one else but Him.

St. John

Chrysostom

- ❖ He did not say ‘proclaim’ regarding the future only, but the Son has begun to proclaim the Father since He was born of the Virgin Mary. He was also declared in various ways across the ages. The Son is present, and is declaring the Father to everyone, to whoever wants Him and whenever he wants Him, and just as the Father wants to.

St.

Irianus

- ❖ St. Paul did not learn the faith by the knowledge of only, but he was also blessed with the wealth of the Spirit; so the proclamation is shone in all of himself, and Christ speaks in him.

St. John

Chrysostom

- ❖ The new minds became wise with a new wisdom. These minds came to be through the new covenant in which the old ignorance was wiped out.

St. Clemendos El

Sekanderi

We therefore realise the new wisdom that Christ rejoiced for, is granted us in Christ Jesus by getting rid of the old man and being blessed with the new man, who is in the image of our creator, the image of Christ. Through this new man, that is, our unity with God in Christ Jesus, we become God's children or His Sons who would know His divine mysteries. For this reason St. Cleamendos El Sakenderi comments on the children being blessed with wisdom, saying, "In truth, are we children of God, did we leave behind the old man? And have we taken off the wicked robe, and did we put our Christ's immortality? And so become a new and sanctified people by means of the new birth? Are we keeping ourselves undefiled? And as God's children, are we washed of all adultery?"

Then, let us be as true children by taken off the robe of wickedness in conduct, as befitting God's children; and thus Christ would reveal to us His mysteries, and be rejoiced for the sake of the wisdom that He has granted us.

3-The Parable of the Good Samaritan:

God is so loving that He is eager to bring every soul to Him. We have seen the Lord Jesus rejoicing in the Spirit for the sake of the simple-hearted being blessed in the grace of spiritual knowledge. Lest the Jesus think that this grace is solely to their race alone, the Lord said to us this parable of the God Samaritan. He wished to declare the concept of general brotherhood for the kind-hearted person. How much more so would it be with God who loves all of mankind, of His own creation, indiscriminately among race or tongue?

The evangelist St. Luke says, (Luke 10:25-29) "Jesus then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus: 'Teacher' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'what is written in the law? What do you read there?' He answered, 'you shall love

the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself? And He said to him ‘you have given right answer; do this and you will live’. But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, ‘and who is my neighbour’?

There is no doubt the parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the important landmarks in St. Luke’s gospel, since it contains so many spiritual concepts, of deep **dwinity**(Page #314, line #22). But our teacher St. Luke did not wish to mention them unless through the circumstances that were fit enough to speak of it. The circumstances increase the splendor of the parable and make it even more beautiful still. For we are unable to aware of the value of light unless we feel the darkness; also, no one realises the value of health unless he who has tasted the sickness.

We may summarize the circumstances of this parable in the following g points:

Firstly: The evangelist says, “a lawyer stood up to test Jesus”, the lawyer may have stood up in **every** of the Lord, for he saw Him as one having authority in His deeds and words. This amazed the people, and thus they gathered around Him, though He was not one of the traditional school graduates. He infiltrated the lines of teachers without any permission, and He surpassed them al. He even endangered them in His spiritual teachings and unsurpassing concepts. It is amazing that this lawyer, even though he was a teacher of law or the old Jewish law in social respectfulness yet he ‘stood up’ asking the Lord. But in his heart he was only testing Him; and this expression has been mentioned by Satan (Luke 4:22). The lawyer seemed to be righteous and yet had Satan’s heart inside! But the Lord gets out food from the eater, and from the barren, sweetness.

Secondly: The lawyer asked (Luke 10:25) “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” He reveals what in his depths has stricken

the Jewish nation, even though they possessed the holy books that included the old law and the prophecies. But the teachers themselves felt incapable of practically reaching the inner restfulness, or of enjoying life. This is why he did not say, ‘What do I learn?’ or ‘what do I teach others?’ he just said ‘What do I learn?’ The Jews are careful to observe a great deal of rituals in worshiping, including sacrificial offerings and prayers. But due to their thirst the question remained, ‘What must I do?’ In this way, no one will obtain the joy of satisfaction unless he receives the Lord Jesus Himself since He is ‘the life eternal’, He is the secret behind the satisfaction.

The lawyer in questioning the Lord wished he might be able to make the Lord fall in a trap, for he thought He would present them with new commandments thereby disregarding Moses’ law and the **teer** commandments, and thus He would be accused of carelessly scorning the covenant, or breaking the old law.

Thirdly: The Lord Jesus did not give the lawyer the opportunity to accuse him of breaking the law, for He asked the lawyer what was mentioned in the law. He stressed the importance of the commandments, and gave them a new and deeper understanding.

The Lord Jesus knew the lawyer had come to test Him; and despite this, He did not face him bluntly, but in gentleness He praised him saying, “you have given the right answer”. He does not face evil with evil, but He overcomes it with goodness, using gentleness so as to win him.

Fourthly: The church fathers offered us a great number of interpretations for this parable of the Good Samaritan. From the behavioral point of view, the Lord wished to stress the importance of having a kind heart, to accept all mankind of every race, just as if they were relatives of ours. St. Jerome says, “We are relatives, all of humanity are related to one

another, for we have only one Father”. The scholar Oreganus thinks that relations do not stop with the blood links, nor in the work field; rather, by carrying out the commandment of love and mercy. He says, “Jesus teaches that this man who was coming from Jerusalem was no relative except to him who wishes to keep the commandments, and the one who is ready to offer help. He briefly said, (Luke 10:36) “Which of these three do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” Neither the Priest, nor Levite was a neighbor to him. But according to the lawyer’s answer himself, “The one who showed him mercy” he is the neighbor to him”. Jesus therefore said to him “Go and do likewise”. St. Sveris the Antiochian says, “you might often think, out of ignorance, that the one who shares you your religion or nationality is your neighbor or relative. But as for myself, I tell you it is he who has the same human nature, is your relative. As you have seen, the one who was looking up in pride of his priestly clothes, and he who was proud of being called of Levite.... Both did not think of him who was our of their folks, who was naked and covered by his wounds that seemed incurable, thrown on the ground, on the verge of death at any moment; he was a human person, after all! But they scorned him as stone or a piece of rejected wood. As for the Samaritan, who did not know the commandments of the law, and who was known among the Jews as being stupid and ignorant, for the wise one said ‘those sitting in the mountains of Samaria, the Philistines, and the ignorant people dwelling Shekim”. This Samaritan knew human nature and understood who it is who are a relative and neighbor.

In your opinion, you judges, he who was far way has come to be very close indeed to him who was in need of treatment. So, do not make known the relative or neighbour, according to the

Jewish incorrectness, as restricted narrowly within close relations only'

Every person overpowered by the Spirit of love, is a neighbor.

In St. Ambrosios discussion about 'repentance' he answers the followers of Novatios, who rejected accepting those who returned after they had denied the faith. He says, "The good Samaritan did not walk away, leaving the man who was attacked by robbers in a fatal condition. He actually bandaged his wounds with oil and wine. He first poured oil to soothe his pain, and made the wounded man lean on the Samaritan's chest; that is he bore all his sins. Likewise Christ the Shepherd did not reject His lost sheep. You have made of yourself a stranger to him due to your pride. You have vainly puffed yourself up due to your physical mind, and your not clinging firmly (Page #344) to Christ the Head (Col 2:18-19). If you had held on to the Head, you would not have left him that Christ died for. If you had held on to the Head, you would have been concerned about the whole body. You would also have been concerned about the link between the members without any division, and would have grown in Christ (Col. 2:19) with the bond of love and the sinners' salvation. When you reject the acceptance of repentance, you are only saying, 'No wounded person will come into our hotel, and no one will be healed in our church. We do not pay enough attention to our patients, for we are all healthy, and are not in need of a physician, for He Himself has said 'The healthy are not in need of a physician but rather the seek ones'.

This is the behavioral explanation. But as for the spiritual interpretation and the symbolic one the fathers have elaborately spoken of. This is why I shall be as brief as possible:

The evangelist says (Luke 10:30) "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers

who stripped him, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead”

a) A man: St. Sveris says, “Our Savior did not say ‘Men were going down, but He said ‘A man was going down’. This is an issue that concerns all of humanity. In truth, due to Adam’s disobedience to the commandment, humanity fell from the paradise dwelling on high, that was so beautifully peaceful, which was really called ‘Jerusalem’. This means ‘God’s peace’. He was going to Jericho, a city in a lowland choked by the heat”. The story of the man who fell among robbers from paradise during Adam, the first man’s time. He lost God’s peace and seeing Him, for it is said that ‘Jerusalem’ also means ‘the sight of peace’.

b) “Going down from Jerusalem to Jericho”; the scholar Oreganus says, “According tot eh interpretation of one of the prior fathers ‘Man, going down, represents Adam. Jerusalem represents paradise and Jericho is the world. The robbers are the hostile powers, and the priest is the law; the Levite is the prophets and the Samaritan is Christ; the wounds are the disobedience; and the animal is the body of Christ. The inn that is open is for all who wish to go in, which is the church. The two denarius represent the Father and the Son. The owner of the inn is the church head who provides for it; and the Samaritan’s promise of return is the expectation of Christ’s second coming.

These symbols were suggested by the scholar Oreganus in the second century. He declared he derived them from one of the old scholar, who could be his spiritual teacher St. Clemendos El Sekendery

or his predecessor St. Bentinos. This reveals the awareness of the first church to the parable in general and the concept of Jerusalem from where we started, going towards Jericho.

St. Ambrosios accepted this interpretation, and spoke elaborately. Of Jericho, to which humanity came sliding from Jerusalem, that is from paradise and going towards the 'world'. For Jericho is the world; it was a city surrounded by fences and barricades that no one could escape from except those that Rahab the prostitute has embraced. It was she who accepted the live spies in faith and tried to hide them on her house roof among the flax stalks.

C) "He fell among robbers": these robbers represented Satan with his wicked army of angels, or with his allures, for he keeps waiting for every soul that goes out of Jerusalem, even if it were in thoughts for a few moments. He wants to seize those souls for his account, and he attacks them with his wicked angels, and sets all kinds of traps that are fit to destroy them adequately.

- ❖ The man who comes down from Jerusalem to Jericho is bound to fall into the hands of robbers, for it is of his own free will that he came down. The Savior says (John 10:8) "All who came before Me are thieves and bandits".

What are these injuries that have stricken man? These are the disasters of sin.

The Scholar

Oreganus

- ❖ The circumstances of man's nature is not due to the change of the site, but it is due to the change of the conduct. When he slides into the world iniquity, he meets robbers, and as soon

As he deviates from the heavenly commandments, he is exposed to meeting those robbers.

Thieves are the angels of darkness and of night who sometimes change their likeness to angels of light (2 Cor. 11:14). But they cannot stay and firmly maintain being in the likeness of angels of light. They begin to rip us of the clothes of the spiritual grace that we have obtained and in this way they afflict us with wounds. This is because if we had kept the garment we have received undefiled, then we would never have felt the blows of thieves.

Beware let you get stripped off from the garment of faith, for this was the violent knock out that could have caused the entire human race to perish, had the Samaritan not gone down to heal the bad wounds.

St.

Ambrosios

❖ He is teaching us that the life of worldly pleasures separates us from God. This life pulls us downward, and chokes us with the heat of shameful lust. It also causes worry, and drives man's low as death, which he eventually faces.

If humanity falls down in this way, and flips over and is pulled down, then bit by bit it is led to the abyss below. There, humanity is attacked by hosts of devils that strip it of the garment of perfection the same way a gang of robbers would do. They left humanity no power or any trace of purity, or righteousness or wisdom or anything that depicts the divine **gortly(Page #347)** image. In this way those devils have inflicted blows on the repeated various sins, and thus left humanity half dead.

This shows clearly what this proverb actually meant when we think of it in depth. It is customary with thieves that they first inflict injuries and wounds so they strip off the victim's garments, and they are not interested in inflicting more injuries

after that. But as for the devils, who as similar to thieves, they cannot do so unless they first take off his garments of righteousness. After this they injure him mercilessly till death, because they do not want our clothes from us. What they really want is our loss and our death. This is why the Lord said in wisdom “they stripped off his garments and wounded him”.

St. Sveris the

Antiochian

*d)*The Priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan: The priest represents the covenant, and the Levite represents the prophecies; whereas the old law of Moses or the covenant or the prophecies could not possibly bandage our hidden wounds and bring us back to the nature in which God has created us. But it is only the God Samaritan who represents the Lord Jesus alone, who came to us and carried us in His body that is able to bless our nature in Him. He offers us every real healing that louches the renewal of our life.

❖ The Priest, I think, is the law, and the Levite as well represents the prophets. Both look upon the wounded person and leave him there. The divine care left this man half-dead so he would be under the care of Him who is stronger than the law and the prophets: he is the ‘Samaritan’, whose name means ‘the guard’. The guard of Israel does not sleep at all (Ps. 12:4). To help this half dead person, the Samaritan came down the road. But he did not come down from Jerusalem to Jericho as the priest and the Levite did: he came down to this half dead man, so as to save him and take care of him. The Jews told him (John 8:48) “You are a Samaritan and you have a devil in you”. When the Lord assured them He has no devil in Him, He did not deny He was the Samaritan for He is the guard.

Oreganus

- ❖ The Samaritan was not the first to come. What the priest and the Levite got disgusted with the Samaritan in his turn did not get disgusted at. Do not scorn him due to his race. For if you know the meaning of His name, you will wonder at Him. His name means ‘guard’, about whom was said (Ps. 140:6) “The Lord keeps the children”. (John 3:13) “No one has ascended into heaven except the one who has seen the half-dead man, and none of his mates could save him. So He draw near to him, by accepting willingly to suffer with us, and His drawing closer to us, and poured His mercy on us, and thus He become our neighbor.

St.

Ambrosios

- ❖ When humanity was known on the ground, and it was only for a few more moments that it was to fall unconscious and die, the lawyer of Moses, and by the mans of Moses, saw her. This is actually what is referred to afterwards by the priest and also by the Levite, because the lawyer is the Levite priest physician. He saw humanity but he lacked the eagerness and the strength, and so he could not heal her full, and he did not raise humanity that was thrown on the ground. St. Paul the apostle says (Heb. 9:9) “This is a symbol of the present time, during which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper. (Heb. 9:12) “He entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption”. This is our Lord did not say, that the Priest and the Levite after they had seen the man half dead, thrown on the ground, they passed him. But He said (Luke 10:31-32) “Now by chance a Priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed

by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side”.

Both of them did not pass the man and left him on the side without their seeing him. But they both stood before him, saw him, and thought about his treatment and touched him. But when they saw they were unable to heal him, and that he was overcome by his wounds, that is, their pleasures, it is them that they retreated quickly. This is what is understood by the phrase “passed by on the other side”.

Finally He says (Luke 10:33-34) “But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him”.

At this point Jesus calls Himself in truth, a Samaritan, when He was speaking to a lawyer who held great esteem for himself and the law. Christ was concerned in showing He is not the Priest or the Levite, and in general, not like those who believed they were ruling according to Moses’ commandments, and actually they had no power. But it was He Himself who has come to fulfill the will of the law, showing facts ‘love your neighbor as yourself’ He is the One to whom the Jews insultingly (John 8:48) “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” Jesus defended Himself concerning the accusation that He had a devil, but He did not deny the words that He is a Samaritan

St.

Jerome

❖ ‘Samaritan’ means ‘guard’ He knows He is our guard, for (Ps. 121:4) “He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep”. Also (Ps. 127:1) “Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain”. Our guard is our Creator.

St. Augustine

- ❖ I wish no one be afraid of perdition, however bad his downfall may be. The Good Samaritan, who is Guard for the souls, I assure you, will not pass by but will tenderly take care of him and heal him.

St.

Ambrosios

e) (Luke 10:34) “He went to him, and bandage his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them”.

When a man faces his downfall under the weight of sin, and his soul is afflicted with deep wounds, this person is not to be blamed harshly, even though he is responsible for these wounds. Yet, he needs someone to bandage his wounds, that is, to cover up his weakness before others, and not to expose him to others. He also needs the oil to relieve him of the severe pain, and is not in need of things that flare up the wounds. As for the wine, it could refer to the discipline. The oil and the wine are blended, that is, the gentleness and the discipline together, the tenderness and the strictness. The wine could also refer to joy; for if the soul has come to be broken by sin, and has lost its peace, and man's life has been transformed to tears, then our physician wishes to give us back joy of our salvation' all anew.

- ❖ The Good Samaritan did not leave the man half-dead, because he saw he still had some breath of life in him, and so he was eager to save him.

How about it with someone fallen into sin, almost half-dead in it? Faith is able to find some breath of life in him.

The man half-dead was relieved by the powering of oil and wine on him; therefore do not pour only wine, with no oil, lest he suffers more with the purifying. Let him lean on your chest, and introduce him to the owner of the inn, and pay the two denarius for his treatment, and be his neighbor.

St.

Ambrosios

❖ This physician has many medications by which He heals people He bandaged the wounds by severe commandments, and brings warmth when He forgives sins. He also pricks the heart as the wine does, when He declares His judgment.

The Samaritan made him get on his animal; contemplate on how He needs you ride in Him, for He has carried our sins, and suffered for our sake (Is. 53:4). The Shepherd also carried the lost sheep on His shoulders (Luke 15:5).

St.

Ambrosios

❖ He also poured the wine, that is, the word that teaches and bandages the wounds. He actually did give us to drink the wine of repentance, as the prophet says in the Psalms (Ps. 100:3) “You have made your people suffer hard things; you have given us wine to drink that made us reel”. In fact, we could never have borne this pain, because of the mischievous wounds and how bad they were are incurable, and we could never have tolerated this extreme **stinging** and so He mixed it with oil.

He also ate with the tax collectors and sinners; and He used to tell the Pharisees who accused Him and criticized Him wickedly, (Matt. 9:13) “Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” but when He heard this He said “Those who are well have not need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this mean ‘I desire mercy, no sacrifice’ for I have come to call not righteous but sinners to repentance”.

He has thus carried on His animal he who was taken care of.

St. Sveris the

Antiochian

- ❖ We can call Christ's body as His animal, on which He set him whom the robbers wounded.

St.

Augustine

- ❖ The soul that fell in robbers' hands is carried on Christ's shoulders.

St. Jerome

f) "He brought him to an inn, and took care of him".

- ❖ The inn is the church that welcome all people, and does not reject supporting anyone, since Christ calls everyone (Matt. 11:28) "Come to Me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest".

The Scholar

Oreganus

- ❖ He is the church that has come to welcome and shelter all people.

For we no longer hear according to the old law in its narrow margin and the symbolic worshiping (Deut. 23:3) "No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord" or (Neh. 13:1) "On that day they read from the book of Moses in the hearing of the people; and in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God". We rather hear (Matt. 28:19) "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". Also, we hear (Acts 10:35) "But in every nation anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him".

After He had brought him to the inn, he 'took care of him' (Luke 10:34). That is to say, after the church has been established based on the assembly of the Gentiles that used to love the worshiping of so many idols, Christ Himself has come

to live in the church and walk in her, as is written, and thus He grants every spiritual grace.

(2Cor. 6:16) “For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people’”.

St. Sveris the

Antiochian

Leaving the two denarii for the wounded man with the Innkeeper.

The Good Samaritan, after getting us into His church, since it is his inn where we could rest, it was appropriate for Him to leave us there, physically, and so He ascends up to the heavens to prepare us a place there. But He never leaves us in need, and so He left two denarii. What are those two denarii?

In our previous study of the Old and the New Testament we found that ‘number 2’ according to St. Augustine refers to love; since it was mentioned in two of His commandments: the love of God and the love of people, and because He makes the two, one.

It is as if the Lord Jesus has left us in His church the treasure of ‘the divine love’ with which we love God and the people.

Some fathers think the two denarii left by the Samaritan to the innkeeper; these are a symbol of the disciples and the apostles working in the church for the account of the Lord Jesus, or for the Holy Book in both of the Testaments.

❖ After taking the wounded man to the inn, He did not leave him on the spot; He rather stayed with him for a whole day, bandaging his wounds, not only by day but also by night. He dedicated for him His will and His abilities. On the next day, when he was ready to leave, he offered his money, that is, ‘from the depth of his heart’ two denarii, and gave them to the innkeeper, who is definitely the church angel who guards us. As for the two denarii, these stand for the knowledge of

the Father, and the Son, as far as I know. He offered the man the mystery of the Father in the Son, and the Son in the Father.

The Scholar

Oreganus

- ❖ He gave two denarii to the innkeeper (Luke 10:35) “The next day he took our two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper”. We understand from this that it symbolizes the apostles, the shepherds, and the ministers that followed; this is when He ascended to heaven after telling them to be concerned about this particular patient. He added saying, (Luke 10:35) “Take care of him, and when I come back, I will repay you, whatever more you spend”.

The Old and the New Testaments are called the two denarii. The first one is given by means of the law of Moses and the prophets. The second one is by means of the Gospels and the teachings of the apostles. Both of them belong to the one God. As the denarii they both have one image of this almighty king. They have engraved in our hearts the royal picture and have made firm the holy words there. The one **altering** words are actually one Spirit also.

St. Sveris the

Antiochain

- ❖ What are two denarii? They may be the two Testaments that are sealed by the eternal Father’s seal, and their price we are healed of our wounds, for we were bought for a price (1 Pet. 1:19)

The innkeeper is the one who said that Christ has sent him to preach (1 Cor. 1:17)

The owners of the inn are those ones about who was said, (Mark 16:15-16) “And he said to them ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one

who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned”.

St. Ambrosios

Finally, St. Irianus thinks the two denarii point to the Holy Spirit that has been granted to the church, so they are engraved on the soul that has previously been wounded by the thieves. The words; the Father and the Son are to be engraved since they are God’s currency and His denarii.

4- Martha, the Worker; and Mary the Sufferer

The Lord Jesus carries the injured ones on His shoulders every day just as the Good Samaritan did, so He takes them into His church, which is the heavenly inn. He offers them the Holy Spirit, that is, the two denarii, supports them and takes care of them till He comes His final coming. So what do those people entering the church do? This is what the story of Martha and Mary answers, and their encounter of the Lord Jesus in Bethany.

We said that Bethany means ‘the house of obedience’ or ‘the house of toil and suffering’. It is as if it is the church, where the members are obedient to God, and bearing all the suffering, as sharing the pain of the Savior. They all work as Martha, all struggling hard. They also sit with Him and hear His voice, contemplating on His mysteries, as did Mary. What we wish to confirm here is that Martha represented the workers in the church particularly the ministers; and Mary represented those members who meditate. The Christian embodies in his heart Martha’s thoughts blended with that of Mary’s. there is no real struggle away from the life of contemplation, and there is no true life of contemplation without any work! Indeed, for every member there is a talent. Some members have a strong potential for work, able to move constantly in the Lord. Some others love to be silent and peaceful so as to live a

life of worshiping and contemplation. But the former ones, in the midst of their struggle, they have to share in the daily life of meditation, they would not be deviated in their struggle. The latter group has to practice their love practically by struggling, if not by apparent service, and then let it be by prayer on behalf of the entire church and for the sake of the entire world.

I wish to speak more elaborately about the practical life and the contemplative life in a special book. I think it enough at this point to mention some excerpts of the fathers regarding this issue.

- ❖ Martha did well in serving the saints; but Mary her sister did better by sitting at the Lord's feet and listening to His words.

St.

Augustine

- ❖ Martha and Mary were two sisters, very close to one another not only **biologically** but also in righteousness. They were close to the Lord, serving Him when He was present in the flesh.

Mary welcomed Him as she did to strangers, as a maid welcoming her Master, and as a patient receiving her Savior, and as a creature towards her Creator. She offered Him food, and she was nurtured in the spirit. The Lord was pleased to take the form of a slave (Phil. 2:7) and this is why the servants gave His food, and in great condescension He allowed Himself to be fed by others. He has come to have a body that hungered and thirsted for real; but do you know that when He came to the wilderness there were angels ministering to Him (Matt. 4:11)?

Thus He was happy to be fed by others, and He showed kindness to those who fed Him. How wondrous it is, when He showed the same kindness to the widow who dealt with the saint Elijah, who has previously been helped by God by means of the raven's service! (1 Kings 17:6). Was the Lord unable to support Elijah when he was sent by the Lord to the widow?

Never; He was not unable to have the authority to sustain him when He sent him to the widow. But the Lord wanted to bless the righteous widow through her good service to His servant. In this way also, the Lord was welcomed as a guest; it is He who (John 1:11-12) “He came to what was His own, and His own people did not accept Him. But to all who receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave power to become children of God”. He adopted the servants so He would make of them His brethren. He also released those in bondage, to make of them parents in the inheritance. Despite this, I wish He would never tell any of you, “You are the accursed, depart from Me into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”. (Matt. 25:41) Blessed are those who have attained the blessing of welcoming Christ in their home. Do not grieve or complain that you were not born at this time to see the Lord in the flesh, because He does not deprive you of this blessing, for He says, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of My family, you did it to Me”.

❖ As Master was busy preparing the food for the Lord, her sister Mary close the Lord rather give her the food. In a way, she left her sister confused and busy in the work, whereas she sat at the Lord’s feet, listening to His words attentively. She heard the words ringing in her ears (Ps. 46:10) “Be still, and know that I am God”.

Martha was confused and disturbed, whereas Mary was enjoying the blessing. One was providing many things, whereas the other focused her eyes on the only one.

St.

Augustine

❖ It is good to do service to the poor; particularly those necessary service and the respectful deeds done to God’s saints. But what is better is what Mary has chosen to do. The

first deeds have a lot of trouble due to the nature of them being so essential.

As for the second deeds, these have their sweetness done in love.

If Martha had become satisfied in doing these deeds, she would not have asked for her sister's help. These chores are numerous and variable, since they are all of a manual and temporary nature. They are actually good chores, but yet they are transient. But what did the Lord tell Martha? 'Mary has chosen the good part' not that you are bad, but that she has chosen the better part. Why is she any better? Because this will not be taken away from her. In some time or other, the heavy weight of these necessary chores will be taken from you, but for the sweetness of the Truth, this is forever, and it even increases. In this life she is increased, and in the other life she is more fulfilled, and it is not taken away from her.

St. Augustine

- ❖ Martha was concerned about feeding the Lord, but as for Mary she was concerned that the Lord deeds her. By means of Martha the Lord's banquet was prepared. It was in this banquet that Mary rejoiced.

St. Augustine

- ❖ I say that in those two women the two lives have been represented: the current life, and the life to come; The life of struggle and the life of rest; the life of grief and the blessed life; the temporary life and the eternal one.

What does this life embody? I do not speak of a malicious life, a deceitful ugly one, an adamant and ungrateful life; but rather a life of struggle filled with suffering, fears, where ordeals deprive it of any peace. Both lives are unharmed, and are even praiseworthy; but one of which is full of weariness whereas the other is an easy one.

In Martha, we see a picture of the current issues of today, whereas in Mary they are the issues to come.

What Martha did, we are doing now; whereas what Mary did, we hope to do well as our first step, and so obtain the second step in perfection.

St.

Augustine

❖ Be like Mary, and prefer the food for the soul to the food for the body.

Leave others to run here and there providing for Christ's hospitable welcome. But as for yourself, when you leave the weighty things of the world, sit at the Lord's feet, and tell Him (Song of Sol. 3:4) "When I found Him whom my soul loves, I held Him and would not let Him go".

St. Jerome

❖ The Lord orders man to depart from his life which is so disturbed, and to cling to the only one; he is to get closer to Him who offers the eternal life.

St. Clemendos El

Sekenderi

❖ The greatest righteous deed in its essence, however great this may be, yet when meditating in the Lord, this is even far greater since He is the Only One.

As for His words 'this is not taken from her' this has revealed that the portion of the other one could be taken from her.

This is because the physical service cannot remain with man forever, but as for Mary's eagerness this has no end.

Father

Moses

❖ He former struggled in the practical service, whereas the other one was concerned about the spiritual **endeavour** in God's word.

Mary chose the good portion that will not be taken from her. I wish we too, struggle hard so we have what the enemy cannot take from us. Let us have the listening ear that is not distorted, because the seeds of the divine Word are subjected to theft if they fall on the way (Luke 8:5, 13).

Let us follow Mary's model, she who was keen on being filled with the wisdom. Thus is a greater and more perfect job appropriate for us than to be hindered by the daily worries and overlooking the heavenly Word.

The Lord does not blame Martha for her good deeds; but He prefers Mary to her because she chose the better share. With Jesus you find the treasures of riches, and He is so generous in His bountiful gifts. This is why she chose the basic wisdom. In this way the apostles did not leave God's Word and serve tables (Acts 6:2).

The basis of the operation is 'wisdom' St. Stephen was full of wisdom, and he was chosen for the service. The church body is one, even though the members are different; yet each one is in need of the (1 Cor. 12:21) "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you' nor again the head to the feet". The ear cannot deny it is of the body for its basic members are these, yet the others still have their importance. The wisdom is the head, and the chores are done by the hands, because the eyes of the wise are in his head (Eccl. 2:14). The real wise one is he who has Christ's thinking, and he looks up in his spiritual vision to the Highest. This is why the eyes of the wise one are in his head, and the foolish one has them in his hand.

St. Ambrosius

The Spiritual Worship

Because He in the heavenly spiritual friend we are unable to receive him in us or be blessed with his friendship in any other way than that of the true spiritual worship.

1-the Lord's Prayer 1-4

2-the fervent prayer 5-13

3-the unity of the spirit (Peter accused of Beelzebub) 14-26

4-friendship and the word of God 27-28

5-friendship and the miracle of Jonah the prophet 29-32

6-the healthy eye 33-36

7-the inner purification and the worship by the spirit 37-54

1-the Lord's Prayer

The evangelist told us of the Lord Jesus everything the house of Mary and the matter, and how each of them expressed her love for him in some way or other. Mary chose to serve him whereas Mary remained at his feet listening to his word (Luke 10:39). We are easy to sit with Mary at his feet, meet him and pray. This is why the following conversation was focused on "prayer". The evangelist says, (Luke 11:1) "he was praying in certain place and often he had finished, one of his disciples said to him "lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples"

There is no doubt the disciples learned a lot of prayers from the old testament or from the Jewish tradition. But the disciples question "lord teach us to pray" reveals what the disciples saw in the Lord Jesus when he was praying. He revealed a new picture they had not tasted before in their worship, and so they were eager to have the same one spirit and thought

For another time we say, if we wish the Lord to enter our house and that we serve him as we should or meditate on him, then there is no other way to be blessed with the church life and its perfect level of work and meditation, except it be by prayer.

St. Cyril the Great says, "if the Lord is so exceedingly good, then why does he pray when he is so perfect and does not need anything? We answer what it is appropriate for him according to the planning of his incarnation that he practices human work at the appropriate time. If he has eaten and drunk, then in truth he is accustomed to praying teaching us not to be careless in this duty, but rather to be struggling and kindled in our prayer. In addition to this, he came as head to the church, carries us in him as newborn of his bosom. When he prays, he only does so representing us and for our account. He carries us by his prayers to his father's exuberance. Our prayers have thus become acceptable to the father through his son his beloved. In other words, by his prayer, he sanctified our own and has opened to us the doors for encountering the father in him

When the disciples' hearts were kindled with love of prayer on seeing him as the Lord in prayer, he then began to tell them of the Lord's prayers have previously spoken of it and testified of it in many of our former words. I think it enough to speak briefly of it here, and mention some excerpts of the fathers, not mentioned previously.

(Luke 11:2) "he said to them, when you pray, say: our father who in heaven"

We cannot pray as should be if we do not first realize our position when we are adopted to his. He has chosen us as sons of the Lord, and thus we speak to him from the basic fact that we are his sons and filiations we obtained freely as a gift from the baptismal waters, even though we feel we are unworthy to be his slaves.

What follows are some remarks of the fathers regarding this please:

+how wonderful is God's love to mankind! He has endowed those who have gone astray from him and have fallen into the alleys of evil, he has endowed them with the forgiveness of sins, and a bountiful share of grace, to the extent they can call his "father":

our father who at in heaven. the heavens are also those who are carrying the heavenly world, in whom the lord dwells and lives.

St.gyryl el orshalimy

+when you begin praying, forest every creation is visible or invisible.begin the prayer by praising god, the creation of all. this is why he said, when you pray say "our father who at in heaven"

St.baselious the great

+look that king of preparation you need so you can say in love "our father". if your eyes are focused on earthly matters, and you desire the peoples glory, and you as enslaved to your passions in corruption, then call corruption a father to your self. you are defiling with your feeling tips the name that is not to be defiled .he has commanded you to call him father and so do not matter it is falsehood.

Father Gregory el neissy

+the prayer begins by testifying about god, as a falter to us, as if it is a reward for the faith. This was set for those who received him and so he gave them the power to become gods children (john 1:12).anyway, the lord often declare god the father as a father to us. He also gave us a commandment not to call anyone on earth as father, but only the father who is in heaven (matt 23:9)

But this prayer, therefore, we obey the commandment.

Blessed are they who know their father! This blame was directed towards assail when the spirit makes heaven and earth testify saying (as 1:2)."Hear oheavens, and listen, oeaith ;for the lord has spoken: I reader children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me."

When we mentis the father up also call on the son, for the says (john 10:30)

"I and the father are one".ploreover.we should not disirlord the church our mother, for the mother is known through the father and the son, and through her the name of the father and the son is manifested.

In a word, we honor the father with his son. We also remember the commandment, and we put a mark for those who have forgotten their falter the schooner stallions.

+when we pray to god our father, it is appropriate for us not to be preoccupied by anyone else, not by any earthly reature, or any evil spirit or even the angels.

There was one saint living in solitude in the riflemen. he was attacked by the devils, and was surrounded by them for two weeks. they threw him up in the air and caught him down in a straw rug; yet they vainly tried to pull him away from his kindled prayer.

Two angels came to another lover of god who devoted his life to prayer. when he was walking in the wilderness, they accompanied him in his trip, one on the right and other on the left, but he was not distracted him then lest he loosen what is belt, putting in mind st.paul the apostle's advice (rom 8:38)

"non angels, on rules, on things present, on things to come, on power, on height, on depth, on anything else in all creation, will be able to sqarate us from the love of god in Christ jesus our lord"

by means of true prayer the monk become another angel, since he is eager to see god's face in the heaven, in zealous and kindled eaganen.

+he who loves god lives with him, and coastally prays for him as a father, putting any though or whims.

Father ogris

(Luke 11:2)"hallowed be thy name"

the father oreganos thinks atheist blaspheme god's name when they attsilrite his name to idols. the prayer here is like the cry of the church to god to take away the atheists worship from the world, so his name be known as holy to entire humanity. in the some concept st.gyryl

the great says "when god's name is served among those who have not yet believed, the beams of truth shine in them and so they confess the holy one of the saints"

at any rates, if Christ's name glorifies the fainter, when we poison his name in truth in us, the father's name is stratified in our life and is glorified in us. among the words of the father regarding this issue.

+just as when a man looks upon the beauty of heavens, he said "glory be to you lord", likewise is it when someone sees the deeds of a righteous man, he sees his righteousness glorifying god even more than the heavens.

St. John Chrysoström

+the name of god is holy in its nature; whether we say it or not, but, since the name of god accrued by sinless as it written (rom 2:24; as 52:5)

"the name of god is blasphemed among the nations because of you", therefore we ask that god's name be sanctified in us, not to become holy, as if it were not holy in us, we who seek to sanctify ourselves, and practice the appropriate deeds by our sanctification.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

The selector Basil the Great thinks the work of angels is to praise in hymns three sanctification "holy, holy, holy" (as 4:3, rev 4:8). we too, when we bless his name we are raised to god so as to practice the partnership in the glory to come, few share the heavenly lots in their praises. if the father's name is gloried (john 17:6), if we are united in him, and practice his life, then the father by his son who dwells in us is gloried

"Thy kingdom come" (Luke 11:2)

+it is befitting the devout soul to say confidently "thy kingdom come". because he who hears st. Paul sayings (rom 10:12). "therefore do not let sin excise dominion in your mortal bodies, " he will cleanse himself in deed thoughts and words; then he would be able to say, "thy kingdom come"

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

+we also ask the lord to save us from corruption, to keep us from death, or as it is written "thy kingdom come". this means may the holy spirit come down on us and purify us.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

+those who say this, seem to wish for the savior of the world to shine once more

St. Cyril the Great

+our wish and desire is that our king hastens in his coming, and so our bondage would not be extended in this world.

The scholar Basil

He martyrs fasten the lord's coming to put an end to evil, saying, (rev 6:10). "Sovereign lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?"

Likewise the believers do, for the doors of heaven have been opened before them, and they have realized their share in the inhumanly earnable; thus they too hasten his last coming to obtain the eternal glory.

(Luke 11:2) "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"

+god's devout angels, the devils, do evil will just as David sang his hymns saying (ps 103:20) "bless the lord you his angels you mighty one who do his bidding, obedient to his spoken word"

when you pray fervently you wish to say "just as you will is fulfilled in your angels, let it likewise be fulfilled in us, we who are on earth lord"

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

+if it is as he is saying "lord, enable us to follow the heavenly life, and that we wish for what you want"

St. John Chrysostom

+because he said that Mau's life often the resanection will be as ma angels life, this is why we have to provide for our life in this world every decency and property, so that whereby we are still in the holy, yet we do not conduct ourselves according to it. at this point the physician of the souls breaks down the nature of the disease, if those who are sick trod to escape from the godly will. this is why they are headed from it by their link to this devise will. the health of the soul is the fulfillment of god's appropriate will.

St.gegouuy el neissi

+we pray that his will be fuebilled in everyone. from the semiotic aspect, we explain "as in the spirit, also in the body". as we ourselves being heaven and earth.

The scholar trilian

(Luke 11:3)"give us this day our daily bread"

the lord commands us to aisele even for the matters concerning the feeding of the body from god, since he is our father who takes care of our sons as well as our bodies. but he asks us not to pamper the body but just to suffers it, so that he body supports us until we finished our mission.

St.gyriel the great says, " some may I think it is not suitable that the saint ask the earthly things of god. this is why they attribute spiritual concepts to their words. even though it is appiopuate for the saints to givethier major concern the spiritualities, yet they ask with no shame their general food as the lord commands , in fact, he asks them to for bread, that is , daily food. this is proof enough they own nothing, and they are repeclbeally poor, for he does not ask for bread from him who has it, but relit from him who is in need of it"

St.basilious thinks this prayer floodlit us by the lord means our commitment to resort to god to tell him everyday of the needs of our daily nature.

Many of the fathers think this daily bread is "Christ" our lord with whom we are blessed as the daily heavenly bread without which the soul becomes badly in need of it. the slier trisection soup "Christ is our bread because he is the life and the bread is the life. the lord says "iam the bread of the life" (john 6:35).prior to this his word were (john 6:33)."for the bread of god is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." god's bread is the living word of god, and his body also is counted as bread.

St.augustine thinks this daily bread is to be blessed with the resurrection of the lord Jesus so we experience every day the power of his resurrection working in us.

(Luke 11:4)"and forgive us our trepans as we forgive those who trepan against us"

+the hurt done to us is simple and small and we can easily forgive it. but as for our hurting to god this is big and we have no other way out when it is by means it is by means of his love to maintained. Therefore, be cautions best you forbid god, due to what's small harm you suffered from, to forgive you sins you have committed toward him.

St.gyiril el orshalimy

+the request for forgiveness is full of confession for he who ask for forgive is only confesiry his own sins.

The scholar tritlian

+even josep, when he sent away his brothers so as to bring their father, he told them (qen 14:24)."do not quenelle on the way"

in this way he caution us not to be angry on the way when we go to our father in prayer, as this is inappropriate.

+what sickliness in this that you spend one day with no prayer when you refuse to be seconceled with your brother or keep your wrath and so those your prayer

+every revengeful act you consiut against your brother who has rearmed you, will be a stone of offense when you pray

Father ogris

+every blinds the mind of him who prays and wraps up his prayer in a dark cloud.

+no one loves real prayer, and yet gives himself a chance to be wrathful or envious, for he will be as a man who wants to be peaceable and yet pulls out his eyes.

Father origin

(Luke 11:4)"and lead us not into temptation"

+it could mean: do not let temptation overpower us and drift us, since temptation is considered a torrent overflow that is hard to overcome. Those not overpowered by temptation could pass through the torrent, like swimming champs who do not allow the current to sweep them away.

St.gyryl el orshalimy

+anyway, it is inappropriate we ask for the physical aralias in our prayer; for the lord jesus commands people in general to pray so as not to be led into temptation. But if someone does fall into temptation, . He has to ask the lord for tolerance, so the words be fulfilled in us (matt 10:22)

"But the one who endures till the end will be saved"

st.basilious

The scholar tritilian distinguishes between the ordeal that god allows, which does not mean "temptation in the general sense, but it means "a test" for our promotion. but as for theadversary, he tempts us so as to deceive us. it is as if we pray not to enter temptation meaning that he supports us against Satan's traps and his deception.

(Luke 11:4)."But deliver us from the evil one"

+if the phrase "lead us not temptation means not to be tempted at all, the lord would not have added "but deliver us from the evil one. the evil is our enemy. the devil, and we ask to saved from him.

St.gyryl el orshalimy

Finally, the scholar tritilain confirms the fact that the Lord's Prayer in the foundation the lord jesus laid for our prayer it open the door. For prayer for each one to ask what is appropriate for him but within the same thoughts that ore for this prayer.moreover, the lord's prayer, though snort in length, yet it contains a lot such as.

God's glorifying by saying "our father"

Testifying of the faith by saying "hallowed be thy name"

Offering obedience in "thy will be done"

Remembering the hope "give us this day our daily bread". the full knowledge of own sears, our debts, in the prayer so as obtain the absolution.

The great fear of temptation in asking to be protected.

How amazing!. it is only god alone who is able to each us himself what he wishes us to pray for.

2-the fervent prayer.

The lord has offered us a living motel for prayer, so he asks us to be kindled in our worship by the spirit. he therefore asks us to pray fervently, not because he answers due to a lot of words, but rather to kindle our depths towards constant praying.

God is eager to give, and knows our needs and our inner longing. but ha asks as for faience so as to learn how to stand before him, and how to begin a real relation with him. Father Isaac says"god, in his eagerness to endow us with what is heavenly and eternal, he verges us to pressure him with our fervent prayer. he does not reason this fervency and does not think lightly of it, but he is actually pleased with it and praises it."st.ougustine says". our lord jesus Christ who is in our midst, would not have asked us to ask of god as a giver, and jesus would not have wringed us to ask so strongly if he had not wanted to give us. he puts to shame our negligence, for he wishes to give more than our desire to takes. he wishes to show mercy more than our own desire of getting rid of misery. This wronging that he offers us only for our own sake. Father origin says, " if you have not a jet received the gift of prayer or

praise giving, then be fervent and you will obtain. The gyriel the great says, " the savior taught us before, in his answering the disciples as how to pray. but some may practice the teaching of prayer, the same way jesus taught it but in carelessness and negligent, and if they are unheard in the first or second prayer, they then quit praying. this may be own situation. this is why the lord presents to us this parable to declare to us that fear in prayer in harmful, but as for patience it is useful indeed"

The lord gave us this payable:

(Luke 11:5-8)"and he said to them, "suppose one of you has a friend and you go to him at midnight and say to him friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a fine of mine has answered and I have nothing to set before him". and he answer from within "do not brother me to doer has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything: I tell you even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs"

We notice the following in the above passable:

Firstly: the foremost purpose of his parable is to urge us in persistence on prayer until you obtain you request. we notice here, furthermore, that the lord jesus presents the fathers as a friend to humanity, for he says "suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight". Father the ophlactis says "god in thus friend who loves all humanity, and he wishes all to be saved".st.ambrozios says" what greater friend can we have than he who has asked his body for our sake? From him, king David has asked at midnight bread, and obtain it, so ha says, (ps 11:62) "at midnight I rise to praise you, because of your righteous ordinances". David obtained those loves that have become food to him/her asked of him at night (ps 6:6) "every night I flood my bed with tears". He does not fear to be woken up for he knows that his dourine friend in constantly wakeful and at work. we too, let us recall what came in the lookes, and he careful about our prayer day and night, pleading for the forgiven of sais.if such a saint who the respousilritly of a whole kingdom on his shoulders, use to praise the lord even times a day.(ps 17:64), and is consistently offering to the lord day and night. how much more so, should we do, we who have to ask for so much due to our incessant downfallen because of our frail bodies and souls, so we are not shortened in our building up any piece of bread that supports anyone's heart (ps 103:15).we have become weary of the way and have toiled greatly in the ways of the world, and at the crossroads of this life"

It is as if the lord is asking us to resort to him as a dewier friend in truth and at all times, even at midnight. We entreat him to supply us with the heavenly bread, so fulfilling to the soul and the borty.

Secondly: if god offers himself a friend to us whom we are able to ask at midnight to grant us heavenly bread for others "sake, coming for us also at the midnight of this world, being so hungry; then the lord according to there is a friend to us as well. we ask of the divide friend for the sake of you alts human friends.st Augustine thinks his friend coming from the street that is from the world is coming to us as if from the eveil way, eafter to obtain the truth. We cannot host him and feed him unless we asle god first and thus be equipped for being who has arrived from a journey, was it not enough to ask for three loaves?

a)because we meet our groom the savior amidst this world in its evil temptation, as if we were at midnight , we ask for ourselves as well as for others three loaves for our soul to be fed, and our souls and bodies too. God alone is the feeder of man's entire being. as father theophlaetius the patriarch of Bulgaria says, " we ask of god these piece of bread that is feeding the needs of man's body, his soul and his spirit, and thus no danger would harm us in our temptation"

we realize the gospel's concept of the sanctified life and chastity. at this point

A chaste or sanctified person in the lord does not live in deprivation. He receives from god's hands what satisfies his life fully, and what quenches its thirst. Thus his soul rgories and his spirit in thrilled an sestiful too; and his body, even through he might be suffering from many ills for the lord's sake this income to be peaceful. for this reason, those newly baptized in the first church, used to sing straight after their baptism, this psalm 23 "the lord is my shepherd, I shall not want he makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside the still waters, he restores my soul. He leads me in the path of righteous for his names sake"

b) St.augustine thinks these three loaves of bread refer to our faith in the trinity. Our souls, our spirit and our bodies will not be inwardly fed unless by means of the holy trinity: the holy trinity of love that fills the reward being and overflows with its blessing on us. He says, " who is he, who, amidst the toil, has to ask god so obtain the understanding of the trinity? By so doing he will find rest of the current world. His hardship is the midnight that promotes him to ask for the trinity. Let us understands the bread of the trinity that is of one essence. Whenever you obtain the three loaves of bread, that is the foal of knowing the trinity, then you will have the source of life and food. Then do not fear, or stop, as this food is endless, it rather puts an end to you need. Learn and teach live and feed.

At another accession, he says, " what are these three loaves of bread other than the mipterwis heavenly food?"

In more details, he also says, "now, there is no need of any fear of some strange coming to you from his way. But by being hospitable to him unwieldy, you can make out of him a citiyeur, and son to the house. Do not fear, for the bread will not run out. The bread us god the father, the son and Holy Spirit. Learn and teach, live and feed others. it is god who gives you, he does not give you what is any letter than himself. You greedy one, what more de you ask for?"

c) St.augustine also thinks those three loaves of bread are excessive gifts from god to mankind---they are. Faith hope and love. he says, " it is necessary for you to receive love, faith and hope .what he gives you, will be sweet to you. These things:faith, hope and love--- are three. They are god's gifts you receive faith from god, for it is said (rom 12:3)."Each according to the measure of faith that god has assigned". Also 'hope' which we receive from the who was told (ps 119:49)"in which you have made me hope". From him we receive love, for it was said (rom 5:5)"because god's love has been poured into our hearts through the holy spirit that has been given to us"

fourlthy:the lord says, (Luke 11:7) and he answers from within, ' do not bother me; the door has already Benn locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything"

the lord jesus gives us the image of this friend answering from within. he does not go out to him, even though the time was pressing. it was knocking. in his answer he dedares this perilous action was pretty disturling and that the door was locked and his children were in bed and that he is unable to get up and give him anything despite this friend in his persistence was able to take from him what be wanted how much more so would god give those who ask him insisently a sign of their honest request particularly because god is not like this friend who answers from wiltin.he rather came out to us through his incarnation and the word of god came to dwell in our midnight speaking to us in his own mouth. he ripped off the barrier dividing heaven from earth thus the door is no longer shut but it is open to all. he wishes all to be saved and to come to know the truth. his children are not with him in bed, for he never sleeps and his angels and saints also watch and work constantly by their prayers and pleadings for the sake of the lost and needy souls! the lord does not say "I am unable to get up and give you anything because the lord has risen from the dead and gave us his secretion that is active in us"

In such a way the lord gave us a pueatyfull image of the friend from whom we obtain our need through persistence in spite of the resisting cercustances.how much more are we going to obtain from the lord himself.

St.augustine says, " if the sleeping person had to give unwillingly often being disturbed from his sleep, to this one who asked of him so how much more would me going in more gealthenes and compassion by their who does not sleep.

He even wakes us up from our sleep so that we ask him to give us?!

His words "the door is shut now". May refer to the shutting of the door of our understanding and so we do not realize him. god does not want a slut door that obstruct our depth of encounteriey him.but it is we who order the shutting of the door is our and our iquorance of his salvation deeds.st ougustine says, " the time referred to here is the famine time for the word when the understanding is slut and those who distribute the gospels wisdom as bread by means of preaching in the world now they are in the restful place with the lord.

The world has shut the door due to its disobedience but the job of the church is to ask the lord to open this door to the preaches so that they launch out with the souls where the rest and satisfaction are in the lord.

St.amprious says "put aside the sleep of slothfmlaies and knock on Christ door.st paul asked this door be opened to him so he speaks of Christ miystense (col.4:3).this may be the door st john saw opened (rev 4:1)."often this I looked and there in heaven a door stood open and the first voice which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, " come up here and i will show you what must take place often this." the door was opened to st.john and also to st Paul so as to obtain for our sake leaves for our nourisliment.this is due to their persistence in knocking at a convent and an inconvenient teaie (2tim4:2) so as to restore life to the equities that have wearied and toiled on the worlds way by an abundance of heavenly food"

Fifithy:our lord jesus Christ wages us to pray fervently for he concludes the payable saying (Luke 11:8, 9)."I tell you even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend at beast because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. so I say to you, ask and it will be given you;seek, and you will find;knock, and the door will be opened for you."

St augustine says, " what does he mean by his words "because of his persistence"? because he did not stop knocking and neither did he relies when his request was syected, god may be sometimes slow in giving us some things so that he makes us know the value of the good things and not because he refuses to give them to us. the things we are so eager for, we receive in great joy but those given us quickly these are counted cheap. There for ask and plead and insist. by the request itself and persistence you yourself will grow and these you will obtain more. he also say "by the prayer we say through the pleadings we wish for we obtain what he is ready to grant. his gifts are excess Ely mawelous but are too small and have too narrow means to obtain them.

St.basilious says "god may delay your request voluntarily so your zeal and your approach to him may be doubled. also so that you may know what gods gift is and take care afit very protectively when you obtain it. What man obtain after so much struggle he takes care in protecting it test he loves his toils as well.

Whay does he say ask seek knock?

a) This may be for emphasis sake. he insist on our asking seeking and knocking because he wants to give us. as st.augustine says "he would not have encowered to ask him us in this way if he had not wished to give us. Let us get rid of the laziness pertaining to all menus, for he wishes to give us more than we ask for"

st.basilious says, " it is appropriate to us to ask the dwrine help of god not in a distorted or careless way distracted here and there. such a person would not only be rejected what he is asking for, but he also angers god, if a man stands before a ruler his eyes would be

fixed inwardly and outwardly so he would not be punished. How much more so, is it appropriate for us to stand before god in fear and caution? but if you are provoked by a certain sin, and you are unable to pray consistently with all your strength have second through so that whenever you stand before god you may concentrate you through on him .god will forgive you because it is not due to carelessness but rather due to weakness for being unable to appear before him as should be. if you commit yourself to this you will not leave him until you obtain what you want. if you do not obtain what you are asking for this will be because your request is inappropriate or because you have no faith or because you have said it in a negligent way or because you ask for things not for your own good or because you have left praying. Some may often ask "why do we pray?" does god not know what we are in need of? There is no doubt that he knows and what we are in need of? there is no doubt that he knows and gives us abundantly all temporal matters even before we ask him. But we first have to ask for what is good and the heavenly kingdom. it is then that we obtain what we desire. Let us ask in faith and patience and ask for what is beneficial to us and we should not hinder prayer by the disobedience to us and we should not hinder prayer by the disobedience of our conscience.

b)the three times repetition may mean "ask, seek, knock" that we do not ask him only with our thoughts or inward intentions, but also with our lips and deeds it is appropriate our prayer be uplifted through the thoughts harmony together with the lips and conduct and thus it goes. Out as holy incense fragrance from deep sanctified souls in blessed words and pleasing behavior to god. in the same outlook st.bernard the autochthon says "the word "knock" may mean ask in an active way. may knock with the lord and the hand is the sign of good work. The distinction between the three could be in a different way. at the beginning of virtue we ask to know the truth. as for the second step it is to ask how to conduct ourselves on this road. The third step is when man reaches virtue he knocks the door to enter the wide field of knowledge.

These three matters, all of which are asked by man in prayer. To "ask" could mean to "pray", and "seek" means to pray by means of the good deeds we practice in a way consistent with our prayer. To "knock" means "to continue praying incessantly". In other words, " the asking, the seeking and the knocking"mean the prayer unity with the practical life in the lord. We ask him to begin with us and we seek. He continues the way and we knock so that he completes our struggle by giving us the eternal glory. For he is the beginning and the end as well as the escort to us on the way as more accurately;he is our way. With him we begin with him we go on, and with him we are perfected and fulfilled.

To encourage us to ask and knock the lord Jesus revealed our right as his children in asking. It is our right as his children to ask of our father receive for he says (Luke 11:11-13)."Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion. if you then, who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly father give the holy spirit to those who ask him?"

We notice the following in the words above:

a)just as he asked us to ask to seek to knock that is three times likewise he gave us three examples in the request: to ask for bread for a fish and for an egg. it is surprising they are three kinds of food and it is as if our request for the lord is to feed us spiritually and physically.

St.augustine thinks the bread is "love" and the fish is the faith and the egg is the hope. We thus ask of our heavenly father to love to believe and to hope.

He says "by bread he means love since this is the greatest of what we desire. it is essential and without which everything else is counted as nothing as a table without any bread. as for the opposite of love. It is the heart cruelty which is similar to stones. As for the

fish. this refers to else faith in inirisible matters; it is this that we receive in the water of baptisiu without it being seen visually.

From another aspeet faith is like a fish attacked by the world waves and yet does not perish.contrary to it is the snake that due to its poisonous deception. The first by throwing its need sin him. the egg is understood to be hope because the egg is still small and the birdis not yet formed in it, yet we wish and hope for this.contiary to the egg is the scorpion that has a deadly sting and scares man dreadfully by going backwards.this is contiary to hope that promotes us forward overcoming the matters before us.in other words bread refers to love whereas the stone refers to the heart erulty.the fish refers to faith whereas the snake refers to the blasphemy of faith when the respect. deceived eve ceinningly and covupted her through away from what is pure (2 lor 11:2, 3).the egg refers to hope since out of what seems to be a hard solid burly a bird full of life comes out whereas the scorpion destropi maus life.

God wants to feed us and so let us ask for him since he is the one to fill our life with love faith and hope. our depths will be filled and we will not be in need of anything. as for the adversary he is the attacker who wants to offer stones instead of bread for he said to the lord jesus command these stones to become bread for he is used to giving the qurelty of the hearts as food instead of the bread of life. it is the devil who suet the serpeut instead of the fish and his deeds are similar to that of the scorpions.

Let us ask god himself to fill our life and give us of what bounties he has. this is why st.ougustine says "you covetous man what are you asking for? if you are asking for something else to satiety you often than god then you will never be satisfied "he also says" give yourself your food so you would not die of hunger. give it its bread.youwill ask "what is this bread?" the lord has spoken to you so if you wish to listen understand and believe in him then he wishes to tell you himself I am the living bread that comes down from heaven (john 6:41)

St.cyril the great comments on asking for the bread from the lord saying. if your son asks you for bread you give it to him happily because he is asking for good food but if he asks of you due to his guoriance stones to eat you will not give it to him and you will rather forbid him from fulfilicy his harmful wish. this is meaning. the scholar oreganos thinks the fish you are asking for is the love of learning's Augustine comments on the egg as the symbol of hope saying". let us put our egg under the hens wring of the gospel that cries out due to the destroyed and devastated city saying "o Jerusalem, Jerusalem..... (Matt 23:37)."how often have I devised to gather your children together as a him gather her brood under her wrings and you were not willing he also says we notice how the hen tears the scorpion into little prices the hen of the gospel also tears up those who blaspheme and destroys them. these ones creep out of their caves and holes and sting the children fatally.

Finally the lord confirm the wish of his heart towards us saying, " how much more will the heavenly father give the holy spirit to those who ask him? if you earthly fathers are couriered about offering us bread fish and an egg so we be able to live on earth then the faith who is in heaven quire us the holy spirit who alone is the spirit of partneiship?he makes us firm in the son the only forgotten one releasiey us by the holy spirit to the heavenly fathers eubrace.his work is to grant us the new life. three embodies the heavenly qualities so we return to the fathers embrace ealt anew.st.clemandous el sekendri says, if we who are evil know how to give good gifts then how much more will the fathers merciful nature be like? he is the father of every comfort the good one very tender and in great long suffering merey he waits those coming back for him. This return is actually to cease from sinning and not to look back words another time.

3-the unity of the spirit being accused of beelzebul.if our friendship with god is based on praying fervently then this prayer has to be supported by the unity of the spirit. god in his friendship to us. Wishes us to conduct ourselves logether in the one spirit. this is by means of

the holy spirit work the giver of partueishy and unity.this is why the evanfelest st.luke speaks to us of the healing of he who had a mute devil. the lord cast him out and so he was accused of being beelziful the chief of the devil.the lord found this accusation to be the appoitunilg to confirm the need for the unity of the spirit with no division.by means of the work of his spirit the giver of the paitneship we have previously spoken of this issue in our study of st.matthews gospel (12:22-37) also of st.mark (3:22-30) in full details.therefore I think it enough here to mention the following points.

Fusstly:the miracle of casting out the mute deeril amazed the people and aroused their adaiuation which piovoked same people who were mostly of the Pharisees they were filled with eavy and jealousy and could not deny the miracle but they accused the lord of having the ruler of the devils beelzebul and that with the devil he was able to cast out devil.

Beelzebul is the aramite derivation of the word beelzebeul that is. the god of the flies of the ebronotice (kings 1:3).these believed he was able to kick out the flies from the houses. some doulted him and so asked for a sing from heaven. They wanted to be sure if what he does is by heavenly power or by some devilish way. They expected for instance the makes fire come down from heaven as did elyayh.they did not realize that the one amongst them was the heavenly one who in condescension he came to dwell in their midst as one of them.

Secondly: he did not answer their request in sending fire from heaven to destroy them when they asked for a miracle from heaven. he rather rebuked his disciples jams and john when they asked him if they would ask for fire to consume the village of Samaria that refused him. in great toberance he answered them not to put them to shame but rather to bring them to the truth. he did not keep back his love even from those who resisted him.gustiad.he gave his life a redemption for all.this is why st.john choysoton said, " he bore all these things so we follow his footsteps and be loleraut in bearing the shameful scores that disture more than any rebuke"

Thirdly: the answer the lord Jesus gave to those who rjected him was as usual not a self defense as much as it was for their souls countruction and their life correction. the answer implied two aspects:

a) the negative aspect which is that the adversary is not divided against himself other wise his kingdom would be destroyed. Here he is asking us not to be duded amongst ourselves be it on the kingdom level or the family one for he says (Luke 11:17, 19)

"Every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert and rouse falls on house. If Satan also is divided against himself how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out the demons by beelzebul.

b)the positive aspect in it he declare the holy spirit inipact who is one with him in godleness for he works by his holy spirit and his strength and calls him gods kinger.regarding this the lord calls us not only not to have a dividing spirit against ourselves or family wise or church wise but rather to accept gods spirit who is the spirit of partnership working in us powerfully for building up gods kingdom. he says (Luke 11:19, 20) "now if I cast out the demons by beelzbul by whom do you exorceists cast them out? therefore they will be you judges but it is by finger of gort that I cast out the demons then the kingdom of god has come to you"

it is not enough to reject the spirit of division so we do not perish but it is appropriate for us to accept his spirit to work in us so his kingdom would come powerfully inside us"

fourthly: the lord jesus calls the holy spirit gods finger. this could be because man who has authouty points his finger to fulfil all what he wants it is as if the father and the son work by their holy spirit as by the finger.st gyril says "the holy spirit is called gods finger for this season. it is said about the son that he is gods hand and his arms (ps 98:1)by whom god the father does everything since the finger is insparable to the hand and is naturally pait of ct likewise (though much differently) the holy spirit is radically united with the son and through

him the son does everything". in addition to this the fingers though different in their sizes placement and length they all work together inseparably. the points to the variety of gifts and the one spirit. as st paul the apostle said (1 cor 12:4-7). "now there are varieties of gifts but the same spirit and there are varieties of services but the same lord and there are varieties of activities but it is the same god who activates all of them in everyone. to each is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good." st. augustine says, "the holy spirit is called the finger of god due to the varieties of gifts each obtaining his own gift. whether it be to humans or to angels since there is no suitable division in our members more than that of our fingers. st. ambrose also says "the name finger points to the unity and not to the difference in authority".

Fifthly: who are their children who cast out devils and will be judges to them other than the simple group of student of the Jewish nation. bring none else among them? they are gentiles also who are experts casting out the devils in outliving and power and so they judge accordingly every accusation launched by the scribes and pharisees against the authority of Jesus Christ. st. Cyril the Great says, "the blessed disciples were Jews and of Jews biologically. they have obtained authority from Christ by calling these words "in the name of Jesus Christ". st. Paul also commanded the evil spirit by the apostolic authority (act 16:18). i order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her"

So, if your children as he says in my name trample by their feet over Beelzebub by Beelzebub's devilish follows and casting out those dwelling in them, is it not then clear that in great ignorance you blaspheme and accuse me of having the authority of Beelzebub? now you are accused through the faith of your children. the lord Jesus now moves on from showing that he cast out the devil by his holy spirit that is by God's finger to me authority he has graduated his disciples who are actually children of the Jews. this is to attract their attention and thoughts from the foolish discussion they arouse through their envy and jealousy to looking forward to the new authority given to the disciples through him also to the capabilities that have come to be for the people by means of Jesus Christ. what the lord Jesus does is not showing off his power so divine but it is a deposit for his kingdom account in our hearts. this means it is us for the account of his church. that is in our hearts. this is why he says "the kingdom of God has come to you". in other words he wished to tell them: "instead of accusing of working with Beelzebub's power be blessed with my authority that I grant to people so as to destroy Beelzebub and cast out his evil spirits of the wrecked souls and bodies. concerning this st. Cyril the Great says "he says if as a man I have become like one of you and cast out devils by God's spirit then the human nature has obtained in me first the kingdom of God. this has become glorified by shattering the devil's power and by repairing the defiled spirits. this is the meaning of the words "the kingdom of God has come to you but the Jews did not understand how the only forgotten son has provided in the body. they rather had to meditate on the only begotten son God's word. he has become in carnate without being changed from what he is. he glorified man's nature for he was not unwilling to take its fifth so he adds to it his own richness"

Sixthly: because humanity has obtained in Christ Jesus authority by his holy spirit and because he has declared powerfully God's kingdom in it then there was no other opportunity for the dark kingdom that has prevailed for so long to go on ruling. this dark kingdom that has possessed violently and fiercely and in great authority in our weakness. the strong one has come to conquer he who thought himself to be strong and to whom we gave the opportunity for a long time to reign over us for the lord Jesus said (luke 11:21, 22) "when a strong man fully armed guards his castle his property is safe but when one stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his plunder."

In this way he presents to us the work of the messiah in our life as a strong man armored and in his house. the evil one has ruled over the heart and the entire world as if it were his our house. his weapons are malice and vice. but the stronger one cause the messiah whose weapon is love and sacrifice and in truth he destroys the corrupt and in love he destroys malice in light he destroys darkness. he kicks out he who has invaded the heart and reigned the world and he look from the evil one all his plunder. in this way the lord makes clear there is no concession between light and darkness and there is no concord between Christ and beelzbul.

St. John Chrysostom says "Satan has been called strong not because he is naturally as such. this is only in reference to his old authority that has become his due to our own weakness." St. Cyril the Great says "this is the destiny of our general enemy the malicious devil who has numerous heads the origin of evil for before the saviors coming he was in great power driving the flock that is not his own to his own barn and shuts them in these flocks belonged to God and so he was as a ferocious thief vicious indeed but when God's word attacked him the word who is above everyone the giver strength the Lord of hosts by becoming man he grabbed from Satan his possessions and distributed his wealth. those ones who were previously imprisoned by Satan's means in unrighteousness and ingratitude were called by the devout apostles to knowing the truth and drawing close to God the Father through the faith in the Son"

Seventhly often the Lord Jesus had given this parable he said the following principle (Luke 11:23) "whoever is not with me against me and whoever does not gather with me scatter here the Lord Jesus shows clearly the danger of the negative life where man thinks he is half way on the road for the Lord Jesus offers two ways without a third one added the them: either the light or darkness God's kingdom or Satan's. he who works in the spirit of Beelzbul does not cast out devils for the account of God's kingdom. he rather worships the dark kingdom. like wise in he who is bestowed with God's spirit. he does not accept except him who works for the account of God's kingdom. it is as if he is asking them to reconsider themselves so as to know in truth where they are located: are they on his side gathering for his account or are they against him working to seal ten the souls?"

It is as if he is telling them he has come to gather God's children in him "these are the ones the adversary Satan has scattered; for Satan does not work with me for he rather wishes to scatter those ones I have gathered. so do you ask for me gather or do you ask for him so you scatter?"

As St. Cyril the Great says, he says "I have come to deliver every person from Satan's hand so as to save them from the wiles he has trapped them in and to release those in bondage and shine brightly on those in the dark I also deliver those who have fallen and heal the broken hearted and gather God's scattered children. as for Satan he is not on my side; he is rather against me. he is bold enough to scatter those I gather and save. how then can he who resists me and spouts his evil against my goals how can he give me authority against him? is it not foolish of you to accuse this?"

St. John Chrysostom comments on the Lord's words saying on his behalf "if he who does not work with me is an adversary to me how much more would someone who resists me be like? at any rate it seems to me he refused by this parable to the Jews who were provoked against him by means of Satan since they were working against him and scattering those he was gathering"

Eighthly: often he had given the first parable of the stronger one who casts out the strong one and how he distributes his spoils giving us the hope of hiding in him so that by him we are able to fight the enemy and cast him out of our innermost being; he then gives us another parable to warn us: (Luke 11:24-26) "when the unclean spirit has gone out of a person it wanders through waterless regions looking for a resting place but not finding any it says "I

will return to my house from which I came. when it comes it find it swept and put in order. then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself and they enter and live there and last state of that person is worse than the first"

By those two parables the lord jesus made clear the difference between the work of the lord jesus and that of the pharisees. in the first parable the lord jesus showed us how he is the stronger one who frees us of him who ruled us and bonded us in his traps. in the second parable he showed the Pharisees work and that of the Jewish leaders who roam the land and sea to catch a man and when he accepts the faith they make him more than themselves since he is offended in them. in this way he is drifted towards evil more than he used to be before accepting the faith. as the lord has said (Matt 23:15). "woe to you scribes and pharisees hypocrites for you cross sea and land to make a single convert and you make the new convert twice as much a child of hell as yourselves". by this parable he warns us best we begin the way and not complete it. for when we begin we cast out the devils from our hearts as from his home but he does not find his rest except in returning to the place from where he was cast out. thus he keeps awaiting the chance to pounce on us in a moment of carelessness and he returns more unciously and more strongly so as to drive all anew. this is the case with so many Christians who begin with the spirit and unfortunately they end with the body (Gal 3:3). so Satan returns to find their hearts a dwelling place to him all swept and clean to welcome him. this is the situation of the Jews who came ahead of the gentiles in knowing God. it is as if they were blessed in casting out Satan from their hearts but because they denied the lord they became more wicked than they were prior to the faith and even more evil than the gentiles. this is what St. Ambrose says "by one man all the Jewish nation is sepulchred. the evil spirit was cast out by the old law and could find no place of rest among the gentiles since they have accepted the Christian faith that drives the evil spirit. the barren and dry hearts of the gentiles were quenched with the dew of the holy spirit and the flaming arrows of the enemy were extinguished (Eph 6:16). the evil spirit returned to the Jewish nation and with him even more evil spirit. Here the number seven refers to the completion of the count. in the same concept St. Cyril the Great says "when they were under the bondage in Egypt they lived according to the Egyptian customs and laws that were defiled indeed. they thus had an unrighteous life and the evil spirit dwelt in them since he lives in the evil hearts. but when they were saved by means of Moses through God's mercy and have accepted the law as from a teacher at a school and when they have been called to God's true knowledge the defiled spirit was cast out of them but because they did not believe in Christ and they denied the savior the defiled spirit attacked them all anew and found their hearts vacant having no fear of God whatsoever as if their hearts have been swept and so the evil spirit dwelt in them. just as the holy spirit when he finds a heart undefiled pure, he then comes to dwell in it and rest there. Likewise in the evil spirit he got used to dwelling in evil hearts because as I have said before they are hacking in every unit and are God-fearing. in this way the last illness have become more wicked than the first ones"

4-friendship and the word of God

(Luke 11:27, 28) "While he was saying this a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him" blessed in the womb that bore you and the breast that nursed you but he said "blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it"

when the women heard the lord she blessed her who bore him and nursed him. there is no doubt the virgin Mary is worthy of every blessing the lord did not take away the blessing from her but he rather urged us to obtain the blessing as well saying "blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it" also St. John Chrysostom says the virgin Mary has been all the more exalted by these words since she conceived with her soul as well with her body. St. Augustine says "her closeness as a mother is not beneficial to St. Mary if she had not carried him in the heart in a devout and blessed way more than her carrying him in her body.

the lord has opened the door for us to meet him and be blessed with his friendship. at the opening of the chapter he asked us to pray fervently then he urged us for the unity of the spirit without any diversion and to be blessed with the work of the holy spirit in us. now he urges us to cling to the word of god and keep it safe in our heart and behavior if we have not been blessed by carrying the lord jesus physically or by meeting him as those who were with him in this days but yet gospel in between our hands if we only hear him and study the gospel then we shall witness his transgressed glories unwardly in us. st Augustine thinks this godly discussion touches the entire church life that experience the unified life as one body to the lord for he says "I wish no one to rejoice for the sake of his earthly children but rather by the holy spirit that times them to god"

5-friendship and the miracle of john the prophet (Luke 11:29-33)"when the crowds were increasing he began to say this generation is as evil generation it asks for a sign but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. for just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh so the son of man will be to this generation. the queen of the south will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them because she came from the end of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon's and see something greater than Solomon is here!. the people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah and see something greater than jonah in here!"

some of them asked him for a miracle from heaven but as for him he offered himself a miracle to them proclaiming jonah the prophet as a symbol to himself. for Jonah has been thrown out of the whales belly just as out of the grave resurrected from the dead (matt 12:40).by jonah preaching he managed to save the people of Nineveh those gentile people and also the wise Solomon who has attracted the gentile queen of the south from the end of the earth she represented the gentile church coming not only to hear his wisdom but to put them into as well---to encounter god's wisdom himself.in both scriptures the gentile church appeared clear in clinging to hear head the real Jonah risen just as from the inward belly and the wise Solomon the donor of peace and wisdom's gyriel the great makes it clear in his comment on st luke's gospel that the miracle is not a show off deed as the Jews thought. for when mozes in the olden time presented to them some of the miracles they had a purpose particularly in revealing their sins for the sake of redemption. when mozes threw the cane on the ground it turned again into a snake by the cane he refused to the jews who were seated among the Egyptians so they became as serpents for following their customs their unrighteousness and their getting far away from god.it is as if they fell from his hands just as the cane fell from the hands of Moses. but our god's holding them just as mozes held the serpents tail they returned to their first state for the serpent livrned once more to become a cane rooted in oaradise they have been called to the true knowledge of god and enriched with the covenant as the way to a righteous life. the case was when he put his hand in his vest robe and so it became leprous as know. he then put it back in his vest robe to remove the leprosy. this misdeed was not performed for no purpose it rather refers to Israel that used to be under god's protection when its people held you strictly to their fathers traditions and led a righteous life befitting them as did alsiahan Isaac and Jacob.they were as if in the lord's embrace as in mozes chest vest.but when they quit this as mozes hand did that is when they left their righteous fathers life they were inflicted with leprosy that is defilement when they accepted to return to the lord's embrace and came to be under the godly care the egyptian unchality was taken away from them.it was appropriate for the jews as st gyriel the great says too realise their error yet they were proceeded with asking cunningly for a miracle from heaven.he says "their request sprung from the malice so they were not answered.as the book says "the wicked seek me and do not find me" (wise hosea 5:6).he told them they will not be given any other miracle than that of jonah which means the passion of the cross and the

resurrection from the dead. for he says (matt 12:40) "for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster so for three days and three nights the son of man will be in the heart of the earth" there will be no miracle given to the jews but these sufferings are necessary for the salvation of the world. "Christ did not want to die by the body and so it was given to the unbelievers for their own judgment. in his words to them he said (john 2:19). "destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. his being destroyed to die and his resurrection by his resurrection from the dead this is a great sign of the power of the world incarnate and his godly authority. it is sufficient evidence as I think of serious peoples judgment. but they bribed pilates soldiers with great sums of money and told them to say (matt 28:13) "his disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep." his resurrection is not a simple sign but it is enough to convince the entire world population that Christ is god. he has suffered physically out of his own will and he rose again. he commanded the powers of death to depart and corruption to be cast away. but the Jews did not believe even in this; this is why it was truly said of them "the queen of the south will rise in the judgment with this generation and condemn it". this woman though she was with those justified yet she eagerly asked to listen to Solomon. she traveled a very long way with this aim in mind so she could hear his wisdom concerning the nature of the visible things the animals and plants as for you among you is "the wisdom" himself who has come to you to tell you of the invisible heavenly matters. he confirmed what he spoke of by his deeds and miracles and yet you left the word and arose over carelessly the nature of his amazing teachings". St. Ambrose says "after he had commended the Jewish people the mystery of the church was manifested clearly. the people of Nineveh repent (Jonah 3:5) and the queen of the south seek to learn wisdom (1 King 10:1), and thus she came from the ends of the earth so as to learn Solomon's wisdom the peaceful one. she is queen to an indivisible kingdom consisting of various nations from far away as one body as Christ and the church (Eph 5:32). this has now been fulfilled not through a symbol but it has actually become fulfilled. in the old times Solomon was a symbol but here we find Christ has come incarnate and the church appears from two sides: departing from sin and wrecking it by means of repentance such as the people of Nineveh and also asking for wisdom such as the queen of the south"

6-the healthy eye:

(Luke 11:33-36) "No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar but on the lamp stand so that those who enter may see the light. your eye in the lamp of your body. if your eye is healthy your whole body is full of light but if it is not healthy your body is full of darkness. Therefore consider whether the light in you is not darkness. if then your whole body is full of light with no part of it in darkness it will be as full of light as when a lamp gives you light with its rays"

these divine words I think reveal the foundation of the divine friendship". if God is light then it is appropriate for us to become the lantern that carries the light that God's shining light is not kept away from it but that the lamp rather has to carry it and be a testimony to the light. to the light's impact in our friendship we encounter the light not under artificial bushes or by human artifices but to be carried on the truth that exalts us above. we thus should not submit to time or place but we rather have to live as God's heavenly angels soaring up in the highest. our friendship in "partnership in the divine light" or "an angelic life of the highest"

if we might ask how can we be a lighted lantern and carry a truthful testimony on the pulpit of the heavenly life?!. the Lord answers the eye in the lantern of the body. it is as if he is stressing our commitment to having a healthy eye so we may be able to see the healthy Lord. let us have the pure vision that implies no complexities but in its simplicity it embodies one aim only which is that of witnessing the Lord. in this way the heart can see which is the soul's eye and its vision God transfigured brightly in everything thus the soul is enlightened and the body is sanctified and man becomes entirely sanctified to the Lord and a lantern embodying

the godly light. we have perviously spoken of this sanctified healthy eye in god the healthy one in our study of st matthews gospel (6:22, 23)

st. ambrosios speaks to us of the shining lantern as being our faith in evanjeslisin or our faith in gods word this is the light that reveals the way to us. with it we may search for the lost coin. for he says "the lantern is the faith as is written. your words are a lantern to my feet and light to my way. the word of god is the subject matter of our faith and it is the light. for the lantern in the faith since it is the true light that shines to every man coming into the world (john 1:9). the lantern can never be lit unless we takes its light from another source who is god. the lantern we light up is the power of our souls and feelings. with it we can find the lost coin (luke 15:8). it is not appropriate that man puts this faith or lantern under the bushel of the law because the law is limited but as for grace it is boundless. the old law offers a shadow but as for grace it lighteus and shines. i wish no one to shut up his faith writhfin the law limitations but rather that he comes to the church and he ornamented with the lords grace. let the chief priest focus the light on the greatness of the royal godliness and thus it would not be choked by the old law shadows. in the olden times the chief priest used to lighten the lanterns according to the jewish rituals is such a symstematic way morning and night. but it has blown out because they were put under the bushel of the old law also the earthly Jerusalem has disappeared after killing so many prightets (matt 23:37). but as for the heavenly jeusalem this has accepted our faith and has placed it on the mountaine tops that is on Christ. this is why I say it is impossible that the church he hidden by the darkness or the shadows of this world. the church rather shines with the splendor of the eternal sun and light on us by the beams of the spirit of grace"

7-the inward purification and the worship in the spirit the wangelist has presented to us the nuptery of our friendship with the heavenly god that is the worship with the spirit and the truth. this is fulfilled by means of fervent prayer and the unit of the indivisible spirit as well as the clinging to the word of god and keeping it practically and the repentance with the faith in the real jonah and he ealighment of the inward eye. the lord concludes his words by declaring the need for "the inward cleansing so that our worship would be in the spirit and the truth and that it should not on outer appearance of no depth. these words came as a result of the criticens said by one of the Pharisees to the lord jesus because he did not wash first. we have perviously spoken of the wasing rituals with the jews and how important this was to them in our study of st. marks gospel (7:1-23). we moreover spoke of the words the lord jesus said against the action of the phaisees and the lawyers wheteher in appearance or in actual worship in our study of the evangelist st. matthew (ehapa 23). we therefore offers the following comments here:

firstly: this Pharisee who has invited the lord jesus to eat at his home was present listening to his words. he has also writnesed the woman who blessed her who conceived him and nursed him. he may have been one of the Pharisees who asked of him for a miracles from heaven. anyway his invitation to the lord jesus probably did not spring from pure love but rather so as to set a trap for him. the Pharisee probably wished to see if the lord would follow the Pharisee tradition in his eating and drinking or not. the lord jesus accepted the invitation and purpasfully did not wash. this was not because the washing before eating was wrong but it was because the concepts of the Pharisees for washing were wrong. they wished by this action of his to correct their concepts and show them the appropriate worship done by the spirit and in the truth. the lord spoke to them of the healthy eye and the shining lantern. if the eyes of him pharises had been healthy and his inivard lantern was shining his heart would have been preoccupied with the messaiah and he would have realized his real identity and that he was the aspiration of all the nations. in him the prophecies are fulfilled and with his death Abraham rejoiced. but because of the evil eye the phasisee was preoccupied with the outer washing and so he was critiedl of the savior of the world.

Secondly: because the Pharisee was surprised at the Lord Jesus not washing first before eating the Lord told him (Luke 11:39-40) "now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the dish but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? St Ambrosius thinks the cup the Lord mentions only refer to the body for the cup is easily broken it crashes once it falls. Like wise is the body that dies in a moment and gets corrupted. The cup also refers to the suffering of the body that man endures if his heart's longing is inwardly kindled. Therefore I wish we do not concentrate on the outward appearance of the cup but that we drink it and endure the body's passion and suffering if the heart is kindled in love. This is why the Lord says "as for the spirit it is strong but the body is weak" (Luke 11:41). It is thus appropriate for us to begin with the inward spirit so it becomes strong and endures the physical weaknesses. St Cyril the Great says "the used to wash before eating as if purifying themselves of any unrighteousness. But this was foolish indeed; for the washing with water is good for the cleaning of the body only for how is it possible to clean the thoughts and hearts of people from any defilement? Tell us you foolish Pharisee where did Moses mention this commandment? What commandment can you point to saying the Lord has asked the people to wash before eating. Indeed the spraying water was given by Moses as a commandment for the sake of physical cleanliness. It is a sign pointing to the baptism which in the truth is holy and pure in Christ. Those called to priesthood were washed in the water for it was in this way that Moses did to Aaron as well as to the Levites with him. In this way the law about the baptism was declared through the symbol and the shadow manifesting that his priesthood does not have what is enough for sanctification or the contrary. It was in need of the sanctification and the divine baptism for the sake of real purification. Then conversion has shown us by this and in a beautiful way that the savior of all is able to sanctify and purify us of any defilement through the precious and sanctified baptism regarding us the generations that have become sanctified to God and have become chosen to Him.

What has the savior said?

The Lord often seized the opportunity to rebuke them saying "now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the dish but inside you are full of greed and wickedness" because it was the time for eating and sitting round the table the Lord drew a comparison between the cup and the dish showing that it is appropriate for those who served God loyally to be pure and clean not only of any physical unrighteousness but also of the hidden unrighteousness of the mind. This is like those who serve in the kitchen and prepare the table for they have to wash the defilement that is outside as well as washing well the inside. But as for the Lord's words (Luke 11:40)

"did not the one who made the outside make the inside also?"

He means to say he who has treated the body has also created the soul as well. But the scribes and Pharisees did not do so for the savior has said (Matt 23:27). "For you are like white washed towels which on the outside look beautiful but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth. Christ does not want us to be like these but rather to be spiritual worshippers holy blameless in the soul and the body. One of those in our parishes says (James 4:8) "cleanse your hands you hypocrites and purify your hearts you double minded". The prophet Isaiah sings (Ps 51:10). "Create in me a clean heart O God and put a new and right spirit within me". For another time Isaiah the prophet speaks on behalf of God saying (Isaiah 1:16). "Wash yourselves make yourselves clean remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes cease to do evil. Notice the accuracy of the description "remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes, for sometimes evil escapes from before the eyes of people but it can never escape from before the eyes of the Lord as long as God sees the hidden matters therefore it is our duty to remove evil from before His eyes. St Augustine says, he manifested that the baptism given cleanses by faith because faith is an inward and not an outward matter. The

Pharisees second the faith and have used the washing from the outside whereas the inside remained full of uncleanness"

thirdly:lest we think the inward spiritual life implies some disregard of the outer actions particularly that of being compassionate to our needy fellow brethren the lord said (luke 11:41)"so give for alms those things that are within and see everything will be clean for you"

the true spiritual worship is based on departing from the "I" or "ego", that is put into action by means of the charitable deeds which are full of love.many of the fathers spoke of charity and its impact on the spiritual building up of our construction.

+charity is greater than any sacrifice for it opens the heavens it was said (act 10:4)"your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before god"his is of more importance than virginity for some virgins were cast out of the wedding for not giving charity or alms whereas other virgins went inside.

St.john chrysostom

+do real charity.what is charity?.it is mercy.listen to what the book says (sirach 30:23)."indulge yourself and take comfort in god.yourself is a beggar before you.go back to your conscience even though you live in evil or ingratitude.you will find yourself begging for you are in need and poverty stricken your soul is sorrowful therefore give it bread.if the Pharisee asks, what bread can I offer my soul?the lord answers "give it alms".in other words love yourself as much as you love others and give alms to your self by giving it to others.

St.augustine

+charity is not an easy treatment for it is put on every wound.it is better than abstinence or fasting or even laying on the floor.since these matters are painful and arduous but as for charity it is way more profitable

st.john chrysostom

+look at this great collection of dedication!.for gods mercy purifies us and his word cleanses us.as it is written:(john 15:3)"you have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.moreover you find the beautiful hymn saying (tobit 12:9)"for almsgiving saves from death and purges away every sin"also (sirach 29:12)."store up almsgiving in your treasury and it will rescue you from every disaster"

st.ambrosius

+despite this we assure you there are various other ways of good conduct such as meekness lowliness and other virtuous qualities so why did the lord omit these and command them to be merciful?what answer can we give?the Pharisees were covetous people enslaved to incorrect gain and collecting money greedily and storing wealth in their treasuries.the lord of all spoke of them saying (jer 1:21-23)."how the faithful city has become a whore!.she that was full of justice righteousness lodged in her-----but now murders!your silver has become dross your wine is mixed with water your princes are rebels and companions of thieves.everyone loves a bribe and turns after gifts.they do not defend the orphan and the widow cause does not come before them".he voluntarily looked upon their diseases that overruled them and he has uprooted their bait from the very roots so as to get rid of its wickedness.thus they would obtain the purity of mind and heart and become true worshipers.the savior has thus performed what is appropriate to the salvation plan.when he was invited to a feast, he offered spiritual food not only to his hosts but to all those with here at the feast as well.

St.gyryl the great

+the merciful one commanded us to show mercy.because he asks to save those whom he has bought for a great price he commanded those who became defiled after obtaining the baptismal grace to be cleansed well all anew.

St.kaprianos

Fourthly:lest we do charity in an impure way that is with a crooked conscience he made it clear them that when he asks for alms he is only asking for the truth and the love of god in them.he does not ask for the apparent forms and habits for he says (luke 11:42)"but woe to you Pharisees!for you little mint and rue and herbs of all kinds and neglect justice and the love of god it is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others.they pay attention to the trivial things for the sakes of human glory and so they offer the one truth for the mint and the rue and herbs grown in their homes or gardens.this is only to show people how meticulous they were in carrying out the law whereas they neglect the truth and the love of god which are the live actions of faith.they did not carry his love inside yet they were clothed in a robe of avarice in carrying out the law.they actually had to do this and not to leave the other.

The "rue" is a tree of the "star" origin which grows in Palestine and is used for medical purpose.st.ambrose says "they observe matters of no use and neglect those ones that grant hope"

St.gyryl the great thinks the pharisees were meticulous in observing the commandments that concern earthly temporal matters such as praying the psalms so they have a position in it.but as for the matters that concern the heart and eternity these were of no importance to them.the concern about the commandment of the law was not based on their zeal in fulfilling the covenant but rather because of their covetousness.

Fifthly:the not dangerous enemy that ruins the spiritual life could be the love of leadership and temporal honor.this is why the lord warns us by his words to the pharisees (luke 11:43, 44)

"woe to you Pharisees!for you love to have the seat of honor in the synagogues and to be greeted with respect in the market places.woe to you!for you are like unmarked graves and people walk over them without realizing it".st.john chrysostom says "this is miserable indeed for whereas we are counted worthy to be temples yet we suddenly become graves filled with corruption.

St.gyryl the great says "if people admire us unknowing without investigating our real situation yet this will not make us chosen ones in god's eyes for he knows everything.this is why the savior advises us woe to you!.for you are like unmarked graves and people walk over them without realizing it.i wish you to notice the gravity of the parable very clearly.those ones who wish to be greeted by people in the market places and those who think it is great to have the foremost seats in assemblies those ones are not any different than the hidden graves that outwardly seem to be well decorated even though they are filled with filth.i wish to know you how blameworthy hypocrisy is for it is a ,alignant disease that god and people hate.i wish we could be true worship who do not ask peoples pleasure lest we get lost from our position as servants to Christ.the devout st.paul says, (gal 1:10)"am I now seeking human approval or god's approval?or am I trying to please people?if I were still pleasing people I would not be a servant of Christ.just as the forged gold currency is rejected likewise is the hypocrite for he is rejected by god and by people.

Sixthly:when the lord showed the danger of hypocrisies the love of money and the love of temporal dignities on the inward spiritual life.he addressed his words to a lawyer warning him of the blind and literal following of the law that is spiritless.the evangelist says (luke 11:45-47)."one of the lawyers answered him teacher when you say these things you insult us too and he said woe also to you lawyers for you load people with burdens hard to hear and you yourselves do not lift a finger to ease them.st gyryl the great thinks it was appropriate for this lawyer when he heard the savior's words and when he left they touched his life drawbacks and weakness he should have come humbly offering his repentance as a sick person asking for the cure from his doctor.he should have said "heal me lord and I shall be healed save me and I shall be saved"(jer 17:14).but this lawyer came up to the savior

accusing him by these words about the Pharisees that he was insulting the lawyers as well. it is as if he was provoked in his dignity instead of asking for the salvation of his frailties and weakness. the Pharisees together with the lawyers shared a lot of mistakes in common for the Pharisees set themselves apart from the rest of the people as an aristocratic religion category whereas the lawyers considered themselves teachers of the law who answered certain questions concerning the law and the covenant both parties were haughty and puffed up and seemed to be pious regardless of any spiritualities. the lord Jesus uncovered the wounds of the lawyers by his words (Luke 11:46) "woe also to you lawyers! for you burden people with burdens hard to bear and you yourselves do not lift a finger to ease them"

St. Cyril of Alexandria says "the law to the Israelites was as they confessed miserable indeed. the religious scribes knew this well enough for they rebuked those seeking to return those who believed in the rituals of the old law saying (Acts 15:10) "now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?" the savior has thought us this for he cried out saying (Matt 11:28, 29) "come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. thus he says that those under the law are weary and heavy laden whereas he calls himself gentle and humble since there is nothing in him of the law. as St. Paul says (Heb 10:28) "anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. therefore woe unto you lawyers as he says because you burden with load those under the law? they are heavy burdens whereas you do not touch this load. for they command keeping the Moses commandment without any breaking of it and they judge to death he who is careless about it. despite this they do not observe fulfilling the least of these easy commandments as this was a customary habit the wise St. Paul rebuked them saying (Rom 2:17-23). "but if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast of your relation to God and know his will and determine what is best because you are instructed in the law and if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind a light to those who are in darkness a corrector of the foolish a teacher of children having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth you then that teach others will you not teach yourself? while you preach against stealing do you steal? you that forbid adultery do you commit adultery? you that abhor idols do you rob temples? you that boast in the law do you dishonor God by breaking the law?" for the teacher is scorned and his reputation is disgraced when his conduct is not in accordance with his words". Father Theophylact comments on the Lord's words against the lawyers saying "it is truly said they do not wish to touch the burdens of the law with one of their fingers. this means they do not fulfill the least of points in the law whereas they pretend they keep it and hand it over well studied and kept to others. they actually behave contrary to their fathers without any faith and without God's grace. St. Gregory the Bishop of Nyssa says "they are areal judges of sinners though they are weak strugglers letting them carry the burdens of the law whereas they neglect carrying it themselves. they do not wish to draw near to it or even touch it through the serious life"

Seventy: the lawyers did not only cling to the literal fatal law without the spirit of commandment they also made the law a burden under which people groan. they found justification for themselves to escape from eating touching the least of these commandments. they did not stop at claiming their knowledge and education even though they did not practice the virtuous life. they went on to do what was bitterly cruel: they built the graves for the prophets ornamented them so as to obtain people's praise whereas they did not know that by doing so they were witnesses against themselves as being killers of the prophets fulfilling the work of their fathers... by killing themselves for the messiah the savior what happened in the past is linked to the present and the future since the cross was present in the eyes of the Lord and he could see their hands stretch out to shed his innocent blood. in this

way those bring at the time of chrisy shared in their fathers vime concerning the killing of all the prophets from the blood of abel to the blood of zochasias who was killed between the altar and the house.st gyril the graet says their fathers have killed the prophets and when they came to believe they were holy prophets they because judge against those who killed them.they have unsested to honor those eoho were condemmed to death and by their doing so they condemmed those ones who committed the error.but those who condemmed their fathers for their cruel auimes were themselves on the same way to commit similar enimes and even worse ones for they have killed the ruler of life the savior of everyone.they thus added to their crime of killing him other crimes.for st Stephen was led to death not because he was accused of anything wrong but because he adised them and spoke to them of what was mentioned in the books of inspiration.other enimes were commited by them against every saint who preached the gospel the message of salvation.in this way the lawyers and the Pharisees proved in every way how they hated god and how faughtly they were lovers of pleasures more than their love for god.they hated their own salvation by all means and this is why the lord added the word "woe" to them contiusally".st.john chrysonts says "the condition of the jews was not corrected through their past mistakes.but rather when they saw others err and get punished they were not corrected to what is better but on the eoutrary they committed the same mistakes themselves.not with standing this man is not punished for others sins.in other words they cannot offer a pretext of not being responsible for what their fathers did because even though they are not condemned for this yet they do commit the very same evil deeds of their fathers lohat does he means by the words (luke 11:51)."from the blood of abel to the blood of zechariah who perished between the altar and the sanctuary".we said that in the age of st.jerome there was found three opinions concerning this zechaiah:he is either zacharia the prophet one of the minor prophet or zechariah st john the babbist father or zechariah the son of yehmya da (1chron 14:21) and st Jerome thinks the third opinion in the most probable one.as for st Gregory the bishop of nisus he believes it is Zachariah john the babtirits father.so if we follow st Jerome point of view which is supported by many fathers then abel was killed in the field whereas zacharias was killed in the temple hall.it is as if the martyrs blood that was injusted shed has filled the public places as well as in the lords holy places.we also consider akel not being a priest whereas zacharias was a priest.thus added to the list of martyrs there is one of the people and also one of the priests.

Eightly:the lord jesus concludes his "woes" to the lawyers by saying (luke 11:52) "woe to you lawyers for you have taken away the key of knowledge you did not enter yourselves and you hindered those who were entering.

St.ambrosios says "the lord rebukes the jews and declares they deserve the judgment to come for whereas they were responsible for teaching others the godly knowledge yet they hindered them because they themselves do not acknowledge what they teach".

St gyril the great says "those ones who search the holy books and know gods will if them are rightoeurs and are zealous in concerting others and are stifful in leading others correctly in all matters these people are blessed abundarily if they 3lolously fulfil their jobs.this is what the savior confirms by his words (matt 24:45-47)"who then is the faithful and wise slave whom his master has put in charge of his housshold to give the other slaves their allowance of food at the prayer time? blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives truly I tell you he will put that one in charge of all his posesseous" but if he is careless or neglect or is a hindrance to those he is in charge of and they thus go astray such a one becomes miserable and falls in the danger of punishment without any hope at all.for another time the lord jesus himself says (matt 18:6) "if any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.in this way Christ proved to those who considered themselves skiful in the law that they commit

grave mistakes such as these. I mean to say the scribes and the Pharisees for he told them woe to you lawyers for you have taken the key to knowledge. We understand by the key to knowledge that it is the law itself and the justification of Jesus which in the belief in him. Even though the law is a shadow and a symbol yet these shadows from to us the truth and these symbols show us Christ's mystery in various ways. For every word in the holy book that is of inspiration points to him and looks upon him. It was therefore the duty of those who were called lawyers since they were the ones studying the law of mores and who knew the words of the saintly prophets to open the doors of knowledge to the Jewish multitude. This is because the law leads humanity to Christ and the devotions of the prophets lead to his knowledge. But those who were called lawyers did not do so. On the contrary they look for the key of knowledge by which the law is understood and the true faith in Christ is achieved because with faith we come to the truth. As Isaiah says (Is 7:9) "if you do not stand firm in faith you shall not stand at all" "they have taken the key of knowledge as they did not allow people to believe in Christ the savior of all"

Finally when the Lord uncovered the wounds of the secrets and the Pharisees they begin (Luke 11:53, 54) "to be very hostile toward him and to cross examine him about many things bying in wait for him to catch him in something he might say. He wished them to be healed of the inward wounds of the soul. But in foolishness they increased in their resentment of him through malicious hearts for they were excessively envious of him. Through their corrupt will they were buying in wait for him to catch him. Also they were mentally deranged for they observed him with all their thoughts so as to catch some fault coming out of his mouth. They declared their inward corruption all the more emotionally, weeping and thoughtfully.

In the previous chapter the Lord revealed the frailties of some religions leaders, as they had worshipping shows of no depth. They also understood the law and the commandments in a literate and spirit less way. They were bitterly tied to the love of the world and temporal honors. But now, the friend came to establish for Himself a new fold that will become His one body. The Lord showed clearly the qualities of this new and small fold so they be in harmony with its Shepherd in heaven, who is the Groom, and its Savior, and its Head working in the body.

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1- The Small Flock and the leaven of the Pharisees:

Because our heavenly Friend wished to establish His believers as a new fold embodying His heavenly qualities, He therefore gave the first commandment to His church through His disciples. This was to put away "the old leaven" that is to say, the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy, so that the church would not be founded on wrong foundation. He wished to destroy the corrupted old leaven so that we are offered as the new Passover bread. As St. Paul the apostle says, (1Cor.5: 6-8) "Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

(Luck12: 1) The evangelical words are: "Meanwhile, when the crowd gathered by the thousands, so that they trampled on one another, He began to speak first to His disciples, Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, that is, their hypocrisy."

With hypocrisy the Pharisees wished to catch the Lord Jesus with a word from His mouth so they could prevent people from reaching Him, and thus their popularity would not be lessened, and their honor and authority would not be lost. But their behavior brought about a contrary result, for tens of thousands came in big crouths eager to meet him. In this way, before the Lord Jesus warned His Flock of hypocrisy that is embedded in the Pharisees, the evangelist St. Luke made it clear in a practical lesson how hypocrisy fails to fulfil the aimof

those who adopt it. As father Theophlactius says “In this way truth is strong whereas every deceit is weak.”

By hypocrisy man wishes to attract all those around him, and he wishes to deprive them of the truth. But hypocrisy is revealed, and people try to avoid hypocritical men and cleave to the truth. This is on one hand, on the other hand the Lord Jesus was likened to a yeast that works despite its small size in the whole batch of dough. The Lord says this could corrupt man entirely. This could make him lose every purity and spiritual virtue in the heart, the thoughts, the feelings, even if he is clothed with a garment of apparent righteousness, and an ability to teach, and zeal for all that is holy.

+ Hypocrisy is an issue that God hates, and is loathed by man. It does not beget any reward, and is absolutely useless in the soul’s salvation. Rather, it could be the offense for its perdition.

If hypocrisy is not revealed at times, yet it is only for a while, for it will not last forever. Everything will be disclosed, and it will inflict its owner with disasters. This will be similar to an ugly woman, who, when the outer artificial cosmetics are ripped off, she appears as she really is.

+ Hypocrisy is foreign to the saintly qualities, since it is impossible that anything we do or say escapes from the eyes of God. (Luke12: 2) “Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known.” All of our words and actions will be disclosed on the judgment day. Therefore hypocrisy is wearisome and useless. It is appropriate for us to be exalted as true slaves and work for God in candid and open features.

St. Cyril the great.

+ The yeast is praiseworthy since it is linked to the bread of life, and it is blameworthy when it means the constant deceit so bitter.

St. Gregory El Nazinzi

+ Hypocrisy is called yeast, for it deceives the intention of him who practices it and misleads it. Nothing destroys man’s personality such as hypocrisy does!

Father Theophlactius

Bishop of Bulgaria

+ He addressed the Pharisees, as if telling them, “You Pharisees, what you speak of in the dark, that is, all your effort to test Me in the hiding places of your hearts, is heard in the light, because I am the light. By my light, the deceit of your darkness is uncovered. What you speak of in the ears and bedrooms, that is, what you whisper in each other’s ears will be declared on the rooftops, for it is heard by me as someone crying out loud on the rooftop.

Here too, light could mean ‘the gospel’, and the rooftop could mean the ‘gospel’. The rooftop means the high spirits of the disciples. What the Pharisees have plotted together, will be called and would be revealed through the light of the gospel, by means of the great preacher the Holy Spirit that reigns over the high souls of the disciples.

Father Theophactius

2- The New Flock and the Fear:

When the Lord asked in his church of the new flock not to carry the yeast of the saints which is hypocrisy, and not to be from the outside other than the inside, the Lord then asks the church to be conducted in God’s fear alone, without fearing people. He who fears God does not pay much concern to peoples judgment, which avoids any hypocrisy on his part, because he would not ask for their praise, and would not ask for any reward, and neither does he fear their despotism.

(Luke12: 4,5) “I tell you my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who after he has killed, has authority to cost into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.”

+ We have to fear the perdition of the soul, and not the killing of the body. For death is a normal ending to the physical pain, but it is not the termination to the punishment. It puts an end to the suffering of the body, the temporal one, but as for the souls punishment this is an eternal one. We have to fear God alone.

St. Ambrosios

+ This commandment concerns those who love him. But are those ones who love him? We answer, it is those ones who have similar concepts as he does and are zealous in following his footsteps. This is what the apostle urges us to do in the words (1Pet.4: 1) “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same intention”, (Ps.88: 5) “Like those forsaken among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave. “Death did not attack him due to sin, as with us, for he always was and still is with no sin whatsoever. He is unable to do any evil, for he endured all suffering willingly for our sake, due to his boundless love for us. Let us listen to him, for he said openly (John15: 13) “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” Is it not bitten ingratitude not to repay Christ the debt so necessary that we have borrowed from Him?

In other words, we say that, as lovers to him, we should not fear death, but that we rather should follow the example of our righteous. For when Abraham our father was asked to offer his only son Isaac, this was because he knew God is able to raise him from the dead (Heb.1: 19). What fear could attack us when ‘life’ has deleted death, because Christ is the resurrection and the life (John11: 25).

Let us bear in mind that crowns are obtained by struggling, for the strong wrestlers in the rings obtain perfection by violent struggle and experience. Courage and mental forwardness serve those skilful people in the battlefield. But he who throws his armour down is scorued by the enemy, if the runaway lives, then he lives in disrespect. But he who stands firm in battlefield, in fortitude and courage with all of his strength against the enemy, then he will be held honorable by achieving victory. If he falls wounded, then he will be held in admiration. In such a way it is appropriate for us to behave, enduring patiently and firmly in the fight with courage, and thus we obtain the great reward. We shall be held in admiration, and gain for ourselves God’s blessings. As for refusing the vulnerability of the physical death for the sake of Christ’s love, then this will bring upon us incessant everlasting punishment. This is because man’s wrath reaches its climax at the boundaries of the body. And the physical death would be the end of their fight against us. But if God punishes, then the loss does not only touch the body alone, but it also touches the miserable soul, and so it falls under a lot of perdition.

I wish our share would be an honouable death which raises us to the beginning of eternal life. It necessarily cleaves to the blessings that spring from the divine love of God. Let us run away from the shameful life, and let us disregard it scornfully, the ugly life so temporal, that leads to eternal and bitter punishment.

St. Cyril the great.

+ Look how the Lord made his disciples above everyone; for he urged them to think lightly of death which scares everyone! At the same time he offered assurance for the soul’s immortality.

St. John Chrysostom

+ One of the saints said, “The body fears any tribulations, so it would not lose its life or suffer. Therefore it becomes a friend to sin; so the Holy Spirit obliges it to die because if it does not die, it will not overcome sin. If anyone wants to become a dwelling place to the Lord, he has to overcome his body, and serve the Lord, and follow the Spirit’s

commandments. He also has to keep himself safe from the physical deeds about which the apostle wrote. The body blended with sin is restless with the physical deeds. But as for its fruits, these do not make God's Spirit restless.

Let me die at this point so as not to see the real death of the soul, that is, the separation from God. I would rather die here for the sake of chastity than live a wicked life. I have chosen this death willingly, for the sake of my sins.

Father Mar Isaac the Syrian.

3- The New Flock and the Reliance on God:

Because the Lord Jesus wished to encourage us in our spiritual struggle so as not to fear the physical death, he assured us of his care even to our very bodies, and even to our very own hairs that appear to us at times as of no worth at all. He is Lord of the soul and the body together. He is concerned about our entire being and life, for he says, (Luke 12: 6,7) "One not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight. But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows."

+ Meditate on his great concern about those who love him. If the Provider of the universe takes so much care of even the valueless things, and he condescends to speak about the little sparrows, then how much more so will He not remember those who love Him, and those who cleave to Him? For He knows every minute of their life, even the very hairs on their heads.

Let us not doubt His enriched hand that grants His grace to those who love Him. For He either does not allow us to fall into tribulation, or if, with His wisdom, He allows us to fall into the trap, and it is only that He may be glorified through the sufferance. He thereby grants us more assuredly, the strength in our tolerance.

Our righteous St. Paul is our testifier in this, for he says (1Cor. 10: 13) "God is faithful, and He will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing He will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it."

St. Cyril the great.

+ If God does not forget about the birds, then how can He forget man? If they are so great in such a way, and are eternal, to the extent that the sparrow and the count of hairs on our heads are not hidden to His knowledge, then how much more ignorant and foolish is he who assumes that the Lord does not know about the honest hearts, and that He disregards them?

I think the five sparrows are the five physical senses: that of touch, smell, taste, vision and hearing. Birds are like physical beings, pecking the dirt of the ground, searching for food in the barren land of nauseating smell. They err and so fall in traps, thereby are unable to rise towards the high fruits and the spiritual banquet. The attraction of the traps implies in its folds the action of our spirit, as well as the kindling of our nature, our activity and our purity. All of these are dispersed by means of our concern about all that is earthly and materialistic, and our possessing the luxury of this world. And now, after our bondage, we have before us two of the pleasures: either being enslaved to sin, or the release from it. For it is Christ who liberates us, and it is the enemy who sells us. He exposes us to be sold, so we would die, whereas Christ redeems us so He might save us. St. Matthew has mentioned two sparrows (Luke 10: 29) referring to the body and the spirit.

We were granted by grace to fly, but it is pleasure that bonds us, and thus the spirit becomes heavy with the evil entrapings, and it slides to the level of the heavy physical nature.

If it is said that not one of them falls down without God's permission. The fallen one slides towards the ground, but he who flies is carried up by the divine grace. Therefore do not fear the devil's overruling, but fear the wrath of God.

The soul, too is symbolized by the sparrow, for it is said, (Ps.124:7) “We have escaped like a bird from the share of the fowlers.” At another place (Ps.11: 1) “In the Lord I take refuge; how can you say to me ;Flee like a bird to the mountains.” Man was also compared to a bird (Ps.102: 7) “I am a lonely bird on the housetop, “For man is composed of two birds in one, as the unity of the two wings that cooperate in agility so it rises, and thus the spiritual nature overcomes the materialistic one.

There is found the good bird, that, with his spiritual nature he could fly, and another wicked bird that is unable to fly due to the earthly wickedness. This last one is sold for two pennies. How cheap the price of sin is! For death includes everyone, but as for virtue it is valuable! The enemy exposes us so as to be sold as slaves that are in bondage and he evaluates us at a cheap price. But as for the Lord, He treats us as good slaves, whom He has created in His image and likeness, and He evaluates us at a great price. For the apostle says, (1Cor.6: 2) “You were bought for a price “ Indeed, it is as expensive price that cannot be counted in silver, but by the precious blood, because Christ has died for our sakes, and has freed us by His precious blood. As St Peter mentions in his epistle (1Pet.1: 18) “You Know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.” Yes indeed , it is precious blood because it is the blood of the sinless body the blood of the Son of God who redeemed us not only from the curse of the law (Gal.3: 13) but also from the death of eternal sin.

St. Ambrerosios

+ The five birds are understood in a mysterious way as the five senses that have awareness from above for the heavenly matters: You can see God, and hear the divine voice of God, taste the bread of life, smell the fragrance of Christ’s ointment, and hold on to the word of life.

These senses are sold for two pennies, since they are considered cheap by means of those who perish what is spiritual, and they are not forgotten before God.

The scholar Oreganus

+ These senses are sold for two pennies, that is, by the Old and the New Testament. Thus they are not forgotten by God.

Father Theophlactius

+ Man’s head is, secretly speaking, his mouth. His hair is his revealed thoughts in God’s eyes.

St. Cyril the great.

4- The New Flock and the Testimony

(Luke12: 8-12) “And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges Me before others, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but whoever denies Me before others, will be denied before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but whoever denies Me before others, will be denied before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. When they bring you before the synagogues, the rulers and the authorities, do not worry about how you are to defend yourselves or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you ought to say.”

Sin has corrupted the five sparrows, that is, our inner sense; for instead of being released with the Holy Spirit towards the heavenly things, so they might see, hear, taste, touch and smell what is eternal and godly, they suddenly fall in the pleasurable traps, and they get tied by the chords of the world. They thus become. Unable to fly, and are preys to

the enemy's traps under his authority, so despotic and destructive. This is why man, even when being religions, was unable to rise above, and has become in his worship and preaching, a prisoner to the vain glory and hypocrisy, and sometimes to materialistic gains, and matters that have given him the Pharisees' thoughts of the old law. Man is outlet concerned about the literal fatal words instead of the deep spirit that is constructive. The Lord has redeemed us so as to free us of these traps, so as to live in this world as true witnesses to the savior through our heavenly life. And our new concepts, and our spiritual being which is of our Lord's making. We testify of Him here and thus the Son of man testifies of us in the heavenly holy places themselves.

He has paid the price of His blood to pull us out of the hypocrisy ambush. He assures us that what we speak of in the dark will be declared in the light. What we whisper in the ear, will be declared on the housetops. Now here He is assuring us, that what we do here, just as in the darkness or in the ear, will be declared by our Lord Jesus Himself before His angels and His saints in the great day of the Lord.

Those hypocritical ones, do wickedness secretly and so they are scandalized. The Church apparent and hidden knowledge is to confess the savior so He be glorified in truth. + Therefore the Lord is not convinced of the inward faith alone; He also asks us confess Him outwardly, and He urges us to have confidence and great love. Since this is useful to all of us, He says "all those who confess Me...."

St. John Chryestom

(Rom.10: 9) "Because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Christ's mystery has been made clear by these words in a terrific manner.

First and foremost it is our duty to confess that the Son. Born of God the Father, the only begotten Son in His essence, God the word, is the Father of everyone. He is not like someone who has obtained the lordship from outside, but this is attributed to Him for being the Lord in truth and by nature, just as with the Father. Secondly, it is appropriate for us to believe that God has raised Him up from the dead, that is because He has become man, He suffered physically for our sakes and rose from the dead. This is why, as I have said, the Son is the Lord. He alone is the Lord by nature, for He is God the word above all other creation. This is what the wise St. Paul teaches us saying (1Cor.8: 5,6) "Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth- as in fact there are many gods and many lords- yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist."

He who confesses Christ before people, that He is God the Lord will be confessed before God's angels. But where? And how? It is clear that this will be when He comes down from heaven in His Father's glory, with the saintly angels at the end of this world, when those who confessed Him in truth will be crowned, those ones who have the real unhesitating faith. There, the groups of saintly martyrs shine, the ones who have endured the struggle till they have shed their life-blood. Those ones have honored Christ by their patience, and have not denied the Savior. His glory was not unknown to them; they rather offered their allegiance to Him. Such people are praised by the saintly angels who glorify Christ the Savior of everyone, for the honor granted to His saints, and that are worthy of it. This is what the psalmist proclaims (Ps.50: 6) "The heavens declare His righteousness, for God Himself is Judge." This is the portion for those who confess Him.

As for the rest, those who disowned Him, and scorned Him, these will be denied, when He will tell them as previously said by one of the prophets in the olden times (Ohadiah1: 15) "As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head." And He denies them with the following words (Luke13: 27) "K do not know where you come from; go away from Me, all you evildoers!"

Who are those ones who will be disowned?

Firstly: they are the ones who, when they fall under the pressure of persecution, and some hardship befalls them, they deny the faith. They lose the entire faith from its very roots. There are no human words that could possibly express this, for they obtain the wrath and condemnation and fire that is never extinguished.

In the same fashion are those ones who follow heresy, and those who teach it. This heresy denies Him; such as those ones who dare say that God the Word the only begotten Son, is not God by nature and truth.

St. Cyril the great

+ 'Denying Christ through the corrupt life that is not befitting us.'

There are other means of denial described by St. Paul, saying (Titus1: 16) "They profess to know God, but they deny Him by their actions. "Also (1Tim5: 8) "And whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." Also (Col.3: 5) "Put to death... evil desire and greed which is idolatry."

Just as there are various ways of denial, it is also obvious there are various kinds of confessing Him. Notice the concerned warning about the deeds.

In the Greek He says 'He who confesses in me' which shows that the confession of Christ is not fulfilled by man's personal strength, but rather by the heavenly grace from above; for man confesses Christ. As for the denial. He says 'he denies Me'; for if he is deprived of the grace, then he is disowned'. Despite this, he is condemned, for the deprivation has come to be by his means, for he has rejected the grace, and so the error is attributed to him.

St. John Chrysostom

I wish, therefore, to testify to the Lord, and confess Him with our mouth, our heart, our true faith, our appropriate conduct through the work of His grace that grants the power of testimony and work. Thus our Christ, the Resurrected from the dead, will appear transfigured in our depth, obvious in our daily life through the new life that we have in Him. By this testimony, and this daily confession, we are equipped that our Lord Himself will confess us before His angels; for He counts us heirs to God, and heirs with Christ, and partners in the eternal glory, where we have a place in the Father's embrace.

The confession of the Lord Jesus has its eternal and declared reward of no return. The denial, too, has its irretrievable punishment; and this is why He feared lest anyone collapses in despair if he fails once, and falls into disowning Him. He then thinks he is unable to repent, and so falls under eternal perdition. This is why He assures us (Luke12: 10) "And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven" thereby the Lord opened widely the doors of hope through repentance. The rest of His words confirmed this by His saying (Luke12: 10) "But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven." This means that he who rejects the work of the Holy Spirit, the Giver of repentance and forgiveness, loses his forgiveness. We have previously spoken elaborately of 'the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit,' and we assured that the unforgivable blasphemy is the insistence on no repentance.

Some have misunderstood this divine phrase, assuming that he who says a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, whereas he who says a word against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. This means that he who transgresses against the Lord Jesus, being incarnate and hidden, will be forgiven when he discovers the truth and thus he repents; whereas he who transgresses against the Holy Spirit, this one has no repentance. This interpretation is unacceptable since the Holy Book confirmed that every sin we repent of, is

forgiven. Moreover, this was declared by the church fathers, thereby opening the doors of hope, even before the heretics that have blasphemed against the Holy Spirit, and their followers as well, if they repent over their transgression. The church has actually accepted them on their repentance.

St. Ambrosius confirms the distinction here is based on the distinctive work of the Holy Trinity, and that the denial of the Holy Spirit, or the blasphemy against Him only means rejecting His work altogether. This means rejecting the work of repentance urged by the Spirit in us. This is made clear in the same discussion by the Lord, for He continues saying (Luke 12: 12) “for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you ought to say.” He who rejects His mysterious work in the heart, will not obtain any forgiveness till he returns and accepts Him all anew.

When the disciples of the Lord Jesus testified of Him before the synagogues, the rulers and dignitaries, the Lord Jesus granted them the ability for this job, for He entrusted them in the hands of His Holy Spirit saying (Luke 12: 12) “for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you ought to say.”

+ The Lord says what we utter and answer with at the time of tribulation, is granted us at this very hour from heaven that provides for us. It is not us who speak, by God’s Spirit does, He who does not depart from those who confess Him, and is not separated from them. He rather speaks in them and is crowned in them.

+ The work of the Holy Spirit is that we overcome, and obtain victory by making the enemy submit in the great conflict.

St. Kyprianos

+ At the time when discord and fights occur among friends, the Lord commands us to think well about the situation. But when the threat and fear of courts of justice come to be, the apprehension rises from all sides. It is at this point that He gives us His power that grants courage, and what we speak, and not to get discouraged.

St. John Chrysostom

5- The New Flock and Covetousness:

The Lord’s previous words were absolutely urging us to testify of the Lord, and confess Him by heart and tongue, even in the most sordid cases and extreme hardship. Now, the Lord is asking us to testify of Him during the life’ of righteous practicability. He warns us of the most dangerous enemy that could harm the believer, which is that of greed and the love of the world. This could disturb even the ministers of the word in the temporal matters to withdraw their hearts from carrying the qualities of their heavenly Groom.

When two brothers quarreled about the inheritance, one of them came to ask the Lord to stand by him on his side. The Lord thus answered, (Luke 12: 14,15) “Friend, who set Me to be a judge or arbitrator over you? And He said to them ‘take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.’ The Lord’s answer may have had the following aim:

Firstly: To raise the mission of preaching the word above any materialistic problems, so that the ministers of the word would be free to give their utmost concern to take every soul to the salvation mission, and be concerned about eternity.

Secondly: Not to take advantage of the faith on the account of the temporal rights, but to focus the concern on the everlasting joy.

Thirdly: The Lord warns His new flock of the greed that corrupts the social life as much as it does the heart.

+ The previous words were entirely given to us so as to endure the pain for the sake of testifying to the Lord. This is also to count death as something light, and to hope for the reward or not to fall under the penalty awaiting them who do not obtain the forgiveness.

Since greed generally corrupts righteousness, therefore a special commandment was added to it with the parable, 'Friend, who set Me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?'

Indeed, He has avoided the earthly issues; He who has come down for the sake of the divine issues. He did not accept to be a judge for the disputes, and rule in the laws that concern the wealth of this world, but He is the Judge of the living and the dead, who rewards each one according to his deeds. When you ask of Him, contemplate on the Giver and not on the gift. Do not think that the thoughts concerning the lofty matters can be disturbed at the worldly ones. This is why the Lord dismissed this friend who was more concerned about the vain gains rather than the heavenly ones.

The Lord saw He should not interfere between brothers as a Judge, but that love and not judgment should be their mediator in understanding and the dividing of the eternal inheritance, and not in the inheritance of silver. For it is useless to accumulate money if man does not know how to use it.

St. Ambrosios

+ Indeed, the Son has appeared in our form and likeness. The Father has set Him as the Head and the King of Zion, the mount of His holiness, as the psalmist said (Ps.2: 6). He has shown the nature of His work clearly, for He says, 'I came to preach the Lord's commandment. What does this mean? Our Lord, the Lover of righteousness wishes us to depart from the earthly and temporal matters, and to run away from the physical love, and from the vain worry over work, and from the base passion, and not to rose about the storage. We rather have to scour wealth and the love of ugly gain. We have to be righteous, and love one another, and not to collect treasures on the earth, but to rather be exalted above fights and envy. We should not quarrel with our brothers, but we rather have to welcome them even if they wish to exploit us, for He says (Luke6: 30) "And if anyone takes away your good, do not ask for them again." Let us rather fight and struggle for the sake of constructive and necessary matters that save the soul.

The Lord did not leave us without education; He found the good opportunity to offer us a useful conversation for the salvation, and He proclaimed 'Be watchful, and be careful of any greed.' The Lord showed that covetousness is the pitfall set up by Satan, which is so hateful to God. This was called by the wise St. Paul as the worshiping of idols (Col.3: 5). This may be because it only befits those who do not know God, or because this equals the malice done by those who worship idols and stones.

Covetousness is the trap of the evil spirits by means of which they pull man's soul to the abyss entrappings. In real justice to ensure their safety the Lord says, 'Be careful and watchful of any greed or covetousness that is be it little or much greed, and from man's deceit one to the other, whoever this man may be like. As I have said before, greed is hated by god and by people.

We learn this of God Himself, who says on behalf of His saintly prophets (Amos5: 11,12) "Therefore because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins, you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and push aside the ready in the gate." Also (Is.5: 8-10) "Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you, and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land! The Lord of hosts has sworn in my hearing: Surely many houses shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant. For ten acres of vineyards shall yield but one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield a mere ephah. "Even though by being unjust to others they possess houses and field, yet they are deserted with no inhabitants inside. They are useless to those evil doers because God's wrath falls on them rightly. Therefore there is no profit whatsoever for greed by any means.

From another point of view, greed does not profit anyone, because man's life as the Lord says is not based on His possessions, for He is overflowing in abundance. This is a real fact, for man's life is not extended according to his riches, and neither is the totality of his life in accordance with his ugly earnings.

St. Cyril the Great

+ (Luke 12: 15) "for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions."

The Lord says these words to rebuke the urgings of the covetous ones who collect wealth as if they were to live for a long time. But, does this wealth make you live a longer time? So why do you show wickedness for the sake of uncertain restfulness?

Father Theophactus

When the Lord Jesus proclaimed man's life is not linked to his wealth, He wished to assure us of this by using a parable; for the evangelist says, (Luke 12: 16-21) Then He told them a parable. "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself" What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops? Then he said 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

We notice the following in this parable:

Firstly: St. John Chrysostom thinks this rich man has erred for he calls his wealth 'goods', for wealth is not 'goods' in itself, and neither is it considered evil. Goodness is the richness, such as chastity, modesty and such like qualities. If man chooses them, he becomes righteous. Evil is malice, and he who chooses it is counted evil. As for the other matters, these are naturally not good and neither are they evil. They could be directed towards righteousness as much as towards evil. If we use wealth in givings, then it becomes righteousness, and if it implies greed, then it becomes evil.

The saint has clarified this concept on more than one occasion, particularly in the article that said, "No one can harm a person unless this person harms himself." He showed clearly that wealth, as much as poverty does, both of them do not harm man. What harms him is the evil of his inward heart, and the misuse of riches or poverty.

Wealth in its essence is not goodness; this is confirmed by St. Clemens the Alexandrian in his book "Who is the rich one who is saved?" Wealth is not wickedness, it is rather beneficial if well used. There are many wealthy people who are blessed with the kingdom due to their love of giving.

Secondly: The heart of this rich man mentioned by the Lord Jesus was attracted to earthly riches. His heart was sealed with the love of temporal issues, and the stuffing of the barns of his greedy soul. He thought himself able to erect more new barns for himself; but all of a sudden his soul was required of him, and the barns were absolutely destroyed.

St. Basil the Great said, "He did not remember his brethren of the creation, neither did he think of giving of his surplus to the needy. His barns were exploding with the surplus storage, but yet the greed of his mind was not to be satisfied in any way. He says 'I will do so, I will pull down my barns....' you will do well; for your evil storage deserve to be pulled down. Pull down your barns that offer no peace to anyone."

Thirdly: This rich man did not realise that God is the mystery of the human soul's life. He who possesses God inside him, possesses life on an eternal standard. He will not be overcome by death, but he will rather soar above by the truth above any time boundaries.

He made a mistake when he thought his life was estimated according to his riches. When he had a surplus of wealth, he thought he had long years of welfare to enjoy. He was

not aware that his soul would be asked of him this very night. St. Clemendous the Alexandrian says, “Man’s life is not based on the overflow of his possessions.” Cyril the Alexandrian says, “Indeed, man’s life is not based on his possession of surplus welfare. But he who is counted as blessed is the one who has glorified hope and is rich in God.”

Fourthly: St. Johe Kasian thinks the deviation of this rich man is his concerned about the morrow, for he says, “I wish we are not concerned about the morrow; we should not allow ourselves at all to be deviated from the basis of renouncing all kinds of luxury, and leading a frugal life.” St. Augustine thinks his concern about obtaining an affluent life is the secret behind his deviation, for he says, “Do you not think that greed, which is when we ask for more than what is necessary, makes us err? Let us beware of any kind of greed, if we wish to be blessed with the eternal wisdom.

Fifthly: In the beginning of this book we said it is ‘the joyful gospel.’ Our heavenly Friend has come to grant us through His friendship, an eternal joy that can never be taken away from us. We have seen in this gospel that it opens with joy and praise, and it was also concluded in joy. The Lord wished to differentiate between the friendly joy and the worldly joy. He therefore offered this parable in which the rich man tells himself ‘Rejoice.’ But it was only for maybe a few hours when his soul lost the source of its temporal joy. It even lost his entire life because it made out of this rich man of the world, an offense to its joy.

The physical man rejoices when he obtains temporal things, whatever their value may be. But soon afterwards, he is grieved when he loses even a little bit of what he has gained. Thus he loses his joy and his peace. This might be what St. Jerome wished to confirm when he said, “When we gain a penny we are filled with joy, and when we lose half a penny we are drowned in grief.”

Sixthly: Father Gregory the great comments on the Lord’s words ‘tonight your soul will be required of you’ saying, ‘The soul is required at nighttime, since it walked in the darkness of its heart; for it did not wish we walk in the light of hope.’

St. John Chrysostom comments on the Lord’s words ‘These things you have prepared, whose are they?’ saying “You will leave everything here; you will not only go out empty handed, but you will also go out heavily burdened with the sins on your shoulders. What you have collected here will probably fall into the enemies’ hands, and at the same time you will be asked about it.”

6: The New Flock and the Temporal things:

(Luke12: 22) “He said to His disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing.”

The Lord Jesus Christ, our heavenly Friend, wishes to exalt with His new flock, so they gradually carry the new qualities befitting Him when being uplifted. The Lord first urged him to confess the faith, then He warned him of greed as a dangerous enemy that makes man lose his contact with God and people. It also shatters his personal inward life. Then He told him the parable of the foolish rich man who set his heart on earthly barns. The Lord urges us not to be concerned about luxurious things. Now He is exalting us to a higher level, which is that of not worrying about even the necessities such as food and clothing. He assures us He is our maker, and the Giver of our life; so will He not be concerned about our feeding us? Since He has made for us the physical body He therefore also takes care of our clothing. He wishes His flock not to be neglectful or careless, but to be well balanced mentally, without any fear or worry. The flock has to lean on the Shepherd’s good chest with no disturbance whatsoever.

+ The words 'Do not fear' do not mean 'do not work'. They mean do not let your thoughts be tied to what is earthly, since man can work without being concerned.

St. John Chrysostom.

+ He did not only say 'Do not be concerned about', but He added 'to your lives'. This means do not focus your concern about these matters, but let your eagerness be focused on greater things. For indeed, life is better than food, and the body is better than clothing. If there is any danger for our life and bodies, then those leading an evil life will fall under the suffering and the penalty. Therefore it is necessary to avoid the concern about clothing and food.

In addition to this, it is despicable indeed for those who love righteousness and its serious followers in great zeal, so they are counted as perfect and praiseworthy before God, to be disturbed about new clothes, as little children do, or run after banquets that are costly and vain. What follows these things is a whole lot of violent passions, and the result is regressing away from God. For it is said, (1John2: 15) "Do not love the world nor the things of the world." Also, (James4: 4) "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God.

You might ask: "Then who will give us the necessities of life?" We shall answer the following. "Let the Lord be entrusted; He has promised you clearly about these things and told you of minor matters, such as His concern about the sparrows and the lilies of the field, to assure us He is sincere about the greater matters.

St. Cyril the great.

St. Ambrosius thinks God has created the soul and the body together in unity. For the body is the soul's garment, and the soul is the life of the body. It is as if He wishes us not to be concerned about the food and the clothing, and be rather concerned about the soul and the body together so we achieve the constant everlasting life.

He wishes us to be exalted even above the necessities; not to neglect them, but so they do not absorb our thoughts and destroy our inward peace. He wishes us to practice it in sacred thoughts, and see with the apostle that if we eat or drink, we only do this for the glory of God. Even our very entertainment and amusement, it has to be in Christ Jesus our Lord. In this way man lives in this world with no worries, and so succeeds here, and obtains a hundred fold through his inward peace. This is counted to him as a deposit of an eternal level.

The life with no worries is the secret behind the believer's success, his peace and his joy in this world, and his glory in the eternal world.

7- The New Flock and the Heavenly Matters:

God does not wish to deprive His sensible flock of anything. He has created everything for man's sake. But when He saw man clinging to the world and how his heart was corrupted by greed, and how his soul was burdened with worry, and his life got further away from his Creator, the Lord commanded him to depart from the temporal things so he be blessed with what is heavenly. The Lord wished man to leave the gift with all his heart, and to cleave to the Giver, and hence he would have an overflow of gifts. This is why the Lord Jesus went on with His words to us confirming to us three points:

Firstly: that God is not hard towards us, and that He is in fact the Lover of mankind. For our sake he is concerned about His insensible creation. He feeds the fowls of the air, and clothes the lilies of the field in wondrous beauty, so would He not be rather more concerned about man for whose sake He has created the birds and the lilies?

Secondly: Worry does not make things any better, for we cannot add to our stature one cubic. So why do we live in worry, and lose all our inward peace, and our relation with God with any fleeting profit either?

Thirdly: The Lord does not wish deprivation for its own sake, but He wishes to grant what is way greater (Luke 12: 31) “Instead, strive for His kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.” In other words, let our hearts be vacant of any temporal things, and thus the Lord enters, and establishes His kingdom without depriving us even of what we have left behind.

If we refer to the gospel words, we find them as follows: (Luke 12: 24-31) “Consider the ravens, they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you – you of little faith. And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for His kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.”

We have previously mentioned excerpts from some of the church fathers concerning these evangelical verses. I add the following words to them:

+ If the birds of the sky do not sow or reap the plentiful harvest, and the divine care constantly provide for them, then it is all the more appropriate for us to see in our greed a sign of our poverty.

The sources of provision for the birds are plentiful and manifold, and none of them are of the bird’s doings, for they know no possession of their own. The fruits given to them are shared by everyone. But as for ourselves, we have lost the commonly shared goods, and we ask for personal properties.

Do not look upon those goods as personal properties of yours, for the Lord wants to make food shared commonly between you and the birds and beasts.

The birds of the sky do not ask for any property of its own. This is why they are never in need of food, and they have no envy for others.

‘Consider the lilies how they grow’: by these words the Lord asks us to have trust in Him, for He grants us His mercy. The literal meaning to these words mean we are unable to add anything to our physical stature. As for the spiritual meaning, it means we are unable to trespass our boundaries without God’s help.

The Lord put the lily on a higher level than that of man himself. He gave it more glory than the people represented by Solomon, who was distinguished by building the Lord’s temple in its appearance, represented by Christ’s church symbolically.

The bright colors of the lilies refer to the glory of the angels of heaven who are the flowers of this world, for they have lit up the world in their brightness, and have spread about the sweet aroma of Christ. Because we are supported by their pleadings and help, we can say (2Cor. 2: 15) “For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved.” Thus we are not hindered by any feelings, and we are not confused with any urgent job, but we rather keep for ourselves the divine freedom blessings, and the gifts of the divine nature.

Indeed, it is very appropriate that the Lord refers to Solomon in all his glory, since he was able to cover up his physical nature with the strength of the Spirit, and to clothe it with the beauty of the Spirit’s deeds.

St. Ambrosius

+ This is true, because the lilies and other flowers that grow in the fields embody amazing beauty in their harmonious colors, whether in variety or splendor, all in natural clothing. This is all copied by man by his art in drawing skillfully or in embroidery; but still, it is so far from reality. However successful this work of art may be, yet it could never reach the actual

truth itself. Therefore however much we try to achieve this apparent beauty, yet our effort is in vain.

St. Cyril the great.

+ I wish we would not ask for such food that is not so essential, and rather ask for the food that concerns the soul's salvation. We do not have to ask for the expensive clothes, but rather ask how to save our bodies from fire and perdition. Let us do this, and ask for His kingdom, and all that supports us so we be sharers in Christ's kingdom.

St. Cyril the great.

+ To be confused about the visible matters, is the share of hopelessness in the life to come, and those who are fearless regarding the coming judgment.

St. Gregory, bishop of Nisus

In this way the Lord Jesus wishes to exalt us, we His new flock, so we live as the soaring birds of the sky towards the heavens. We do not care about any private property or any earthly storehouses. We rather hover as if in eternity in an atmosphere of perfect love. We also live as the lilies of the field, embodying the angelic bright beauty, which is not of the making of our hands, but the making of His absolute grace. We see in God that He is our Father, who is concerned about our sharing in His kingdom, He offers us the temporal matters as secondary and cheap when compared to His immoral fatherly gifts.

8- The New Flock and the Father's Pleasure:

(Luke12: 32) "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

What a comforting phrase, for He calls God 'our Father', and so we are relieved regarding His care and provision for our account. Indeed, the church will constantly remain the little flock', for many are called but few are chosen. These few ones disappear in the world, yet they are well-counted in God's eyes, for the Lord tells Elyah, who has believed the flock to have been absolutely eradicated, (1Kings19: 18) "Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

It is a flock not only in number but regarding the human possibilities as well. They are unable and helpless to do any strong temporal job, yet they are held as pleasing to God the Father, and are heirs to the eternal kingdom. It is the small flock in the world's eyes, but they are in God's heart, being blessed with His divine grace, and they usurp lovingly the heavenly kingdom.

+ This is actually a spiritual comfort, and the rood that leads us to the assured faith. By saying 'Do not be afraid' He means they have to believe in this issue, so confirmed, that carries no doubt whatsoever, which is that their heavenly Father grants the way of life to those who love Him. He will not disregard His own; He will rather open His hand that satisfies the universe with goodness.

He who grants these precious great matters, and He who grants the heavenly kingdom, is He going to deprive us of His mercy? Or, will He not supply us with food and clothing? What earthly welfare is equal to the heavenly kingdom? What could possibly be compared to what God will grant such as these indescribable and unimaginative matters? (1Cor.2: 9) "What no eye has seen nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him." When you praise the earthly rich person, and admire his temporal authority, this is not to be compared to what has been prepared, for it is said (1Pet.1: 24) "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass." So if you are speaking of richness and luxury and banquets, it is said, (1John2: 17) "And the world and its desire are passing away." The divine matters are not to be compared with the world's. if God

grants His kingdom to His loved ones, will He not all the more so, offer them food and clothing?

He has called them 'little flock', because we are fewer than the innumerable hosts of angels, and who surpass in their ability our deadly matters immeasurably. This is what our Savior Himself taught us in the parable mentioned in the gospels, for He says (Luke 15: 4 etc) "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices." Notice that if the number of sensible creatures is extended to ten times ten, then the flock on the ground is only one in a hundredth.

Though it is small from the natural aspect, and number, and honor when compared to the hosts of higher spirits that are innumerable, yet it is blessed with the Father's goodness that surpasses any description; and it is granted a portion with the loftier spirits, I mean, the heavenly kingdom.

St. Cyril the great

+ The Lord means by the small flock those ones who wish to become His disciples, (who are few in number). Or, the Lord may have wished to show that the saints in the world seem to be small due to their voluntary place of settlement, or because they are joined to the heavenly angelic hosts who surpass us in all that we cherish, in an incomparable way.

The little was given by our Lord to His elect ones, when compared to the huge numbers of evil people, or maybe because of their revered modesty.

Father Theophlactius

+ Be careful to belong to the chosen few; and do not be cold by following the negligent behaviour of others. Live like those few ones so you become equipped to enjoying God. (Matt. 20: 16) "For many are called but few are chosen."

St. John Casian

+ For each one of us there is a flock that leads him on to the green pastures.

St. John Chrysostom

9- The New Flock and Charity:

if the Lord Jesus has called His flock 'little' so they be counted as pleasing to the Father who has given them the kingdom, then it is appropriate for this flock to declare their eagerness for this free kingdom, by renouncing the world treasures, and offering them to the poor. Those poor ones are like keeping them safe in the new home, that is to say, in heaven. In this way the Lord Jesus offers us a new concept for giving or charity, which is the emptying of the heart of any temporal love with the aim of heavenly satisfaction.

(Luke 12: 33,34) "Sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where not thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

St. Augustine says, "I wish his deeds reveals his voice" which means if the believer speaks of the kingdom, let him proclaim his words practically by giving alms.

+ Let our eagerness be firm for the matters to come. Let us store our hope in the imminent matters as a treasure to us. Let us collect before us, for ourselves, all these matters by means of which we are well equipped for God's gifts.

St. Cyril the great.

+ Charity is a medication to every wound. But charity is not practiced by monetary giving alone, it is rather practiced by all that man masters to relieve others. The physician, for instance cures and the wise one gives advice.

St. John Chrysostom

+ Someone may ask ‘On what basis are we to sell our possession? Is it because these matters are harmful in their nature? Or, is it because they represent a tribulation to our souls?’

We answer this question, firstly; if all that is in the world, is evil in its essence then this would not be counted as God’s creation; for all of God’s creation is good (1Tim.4: 4). Secondly; our Lord’s commandment teaches us to wipe out the evil in us, and not to offer it to others, saying ‘Give alms’.

St. Basilios the great.

10- The New Flock and the Friend’s Coming:

when the Lord uplifts the heart of His little flock towards heaven, and He asks them to offer all of their treasures to the heavenly storehouses where no moth or thief could draw near, the heart is then kindled with the heavenly Groom, the Shepherd of the new flock. The body thus remains clothed, like someone ready to take off with Him; and the soul like a lantern brightly lit with the love for the coming Christ the Groom. All that is in man’s being is in a state of watchfulness and wakefulness, so all would depart to where the Groom is. (Luke12: 35, 36) “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet so that they open the door for Him as soon as He comes and knocks”.

What is it to ‘be dressed’ other than the chaste body that leads a life of restraint and discipline? What are the brightly lit lanterns other than the souls kindled by God’s Spirit, the Giver of enlightenment? Who are those people awaiting their Master other than man’s potentials and his motivation in all his feelings, emotions and talents?

Everyone works as if in watchfulness for the sake of the coming Groom who will reign.

+ Being dressed and well girdled, having a dead leather belt on, only means man practices deadening these members that include the passionate seeds of corruption. Man thus will know perpetually the gospel’s commandment ‘Be dressed for action’, and applying this to the apostle’s interpretation (Col.3: 5) “Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire and greed”. We find in the Holy Book that those who are dressed for action are the only ones who destroy the seeds of physical passion. They sing loudly the words of the devout king David (Ps.119: 83) “For I have become like a wineskin in the smoke”.

St. John Casian

+ What does it mean ‘Be dressed for action’? ‘Depart from evil (Ps.34: 14). What does it mean ‘your lanterns be brightly lit’? Do good.

St. Augustine

+ To be dressed for action means virginity or chastity. The lit lanterns are the good deeds.

St. Augustine

+ What does it mean to be dressed and ready for action? It means to control our passions, which is the work of chastity. As for lighting our lanterns, this means to light them brightly with the good deeds, that is by righteous work.

St. Augustine

+ ‘Be dressed for action’, this means to be constantly ready to practice God’s work. ‘Your lanterns lit’ means not to lead a life in the darkness, for you will have the light of common sense that reveals what you should or should not do. For this world is night, and those who are dressed for action lead a life of practical activity. For this is the case with those servants who have to have their lanterns lit, that is, the gift of discernment. The active servant has to

have the ability not only of discerning what he has to do, but also how to practice it so he would not fall headlong into the abyss of pride.

Let us struggle in practicing righteousness, and thus have two lit lanterns which are the mental understanding that shines in the soul and so lighten it up, and the leaching by means of which we enlighten others.

Father Theophlactius

+ It is appropriate for the apostles to be girdled and dressed for action so as to carry the gospel lantern.

St. Jerome

+ No one should say that the Lord wishes us to be physically dressed, and hold a lantern in our hands, literally speaking, since this interpretation befits the stupidity of the Jews alone. But as for us, to be dressed for action means to be mentally ready to work strongly in all praiseworthy things. The lantern represents the mental watchfulness, and the mental joy.

St. Cyril the great.

In addition to this, we can say these two points refer to the partnership of the body with the soul in the Holy life. The area of the waist refers to the body subdued by the apostle and enslaved it to him, not to destroy it but rather to discipline it by the Holy Spirit and thus live sanctified to the Lord. The lit lantern is the soul with all its potentials that lights inside the body so that man lives in unity and harmony under the leadership of the Spirit, for the account of the kingdom of light.

If these two chores are practiced by man through the spiritual work, then the Lord's commandment has come to announce the commitment to work through watchfulness and constant wakefulness until the Lord comes, and dwells in the midst as a Groom to the soul. For He says, (Luke 12: 36) "Be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for Him as soon as He comes and knocks".

+ It is appropriate for us to look forward to Christ's second coming from heaven; for He will come in the Father's glory with the saintly angels.

Christ will come as if from a banquet; it will be clearly manifested that God dwells as if in feasts and weddings- a befitting thing for Him. There is no sorrow whatsoever in heaven above; since there is nothing at all to grieve for in the nature above the fantasies, and that is not affected by anything.

St. Cyril the great.

+ When our Lord ascended up to the heavens, to the wedding, He was as the Groom who is attached to the heavenly hosts of angels.

Father Gregory the great.

He comes as from a wedding, as groom asking for His human bride. He knocks and so they immediately open to Him (Luke 12: 36). What does His knocking on the door mean other than His issuing the order of the resurrection! The immediate opening of the door is their quick readiness to meet Him, for they have slept in this hope, awaiting the eternal wedding day.

The true believers open the door so the Groom enters as if in His own kingdom. He would open the door for them so they be blessed with the Father's embrace. But as for the wicked ones, they will rise but to eternal death having no joyful resurrection, and they will never be blessed with seeing the divine glories. In this way their doors will remain locked, and the Groom will not enter there, and the Groom's ageless doors will be locked and they could not cross it.

The Lord Jesus continues His words, saying, (Luke 12: 37) "Truly I tell you, He will fasten His belt and have them sit down to eat, and He will come and serve them". This is amazing indeed, that the groom fastens His belt, and honors His bride, will let her sit down to eat and He Himself comes to serve her. He serves those before Him, have fastened their belts

in the world, and have served others for the heavenly Groom's account. They are thus well prepared for Him to serve them.

This sight kindles the heart of St. John Chryostom, and so he says, (Joh.6: 10) "So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith". "If you see someone in trouble, do not be curious and ask too many questions; for as long as he is in trouble consider it enough he be blessed with your help. He is God's man, be he an atheist or a Jew, and even if he is an unbeliever, he still needs your help."

+ We obtain a similar reward, for He Himself fastens His belt concerning those who have fastened their belts as well.

St. Cyril the great

+ He fastens His belt with righteousness.

The scholar Oregances

+ He fastens His belt which means He is ready for the judgement.

Pope Gregorious the great

(Luke12: 37) "He will fasten His belt, and have them sit down to eat, and He will come and serve them."

+ He would have them sit down as if relieving them of their toil, and offering them the spiritual pleasures, and prepare them His table of exquisite gifts.

St. Cyril the great

+ The sitting down here means the relief from many troubles, and the life of no worry. There is the change also for those who live in the light; their nature will be enriched in holy feelings, and will be overflowed with all the gifts, and thus they will be overjoyed. Jesus makes them sit down to grant them everlasting relief, and will distribute for them countless blessings.

St. Dionysius Arioagki

When the Lord had revealed the condition of the little flock that awaits the coming of his unique Friend, and the only Shepherd, and the heavenly groom, He began to stress the commitment to watchfulness and expectation of this coming. He said, (luke12: 38-40) "If He comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slave. But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour."

Father Methodios thinks the Lord Jesus could come in the beginning of the night when man is in his childhood. He could wait for us till the middle of the night, that is, when we mature to manhood. It could also be late at night, that is, in old age. Let us therefore be ready to meet Him whether we be children, adults or seniors. St. Cyril the great has also offered us the same interpretation.

11- The New Flock and the honesty in the job:

The Lord drew the flock's heart towards Him in the expectation of His last coming, so they be blessed with God's kingdom. Now the Lord Jesus declares to His flock the commitment to honesty so they have a share in this kingdom.

(Luke12: 41, 42) "Peter said, 'Lord are you telling this parable for us or for everyone?' And the Lord said 'Who then is the faithful and prudent manager whom his master will put in charge of his slaves, to give them their allowance of food at the proper time?'"

When St. Peter heard the parable concerning the Lord's coming in which the Lord declares His coming all of a sudden at an unexpected time, and how we should be watchful

awaiting this coming, St. Peter asked His Master if this parable concerned the disciples alone or if it concerned everyone else.

St. Peter might have asked within, himself “What did the Lord mean by saying ‘these slaves?’” Did He mean the disciples entrusted with ‘the house of God’ as servants and as shepherds until the master of the house comes? Or did He mean every believer entrusted with his life as God’s house, as a servant and a shepherd to the body, the soul, the potentials, the talents and all the possibilities to work together for the account of the house Master, the Lord Jesus Himself?

The Lord’s answer came as follows (Luke12: 42) “Who then is the faithful and prudent manager whom his master will put in charge of his slaves, to give them their allowance of food at the proper time?” As St. John Chrysostom says, “The Lord did not pose this question because He did not know who the believers and wise entrusters were, but rather He wished to reveal the scarcity of finding them, particularly to be entrusted with the church service.

+ He who is found to be honest and a wise agent, let him receive the providing of the Master’s house so he would give the allowance, their portion of food at the right time. He is the word of nutritional education for their souls, or the practical example that forms their life.

Father Theophlactius

+The Savior has exalted the apostles as agents for serving Him; that is, over those who were gained by faith for knowing His glory- people who are honest and of deep concept, will be educated in the sanctified edification.

The Lord exalted them, and commanded them to offer the food allowed to them, not indiscriminately, but at its due time. I mean the spiritual food appropriate for every individual, and that which suffices him. For it is inappropriate to offer instructions in every point in one consistent way to all those who believe in Jesus, for it is written. (Prov.27: 23) “Know the condition of your flocks.” For when we offer the true ways to any person, he would become a new student to whom we apply the simple education that does not include anything too difficult to understand or be aware of. This is an absolutely different thing than the way we use to discipline those who are firmer in the concepts, and those who are able to realise the height, the depth, the length and width of the divine concepts that are so sublime. As we have previously said (Heb.5: 14) “But solid food is for the mature.”

St. Cyril the great

The Lord’s coming will differentiate between the honest and wise agents, and those who are careless and violent, working for the account of their heroism, and not for the account of their landlord. For He says, (Luke12: 43-46) “Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives. Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions. But if that slave says to himself ‘My master is delayed in coming’ and he begins to beat the other slaves, men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and put him with the unfaithful.”

+ He who gives the servants his friends their share of food, wisely and in due time according to their needs, he will be blessed immensely as the Savior said. He will be counted worthy for greater matters, and will receive a reward worthy of his honesty. This is what the Savior taught us on another occasion, when He praised the active hard working and honest slave, saying (Matt.25: 21) “Well done, then good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.”

But if he was negligent in his work, and if he was neither hardworking nor honest, and thought lightly of being watchful over these matters as they are light things, and left himself over occupied with earthly concerns, and left his mind to be corrupted by inappropriate things, and uses violence and cruelty with those inferior to him, offering none of their due

share, then this individual will be in abject misery. This is the meaning of being 'cut off', as I assume, 'and be among those who are betrayers.' For he who harms the glory of Christ, or dares to scorn the entrusted flock, he is no different than those who do not know Christ. They will be counted with those who do not love Him. Christ has thus said to the devout St. Peter (John.21: 15, 16) "'Simon son of John, do you love Me more than these?'" He said to Him 'Yes Lord, you know that I love You. Jesus said to him, 'Feed My lambs.'" He who loves his sheep, takes care of them. He who neglects them, and leaves the flock-shepherding assigned to him, this means he hates them. If he hates them he will be punished and counted with the unbelievers.

St. Cyril the great

(Luke12: 44) "Truly I tell you, He will put that one in charge of all His possessions." This will not only be over His own home, but over the earthly matters as well as the heavenly ones, and so obey Him. This is similar to what happened to Joshua son of Nun, and Elyah; one commanded the sun, and the other commanded the clouds. All the saints, being as friends to God, used what is God's.

he who crosses his life in a righteous way, and makes his servants submit in an appropriate way, such as wrath and lust, and supplies them with food in due time. As for the wrath he uses it against those who hate God so they may repent. As for the lust, he uses this when strictly necessary for the body, making it submit to God. Such a person, I assure you, God will make him manage all His property, for he will be counted worthy to enjoy all the divine issues of God through the light of meditation.

Father Theophactius

I wish we could be, therefore, honest agents not only as servants who offer the spiritual appropriate food to every soul in its due time, but also even for us, let us be honest with the servants under our authority. This is just as the body with all its members, its feelings, the thoughts in all their potentials, and the heart with all its emotions and urges- let all that is in our hands be a trust handed over to us by the Lord. We have to serve it with the Holy Spirit, and give it the satisfaction, not with matters of this vain world but by the Spirit's food, the Word of God that satisfies all of our being. It is then, at this point, that God will make us manage all of wealth, for heaven and earth will yield to our eagerness for the Lord, and everything will work for our development. Each of us will then be like a king of authority in the Lord, the King of kings and the Lord of Lords.

It does not befit us to beat up 'the young boys and the maids. The young boys refer to the soul's potentials, and the maids refer to the physical potentials. In our previous study we have seen that the soul is symbolized by the male, and the body by the female. For the young boys are the sons of the soul and the maids are the daughters of the body. We are asked not to destroy these two, but rather to feed them and raise them so that all would be sanctified in the Lord, working in a harmonious Spirit for the account of God's kingdom.

The Lord offers us an important principle in the reward or the prize; it is this: that whenever knowledge increases, the responsibility becomes greater, and consequently the reward or the prize is greater too. For He says (Luke12: 47, 48) "That slave who knew what his Master wanted, but did not prepare himself or do what was wanted, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. From everyone to whom much has been given much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded."

+ He who knows the will of his Master and is slothful about it, and does not do what is appropriate as his duty should be, this crime is not discussed, for he is counted as in explicit shame and he deserves many beatings.

But why should the one who does not know his Master's will, and does not do it, why should he endure beatings even if they are few? This is because he did not wish to know, even though he was able to know.

It is a very severe condemnation for the ones who know, to fall under its judgment. This is manifested by Christ's disciple who says (James3: 1) "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness". For the gift spiritual of talents is abundant to the leaders of the people. The wise St. Paul writes to the devout Timothy (2Tim.2: 7) "For the Lord will give you understanding in all things". (1ti8m.1: 6) "For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the baying on of my hands." It is manifested from this that the Savior of everyone, because He gives them more, He asks for more. What are the virtues He asks them for? To be firm in the faith, the correct edification, the good foundation in the hope, the unhesitant patience the spiritual strength that is not overcome, the joy and the courage in every forward step: in this way we become a model for others in the evangelical life. If we live as such, Christ will grant us the crown, by whose means and with whose means we praise and have the authority to the Father and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.

St Cyril the great

+ Notice how He reveals openly that it is serious indeed for man to sin knowingly, than to sin in ignorance. Despite this, we are not to take refuge under the shadow of ignorance; Because there is a difference between being ignorant, and between not ready to receive any knowledge. The person about whom was said (Ps.36: 3) "They have ceased to act wisely and do good." His will is a wrong one, and he has no right to apologize by being ignorant. Despite this, ignorance does not justify anyone or exempts him from the punishment of eternal fire. It could lessen the punishment for it was not in vain that he said (2Thes.1: 8) in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."

St. Augustine

+ What excuse do we have, we who have entered the palace, and were counted worthy of entering the sepulchre, and we who have become partners in obtaining the mysteries for the forgiveness of sins, and yet, we behave more wickedly than the Greeks, and the Gentiles who did not partake of anything of the sort?

St. John Chrysostom

12- The New Flock and the Fire of the Spirit:

Since the Lord has asked us to live as honest and wise workers, then from where can we obtain honesty and wisdom? These are the gifts of the fiery Holy Spirit that the Lord Jesus has sent to His church so He changes her members to what is like 'a cherubim throne kindled in fire.' We are thus equipped for the Lord to reign over us, sitting inside us as if on His throne.

This divine fire is the Lord's gift to us, for He says, (Luke12: 49) "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!"

+ By this, He wanted to present to us a disciple full of blaze and fire, ready to endure every risk.

St. John chrysostom

+ For this reason the Spirit appeared in fire, but we increase in the cold more than the dust, and in lifelessness more than the dead; whereas we can see St. Paul soaring high in the heavens, and the highest of the heavens. He is more zealous than the blaze, overcoming

everything, and surpassing all matters: the lower and the higher ones, the present and the future ones, the existing and non-existing ones.

Apart from St. Paul, let us remember the first believers who left all their property and possessions, and all earthly concerns, and the temporal restfulness, and so devoted themselves entirely to God. They offered all their concern to the edification of the word, by day and by night. This is the fire of the Spirit that does not allow us to have in us any desire for matters of this life. We are rather transferred to another kind of love.

St. John Chrysostom

+ He said this to declare the fiery love He asks to be in us. Just as he has loved us so much, likewise does He desire us to love Him also.

St. John Chrysostom

+ The God of all is (Ps.104: 4) “You make the winds your messengers fire and lame your ministers.” When the righteous St. Paul wished the Spirit's grace given to us be not cooled, he warned us, saying, (1Thes.5: 19) “Do not quench the Spirit,” so that we stay partners with Christ if we hold on till the end to the Spirit that we have been granted. For he says ‘do not quench’ not because the Spirit is put under the authority of man, or because he endures sufferance from the Spirit, but it is due to man's ingratitude which quenches the Spirit openly. Thus man becomes as the evil ones that disturb the Spirit by unsanctified deeds.

Such fire got hold of Jeremiah the prophet when the word was as fire in him, for he said he was unable to endure this fire (Jer.20: 9). Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lover of mankind has come to throw this, fire on earth, saying ‘What do I need if it is kindled?’

St. Pope Athanasios

+ May the correct understanding kindle our minds and purify them with he who has come to send fire on earth to scatter the evil habits, quick to kindle it.

St. Gregory El Nazinzi

+ When the Holy Spirit came down, it was said (Acts2: 3) “Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.” Thus the apostle also said (Rom.12: 11) “be ardent in Spirit,” for from Him the zeal of love comes (Rom.5: 5) “because God's love has been poured in our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” As a contrast to this zeal, is what the Lord said (Matt.24: 12) “The love of many will grow cold”. For the perfect love is the perfect gift of the Holy Spirit.

St. Augustine

+This is the fire that was kindled in the disciples' hearts and obligated them to say (Luke 24: 32) “Were not our hearts burning within us while He was talking to us on the road, while He was opening the scriptures to us?”

St. Jerome

+ He does not mean the fire that burns goodness, but the fire that urges the good deeds, which makes the golden vessels in the house of the Lord, in a better state, by burning the hay and the straw (1Cor.3: 12), and also burning every temporal place, filled with physical pleasures that are temporal and doomed for perdition.

This divine fire kindled the bones of the prophets, as Jeremiah said (Jer.20: 9) “then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.”

There is fire for the Lord about which is said (Ps.97: 3) “Fire goes before Him”.

The Lord Himself is fire, for He says of Himself (Ps.3: 2; 24: 17; Deut.4: 42; Heb.12: 29) that He is consuming fire.

The Lord's fire is the everlasting light. With this fire the lanterns are lit up, about which was previously said (Luke 24: 32) “Fasten your belts for action and let your lanterns be kindled”. Cleopas and his friend testified that the Lord has put in them this fire by their words ‘were not our hearts burning within us?’ They proclaimed the work of this fire that enlightens

the depth of the heart. Maybe due to this, the Lord will come in fire (Is. 46: 15, 16) so He burns all the malice in the resurrection, and by His presence He fills the eagerness of every believer, and shines with His light on the deeds and the hearts.

St. Ambrosios

+ We confirm that this fire sent by Christ is for human salvation and for their own good, God grants all our hearts to be filled with it. Fire here, as I have mentioned, is the gospel's message of salvation and the power of His commandments. For all of us on earth are cold and dead due to sin, and in ignorance too. Let us be kindled by the righteous life and become hot in the Spirit (Rom.12: 11), as the righteous St. Paul has expressed.

In addition to this, we become partners in the Holy Spirit that is like fire inside us.

This is the custom of the divine Holy Book of inspiration, that it names the holy divine words sometimes with 'fire'. This is to show the impact of the Holy Spirit and His strength by which we become eager and hot in the Spirit.

One of the saintly prophets spoke of the personality of God about Christ the Savior of everyone, (Mal.3: 1-3) "and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight – indeed, He is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of His coming, and who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and He will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offering to the Lord in righteousness.

By the temple He means the body that is sanctified indeed, that is sinless, born of the Virgin Saint by the Holy Spirit by the Father's power. It was said to the devout Virgin (Luke1: 35) "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." Christ has come to reveal to us the Father's good will, and to serve us. He himself says that He has made us know all what He heard of His Father (John 15: 15). Furthermore, those who know how to purify gold and silver, use fire. In this way the Savior of everyone purifies the thoughts of all those who believe in the gospel's teaching by the power of the Spirit.

How do we explain the coal of fire that touched the prophet's lips (Is.6: 6, 7) and that has purified him of all sin? It is the message of salvation, and the confession in faith of Christ, and he who accepts this, will be purified from his mouth. This is what St. Paul confirms to us (Rom.10: 9) "Because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved".

We therefore say that the power of the divine message is similar to live burning coal and fire. The God of everyone tells Jeremiah the prophet (Jer.23: 29) and (Jer.5: 14) "Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" "I am now making My words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall devour them."

St. Cyril the great

13- The New Flock and the Passion of Suffering:

Because the Lord grants His new flock His fiery Holy Spirit, and because He offers them His fiery words, and grants them the fiery love, this is only to make His flock leave on a fiery heavenly level where no world events could ever hinder them from reaching the heavenly matters. Indeed, the Lord's coming kindles the hearts in love, yet the unbelievers are provoked by even the close ones to disturb them. The believers therefore endure every hardship and suffering with a long forbearing heart, as their Master did.

The Lord Jesus says (Luke12: 50-53) "I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on, five in one household will be

divided, three against two, and two against three; they will be divided; father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

What is this baptism the Lord was baptized with, other than His endurance of the passion until death, shedding His blood for our sake. We therefore find it appropriate for us to carry on in bearing His qualities for His sake, in the spiritual struggle even till the blood is shed, that is, till death. As the apostle says (Rom.8: 36) “For Your sake we are being killed all day long.”

The baptism has been called dye, for by it we carry the qualities of the Lord Jesus; by being buried with Him to rise also with Him, carrying the power of His resurrection in us. This dye as the scholar Trinitarian says, is to be in the waters of baptism or during martyrdom. These two baptisms, in his opinion, the Lord has got them out of His crucified side, for out of it came blood and water (John: 19: 34)

+ By His baptism He means the ‘dye’, which is the physical death. By His stress, He means His grief and His endurance till they are fulfilled. What happened when everything was fulfilled? The Gospel message of salvation has become declared, not only in Judea but in the entire world. Before the precious cross and His resurrection from the dead, His commandments and the glory of His divine miracles were in Judea alone. But when Israel sinned against Him, and they killed the Head of life, He gave the commandment to His disciples in this way (Matt. 28: 19, 20) “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” Now you can see the divine and sanctified fire has spread by means of the devout preachers.

St. Cyril the great

Now that the Lord has sprinkled His blood as a sanctified dye by which we are dyed, and by the means of which our hearts are kindled by the fire of His Holy Spirit, we have to, just as He went through all this stress till the redemption job has been fulfilled, to be stressed ourselves by means of the passion, then, at this point, we shall declare the perfection of our love for Him, enduring the hardship even by the closest ones to us, of our own household.

+ Do you think He commands the loosening of the bonds among His beloved children? How can this be when He Himself is our peace who made the two into one? (Eph.2: 14). He said (John14: 27) “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you.”

If He has come to divide the fathers from the sons, and the sons against their fathers, then how does He condemn he who does not honor his father? (Deut.27: 16).

God wants to be in the first position, then after this the filial love to the parents comes next. We have to prefer what is God’s to what is human’s, because if the parents have their due rights then we have to be thankful to Him who has granted us those parents. I add to this His words in another gospel (Matt.10: 37) “Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. God does not forbid you to love your parents, but rather if you prefer them to God. For the natural relations is one of God’s blessings, and so it is inappropriate that man loves the gift more than the Giver of the gift and its keeper.

St. Ambrosios

+ When you disown an earthly father for the sake of your righteousness towards Christ, then you will own Him who is in heaven as a Father to you. If you reject a brother because He dishonors God and does not serve Him, then Christ will accept you as a brother to Himself. Leave your mother according to the body and own the heavenly mother, that is the heavenly Jerusalem, that is our mother’ (Gal.4 : 26). In this way you find a relationship, glorious and strong in the family of the saints. With them you will become a heir to God’s gifts that are inconceivable and no tongue could express them well enough.

St. Cyril the great

St. Ambrosios asks the reason why the Lord Jesus says (Luke12: 52) “From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three” even though He mentioned six persons: the father, the son, the mother, the daughter, the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law.

The response is as follows:

Firstly: There lies the possibility that the mother and the mother-in-law are one and the same person since the son’s mother is the mother-in-law of his wife.

Secondly: He offers us a symbolic interpretation; for the house is man as whole, as St. Peter the apostle says (1Pet.2: 5) “Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” In this house there are two: the body and the soul. If they agree together in the name of Christ, then the Lord is in their midst (Matt.18: 19). It is He who makes the two into one (Eph.2: 14). Through this unity, the body is enslaved to serve the soul (1Cor.9: 27). These two stand against the three others: the deviated thought, the lust and the wrathful nature.

Thirdly: He can also see that this house contains five senses: that of smell, touch, taste, vision, and hearing. If we, through the hearing and the vision, isolate those two senses together so they be sanctified, and resist the wrongful physical pleasures by means of the greed of taste, the touch and the smell, then two have been divided against three.

Some think the house refers to the entire world; and that the two refer to the Jews and the Gentiles who resist the Christians who believe in the Holy Trinity.

The father who rises against his son is the devil who has set himself as a father to the unbelievers, He thus found his son deserting him through the Christian faith so as to accept a heavenly Father.

The mother who is against her daughter refers to the Jewish synagogue that attacked the first church, particularly that of the apostles and the disciples who have left their mother by accepting the faith in the crucified Messaiah.

The mother-in-law who rose against her daughter-in-law is also the Jewish synagogue that attacked the Gentile church that accepted being united with the heavenly Groom, the Lord Jesus who came as a Son to the Jews, biologically speaking. It is as if the Jewish synagogue attacked its daughter as well as its daughter-in-law; that is, it rose against the church of Jewish origin as well as the Gentile church.

The daughter and the daughter-in-law rebelled against this synagogue, that is to say, the mother and the mother-in-law, because the church rejected the literal deeds of the old law, such as the circermciseon, the washings, and the physical purification.

14- New Flock and the Spirit of Discernment:

when the new flock faces the suffering with his Groom in His passion, it is appropriate for the flock to behave wisely, and to have the Spirit of discernment as well.

(Luke12: 54-56) “He also said to the crowds, ‘When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say’ It is going to rain, and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat, and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, byt why do you not know how to interpret the present time?’”

+ The Lord rebukes those who know how to discern the face of the sky, and yet they do not know how to discover the time of the faith, for the kingdom of heaven has drown near.

St. Augustine

+ Humans focus their concentration on such things. Through their observation and long experience they know ahead of time when rainfall is to happen, or when the tempestuous

winds are to blow; particularly the mariners, they are very smart in this field. The Lord says those who are able to estimate the accounts of these matters, and prophecy by predicting them such as the occurrence of tempests etc... all this is good and it would be much better if they focus their thoughts deeply on more important matters. What are these important matters? The old law has previously prophesied about Christ's mystery, and showed He would shine at the end of ages on the people of the earth, and offer Himself a sacrifice for the salvation of everyone. If the old law has commanded the offering of a lamb as a symbol for Christ, in the evening when the lantern is lit, this is only to make us understand that when the world tends to end as the daylight does, then the great and precious sufferings of salvation will be truly fulfilled. At this point the door of salvation will be wide open to all who believe in Him, and thus they will have an abundantly joyful share.

In the Song of Songs we find Christ calling the bride described in the book, and the one who symbolizes the church, saying (Song.2: 10-12) "Arise, My love, My fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come." As I have said there is a kind of spring peacefulness that falls on those who believe in Him.

The blessed prophets prophesied in many ways, prophesying and preaching of Christ's mysteries, a matter no one could ever doubt.

The Lord says it is their duty indeed, since they have the understanding, and are able to discern the face of heaven and of earth, to test the coming matters, and the forthcoming tempests would not go unnoticed, in this world, of their attention. For the south winds would blow and the rains would fall, that is, the fiery punishment of torture would befall them, because the southern winds are warm. In this way the penalty will be adamant, and no one should escape it, just as the rainfall that will definitely fall on them. It was therefore appropriate for them not to pass through the time of salvation without them noticing it, that is, the time of the Savior's coming when He will offer mankind an absolute knowledge of the truth, and when graces will shine so as to purify the wicked.

St. Cyril the great

St. Cyril the great saw this as a warning from the Lord Jesus towards the Jews who were concerned about prophecies, about forecasts without being concerned about the prophecies of His coming, and so they fell under the rainfall of the divine wrath of God and the fire of punishment due to their ingratitude. Thus we can also look upon the words of the Lord Jesus from another angle which is that He wishes His flock to embody the spirit of discernment, not to keep away from the weather forecast but to enjoy the spiritual and heavenly weather. As we have previously studied, rainfall symbolized the gift of the Holy Spirit in many of the prophetic books. Early rainfall is the Spirit's gift in the old Testament before the Lord Jesus coming; whereas late rainfall, which ripens the fields this is the gift of the spirit in the New Testament when the Lord sent Him on His church at the Pentecost, as an endless deposit to be enjoyed by every member through the baptismal water. It is this rainfall that quenches the soul, and that transforms it from wilderness to a fruitful paradise for the Lord's account, that has fallen on us through the clouds coming from the west. That is to say, through the Lord Jesus who has come to us in the human nature. As for the 'heat', this refers to the fiery Spirit that kindles the heart as we have seen in the same chapter verse 49. We are in need of both the rainfall and the fire, or the water and the fire . both refer to the gift of the Spirit, particularly through the baptismal water.

15- The New Flock and the Forgiving Love:

The 'Spirit of discernment' may have the purpose for this, flock to embody the spirit of forgiving love to others mistakes, so they be equipped to have the quality of their heavenly

Friend, the Lover of mankind. This is why He says (Luke12: 57-59) “And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? Thus, when you go with your accuser before a magistrate, on the way make an effort to settle the case, or you may be dragged before the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer throw you in prison. I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny.”

+ Let us see who is this adversary with whom we have to agree so he would not hand us over to the magistrate: if you err, then God’s word is your adversary. He is the adversary to your will, so He becomes a source of your salvation. What a good and useful adversary! He is our adversary since we are adversaries to ourselves, that is, since you are an enemy to yourself; and thus God’s Word will be and enemy to you. Be a friend to yourself, and thus you will be in accord with the Word of God. As for the way, it is this life!

If you have a righteous will with your adversary, and you agree with Him, then you will find, instead of a magistrate,. A Father; instead of a cruel officer you will find an angel who carries your to Abraham’s embrace; and instead of jail you will find paradise. Look how things change so quickly on the way, all because you have agreed with the adversary!

St. Augustine

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Chapter XIII
The active Repentance

Our righteous God wishes us to be blessed with His divine friendship. He thus established us as a new flock that He Himself cares about. He grants us the heavenly qualities and enters with us through the partaking of His suffering to the power of His resurrection. Now, He reveals to us the door of His fold that He has prepared for us under His shelter, which is the 'active repentance'. This is the door by which we enter to His kingdom, so that every soul lives under His care, and be blessed with His divine deeds in its behavior and worship.

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1- A Call for Repentance:

The Lord Jesus has come asking for our friendship, and offering His life a price to this friendship, intiating His love. But we cannot encounter Him and accept His love in us in any other way than that of repentance. This is what the Lord Himself confirms saying (luke13: 3,5) **“unless you repent, you will ass perish as they did”**, this was when some told Him about the Galileans that Pilate mixed their blood with their sacrifices. (Luke13:2, 3) **“He asked them, ‘Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you: but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did’”**.

Who are these Galileans?

Neither St. Cyril the great nor St. Ambrosios offered any comment on this part of the chapter. But in an excerpt of St. Cyril the great, it was mentioned in Catena Aurea that those Galileans were followers to Judas the Galilean (Acts5:7) referred to by St. Luke in Acts. Of the Apostles. It was he who said that no one should be called master or lord. He was surrounded by many who refused to call Caesar lord to them, and so Pilate punished them. They also claimed no sacrifice should be offered to God that is not mentioned in the Mosaic law they forbade the people from offering sacrifices to God for the sake of the emperor's peace and the roman empire's peace. This provoked Pilate, and so he asked they be killed when offering their sacrifices in the temple according to the covenant; thus their blood was mixed with the sacrifice they offered. In the same excerpt it was stated their was a belief those Galileans were punished justly because they sowed discord among the people and motivated them to rebel against their rulers. Those who mentioned this case to the Lord, wished to know the opinion of the Lord Jesus concerning it.

In addition to this, some scholars think when the Lord Jesus spoke of the compromise with the adversary so he would not be handed over to the magistrate, and so be put in jail until he pays the last penny, those people wished to complain to the king of the Jews who was long awaited for, the despotism of the roman occupation to the Jewish nation. Or, they might

have wished to tell Him of 'the problem of pain sufferance' to which the Jews found no solution across the ages.

The Jews may have expected the Lord Jesus to rebel against Pontius Pilate who disrupted the reverence of the temple when he sent his officers chasing those Galileans who have come in with their sacrifices to the sepulchre. They wished to hold the altar horns, and so the officers did not cease chasing them until they killed them when offering their sacrifices. Some historians think what Pilate did to them was only a pretext for the enmity between him and Herod, (Luke 22: 12) because they were of his subjects. Some others think that Barabas was arrested due to this betrayal (Luke 23: 19).

At any rate, the Lord Jesus seized this news as an opportunity not to speak of outer matters, but to enter to the souls of His listeners to the life of repentance so they be blessed in relief not because of the fear of Pilate, but due to their fear of sin, which is the source of perdition. His response revealed the following:

Firstly: The Lord manifested the outer disasters and hardships are not necessarily the ailment of particular sins. The killing of those people does not necessarily mean they were more evil than other Galileans. For He says (Luke 13: 2) **"Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you."** This is because the Jews thought every tribulation man was exposed to, was a sign of God's wrath to them.

Secondly: When God permits ordeals and tribulation to happen sometimes, this is only for the sake of repentance; not only the repentance of the fallen ones under sufferance, but also for others' repentance as well. For the Lord Jesus goes on to say "But unless you repent, you will all perish as they did." If those ones have died, and their blood was mixed with their sacrifices, they are not necessarily more evil than those not killed. Let their killing be an opportunity for every person to reconsider himself in repentance so he would not perish forever.

+God punishes sinners by cutting off their wickedness, such as them being killed, so their punishment be lessened. Or, it could be so they do not fall under an eternal punishment later on. At the same time, when those living in sin see these things, they would learn how to correct themselves.

Once more, others are not punished so that when they reconsider and repent, they escape the present and forth-coming punishment. But if they continue to sin, they will fall under more severe punishment.

This shows at this point, that He allows them to endure this pain, so He warns strictly the heirs of the kingdom of these tribulations when they are living, and so that repent.

You might say "Is someone punished so my own situation be corrected?" never, he is punished due to his crimes, and this gives an opportunity for onlookers to be saved.

St. John Chrysostom

The Lord Jesus goes on to say (Luke 13: 4, 5) **"or, those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them .. do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."**

They mentioned the Galileans' case committed by Pilate's officers, but the Lord Jesus mentioned the case that happened in Siloam next to the holy temple. This was not by any human hand, but by God's permission in the city, as a warning to all the Jews.

Both instances imply a symbolic meaning urging people for repentance. Pontius Pilate's killing of some Galileans refers to Satan's war against humanity even at the worshiping moments when in the holy sites, offering their sacrifices. 'Pilate'. Means 'the mouth of he who has a cudgel'. It is as if he is Satan who does not cease hitting as if with a hammer. Or a cudgel, by using sweetly coated words to make us lose our purity even at

moments of worship. As for the second case, the number eighteen on whom the tower fell, in Greek it is like this 'IH'. these are the first two letters to the name Jesus, and Siloam means 'the messenger'. From this we understand this accident refers to the Jews', perdition inside their tower; that is, within their 'law' itself. This is due to their rejection of Jesus as a Savior, sent from God the Father to save the entire world. We can say that the Lord is urging us to repent, by rejecting the sweet and deceptive words of Satan. He warns us lest we are offended in the Lord Jesus Himself who has come asking for our salvation.

2- God asks for fruits:

When the Lord offered us the invitation to accept His friendship to us by means of repentance, He assured us of the necessity of grafting repentance with the spiritual fruits, joyful to the heart of God. He compared humanity to a fig tree planted in His vineyard. It remained for three long years not bearing any fruits. These three years are: the stage of downfall inside paradise, the stage prior to the Mosaic Law, and the stage of the law. The tree was exposed to being cut down, since it bore leaves by which Adam and Eve covered their nakedness, without treating their nature. The real vinedresser intervened, our Lord Jesus, and asked it be left for another year, which is the 'age of grace' so He would upturn the soil and put fertilizer roved it. He takes care of it, for it is His divine plant, so it could bring forth the appropriate real fruit. The shepherds, too, were granted to carry the Spirit of their Lord, and thus they interceded for every tree for it might bring forth-spiritual fruit.

Now, the vinedresser that intercedes for it, is every saint who prays in the church for the sake of those outside of it. What does he pray for? "Lord, leave it this year as well, that is, leave it in the age of grace. Leave the sinners, leave the unbelievers, leave those barren people who are unfruitful, (Luke13: 8,9) **"Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down."**

What is the digging round it other than the teaching of modesty and repentance? For the pit is a lowland.

The manure is the defilement that in its reaction produces forth good fruit. The defilement of the planter is the sighing of the sinful repentant ones, having filthy clothes on. If repentance is done in understanding and truth, then to such a tree it is said (Matt.3: 2) "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

St. Augustine

+ (On some commentary about the putting of manure round the tree.)

I wish we put manure to this field that is ours, following the example of those struggling planters who are not ashamed to satisfy the land with manure, and to throw the dirty dust on the field, so they harvest a better crop.

St. Paul the apostle taught us how to fertilize our field by his words (Phil.3: 8) "I regard everything as loss... in order that I may gain Christ." In a good or bad reputation, I am aware of pleasing the Lord Jesus.

St. Paul read about Abraham that he had confessed he was nothing more than dust and ashes (Gen.18: 27). He also read about Job that he had sat on the ashes (Job2: 8) and in this way he regained all what he had lost (Job.42: 10). He also heard from David's mouth that God (Ps.113: 7) "He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap." I therefore wish we are not to be ashamed any longer o confessing our sins.

It is actually shameful and embarrassing for man to confess his sins. But this shame is likened to the process of digging the earth, and removing the weeds from it, and cleaning it of the thistles. In this way we shall make blossom the fruits that were not thus before.

Let us follow the example, therefore, of he who has turned up the soil of his field diligently in search of the eternal fruit (1Cor.4: 12, 13) “When reviled, we bless; when persecuted we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day”.

St. Ambrosios

+ The parable of the fig tree applies to the synagogue; for the tree has been covered with many leaves, and it has deceived its owner, who has waited in vain for the expected fruit. Similarly, in the synagogue the teachers of the law show off their words as the ornamental leaves that have no job to do.

Accurately speaking, we find this kind of tree as being different in its fruits than those of other trees. In other trees, the blossom precedes the fruit, for it announces the forthcoming fruit. But as for the fig tree, it bears the fruit from the very beginning without the appearance of any blossoms. The blossoms fall off from the other trees once the fruit appears in its place. But with this tree the first fruit falls, to be replaced by another one. The first fruit falls and the stem dries up and weakens, and leaves a place for another stem to make more use of the squeezed juice. But there are some very few ones of the first fruits that do not fall off, since they are on short stems between the branches. These fruits are kept and nourished as if in nature’s embrace, and its food supply is more plentiful.

The Jews are like the first fruits in the synagogue; weak fruits that fall off to leave a place for fruits of our nature that remain forever. The people of the first synagogue had no depth for its deeds were dry, and they could not drink enough of the juice of the natural fruitful wisdom. Thus they fell of like useless fruits, and consequently the new church congregation fruit appeared on the same branches through the juice of the old righteousness. But as for the best Israelites that have been carried by the trunk of the law reaching up to the cross, these have been dyed in their entrails by the two juices, and thus they have ripened. To them it was said (Matt.19: 28) “Judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” This is not new to know, since Adam and Eve, the source of our being and the source of our downfall, these have been clothed with the leaves of this tree, and were deserving of being expelled from paradise when they became aware of their nakedness, they hid from the Lord’s face when they heard Him walking in paradise. This reveals the Jew at the end of times when the Lord and Savior comes; for then He came to call him, the Jew realised Satan’s temptations have unclothed him of every righteousness. In his fear of the pricking of his conscience he loses his strength and is ashamed of his dishonesty, and he knows well enough he has strayed away from the Lord. He attempted to cover up his debased deeds by too many words. this is why those who have taken the fig leaves without any fruits, were expelled from God’s kingdom, since they were ‘a living being.’

The second Adam came to ask for the fruits and not for the leaves, because he was (1Cor.15: 45) “A life-giving spirit.” For with the spirit we obtain the fruits of righteousness by which we worship the Lord.

The Lord asks for the fruits, not because He does not know that the fig tree has no fruits, but to refer by this symbol that He has come at the time of harvesting the fruits, and that He has not come before His due time. He has come for three years (Luke13: 7) **“See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?”** He has come to Abraham, when He asked for the circumcision; He has come to Moses offering him the law; He has come to Mary, incarnate in her womb to grant us grace. In other words, He has come as a Seal to the covenant, with Abraham through the circumcision, and in the law and in the body. We His lovers, know His blessings on us; sometimes He purifies, at other times He sanctifies or justifies. The circumcision purifies, the law sanctifies, and grace justifies. Despite this, the Jewish people could not be purified because they have taken the physical circumcision, not

the spiritual one. They could not be sanctified because they were ignorant of the value of the law by cleaving on to the physical, not to what is spiritual, even though the law is spiritual (Rom.7: 14). They could not be justified either, since they did not repent of their sins, and so they were ignorant of any grace. This is why the command was given it be cut down, but the good gardener came to intervene, He who has come to the Gentiles and not to the people of circumcision so the tree be not cut down; for He was sure that the Jewish people, if they accept the Messiah, the Savior, then they will be saved. This is why He said, "Sir, let it alone for one mere year, until I dig around it and put manure on it." He digs with the apostolic spade and searches around it, destroying the cruelty of their hearts. He digs, with the double-edged sword, deep in their shut hearts because of their negligence this long time. He opens their hearts and so their feelings are enlivened, breathing in the air, and so they be not choked in their rooted wisdom, and they would not be buried under the soil weight. He says 'I put manure', by which the barren earth becomes fruitful, and the wilderness becomes planted. On the manure sat Job in his tribulation and so he was not defeated. St. Paul the apostle, too, considered himself like trash or manure so as to gain Christ (Phil.3: 8). For the earth that is dug well, and in which manure is put, this brings forth fruit; the Lord thus uplifts the miserable one sitting in the dust, and up lifts the poor one from the rubbish (Ps.112: 27).

I wish what is said about the Jews, generally speaking, is to be focused on in our life, so we do not occupy the church land that is fruitful, and keep it as a fruitless tree.

St. Ambrosios

In this way St. Ambrosios offers us in this parable a live image of the Jewish people that remained unfruitful for three years. They did not profit by the circumcision before the law, from Abraham to Moses. Neither did they benefit from the law, from Moses to the coming of Christ; or from the grace offered us by the Lord Jesus. Despite this, God does not cease to work for the salvation of the entire world, even those who resist Him. He is eager to hit with the evangelical and apostolic writings round the tree, so the earth opens up, and our deep roots would smell the breeze of spiritual life. He would then put the manure of modesty so He raises it up and brings forth heavenly and spiritual fruits.

We can also see in these three years, concerning humanity at large, the following points:

- 1st) When man was in paradise, he left it with the weight of sin and the seeds of death and corruption.
- 2nd) Man, prior to the law, remained in his corruption and in worshiping idols.
- 3rd) Man, when under the law, could only misuse it, and could not understand it spiritual nor could he fulfil it. He rather fell under the curse for breaking its commandments.

Finally, the good Gardener came forth, our Lord Jesus, in the fullness of time, giving us one more bonus year which is the year of divine grace, in the hope that we accept His work in us. At this point we shall carry the fruit of His Holy Spirit, the mystery of the Father's pleasure, the landlord of the vineyard.

+ Our nature was called for three times, and yet it never offered any fruit. Once was when this nature of ours disobeyed the commandment when in paradise. Another time was when it made a bull under the law. A third time was when this nature rejected the Savior.

These three years could also be understood as standing for the three life-stages: Youth, manhood and old age.

+ The Lord came up to the fig tree times: He searched for man's nature before the old law, when under the law, and when under the grace. He was awaiting, giving advice and calling on us; and yet He found no fruit as there were wicked ones whose hearts were not corrected by the natural law in them. Neither were they disciplined by the command.(not found p.474)

As for the three years in which He asked for fruits, and could find none, they are, as I think, the three stages in which the Jewish synagogue did not offer any fruits. The first year could be interpreted as the year in which Moses and Aaron and his children who served God by means of their priestly duties according to the covenant. The second is the stages of Joshua son of Nun and the judges who followed him. The third stage is the one in which the devout prophets appeared until St. John the Baptist. During these phases Israel offered no fruits. This is why He says, (Luke13: 7) **“For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?”** It is as if He is saying **“Keep this old tree’s place vacant so that you may plant another tree in its place.”** This is what happened; since He called the Gentiles in Israel’s place, and they have obtained its inheritance. The Gentiles have become God’s people, the paradise was planted, a good and honorable seed, that knows how to offer fruits. This is not through shadows and symbols, but rather through perfect and pure and blameless service, practiced by the spirit and truth, offered to the living and non-materialistic God.

If anyone says the vinedresser is the Son, then this opinion has its acceptable evidence that is quite appropriate, for He is (1John2: 1) **“We have an advocate with the Father.”** He is our Redeemer, and the Vinedresser of our souls; who cuts off from us all that is harmful, and He fills us with sanctified and sensible seeds, so we carry His fruits in us. As He Himself said (luke8: 5) **“A sower went out to sow”**. The Son said to the saintly apostles (revise John15: 1) **“I am the vine and you are the branches, and My Father is the Vinedresser.”**

Let Him therefore intercede for us, saying **“Sir, let it alone for one more year until I dig around it and put manure on it.”** What does this year stand for? It is this is why I say that the fig tree mentioned in the parable, is the Jewish synagogue, that is, the Israelites.**(not found p.476)**

This is a live example of the real Physician who heals the soul of its wounds. It is He who grants the repentance and it is He who gives the healing!

The evangelist says (Luke13: 11) **“Now He was teaching in one fo the synagogues on the Sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to standup straight.”**

St. John Chrysostom says that He was teaching in the synagogues peacefully, so as to declare He did not come to resist the law, but rather to fulfil it. As for His teachings on the Sabbath, this was because the Jews were preoccupied with their listening to His words about the law.

This woman who had an infirm spirit, as St. Augustine says, is the exact one as the barren fig tree that remained for three years bearing no fruits. This refers to Jewish nation that bore no fruits during the three stages. The eighteen years refers, pointing to the work of God in the creation until the sixth day. It is as if this nation has rejected in each stage God’s work with it. God wishes to renew His creation, but it is man who rejects God’s divine work. In this way the three stages have gone by, so that the Lord of glory comes as if on the seventh day, the day of His rest. He declares the completion of His rest by the renewal of our creation, and the straightening up of our backs that were bent down in sin across the entire history.

Once more we repeat with St. Augustine, **“This woman in understood to be as a symbol t the church that has become straightened up, and whole, by means of the Lord, after it had been bent with infirmity through Satan’s ties to it. Here are the words of the psalm speaking of the hidden enemies (Ps.57: 6) “My soul was bowed down.” (Not found p.478)**

+ It could be said that this bending woman was suffering of this due to Satan’s cruelty. Because this is the condition so all mankind, therefore God who is good in His nature, has not left us like this in our suffering of the punishment of long sickness, and that is impossible to cure. He has rather freed us of our bonds, and He has declared His presence and Himself in

the world, as a glorified cure for mankind's pain. He has come to renew our situation and bringing it back to its origin. He also wrote "God did not create death, neither is He pleased by the perdition of those alive ones. For He has created all so go to remain, and that those born in the world are safe, and have no deadly poison in them. Also "Death has entered the world due to Satan's envy."

Now the Word has become incarnate, and has embodied the human nature so as to destroy death and devastation, and to get rid of the envy embedded by the old serpent against us. This was the primary iniquity of wickedness. This is evident to us from the actual facts; for He has freed Abraham's daughter (16) from her long time sickness and He told her (Luke 13: 12) "**Woman, you are set free from your ailment.**" This is a very appropriate discussion by God that embodies immense natural power. With His royal will He took away the disease. he also put His hand on her, and on the spot it is said she stood up straight. We can also easily see at this point His sanctified body that embodies the divine authority and the divine power.

St. Cyril the great.

+ Because she had an infirmity due to a spirit, she was quite unable to lift up her head. In such a way does sin bend our necks, and at the same time it binds our feet.

+ Any person who is sick due to a spirit, he bends and looks (**Not found p.480**)

But the Lord answered him and said "Your hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day? "When He said this, all His opponents were put to shame, and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that He was doing."

+ The Lord made this deed on the Sabbath to signify what is to be fulfilled, which is that man fulfils the law by being blessed with grace (Luke13: 8,10). With Christ's mercy we could be freed from the toils of this weak body, so we enter the Sabbath which is the rest.

He gave the sanctification in the image of Moses, through the restful Sabbath, because the forthcoming sanctification and the work by the Spirit, have the basis of departing from the temporal deeds. This is why the Lord rested on the seventh day from the works of the age, and not from all of His works. For His work is continuous, incessant, as the words of the Son (John5: 17) "My Father is still working, and I also am working." We likewise are following God's model, we stop doing the deeds of the world, but not stopping from doing God's deeds.

The leader of the synagogue did not understand this fact, and thus he did not approve of the healing process on the Sabbath, even though the Sabbath referred to the forthcoming rest, and so we do not cease from doing the good deeds, but rather the evil ones. He commands us not to carry the yoke of sin, but to go on doing the righteous deeds so we achieve the forthcoming Sabbath after our sleep. This is why the Lord answered him referring to the spiritual meaning (Luke13: 15) "**You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath, untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water?**" Why hasn't the Lord mentioned any other beast? Is it not to point to the Jewish nation, as well (**not found p.482**)

Rest, also your ox, your horse, and all your cattle. If He has given rest to mankind by releasing them from their diseases, and you were to forbid this; then it is you who is breaking the Sabbath, law, for you do not allow restfulness to those in pain of the diseases and sufferings, those ones who are bounded by Satan.

When the malicious ruler of the synagogue saw the woman crippled with her bent body to the ground, and how she accepted Christ's mercy and became entirely straightened up as soon as He touched her, and could walk along with Him who has become human in

straight pace, praising God for her salvation, the ruler became furious and resisted the Lord's glory. He was confused in his envy, and so indignant at this wonderful miracle that he tried to defame it.

Tell me, you who are enslaved to envy, what kind of work does the law forbid when you forbid every manual work on the Sabbath? Do you forbid the work of the mouth and of words? Then you too, should stop food and drink, and should stop discussion and praise singing on the Sabbath. If you cease doing these things, and so not read even the covenant, then of what use is the Sabbath? But if you specify the forbidding of manual work, then do you consider the woman's healing with a word, as manual work? If you consider it work because the woman was actually healed, then you too are working, by blaming her healing, because you have spoken just as Christ has spoken.

He has said (Luke 13: 12) **“Woman, you are set free from your ailment,”** and she has become freed of it. This is good! Do you also not untie your girdle on the Sabbath? Do you not untie your shoes, prepare your bed, wash your hands before eating when they are dirty? Then why are you angry at one word that the Lord has said ‘you are set free’?

What kind of work did the woman make after He has said (**erased**) God commanded the people to cease from working on the Sabbath? It is to make your servants take a this word? Has she gone to work for a sculptor, a carpenter, or a builder? Has she begun on the same day to weave or to sew?

Merely to be healed is counted as work, but no, you are not really angry because of the Sabbath, but it is because you have seen Jesus honored, worshiped for He is God. Thus you were furious and bit with envy. You have hidden in your heart one thing and showed quite another one.

(Luke 13: 15) **“You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water?”**

He says, “You are amazed that I have untied Abraham's daughter, whereas you give some rest to your ox or your donkey, and relieve it of its weariness, and you lead it to drink. At the same time you can see a woman suffering from a disease, and healed miraculously, and God showed mercy on her, and yet you blame them both as being disobedient; One for healing, and the other because she was cured of her disease.

I am asking now the leader of the synagogue: is man, in his opinion, of a lesser degree than a beast? His ox or his donkey deserved care on the Sabbath, and yet in his envy, he did not wish Christ to save the woman of her infirmity for she was bent. He did not wish her to return to her normal shape.

The leader of the synagogue preferred the woman who was straightened up to have remained bent as the four legged beast rather than be healed, and return to man's proper nature. He did not wish Christ to be glorified nor to be declared that He is God through the wonders that He made.

(Luke 13: 17) **“When He said this, all His opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that He was doing.”**

Those who uttered these infamous words were put to shame. They are the ones who were offended in the main corner- stone and so they were destroyed. They have resisted the physician, and had a conflict with the skilful potter who was busy fixing the shattered vessels; and so they had no answer to give. They had to be convinced and could offer no answer. But as for the crowds who enjoyed the benefits of the miracles, these were over rejoiced.

St. Cyril the great
+ The leader of the synagogue was justly called a hypocrite; for he had the semblance of a law keeper and observer, but his heart was deceitful and envious. What frustrated him was not the breaking of the Sabbath, but rather the glory of Christ.

St. John Chrysostom

+ In a probing way, the barren fig tree means the bending woman, because the human nature willingly drove itself towards iniquity. It did not bear the fruit of obedience, and so it lost its straightened up position. The fig tree also means the woman who has become erect and could stand up straight.

Father Gregory the great

4- The Parable of the Mustard Seed:

Even though the work of the Lord Jesus with His people was amazing indeed, since He lifted them up from the constant bending towards the dust, so their inner vision be raised up towards heaven, yet He found resistance from the leader of the synagogue. This resistance is similar to the soil surrounding the little and live mustard seed. It cannot destroy the seed, but it rather becomes an obstruction to the soil, and so it becomes a big tree where the birds of heaven take shelter in its branches, and under its shade the wild beasts rest.

We have previously spoken at length of the mustard seed in our study of the gospel of our teacher the evangelist St. Matthew (13: 31). We have mentioned the beliefs of some of the fathers such as Father Gregory the great, and the saints Chrysostom, Ambrosios, Jerome, Augustine and Hillary, we have also mentioned the opinion of St. Gregory the great in our study of the gospel of St. Mark the evangelist (4: 30).

+ Anyone who accepts the mustard seed, that is, the gospel word, that is sowed in his heart's garden, becomes a great tree bearing branches. There, the birds of the air take rest, that is those who give praise on the earth, between its branches that is those who are sublimely meditating. St. Paul accepted the teaching of Hananiah (Acts9: 17) as a little seed sowed in his paradise; thus it produced many useful teachings in which many of those who have sublime meditations dwelt, such as Dionysius.

Father Theophlactius

5- The Parable of the leaven and the dough:

One more time, the Lord compares His divine work in the life of His new flock as a little leaven that is able to transform the nature of the whole dough. He said (Luke13: 20,21) **“To what should I compare the kingdom of God? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed it with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”** We have previously mentioned the opinion of some church fathers about this parable in our study of St. Matthew's gospel (13: 33).

+What is the woman other than the Lord's body?

What is the yeast other than the gospel?

What are the three measures other than all the Gentiles that have issued from Noah's three children?

St. Augustine

+ The three measures of flour spoken of by the Lord is the human race. Remember the flood, since there remained only three from whom all humanity came. Noah had three sons from whom the human race was renewed.

The woman who hid the yeast is wisdom.

You can see all the world crying out in God's Church (Ps.135: 5) “For I know that the Lord is great.” But undoubtedly, those who are saved are few. Struggle hard to enter the narrow gate (Luke13: 24). Through it, few will be able to go in.

St. Augustine

+ it is appropriate for us to understand that the woman is the soul. As for the three measure, they are its three sides: the mind, the emotions and the desires. If man hides God's word in these three sides, everything in him becomes spiritual. He begins no discussion by his mind or his wrath or his desire; for everything is changed immeasurably and is formed according to God's word.

Father Theophlactius

St. Ambrosios mentions in his comments on St. Luke's gospel several interpretations to this parable that were spread at his time. Among which are:

(a) Some think the Lord Jesus Himself is the 'Yeast' offered by the church, that is, the woman here, so He leavens us the flour by His righteousness and thus we bear His qualities in us. The Word of God became incarnate, bearing our human nature but by the power of His divinity He works in us, not to change our mere outer appearance but rather our inward nature. For he says. "The yeast changes the nature of the flour and not only its appearance. In this way Christ works in us."

If this woman refers to the holy church, then we are the flour of the church. The Lord Jesus has to hide in the depth of our hearts so we accept the heavenly wisdom inside us.

(b) Some think the three measures of flour that have accepted the yeast, refer to the law, the prophets and the gospel; where Christ was hiding by means of the symbols of the law and the prophetic prophecies, and was manifested through the gospel. In this way the believer appropriately bears in his heart these three measures, so he discovers his Christ inside himself. Or, as St. Ambrosios says 'we have to search diligently and accurately in the law, the prophets and the gospel for Christ to be declared to us.

(C) St. Ambrosios mentions elaborately, the interpretation of the 'Yeast', being 'the church edification' (Matt.16: 6) which is different than the yeast of the scribes and the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. St. Paul the apostle says (1Cor.5: 8) "Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

By means of the church yeast, which is the gospel edification, the three measures of flour are leavened. Which is man's body and his spirit and his soul. Thus he is blessed with the sanctification of life in every aspect of his life. The work of the church is man's life extends up to his whole being, so the body lives in submission to the soul and the spirit under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. This is supported by St. Paul's words (1Thes.5: 23) "May the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The church offers her yeast which is the Lord Jesus' teachings, which grants us internal unity; and thus the body no longer lusts against the soul, and neither the soul lusts against the body (Gal.5: 17). This unity is enjoyed by its earnest or pledge in this world when we conduct ourselves when still in the body, not according to the body but according to the soul as the apostle said. We shall be blessed with its fulfillment in the resurrection. St. Ambrosios says, "In this way we can keep safe the partnership of the body, the soul and the spirit together in the resurrection, without any corruption."

Let us live here with this earnest as the Lord Jesus Himself has said (Matt.18: 19) "Truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven." For, some think that the two are the body and the soul when they agree together under the leadership of the Lord's Spirit. Thus the enmity will be taken away whereas true love will dwell in the soul as well as in the body, and Christ will be glorified in man as a whole.

In addition to this, the Lord confirms that if two or three are gathered in His name, He will be there in their midst. This gathering is the sign of man's unity and his perfection physically, spiritually and emotionally in the Lord.

As for St. Cyril the great, he comments on this analogy saying “The yeast is small in size yet it affects the entire dough, and soon enough it gives the dough its impact. In the same way does God’s word work in us when it dwells in us. It makes us saintly and blameless. It pierces our minds, hearts and makes us spiritual. As St. Paul says, (1Thes.5: 23) “may your spirit and soul and body be deep sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover, the God of everyone manifests that the divine Word is poured into the depths of our understanding; for through Him one of His saintly prophets says (Jerusalem.31: 31-33) “The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt- a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, 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 within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” In this way we receive in our mind and understanding the divine and sensible yeast, so that with this precious, pure and sanctified yeast we be found as spiritual bread, that bears no evil yeast of the world inside us. The power of the gospel preaching that grants life, comes into our minds and thus changes the soul, the body and the spirit so they bear the gospel qualities, so we become pure and saintly and partners to Christ.

6- Repentance and the Narrow Gate:

When the evangelist St. Luke presented us with ‘repentance’ as the way to be blessed with salvation from perdition (Luke13: 1-5), he then revealed God’s long forbearance to us, for He stands as if to intercede for us. He gives us new opportunities, for repentance, just like a good gardener who is patient with the unfruitful fig tree (Luke13: 6-9). He takes care of it Himself by digging round it, and adding fertilizer to it so it blossoms. He declared that He in truth, He alone, is the mystery for our healing and salvation. He commands the bent soul that is under the physical passions so it becomes straightened up, (Luke13: 10-17). He offers His gospel to our hearts, just as it were a small mustard seed that becomes a huge tree where the birds of the sky take shelter in its branches. Also as a yeast in our minds that sanctifies the body together with the soul and the spirit. Now, lest we assume that our role in salvation is a passive one, He assures us of our commitment in struggling, so we enter with His grace through the narrow gate. For the evangelist says,

(Luke13: 22-24) **“Jesus went through one town and village after another, teaching as He made His way to Jerusalem. Someone asked Him, “Lord, will only a few be saved?” He said to them, ‘Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you , will try to enter and will not be able to.’”**

The door of the kingdom is narrow, and the way is arduous, and few are they who will be able to find it; for it is the way of the cross that will not be truly found and entered into except by him who has disappeared in the Crucified.

We have previously spoken of this way in our comment on St. Matthew’s gospel (Matt.7: 13, 14) and we mentioned some quotes by St. John Chrysostom, Caprianos and Jerome.

We notice here the evangelist St. Luke mentions the Lord’s words about the ‘narrow door’ after he had declared that Jesus ‘went through one town and village after another teaching as He made His way to Jerusalem.’ It is as if the goal of His preaching was to everyone: to the city dwellers who cared about the foremost positions, wealth and showing off, and also to the modest village inhabitants. He wanted to carry everyone in Him and with Him to His cross, so they be blessed with His kingdom through the narrow door. He would

then release them not to the earthly Jerusalem, but to the heavenly one, so they witness His real peace and live it.

+ “Strive to enter through the narrow door” (Luke13: 24).

The straight way is a narrow one; any deviation from it is risky, whether it be on the left or the right. It is like a bridge that he who deviates from it, will surely fall in the river.

St. Basilious

+ When He wanted to speak of entering the narrow door, He began by saying ‘Strive...’, because unless the mind strives strongly the waves of the world will not be overcome. It is these waves that pull the soul down to the bottom.

Father Gregory the great

+ I think it appropriate that I mention the narrow door through which man enters into life.

He who wishes to enter it, necessarily has to have, firstly, the straight faith that is uncorrupted. Secondly, his conduct has to be undefiled and blameless according to the standard of human righteousness. It is in this way that David the prophet pleaded to God (Ps.7: 8) “Judge me O Lord, according to my righteousness and according to the integrity that is in me.” This is because the purity of the saintly angels and their righteousness is way farther than the purity and righteousness of the earth dwellers. What concerns others is of a lesser and lower kind from every aspect; their nature, too, is baser than the angels’ nature. In spite of this, he who wishes to live in sanctity, will not be able to without striving. Because the way that leads to righteousness is arduous at all times and sloping, too difficult for most people to go through. A lot of toil shows up, and so we need persistence, patience, a noble conduct, and indeed we need an undefeatable mind that does not participate in the base pleasures, and is not moved by the physical lust or bohemian feelings. He who has this mind and spiritual persistence goes easily through the narrow door, and he even runs through the narrow way. It is said (Prov.16: 26) “The appetite of workers works for them... and leads them in a way that is not good.” Here you can hear the prophet speaking dearly that man owns victory over his perdition, by means of violence. The Lord also says, (Matt.11: 12) “the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.”

St. Cyril the great

+ What then do the Lord’s words mean at another place (Matt.11: 30) “For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”

Actually there is no contradiction between both quotes. One speaks of the nature of tribulation, as the narrow door, and the other speaks of the feelings of those who overcome them. What causes hardship to our nature could be counted as easy if we accept it willingly. Moreover, the way of salvation is narrow in its entrance, but once you get in you will find a spacious place of rest, contrary to the way leading to perdition.

St. John Chrysostom

The Lord Jesus continue speaking about the ‘narrow door’ saying, (Luke13: 25-27) **“When once the owner of the house has got up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying ‘Lord open to us’, then in reply He will say to you ‘I do not know where you come from’. Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank with You, and You taught in our streets’. But He will say, ‘I do not know where you come from; go away from Me’, you evil-doers’.”**

Those who are careless enough are unable to find the narrow path, not due to their ignorance in thinking, but rather due to their ignorance in their actual live experience.

They read about Him, or hear of Him, yet they do not experience Him. This is why they ask for Him with their thoughts but not with their hearts; with their tongue and not with their life. These are deprived of knowing the ‘narrow door’ or ‘the way to the kingdom’. Their reward, therefore, will be of the same kind as their work. They do not know the Lord’s way in their life, and hence the Lord will not know them at His final coming. This does not

mean He will not know them personally, but He will count them unworthy of knowing them, for they are out of the light of His glory and splendor. They have rejected going in through His door when they were still in the world; thus He shuts the door when He comes and finds them unworthy of entering, even if they have practiced the form of worshipping, or bore His name yet His life was not in them.

+ The Lord knows His own, which means He accepts them in a strong relation due to their works.

St. Basilios the great

+ The Lord does not know the sinner, but He knows the righteous one.

St. Jerome

+ He says to those who are proud of their miracles, without their leading a virtuous life. 'I do not know you' (Matt.7: 23) for the Lord does not know the way of the evil ones.

Pope Athanasios the apostolic

+ (Luke13: 27) "**Go away from Me, you evil-doers**"; for there is no partnership between light and darkness. It is impossible for him who has touched the corruption of sin and did not wash in His blood, to draw near to God who is so entirely pure.

It is also appropriate for us to ask "What does it signify when those who tell Christ 'We ate and drank with You, and You taught in our streets.'" Those are surely the Israelites, to whom Christ has said (Luke13: 28) "**There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out**". How were they eating and drinking before God? The answer is: by their carrying out the ministry and the service according to: the covenant; for, when they were offering the sacrifices to God in shedding blood, they used to eat and be happy. Moreover, they have listened to Moses' writings in their temples, and interpretations to God's messages, for they always introduced His words saying "In this way the Lord said." But to worship God by shedding the animal blood is not enough for any justification. Man's iniquities are not washed merely by his hearing the divine commandments, unless he practices what he has been commanded to do.

In other words, we may say, because they have rejected accepting the faith that justifies the vagabonds, and because they did not follow the gospel commandments by which they practice the sublime and selective life, then how could they possibly enter God's kingdom?

Once more, who are they who say, 'We have eaten before You...'? Many have believed in Jesus Christ, and have honored the sanctified feasts to glorify Him, and often go to the churches so as to hear the gospel edification, and yet, despite this, they do not keep in mind anything at all of the facts of the Holy Book. To practice righteousness to them is difficult, whereas they void their hearts entirely of the spiritual fruit. Those too, will cry bitterly and gnash their teeth because the Lord rejects them.

St. Cyril the great

7- Declaring His death:

When He spoke of 'the narrow door', and showed that the Gentiles will come from the east, west, north and south and rest in God's kingdom (Luke13: 29) through this door, whereas the children of this kingdom will be cast out because they reject this door, in this way the last shall be first and the first shall be last (Luke13: 30). St. Luke began to reveal to us how our Christ lived in this **(incomplete p. 494)**

'narrowness', and that He rather came to enter through the narrow door, and how He endured death for our sakes, so He carries us with Him to His resurrection.

The evangelist says, (St. Luke 31- 33) **“at that very hour some Pharisees came and said to Him ‘Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.’ He said to them, ‘Go and tell that fox for Me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish My work. Yet today, tomorrow and the next day I must be on My way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem’.”**

Many fathers think that the Pharisees here stand for wolves that came in the semblance of lambs. They pretend to be loving towards the Lord Jesus, whereas their motive for their action was their envy, because He attracts the crowds away from them, and hence they lost their honor and their gains. They therefore wished to cast Him out of the area subject to the rule of Antipas Herod, and so they advised the Lord to go away lest He be killed by Herod. As St. Cyril the great says, “their hearts were on fire with envy. They did not wish Him to live in Jerusalem so He would not benefit the people, who were absolutely thrilled by His divine miracles on one hand, and on the other hand He shone on them with the accurate light of seeing God through His teachings of the real facts that surpass what was mentioned in the old law.

They resisted the Lord in various ways: once by their scorn of His authority in performing miracles, and their audacity in accusing Him, that what He did was only by means of Beelzebul. At another time they pushed Him to be taken by Caesar’s followers, with the accusation of His forbidding the Israelites from paying the taxes to Caesar (Luke 20: 22).

Then, why did they draw close to Him, saying, (Luke 13: 31) **“Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.”** What is their purpose for doing so? The evangelist answers by telling us “At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to Him...” what does he mean by ‘that very hour’ when the Pharisees came and said these words to Jesus? As He was busy teaching the Jewish multitudes, one asked Him if there were many to be saved. The Lord expressed His response to answer appropriately what they should be informed with. It is the way in which humans should go so they become heirs to the heavenly kingdom. For He said, “Strive to enter the narrow door.” He told them if they rejected this, they will see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the other prophets in God’s kingdom whereas they themselves would be cast out (Luke 13: 28). He also added (Luke 13: 30) **“Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last,”** meaning, the call for the unbelievers to come to the faith. These signs provoked the Pharisees to anger. They saw the multitudes repent and adopt the faith in Him eagerly. They only needed a few more things to realise His glory and the mystery of His great incarnation that is worthy of all worship. In this way, the Pharisees almost lost their authority as leaders of the people, and also lost their monetary gains, for they were avid and greedy in their love of covetousness and luxury. They pretended as if to love Him and so drew close to Him saying “Go away from here for Herod wants to kill you.” They thought they would be able to deceive Him who said (Job 38: 2) “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? ...I will question you, and you shall declare to Me... Tell Me if you have understanding...” (The seventieth translation)

The Pharisees believed they were able to deceive the Lord. But he answered them as a Perceiver of the hearts and innermost being, the One who knows every secret and all the future, in peace and amazing wisdom. It was a conclusive strong response for the construction of the listeners, for He manifested the following in His answer:

Firstly: He proved His courage by sending them to Herod, calling him the ‘fox’. He wished, on one hand, to declare to them He would not withdraw from serving the multitudes however dangerous this might be, but that they themselves would rather withdraw if they wished to and get busy with what does not hinder the salvation of their brethren; on the other hand, He

called Herod 'fox', for He knew the ferocity of his heart and his love for shedding innocent blood in great malice.

Some think Herod here refer to the heretics who wish to kill the faith in Christ, and snatch it away from God's children, and this is why he is called 'fox'. Since they use malice and deceit.

Others think Herod refers to the love of temporal honor, or being linked to what is earthly. This matter kills our faith in Christ, and runs our partnership with Him, and this is why he was called 'a fox', for he digs in the earth and lives in holes. As St. Clemendos the Alexandrian says, "He calls the malicious and earthly ones who are preoccupied with wealth, for they dig in the earth as foxes do."

Secondly: He also manifested His mission, that He was not a rival to Herod in his earthly kingdom; but that rather, He was a heavenly King working for the construction of the souls, and casts at the devils and He heals offering up Himself willingly to death (Luke13: 32, 33). He has come to destroy the work of Satan, and heal humanity form its deadly wounds, and appoint His church as a spiritual kingdom. As St. Augustine says, "understand these things He uttered in a mystical sense, referring to His body that is the church. For the devils are cast out when the nations depart from superstition and come to cleave to Him. The absolute healing is fulfilled by means of His commandments, after the devil is denied as well as all the world in the resurrection. At this point the church becomes perfect in the fullness of the angelic life, by the immortality of the body as well."

This is His kingdom that is fulfilled by His work, as His words are 'Today and tomorrow, and on the third day it is fulfilled.' He means by the third day, our resurrection with Him as on the third day, what Satan will be absolutely destroyed and no trace of his injuries will be in us.

The Lord wished to stress that His kingdom was a spiritual one, not based on any political foundation, by comparing His care to His congregation to a hen that embraces her little chicks under it wings (Luke13: 34). This stands in contrast to the Roman eagle that used to be set up in the Roman empire in great haughtiness and arrogance, as a sign of dominance, pride and violence.

Thirdly: The Lord manifested His knowledge of the future by His words "I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish My work." This is a Hebrew symbolic expression that means His days on earth are almost done and are to be counted (Hos.6: 2).

By saying 'I finish My work' He revealed His passion was the mystery of His glory, for by it His work of salvation for His people will be fulfilled.

Fourthly: He uncovered His mission; that He has come to shed His blood for His own that is Jerusalem, for He said, (luke13: 33) "**Yet today, tomorrow and the next day I must be on My way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.**" As St. Cyril the great says, "The Pharisees thought herod's authority would threaten Him, and He would thus fear him. But He is the Lord of hosts who begets in us the spiritual courage by His words (Matt10: 28) Do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul; rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." He paid no concern to human violence; He rather says that He has to work today, tomorrow and what follows (Luke13: 33). When He says 'I have to', this does not mean He is obliged to, but He 'has to' so willingly, out of His own self-will. Without any danger, He can go anywhere throughout Judea, without anyone resisting Him, or plan against Him; so that He accepts the suffering by His own will through the precious cross. With His own self will He accepted the passion so that by His body's death, He would delete death and rise. When He rises from the dead, He resurrects the entire human nature with Him. He renews it, and grants it the incorruptible life.

Fifthly: He manifested His super care to His people, yet it is not obligatory, for He sanctifies our freedom. We could either accept it and react with it, or reject it. For He says (Luke13: 34, 35) **“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing. See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see Me until the time come when you say ‘Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord’.”** We have previously explained this phrase (Matt.23: 37-39) in our interpretation.

+ he does not only not surpass us, but He also does not want to leave us unless we want this.

He showed we are the ones who begin in deserting Him. We have thus become the pretext of our perdition. But as for God, He does not wish to desert us or even punish us. If He punishes us, He does so as if He is forced to. He says, (Ezek.18: 32) **“I do not wish the sinner’s death, but I rather wish him to come back and live.”**

Christ grieves over Jerusalem’s perdition, Just as we grieve the perdition of our friends.

St. John Chrysostom

(I don’t know if it completed or not)

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Chapter XIV
(Page 500- 531)
The Basics of the Divine Fellowship

Since we have spoken of repentance as the way without which we shall not encounter our heavenly friend, therefore this repentance has to be interpreted practically in the following ways:

1- Sublimity which is above any literacy	1- 6
2- Not to desire the foremost places	7- 11
3- Opening your heart to the needy	12- 14
4- Being concerned about the banquet invitation	15- 24
5- The Carrying of the cross	25- 35

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1- Sublimity which is above any literacy:

(Luke14: 1-6) “On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching Him closely. Just then, in front of Him, there was a man who had dropsy. And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, ‘Is it lawful to cure people on the Sabbath or not?’” But they were silent. So Jesus took him, and healed him and sent him away. Then He said to them, “If any of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a Sabbath day?” And they could not reply to this.”

This was not the first time in which, the Lord Jesus accepted the invitation to dine at a Pharisees house, or at one of the Pharisees’ leaders house. His acceptance of the invitation was one of the features of His preaching that is founded primarily on the relations of friendship and love. For the Lord did not come to compete with them for positions, but He rather came to open His heart in love to them and to others so that He gains them in His kingdom as lovers and friends on an eternal standard.

The evangelist St. Luke narrates to us His acceptance to Simon the Pharisee’s invitation (Luke7: 36- 50) where He met the sinful woman who in tears and in love offered a tremendous banquet, and so she obtained the forgiveness of her many sins. The Lord revealed to him the concept of inward purification, and the purity of the heart instead of the concern about the physical washing alone (Luke11: 37 etc) Now, for the third time, He accepts the invitation to eat bread at one of the Pharisee leaders’ homes, so He reveals to him the true concept of the Sabbath. In the first invitation the Lord Jesus calls the Pharisees for repentance by means of love. In the second one He asks for their inward purity. In the third, He asks for the spiritual worshiping.

The Pharisee invited Him, and he and his friends were watching Jesus, wishing to catch Him making any mistake instead of benefiting from His fellowship.

St. Cyril the great says, “A Pharisee of some high rank invited Jesus to a banquet. Even though the Lord knew the malice of the Pharisees, yet He went along with him, and ate in their company. He condescended and accepted this, not to honor the host, but to benefit those ones in his company, by His words and miraculous deeds so as to guide them to the knowledge of real service, and to teach us as well all about this in His gospel. He knew He would make of them eye witnesses, though without their own will, of His tremendous authority and awesome glory that surpasses that of humanity. This might make them to

become believers that He is God, and the son of God who has indeed taken our image without His being transformed or changed from what he is. He became a guest to those who invited Him, so as to fulfil an urgent mission, as I have said. But as for them, they kept observing Him to see if He disregards the appropriate honor due to the law, and would thus do some other work forbidden on the Sabbath.

You Jew who has lost your feelings, understand well that the old law was a shadow and a symbol awaiting the truth, and that the truth is Christ and His commandments. So why are you armored with the symbol against the truth? Why do you set the shadow as contrary to the spiritual interpretation? Keep your Sabbath within reason; and if you are not convinced of doing so, then you are taking away from the Sabbath the matters that are pleasing to God. You will be unaware of the true Sabbath restfulness that God asks of us, and of which He spoke in the olden times in the law of Moses. Let us cease committing any sin, and rest by departing from any errors, and let us be washed from any defilement, and let us depart from the physical love of lust. Let us run away from greed and covetousness, and from any ugly gain and the love of incorrect money. Let us collect first a supply for our souls to support us on the way; the food sufficient in the world to come, and let us resort to the sanctified deeds, and so keep the Sabbath in a sensible way.

Those who practice the service among you, they are used to offering God certain sacrifices on the Sabbath, and slaughter the sacrifices in the temple, and fulfil the service chores they are assigned to do. Despite all of this, no one rebuked them, and even the law itself was silent! Therefore the law did not forbid people to serve on the Sabbath.

This was a symbol to us; and as I have said, it is our duty to observe keeping the Sabbath in a sensible way, and please God by the sweet spiritual fragrance. As I have previously mentioned, we fulfill this when we cease committing any sin, and offer God a sanctified offering, a sanctified life worthy of admiration, and develop steadfastly in every righteousness. This is the spiritual sacrifice that pleases God.

If you do not bear this in mind, then you are cleaving to the heart stubbornness mentioned in the Holy Book, and you have left the truth as a matter you cannot adopt. You are thus listening to the words of God spoken by the voice of Isaiah the prophet (Is.6: 10) "Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed."

What was the miracle they were observing?

Before Him there was a man who had dropsy. The Lord therefore asked the lawyers and the Pharisees if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not. They remained silent.

Why are you silent, you lawyer? Adopt something from the Holy Book to show that the law of Moses forbids the doing of any good on the Sabbath. Prove to us that He wants us to be hard hearted and merciless for the sake of resting our bodies, and that He forbids gentleness for the sake of honoring the Sabbath. This is what you cannot prove in any part of the Holy Book.

Because they remained silent due to their deceit, the Lord challenged their same that is unabsolved, and He offered them the evidence.

He says (Luke14: 5) "If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a Sabbath day?" if the law forbids showing mercy on the Sabbath, then why do you practice pity on him that has fallen in the well? Do not be disturbed by the danger that surrounds your child on the Sabbath, but rather rebuke the natural feeling that urges you in fatherly love! Push your son on to his grave, and be joyful for honoring the Giver of the law, as if He is unmerciful and cruel! Leave your friend in danger, and do not be concerned about him, and if you even hear the weeping of a little child asking for help, tell him 'Go die; for this the will of the law!'"

You do not approve of this; you rather open your arms to him who is in distress, and give him more care than your honor to the law, or to the restful Sabbath that has no emotions, even if you do not yet know that the Sabbath is to be kept in a spiritual way.

The God of everyone does not cease to have compassion, for He is good and the Lover of mankind. He did not establish the law of Moses to fulfil cruelty, nor did He set it as an instructor to mercilessness, but rather to lead you to love your neighbor.

Because He paid no attention to the envy of the Jews, He saved the man from his disease that is, the dropsy.

St. Cyril the great

At any rate even the Jew in his literacy to the law, if he sees his ox or his donkey fallen in the pit, he cannot stand immovable. He rather overrides the doctrine so as to save the animal from danger. How much more so would it be with God, the One so full of love and mercy, when He saw humanity has become two nations: the Jews burdened with the fatal yoke of literacy and have thus become as an ox in the pitfall of perdition, and the Gentiles who have become filled with foolishness in the atheist worshiping, and have thus become as the incomprehensible donkey. Will God not be concerned about their salvation to grant them a true Sabbath, and restfulness of an eternal standard?

Furthermore, St. Augustine thinks the patient sick with dropsy, whenever he drinks water he gets more thirsty. This is because the water is separated from the blood. Likewise is the money-lover; the more earthly blessings he receives, the more thirsty he becomes for it, and he never gets satisfied. For he says, "Indeed, the patient sick with dropsy is compared to the wealthy and greedy man. The former one; the more he obtains unnatural humidity, the more thirsty he gets. Likewise is the greedy rich one; the more affluence in riches the more he misuses it, and thus increases in his eagerness for more wealth.

The evangelist mentions the healing of this man sick with dropsy saying (Luke 14: 4) "So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away." These are the three stages man goes through to be blessed with the Lord Jesus' salvation work. They are:

- (One) Jesus took him: if the disease has taken hold of our life, then we are in need of the Word of God, the real Physician who has come down to us, so He might take us. Thus we shall be in His grasp, and accept cleaving to Him and go into partnership with Him. The Lord takes hold of us by revealing the mysteries of His love through the cross; and so He encompasses our life, and absorbs all our feelings and senses for His account, in addition to His love for us. Hence we can say (Song 2: 16) "My beloved is mine and I am His."
- (Two) He healed him: when the Lord takes us and we take Him, we are blessed with His salvation and are healed of our sins. In other words, our encounter with Him is based on absolute openness. We confess to Him our sins so as to obtain forgiveness, and be blessed with the deeds of His saving love that are non-intermittent.
- (Three) He sent him away: The purpose of encountering the Savior is to be blessed with the release of freedom as God's children, so we be found perpetually firm in Him. We are thus counted as God's heirs, for He is our Father, and heirs with Christ (Rom. 8: 17).

This is the work of the Lord Jesus in us. We encounter Him and hold on to His love, be healed of our sins, and be freed as God's children so as to be found in Him eternally.

2- Not Coveting the Foremost positions:

When the Lord Jesus wished us to accept His fellowship to us, He asked us to rise above any literacy. We are not to keep the Sabbath in a materialistic and dry way, but rather in a spiritual way so as to be blessed with the everlasting rest. We shall be healed not of the dropsy disease, but of every sin. We shall be released to be found with Him eternally. This is

what we have seen in the above phrases. But now, being a Friend to us, He wishes us to embody His qualities in us, so we be able to encounter Him. The most important of these qualities is probably lowliness, and to depart from the love of having the foremost positions.

He does not tell us not to covet these positions so He may humiliate us, or lessen our sense of honor; but because He humbled Himself and occupied the last seat as a slave, He therefore wished us not to covet this position so as to be with Him through the spirit of lowliness that is full of love.

In other words, our seeking the last position is not based on a feeling of inferiority, neither of obligation, but rather it is based on true love to carry Christ the One who has the last seat. It is at this point that He is transfigured in us, and His qualities are strongly manifested shining on those around us. This then becomes the mystery of the inward glory in the Lord.

The evangelist St. Luke says (Luke 14: 7-9) "When He noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, He told them a parable. 'when you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you 'Give this person your place', and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place". +These things may seem to some as being trivial and is not worthy of any attention. But when someone focuses his mind on it, he will learn what defect man has been able to get rid of, and what good provision is found in him. For, to run after honors in an inappropriate way that does not befit us or is appropriate to us, for it shows us as being foolish, violent and haughty, asking for what is inappropriate to us, and actually it is appropriate to those who are greater than us and are more prestigious.

He who does this becomes despised, and at most times he is made fun of when he is obliged most probably, quite unwillingly to return for others the honor which is not his. He has to return what took unworthily.

The modest and praise worthy person, who is not afraid of any blame deserves to sit among the dignitaries, but he does not ask this for himself. He rather leaves to others what he is worthy of; and he is counted most probably worthy of vain glory, and he will receive this honor that befits him, for he hears someone who tells him (Luke 14: 10) "Friend, move up higher".

The modest mind, therefore, is great and excessively good. The mind saves its owner from and blame or rebuke, and from asking for any vain glory.

If you ask for this vanishing human glory, you will lose the right way by which you can indeed be famous, and also obtain unrivaled honor! For it is written, (1Pet. 1: 24) "For all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass". Moreover, the prophet king David blames those who seek temporal dignitaries and said to them (Ps. 129: 6) "Let them be like the grass on the housetops that withers before it grows up". Just as the grass that springs on the housetops, that has no deep root, and so it withers quickly, likewise' is he who is concerned about the worldly dignitaries. For, after he has become prominent in so short a time, just as the flower blossom, he falls to his downfall and becomes as nothing.

If anyone wants to win others, let him obtain this by the law of heaven. Let him be crowned by the honors granted him by God. Let him be above many others by the manifestation of the good virtues in him.

But, actually, the law of righteousness is the lowly mind that asks for no arrogance but rather asks for humility. This is what the devout St. Paul considered better than anything else, for he wrote to those who are eager to lead a conduct of holiness "Love humility" (Col. 3: 12). Christ's disciple praised this as well, for he wrote (James 1: 9, 10) "Let the believer who is lowly boast in being raised up, and the rich in being brought low, because the

rich will disappear like a flower in the field”. The mind that is lowly and controlled is exalted by God, for (Ps.51: 17) “a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise”.

He who thinks within himself he is highly esteemed, and so becomes arrogant in his thoughts, is gets puffed up in vain loftiness, this one becomes rejected and falls under the curse. He behaves contrary to Christ’s words, (Matt.11: 29) “Learn of Me for I am meek and lowly in heart”. It was moreover said (1Pet.5:5) “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble”. The wise Solomon showed on many occasions the security that dwells in the lowly mind, for he says (Sirach1: 30) “Do not exalt yourself, or you may fall”. The same thing is declared in an analogy (Prov.17: 19) “One who builds a high threshold invites broken bones”. Such a one is justly despised by God, for he wrongs against himself, and he wishes to over go what is beyond his nature, quite unwarily.

I ask you; on what basis does man assume within himself he is a great one?

I wish everyone to regard himself with wise eyes, and so he becomes as Abraham who did not err in realising his nature, and he rather called himself dust and ashes (Gen.18: 27).

St. Cyril the great

+ Do you refuse to be modest, whereas you are actually a fallen one? There is a huge difference between him who is trying to be modest and him who is actually fallen on the ground. You are thrown on the ground, and do you not want to be modest?

St. Augustine

+ The one asking for honor does not obtain what he aims at, but he rather suffers from disillusion. For, he is preoccupied as to how he could be loaded with honors, and he suddenly finds dishonor instead. Since there is nothing any better than modesty, this is why the Lord leads the listening to Him to reject the foremost positions, and He rather commands then to seek the modest ones.

St. John Chrysostom

+ No one should think these commandments of Christ make him a trivial person, unworthy of the sublime and glorious word of God.

Father Theophlactius

Furthermore, St. Basilios warns us of misunderstanding these words of Christ. He has asked of us not to covet the foremost positions, but rather seek the last ones. But we ask of Him in peace and in modesty and discipline, not through violence or any ostentation. If we ask the host to have the foremost position we also accept it quietly, and do not disrupt his disciplinary system. In other words, the Lord’s words touch the innermost heart so that man does not covet the vain glory, whether we sit here or there. God asks for the heart and not for any outer appearance. This is why the Lord concluded the parable by saying (Luke14: 11) “For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted”.

We may say that the wedding, or the banquet host is the Lord of glory, Jesus Christ Himself. He has invited us all to come to His church, the joyful banquet to the soul. He walks in its midst without any stopping, because the church is sanctified. He wants to see the lowly hearts, and thus He richly overflows them with the fruits of His Holy Spirit. He exalts them in the eyes of the heavenly and earthly ones. Just as the saint Mary said when she accepted the banquet Owner in her womb (Luke1: 52) “He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.”

3- Having an Open heart for the Needy Ones:

Because the Lord offered us His lowliness as a foundation upon which we accept His fellowship, and to carry His thoughts in us, and so conduct ourselves in the spirit of

lowliness, and asking for the last position, and are eager to depart from the foremost positions to give them to our brethren, presenting each other in preference of honor (Rom.12: 10), the Lord therefore asks us as well to follow His example. He is our heavenly friend; and so we have to carry a big heart for those who are in need, the deprived ones and the disabled ones. The Lord in His incarnation has come for the lost man, and has left His heavenly creation, that is, the ninety nine sheep, so as to search for the lost one. In love He endured the suffering of the cross, so He may carry the lost sheep on His shoulders, and lift him up to the glory of His heavens. Likewise we should appropriately search for every needy and suffering person.

(Luke14: 12- 14) He said also to the one who had invited Him ‘When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous’.

+ If we are ashamed of those whom Christ is not ashamed of, then we are ashamed of Christ Himself by being ashamed of His friends.

Fill your table with crippled and deformed ones, and thus Christ will come to you through them not through the rich.

St. John Chrysostom

+ If you invite a friend, he keeps thanking you till evening time. But friendship remains for a while and soon ends, and so it is not worth the expenses you spent. But if you invite a poor or deformed one, then the gratitude is not corrupted, because God remembers it for you everlastingly. He will not forget it, since He Himself will be indebted to you.

St. John Chrysostom

+ Let us follow the friendship according to the Spirit, for it is strong and is hard to untie; and not the friendship that is round the table.

St. John Chrysostom

+ The more modest our brother is, the more Christ comes through him and visits us. Because when you host an important person, this is probably done due to vainglory. Let us not ask the able ones to reward us, but rather follow the saying ‘you will, be blessed since they have nothing to reward you with’.

Let us not be disturbed when we are not rewarded gentleness for gentleness. Because if we accept it of people, we do not obtain what is more. But if we are not repaid by humans then it is God who will reward us.

+ It is appropriate that you receive the poor ones in the best room you have. If you reject this, then at least accept Christ in the lesser rooms where those who perform the base chores and the servants are.

Let the poor one at least keep your door safe; because where charity is, Satan cannot barge in and enter.

If you do not sit with them, then at least send them the plates from your table.

St. John Chrysostom

St. Cyril the great mentions his remarks on this parable, saying that those concerned in presenting beautiful pictures, do not find it enough to use one color. Likewise is the God of everyone, the Giver of spiritual beauty and its Teacher. He decorates our souls by various virtues so as to lead a sanctified life of various angles, so we be perfected in His image. This is why the Lord Jesus commanded the lawyers and the Pharisees and the scribes to lead a modest conduct, and be released of the love of vain glory. Also, they should not ask for the foremost positions. Now he is asking of them to love the poor, and not to host in their banquets the rich, and to ask for praise and the love of showing off; but rather to invite the needy, the unpaired, those in suffering by all kinds of physical diseases, so as to obtain the hope in the heavenlies from God Himself. St. Cyril the great concludes his words about this

virtue that ornaments the soul saying. “The lesson He teaches us is to love the poor, this very precious matter in the eyes of God”.

Are you pleased when you hear words of praise said by your friends and relatives that you host at a banquet? I shall tell you what is even better: the angels praise your generosity, and the sensible heavenly hosts and the saints likewise do so, and even God accepts him who exalts everyone and loves mercy and is compassionate. Lend Him and do not fear, for He will repay you with an interest, for it is said (Prov.19: 17) “He who has mercy on the poor, lends the Lord”. He knows the loan and He promises to be faithful to it (Matt. 25: 31).

Bring to your possession the grace springing from God. Have the Lord of heaven and earth a Friend to yourself, for indeed, man possesses the friendship of people usually by means of much gold. If those dignitaries befriend us, we are overjoyed, and try to offer gifts more than we can afford because we have obtained honor in being close to them. Despite this, these matters are transient and quickly pass away as an shadow in a dream.

Is it not appropriate to count our membership in God’s house as worthy of possession? Do we not consider it a valuable issue? Surely we shall stand in Christ’s presence after the resurrection from the dead, and the reward will be given to the compassionate and the merciful. The condemnation will be harsh indeed on the violent who had no natural love. For it is said (James2: 13) “For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy”.

But as for the scholar Oreganus, due to his symbolic interpretation, he sees the banquet as the spiritual table that is appropriate for us. For we cast away from us the vain glory, and so we welcome the poor and needy, that is, those who are ignorant and are in need of wisdom, so they find on our table the Lord Jesus who enriches everyone. We also host the weak ones who resist the inward conscience so they be inwardly healed. Also those who are crippled, who have got lost in their conduct of truth, so they find the straight paths in the Lord. We also host the blind who have no spiritual vision to realise the truth, and thus enjoy the true light. Those do not have what they could reward us with, for they do not find any answer as to the preaching so overpowering in its love.

4- Being Concerned about the Banquet Invitation:

The Lord Jesus, as a skilful artist, wished to color in our minds the variable virtues, as St. Cyril the great said, so as to form a beautiful icon as His model that has His image. He commanded us to open our hearts in love to the poor, the needy, the physically and spiritually deformed so as to be satisfied for the Lord’s account, awaiting the above reward from God alone. But we will not be able to open our hearts in love as a banquet where we welcome our little brethren unless we first are blessed as little children by entering the divine banquet. This is why the Lord’s words were addressed to us so we accept being blessed by His banquet and do not refuse His invitation to us. We enter His spiritual banquet and hence our hearts themselves become a banquet of love to our brothers in the Lord of glory.

The evangelist says (Luke14: 15-17) “One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to Him ‘Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is ready now’.”

When those sitting around heard the previous words of the Lord Jesus, one of them wished to be rewarded with what the Lord had promised when inviting the poor in his banquets. He thought the reward is to obtain materialistic banquet in the kingdom of heaven, for the Lord had said ‘Blessed is he who eats bread in God’s kingdom’. In such a way were the Jewish doctrine leaders so materialistic in their concepts even when concerning God’s kingdom. But as for God’s sons, these find their satisfaction not in materialistic food, but

rather in God Himself 'the true love'. This is why St. Clemendous the Alexandrian says, "The philosophers are wiser than the rich ones, for they do not bury their minds in food, and are not deceived by its pleasure.

The shared love (aghabi) is the heavenly food, the table of the mind.

(1Cor.13: 7,8) "Love bears all things, believes all things hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies they will come to an end".

St. Cyril the great says, "This man may not have become yet spiritual, but he was rather physical and was unable to understand fully what Christ said, as he was not one of the believers, and neither was he baptized. He assumed the reward for the saints due to their loving deeds shared in common, concerned physical matters.

This man was probably one of the Pharisees invited to one of their leaders' home. He represented the materialistic Jewish concepts even in the heavenly matters. This is why the Lord Jesus presented to them the following parable to reveal to them the secret behind the rejection of so many to the heavenly invitation. This was the concept slope towards the materialistic affairs, and the soul's soaking into temporal matters, and being enslaved by the vain passions; for the Lord said: (Luke14: 16-21) "Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is ready now'. But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets. Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets'. Another said, 'I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come'. So the slave returned and reported this to his master, then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame'."

We understand here that the master refers to God the Father. It is he who created the universe, and is Father of the glory. He has prepared a great banquet, that is, a feast for the entire world in honor of Christ. In the last days of the world, that is, in these our days, the Son has risen for our sakes. In these days too, He endured death for our sakes and offered His body as food, for it is the bread that comes down from heaven, and that gives life to the world.

When almost evening, too, in the light of the lantern, the offal was offered as a sacrifice according to the covenant of Moses. This is why the invitation offered by Christ was called supper.

Who is he who was sent, and about whom was said he was slave? This could mean Christ Himself; for He is by nature God the Word, the Son of God the Father. But He yielded Himself and took the form of a slave. By being god of God, He is the Lord of all, but could be called a slave with regards to His humanity'. Even though He took the form of the slave, as I have said, yet He is Lord for He is God.

When was He sent? At even tide. For the Son of God the Father, the only Begotten, He did not come down from heaven and become like us in our image at the beginning of this world; but rather when the Almighty Himself wished for it in the end of times as I have previously mentioned.

What is the nature of the invitation? 'Come, for everything has been prepared'; this is because God the Father is preparing for the inhabitants of the earth in Christ, the talents given to the world through Him. These are the forgiveness of sins, the washing away of every iniquity, the partnership of the Holy Spirit, the glorious adoption as being His children and the heavenly kingdom. Christ called Israel for these blessings by the gospel commandments before calling anyone else. On one occasion the psalmist says (Ps.2: 6, 7) "I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill. I will tell of the decree of the Lord". On another occasion it was said (Matt.15: 24) "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel".

Was this persistence for their own good? Did they admire Him who has commanded them, and who has worked, and has come to serve them by the vocation? Never! For one by one they all began to apologize. This means they did not postpone it, they just rejected the invitation. Here you can realise how they were unable to be aware of the spiritual matters by submitting themselves to the temporal matters. Thus they have become insensitive, for they were overcome with the love of the body, and have become far away from any holiness. They were greedy and eager for wealth. They asked for the worldly affairs, and paid no concern to the hope of what God above kept in store for them. To possess the joy of paradise is way more wonderful than the earthly fields. To harvest the fruits of righteousness is way better than the temporal fruits we wish for from the yoke of the oxen. For it is written (Hosea 10: 12) "Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap steadfast love... that He may come and rain righteousness upon you". Was it not their duty, instead of begetting physical children, to have the spiritual fruitfulness? Because the first are subject to death and corruption, but the others will live eternally as saints.

St. Cyril the great

Let us go back to the parable to find the banquet owner sending just before dinner inviting everyone. This was the custom in the East; that the host sends his slaves first so as to invite his friends, and just before eating he sends a second time to make them hurry in coming. Likewise did God send to us the prophets first. Even before the banquet of the cross, He sent His only begotten Son, who yielded Himself as a slave, and kept calling us to the banquet of the divine love, to His sacrifice that can satisfy everyone. As St. John Chrysostom says, "Indeed, the sacrifice has been offered to the entire humanity. It is sufficient to save everyone; yet no one would be blessed by it except the believers alone".

Who are those who apologized? St. Augustine says, "They are of three kinds":

Firstly: The man who bought a field represents he who has authority on a particular spot, and this refers to pride.

Secondly: He who has purchased five pairs of oxen refers to the one confused about the physical senses, for every one has five physical senses (vision, hearing, touch, smell and taste). These have an influence on the soul, like someone carrying five hidden senses. He who gets disturbed by these senses in earthly matters, which preoccupy his body as well as his soul, will not be able to obtain and enjoy God's kingdom.

Thirdly: The one who apologized for getting married refers to him who has changed even the holy matters to physical pleasure that hinder his spiritual ones.

St. Augustine summarizes these regrets saying "I wish we leave behind those vain and evil regrets, and that we come to the dinner of fully inward satisfaction. I wish we be not puffed up with pride that offends us and hinders us. I wish we be not inquisitive, and be not disturbed and get far away from God. I wish the physical pleasures not to hinder the hearts pleasure. Let us come and be satisfied".

St. Ambrosius in his remarks on St. Luke's gospel, thinks those three who have apologized for not coming these three represent the variable ways in loving the world. The first one is preoccupied with earthly affairs, and has come to own for himself an earthly house that drifts him away from God's kingdom. This is why the Lord's commandment came as follows (Matt. 19: 21) "Sell all what you have... and come follow Me". Also the buying of the cattle refers to getting disturbed by the world deeds and actions. This is why Elyah slaughtered on a acre of cattle and cooked the meat with cattle utensils and gave the people to eat (1 Kings 19: 21). The third one who had married refers to him who is concerned with what is worldly so as to please his wife (1 Cor. 7: 34).

We can say that the drawback is not with the field, which is the earthly dwelling; neither is it with the cattle, which is the work; nor with the wife, which is the family relations, for it is possible for man to sanctify his body as well as his soul, when his house, his work,

his family are sanctified in the Lord. But the real drawback is to be disturbed by these matters away from the circle of God's love and the concern about the eternal inheritance.

St. Ambrosios says some provide a different interpretation: it is that those to be avoided from the banquet are three; the unbelieving Gentiles, the ungrateful Jews, and the heretics. The Gentiles represent the love of money and greed. This is why the apostle advises us to flee covetousness (To.1: 29) lest we be deprived of the banquet like the Gentiles. He moreover says (Eph.5: 5) "Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolator) has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God".

The Jews, as the five pairs of cattle. Carry the yoke of the law in fatal literacy. They are five pairs, that is to say ten in number as a symbol of the ten commandments. It was said to the Samaritan woman. "You have five husbands" (John5: 18). But as for ourselves, we have taken Christ, who has set on us the light yoke of His love (Matt.11: 30). The heretics may be similar to the one confused and busy with his wife; since they reject the church, the true bride of the Lord Jesus Himself. They wish to assign for themselves a wife that offends in corrupt teachings the heavenly wedding.

Pope Gregory the great thinks the one preoccupied with the field refers to him who is preoccupied with the outward affairs of his life, and not concerned about his inward spiritual life. The one preoccupied with the five pairs of cattle refers to him who is concerned with the sensual physical matters and not with the deep spiritual life. The one preoccupied with his wife refers to him who ruins marriage, and instead of accepting to bring forth children, he changes to the physical lust and pleasures.

The scholar Oreganus thinks that he who owns the field, and thinks lightly of the banquet is he who accepts godly teachings that are adverse, and he rejects the word of truth. He who purchases five pairs of cattle is he who is careless about his spiritual and sensible nature, and thus yields to the physical senses and so he is unaware of the spiritualities. As for he who marries, this refers to him who is tied to the body and is concerned about the physical pleasures more than being concerned about God.

Finally, many fathers have spoken about the one who rejected the invitation due to his marriage. They confirm that family ties, particularly the matrimonial bond, if in the Lord is for the construction of the soul.

+ I do not reject the matrimonial tie. I rather yield to it in greater love; for with this I confess to my wife appointed by the Lord to me, and I honor her. I do not reject being tied to her in this love of Christ that is never untied.

Father Theonas

+ The God of peace, who urges us to love our enemies, does not insert in us the hatred and undiscipline to those dear to us. If we love our enemies, let us then all the more be exalted so as to love the ones close to us.

If there is a wicked father, son or brother who obstructs anyone in the faith and confronts him in his offense to the higher life, and so let him not befriend him, and be released from the physical ties regarding this matter.

St. Clemandos the Alexandrian

Now that we have revealed how the Lord Jesus has shown His parable the kinds of people who have rejected His evangelical banquet due to their temporal link and their physical passions, the Lord continued His words in this way: (Luke 14: 21) "Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame".

Those who rejected the banquet in the first place, represent the Jews who disbelieve the evangelical message. The household here refers to the opening of the faith door to all the nations and the Gentiles who have lived for so long in atheist worship and its corruption. This was like the miserable ones who have no treasures of God commandments and prophecies.

They are like the lame and crippled ones who are paralyzed in their spiritual action, as the blind who have no inward vision. They are like those ones in the streets and alleys, who have no house of God in which they could rest.

Now, the doors of the heavenly city are open to them, so they be blessed with God's banquet, and be present in God's presence as members of Christ's body, the sons of the living God.

+ The Gentiles came from the streets and the lames. I wish the heretics be rid of the barriers, and the thorns".

St. Augustine

+ Those defeated by the disasters of this world, and have been forced to return by God's love have returned and entered.

The following phrase is a terrifying one (Luke 14: 24) "For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste My dinner". I wish no one to think scornfully of the invitation, lest if he is called he apologizes, and when he wishes to enter, he is unable to.

Pope Gregory the great

+ He sends His slaves to call the poor, the crippled the lame and the blind (Prov.1: 20) "Wisdom ones out in the street".

He sent so as to call sinners to come from the wide roads to the narrow ones (Matt.7: 13).

He sew his slave to the village streets and its alleys, because those qualified for God's kingdom have to depart from the existing current matters and hasten to the promised goods, that are besieged, and are not in the streets and the alleys. Those fences separate the cultivable land from the streets, so they prevent the beasts from entering the fields and destroying the plants. In this way with the shield of faith, which is like the fence, we can discern the good from the bad and thus be able to resist the evil spirits. Therefore when the Lord wished to manifest His protection for His vineyard He said (Matt.21: 33) "He put a fence around it".

St. Ambrosios

+ Those prestigious people from among the populace, did not submit to Jesus. He told them (Matt.11: 29) "For My yoke is easy", but the rejected the call and did not accept the faith, and were far away from the banquet. They scorned the great dinner through their arrogant disobedience. The lack of faith among the scribes and the Pharisees was manifested in the Lord's words (Luke11: 52) "Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering".

Instead of them, the call was offered to those in the streets and they alleys, who were also attributed to the common Jewish people; these were weak, impaired and mentally sick. They are regarded as being blind and crippled, yet in Christ they have become strong and whole. They have learnt how to walk uprightly, and have accepted the divine light in their minds.

Notice also the call to the Gentiles after those simple Jaws have adopted the faith. Those Gentiles in the old times were miserable ones in their thinking, having no spiritual culture regarding their understanding. They resided out of the city, and abided by no law. They were more of a herd of cattle than humans, for they barely used their mental ability. For this reason he sent the slaves to invite them to dinner, to those were in the streets out of town, as if he was obliging them to enter in. Despite this, the call to all humanity to come to the faith is an optional matter, which they accept in perfect freedom. Thus they become acceptable to God and are blessed with an overflow of His blessings.

St. Cyril the great

How does he oblige them to enjoy the banquet even though the invitation to the faith is optional? St. Cyril the great answers saying that the nations have become as id in the

bondage of Satan, and are unable to move. These nations need someone to pull them out of this bondage, as the Lord said (John6: 44) “No one can come to Me unless drawn by the Father who sent Me”. This drawing occurs by God’s strength that works in the Gentiles so they receive the Lord Jesus. The obligation here does not mean that man loses his voluntary wish, but that he is rather God’s help so as to urge him on to the faith.

Man, in his faith, asks god freely to seize him to His kingdom as if man is obliging God to do so. This means than with man’s will he yields his life in the Lord’s hands, so God may work in him according to His divine will.

The obligation here may also not mean the obligation to individuals to accept the call, but it rather obliges the nations of Gentiles after the rejection of the Jews. Thus the Gentile nations have adopted the Christian faith.

5- The Carrying of the Cross:

The divine fellowship requires us to bear the qualities of our greatest Friend, and accept His invitation to His evangelical banquet. This friendship is based inside the circle of the cross. Our Friend has carried the cross instead of us, for our sake. Let us therefore carry it also for His sake! This is the account the Lord asked us to consider so as to construct the tower of friendship.

The evangelist tells us of carrying the cross, saying (Luke14: 25, 26) “Now large crowds were traveling with Him; and He turned and said to them. ‘Whoever comes to Me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be My disciple’”.

Because the multitudes surrounded Him, and followed Him, the Lord declared to them the concept of “His fellowship”, and their surrounding Him and following Him. He does not ask for the mere outward appearance, but He rather asks for the hearts’ encounter to come in the first place; when the heart rejects anyone’s entrance neither the father nor the mother nor the son—unless it be through the greatest Friend Jesus Christ. Even our very souls, we do not have to love them away from God. This is the concept of true love, which is to accept the cross, interpreted practically by hating every relation out of God’s love. In other words, if I hate my father and mother, my children and my brothers or sisters, even myself, this is only to accept them in a deeper and wider circle of love, for I love them in the Lord. I love even the enemies, and those who resist me in the Lord who has loved me when I was an enemy and a rebel so as to forcefully take me to His kingdom, as a friend and a loved one to Him.

+ Some may say ‘What is this O Lord? Do you scorn the law of natural emotions?’

do you command us to hate one another, and to think lightly of the parents’ love towards their children, and that of the husbands towards their wives, and the brothers towards each other?

Do we count the house members as enemies to us, even though it is appropriate that we should love them? Shall we make them enemies so we are drawn closer to You, and be able to follow You?

This is not what the Savior means. This is wrong and inappropriate thinking, because He has commanded us to be gentle even with the tough enemies, and to forgive those who hurt us. He said to love our enemies, and to pray for those who offend us. How does He wish us to hate those born of the same family, and to scorn the honor due to parents, and to scorn our brothers? Even our children and ourselves? What He wishes to teach us by these commandments is explicit to him who understands what He said on another occasion about the same subject (Matt.10: 37) “Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me”. By His saying

'more than Me', He manifested He allows us to love, but not more than He. He asks for himself our main emotions. This is right and true, because God's love in those of perfect mind, has its sublimity more than honoring the parents, and more than the natural emotions for the children.

St. Cyril the great

+ It is clear that man hates his neighbor when he loves him, as himself. We truly hate ourselves when we are not engrossed in our physical pleasures, but rather suppress them and resist their urge. By hatred we are better off, as if we love ourselves by hatred, for thus we hate its evil malice.

Pope Gregory the great

+ God does not want us to be ignorant of nature, and the natural family love. He does not want us either to be enslaved to it; but rather to submit nature, and give honor to the Creator of nature. Thus we should not give up God due to our love to our parents.

St. Ambrosios

He has pointed out clearly here, what the Lord meant by His commandment saying (Luke14: 27) "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple". He does not ask us to have the hateful nature to others, but to accept the daily death to everything for God's sake. Thus, we have to carry the cross with Him incessantly, not through our hatred to others, or even to ourselves, but through our tremendous love to God, who absorbs every emotion and love.

St. John Chrysostom says that the Lord does not ask us to put a cross of weed to carry every day, but to put death before our eyes, and thus do as St. Paul who scorned death.

+ We carry our Lord's cross in two ways: either by declining what concerns our bodies, or by our kindness to our close ones and so consider their needs as our own. Some physically give up everything not for God's sake, but rather for vain glory. They show tenderness not in a spiritual way but rather physically. This is why He truly said 'Come, follow Me'. The carrying of the cross, and following the Lord means using the physical renunciation and being kind to our close ones for the sake of eternal benefit.

Pope Gregory the great

The carrying of the cross is the price of our true fellowship with the Lord Jesus. He also asks us to calculate the cost account and He offered us two parables: the first one is he who builds a tower has to calculate the cost first, before digging the foundation. The other example is that of the king who fights another king, and how he has to reconsider his potentials before waging the war. Our fellowship with Christ has to have those two aspects: the building of a very high tower by means of which we shall encounter the heavenly king, so as to live with Him in the heavenly embrace. The second is the waging of war with Satan who resists Christ's friends, and does not cease wrestling with them so as to withdraw them to the dark kingdom instead of the kingdom of light.

First: The parable of building the tower:

(Luke14: 28-30) "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow bean to build and was not able to finish'".

+ Let us calculate the cost of the very high spiritual tower, and let us meditate carefully ahead of time. Let us take into consideration first the errors in a clear way. Let us put aside the physical corruption and passions, so we be able to set the basics of simplicity and modesty, which are so strong that they are above the solid soil of our live chest. In other words, the foundation is laid on the gospel rock (Luke6: 48). In this way the tower of spiritual virtues is heightened; and is able to stand firm and gets higher to the highest heavens, in perfect safety, and is immovable.

Father Isaac.

+ Those who have chosen to lead a blameless and glorious life, they first have to store in their minds sufficient zeal. They should remember Him who said (Sirach2: 1) “My child, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for testing. Set your heart right and be steadfast”. But those who have no such zeal, how could they reach the sign ahead of them?

St. Cyril the great

+ Because He has given us such high commandments that are so sublime, He mentioned to us the parable of building the tower.

If we wish to build the tower of modesty, we first have to prepare ourselves against the troubles of this world.

Pope Gregory the great

+ The tower is that one of high observation and supervision for guarding the city, and discovering the approach of the enemy. In such a way, our minds have to keep righteousness and beware of any evil.

St. Basilious the great

+ We have to struggle continuously to achieve the goal of every hard job, by more and more concern for God’s commandments. In this way we shall complete the divine work. It is not enough to have one stone to make the tower. Likewise, it is not enough to follow one commandment to perfect the soul. We rather have to dig the foundation. As the apostle says to put stones of gold and silver and precious stones (1Cor. 3: 12).

St. Gregory, bishop of Nicus

Therefore, if we wish to have ourselves a gigantic tower high up towards heaven, or a tower sanctified to the Lord, then let us consider the cost to be paid, which is ‘the live faith working in love’. This manifested love makes us carry the Lord’s cross. He begins with us this work, since we are carrying His own cross. He Himself accompanies us the difficult way of the cross, for He has walked through it all by Himself. No one could cross it unless he is hidden in Him. It is He who completes the way, and He lefts us up to the thrill and joy of His resurrection.

Unless we accept the cross, we carry Christ’s name without His life in us. We will then have the appearance of the cross, yet without its power. In this case the evil powers look scornfully on us, saying, (Luke14: 30) ‘This man has begun to build but is unable to complete the building’. As St. Cyril the great says ‘We have many enemies who are been on mocking us, whether they be evil spirits or the law of sin and the physical lust...etc.

Secondly: The parable of the fighting king:

(Luke14: 31-35) “Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes with twenty thousand against him? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become My disciple if you do not give up all your possessions. Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; they throw it away. Let anyone with ears to hear listen”.

In the parable of the tower, He spoke of the building expenses, that is, about the positive aspect. We have been called to the divine fellowship so as to build up ourselves as a tower, soaring up high to the heavens themselves. Therefore this, the vision is blessed with matters that are unseen, and enters solely with God so as to contemplate on the mysteries of His overwhelming love, and comes to know His glories inside herself. The building of the tower, as we have seen, means that through our fellowship with our Lord Jesus, we become by Him a fortified tower which the enemy cannot invade into our sanctified inner self. The enemy will find no place of rest for Him in us, and we shall say with the Lord Jesus ‘The ruler of the world comes and finds nothing for him in us’.

But as for the parable of the king, this refers to the conflict of the enemy against us. For when he sees the tower of our inward life being built by the Holy Spirit, so the Lord of glory is glorified in us, and our souls are exalted to the Father's embrace, the enemy is kindled in envy and jealousy. He does not cease to fight us in every deceitful way so as to destroy our depths.

The adversary wrestles since he is king, and he wishes to devour everyone to his dark kingdom. But we, as believers, are bonded to the king of kings, and have become 'kings' (Rev.1: 6) and we have spiritual authority. We have the ability to work with the Holy Spirit, so as to overcome with Christ who (Rev.6: 2) 'has come out victorious and to overcome.

Our call to Christ's fellowship, the Overcomer, is a call to overcome by Him, and to be blessed with the heavenly crown, and to share His glories. This is why St. Cyril the great says:

"What does this mean? Our struggle is not with flesh and blood (Eph.6: 12) "But against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places".

We too have a crown just as the overcoming of the other enemies, such as the physical thoughts, the rebelling law in our members, the variable passions as the passion of pleasure, the physical pleasure, the wealth pleasure and so forth. We wrestle with these as if they were a violent troop of enemies.

How do we overcome? By faith, (Ps.60: 12) "With God we shall do valiantly; it is He who will tread down our foes". One of our saintly prophets speaks to us of this confidence, saying, (Is.50: 9) "It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty?" The devout king David chants, saying, (Ps.27: 1) "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" He is our strength, and by Him we achieve victory, for He gives us the authority to tread on life and scorpions, and every power of the enemy.

+ (Rom.6: 17, 25) The king is the sin that reigns over our members. But our spiritual understanding was created a king. If he wishes to fight against sin, let him work with all his mind.

Father Theophlactius

The true Christian, when he faces spiritual war, he meets with ten thousand him who comes with twenty thousand. He represents the 'small flock' (Luke12: 32) That the Father was pleased to give the heavenly kingdom. He apparently seems lesser and weaker when facing the adversary. But as much as he leaves 'all of his wealth' (luke14: 33) that is, he does not rely on himself or his self righteousness, nor his potentials; this one becomes salt good to salt others so they would not go bad.

The Christian carries 'Ten thousand' because the number 10 refers to the commandments, and the number 1000 refers to the spiritual thinking of heaven. He fights Christ Jesus, and abides by the commandment in heavenly thinking. But as for the adversary, he comes as a king of 'twenty thousand', for he fights him in spiritual wars (1000) through the northern strike (10) and the right strike (10). Sometimes he urges the lust as a northern strike, and at other times he urges in him the self-righteousness, as a right hand strike.

As for the secret behind victory, it is the departure from everything (Luke14: 33) so that God becomes the all in all, and also to be armored by the good salt, that is, the divine commandments. As St. Cyril the great says 'This is for our salvation. If we scorn God's word and His commandments our life will be transformed to corruption, and we will be fit for nothing'. We have previously spoken elaborately of the good salt.

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Chapter XV
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His Friendship to Sinners

The evangelist has spoken to us of the basics of the divine friendship. Now he is telling us of our amazing Friend who is asking for sinners, and is searching for those who are lost, and is opening His arms to the lost ones coming back to Him. By means of parables, He offers us His tender fatherhood and His divine eagerness for man, and His search for every soul.

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1-The Parable of the lost sheep:

The evangelist St. Luke reveals to us to what extent God's eagerness and His search for man is. He also reveals the joy of the heavenly hosts for his salvation, and his return to them in partnership by means of this parable. He says (Luke 15: 1-7) "Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them'. So He told them this parable; 'Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost'. Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance".

St. Ambrosios links those three parables given by the Lord of glory, Jesus, concerning the care given to the salvation of sinners. He says, "The good physician advises us with the medication needed for the cure of the lost ones, for the forgiving Judge does not reject granting forgiveness. St. Luke will fully mentioned those three consecutive parables: the lost sheep that is found, the missing coin that is found, and the lost son who was dead and has lived. The evangelist wished to motivate us with this triple medication to obtain the healing of our wounds, for the braided triple cord is not cut easily.

Who are these three? The father, the shepherd, and the woman? The father is God the Father, the shepherd is Jesus Christ, and the woman is the church.

Christ the Shepherd carries you in His body, for He carries your sins in His body, and the church is searching for you. The Father accepts you, the Redeemer helps, and the church is concerned, and the Father reconciles. What great mercy is God's divine work!

The wearisome sheep is returned by the shepherd, and the lost coin is found by the church, and the son returns to the Father's way, full of repentance for the lost life he has led".

St. Ambrosios continues commenting on the parable of the lost sheep, saying, "Let us rejoice, therefore, for the sake of the sheep that was lost in Adam, and is risen in Christ.

Christ's shoulders are the arms of the cross, where my sins were put on this life giving wood, and so I rested.

(Luke 19: 10) "For the Son of Man came to save that which was lost". He came to save us all (1 Cor. 15: 22) "For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ".

The Shepherd is rich, we all put together represent one percent of His inheritance. He has a tremendous fold of angels, archangels, principalities and dominions (Col.1: 16): He has folds in the heavens. Because they are wise, they rejoice at human redemption, a thing that urges us all the more to righteousness.

“We have to know that our renewal over-rejoices the heavenly hosts. Let us ask for their intercession and their support, and let us not anger them. May you bring joy to the angels when they rejoice at your return.”

This parable has attracted the heart of the church since the first apostolic age; for in it we can see the good Shepherd who seems as Someone leaving the ninety-nine sheep, that is, the heavenly hosts, so as to seek man for being the lost sheep. The Word of God has Come incarnate, carrying all sins till the cross; He went to the grave to snatch away the fallen man from the depths of hell. He destroyed all the powers of darkness to bring us back to the joy of His salvation. This parable has moreover, pointed out clearly our relation with the heavenly hosts who rejoice at our return and at our sharing them the heavenly praises, and our being blessed by the eternal glories.

The shepherds found in this parable a live source of shepherdly love that is so true. Sinners too, found incessant hope of every soul's acceptance however corrupt it may be.

I find it enough mentioning a few of the fathers' comments on this parable:

+ I do not want the salvation of many, but rather of everyone. If one remains in perdition, I, too, perish. We have to follow the example of the good Shepherd who has ninety-nine sheep, yet he hurried after the one lost sheep.

St. John Chrysostom

+ The sheep that got separated from the ninety-nine, and then returned once more, only means to us the believer who fell and then returned. He is related to the rest, and he was the concern of the same Shepherd. He has lost the partnership, and has strayed on the mountains and valleys on a long journey away from the way of the truth.

St. John Chrysostom

+ The number 100 is a complete number. God had a hundred sheep when He created the angels and humans. But one sheep got lost, for man has sinned, and has left the pastures of life. But their Shepherd left the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and He left all the angelic heavenly hosts above.

How was heaven called 'the wilderness'? (Luke15: 4) It was as if it has become deserted! Man has deserted it when he sinned. But the ninety-nine remained in the wilderness, whereas God went in search of the lost sheep on earth.

The number of the rational creation has decreased, that is, the angels and humans. These were created to see God; but man has fallen. The number in heaven had to be complete; this is why God came down to the human race on earth.

What St. Luke calls 'the wilderness' is mentioned by St. Matthew on the same topic as 'the mountains' (Matt.18: 12). This is to point out that the ninety-nine were not lost, but they rather remained in the highest heavens.

Once He found him, He put him on His shoulders joyfully. He carried the sheep on His shoulders because He adopted our human nature, and carried our sins.

Once He returns home, He calls His friends and His neighbors letting them (Luke15: 6) "Rejoice with Me, for I have found My lost sheep". When He found the lost sheep, He returned home; since our Shepherd returned to heaven when He has saved man. There He found His friends and His neighbors, the hosts of heaven who are His real friends. They are the ones who are not shaken, and carry out His will continuously. They are His neighbors, since they are blessed by seeing Him clearly while listening to Him with no interruption.

It is appropriate for us to notice He did not say 'Rejoice with the returning sheep', but rather 'Rejoice with Me' because His joy is our life, and when we return to heaven His joy is fulfilled.

(Luke 15: 7) "I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." Brothers, we have to contemplate why our Lord says there will be joy in heaven with sinners who repent more than with the righteous ones. In our general experience we find many who are not burdened in their conscience with sin who are on the righteous way, strangers to the forbidden things, these do not have strong eagerness to reach the heavenly home. We find them rather careless in practicing the most important virtues, since they know they have not committed grievous sins. On the other hand, they sometimes feel they have committed sin, and so they are pricked by their conscience and are kindled by God's love, and thus they attempt to do greater virtuous deeds. They face all difficulties with more sanctified courage. They depart from all worldly matters, and from all honors, joyful over the scorn springing from others against them. They are kindled by the heavenly desires and eagerness towards reaching the eternal home. They realise they have strayed away from God, and thus their old sins are an urge to the final gains. For this reason there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over a righteous person who goes on in his righteousness. This is just as in the battlefield, when the officer sees the soldier who has previously escaped, return to fight the enemy more courageous than he who has not escaped, yet he did not fight zealously. It is also similar to the laborer who appreciates the land that previously produced thorns and thistles, and how it has now come to produce plentiful harvest, more than his appreciation of the land that had no thorns, yet it did not produce any fertile crop.

Despite all of this, we cannot deny that some of the righteous lives cause such uncountable joy less than the joy of the sinners return.

But there are some people who lead a life of death as if they have committed every kind of sin in the world, even though they have not committed a particular crime. These reject every rest even if lawful, and welcome others scorn to themselves. They do not allow themselves the least of pleasures, they rather denounce even the pleasures allowed to them. They scorn all materialism and their eagerness is kindled to what is invisible.

They find their pleasure in suffering, and modesty in everything; and if some weep over their sinful deeds, these lament the sins of the mind.

Pope Gregory the great

+ the fold is one hundred, and only one of them got lost. This is the family that is on earth. This is what the Shepherd is asking for, and thus He left the ninety-nine in the wilderness. Is it because He does not care about so many that He has shown His mercy to only one? Never... but it is because many are in safety, protected by His able hand. Therefore indeed, mercy has to be shown to the one who is lost, which the remaining group are in need of. By the return of this one, the beauty returns to the one hundred.

The search for the lost one does not mean the disregard of those who have not sinned. It is rather appropriate to manifest grace, mercy and love to humanity, as a matter befitting the above sublime nature granted to the befallen creation.

St. Cyril the great

+ If the good Shepherd does not put me on His arms and brings me back to the fold once more, then my steps will remain hesitant, and whenever struggle to get up, I find my feet failing more and more.

St. Jerome

+ He who has laid down His life for the sake of His sheep, He searched for the lost one on the mountains and hills. When He has found him, He carried him on His shoulders that have carried the wooden cross.

St. Gregory El Nazinzi

+ The Lord manifested His great zeal for the weak and the small, by leaving those who have been saved, and paying all of His concern for the single one so as to rejoice for him.

St. John Chrysostom

+ When the Shepherd found the sheep, He did not punish him, nor did He drag him to the fold. He rather put him on His shoulders, and carried him gently and included him to the fold.

St. Gregory El Nysy

2- The Missing Coin:

The above parable reveals the Shepherd's love; He has given up Himself, and came down to earth, in search of the haughty person, not to rebuke him or to hurt his feelings, but in love He embraced him, and carried him on His shoulders, and brought him back to the heavenly host. In the following parable, He offers us a picture of how the church should be like, the bride of the good Shepherd. The church has the same qualities towards the fallen ones, and searches for them lovingly and is tender to them, and rejoices for their coming back, He says, (Luke15: 8-10) "Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost! Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'"

The above parable shows the lost sheep as to refer to the family on earth; for we know we belong to God, the God of everyone, who creates all existing things out of nothing. As it is written (Ps.100: 3) "It is He that made us, and we are His". Also (Ps95:7) "For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand". With this second parable in which He compares the lost one to a coin, and that he is one of ten, that is, of a perfect number... it is clear we have a royal semblance, and the royal picture of the God of everyone. This is because the coin, as I think, is sealed with the kingly semblance. If we have fallen and have become lost, Christ has found us and shaped us in sanctification and righteousness in His own image. No one doubts this, for the devout St. Paul wrote (2Cor.3: 18) "And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit". He also sent to the Galatians these words (Gal.4: 19) "My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth, until Christ is formed in you".

The search has been done about what has fallen. The woman lit the lantern, and as I have said, we have been found by means of the wisdom of God the Father, who is the Son, when He shone in His light, so godly and divine on us. The sun has shone, and daylight opened up, and the morning star has risen (2Pet.1: 19) as the Book says. God moreover said on another occasion by means of one of the devout prophets about Christ our Saviour of us all (Is.62: 1) "for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch". The Lord also said about Himself (John8: 12) "I am the Light of the world". Also He said (John12: 46) "I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me should not remain in the darkness". Therefore, by Light, what was perished has been saved, and there has been joy in the powers above.

St. Cyril the great

+ The joy of this woman who found the lost coin is not to be overlooked, because the coin has the King's image. We own this image in the church.

I admit, I wish, as sheep, entreat God to lead us to the restful waters (Ps.22:2), and that we ask for the pastures, and as coins, we keep its value in carrying the King's image in us, and as children, we come back to our Father.

St. Ambrosios

The woman and the shepherd here have the same meaning, for they stand for God and God's wisdom.

The coin is a currency carrying an image; likewise is the woman who loses the coin; she stands for man, who has been created in the image of God and how he goes astray when he loses his semblance to his Creator, because of iniquity.

The woman lights her lantern (Luke15: 8) since God's wisdom has been manifested to mankind. The lantern is simply light put on a stand. But the light here is God taking the form of man and has become human. He who is wisdom speaks of the light of His body in the words of the psalm (Ps.22: 15) "My mouth is dried up like a potsherd". Just as the soil gets heavier with fire likewise His strength has dried up as the clay. This means that by enduring His suffering, the body has become strengthened in carrying the glory of the resurrection. He lit the lantern once, and searched the house. For as soon as His godliness has been manifested in the body, man's conscience became terrified at the reality of his great sin, just as the house that has been searched from top to bottom.

The word 'evertere' means the 'upturning of something'. It is not any different than the word mentioned in other documents as 'emundre' which means 'the sweeping of'. For, cleaned or swept of its old ugly habits.

When the house is searched, the coin is found. When man's conscience is disturbed over his sins, then man discovers the image of his Creator.

(Luke15: 9) "When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost'. Who are these friends and neighbors other than the heavenly powers about whom we previously spoke? These are constantly close to the divine wisdom, because grace gives them light by its constant presence.

But, let us think about these matters: we should not forget why it was said about this woman, she who represents the divine wisdom, that she is the ten coins. She lost one of them, but after the search, she found it. God has created the angels and humans so they would know Him. Because He granted them eternal life, He formed them, undoubtedly, in His image. The woman had ten coins, because the angels are of nine ranks. It was necessary to fulfil the number of the elect by creating man. He was not lost even after the disobedience; for the eternal wisdom of God shone on everyone, and was manifested by the miracles fulfilled on earth. This corrected what sin has corrupted by the light of His physical presence, as a lantern on a lighthouse.

Pope Gregory the great

+ Who is the woman? She is Christ's body.

What is the lantern? (Ps.132: 17) "I have prepared a lamp for My anointed one". This is why He was searching for us until we were found, and when found, we speak.

I wish we be not proud, because previously, we did not exist, and would have remained as lost if the search was not made for us.

St. Augustine

+ The lantern was lit, that is, His body. The house was swept by purifying the world of sin. The currency was asked for, and the kingly image too, which was no more bright due to the air exposure. He calls His friends, that is, the heavenly powers when He finds His coin, so they share Him His joy, for He has previously made them share in praises for the mystery of His incarnation.

St. Gregory El Nazinzi

+ This is God's purpose in us; for He has become man for our sake, and has become poor (2Cor.8: 9) so He raises our bodies (Rom.8: 11) and give back His image in us (Luke15: 9; 1Cor.15: 49) and thus man is renewed and all of us become one in Him.

St. Gregory El Nazinzi

+ It is said that there is great joy and a festive feast in the heavens, at the Father with His angels, when one sinner returns and repents.

St. Clemendos the Alexandrian

+ The heavens and the angels therein, rejoice at man's repentance. Oh! You sinner, be in good joy!

Look how there is joy on your return and repentance!

The scholar Tritilian

3- The Parable of the Prodigal Son:

This is called 'the parable of the lost son' or 'the parable of the loving father'. As much as this reveals the unfeeling son's heart, who has fled away from the face of his loving father, as much as the father is eager for his son's return. He welcomes him with kisses, without blaming him or hurting his feelings, whereas his brother stood outside grumbling because of the father's love to him.

Let us return to this parable in more details.

(Luke15: 11-13) "Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me'. So he divided his property between them. A few days later, the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living".

In both of the above parables, the Lord Jesus did not find it sufficient to reveal God's relation with man; for God searches for him, as does the shepherd to his lost sheep, or as the woman who lights up the lantern and searches the house for the sake of the lost coin. The Lord also reveals the heavenly hosts' relation with us. In the first parable, they appeared as the ninety-nine sheep, whose number is not completed unless we return; for heaven rejoices at the repentance of one sinner, and as nine coins that are completed by us, we the lost coin. But as for this parable we are speaking of now, the Lord mentions a bitter and grievous picture of man's relationship to his brother. It manifests the elder brother, though he seemed to be sensible and integral at his work, yet he is unable to easily accept the return of his brother to the father's house. He rather criticizes his father for being so kind to his brother's return.

Anyway, the appearance of two brothers in the parable reveals many matters among which we mention:

Firstly: No judgment could possibly be passed on anyone as long as he is still struggling on the road. The younger one appeared at the beginning of his life to be a pleasure-lover, and violent in his actions, for he asks his father for the inheritance, whereas the father is still alive. He thus squanders the talents, and is dishonest in what he has. But he returns in repentance to his father's embrace, and appears as dressed in new clothes, with the ring of sonship, and shoes on his feet, and enjoying the feast at his father's house. But the elder brother began his life as being gentle in his attitude, serving his father and not asking for any money. He remains in his father's house, but he ends his life by standing outside, criticizing his father for his love, and shuts his heart towards his brother. He thus loses his inward peace and joy, and so lives with a controversial heart to that of his father's.

Secondly: Some people seemed to think the two sons referred to the heavenly hosts and the human race. The elder son refers to the saintly angels who live sensibly, whereas the younger son refers to the human race that left the father's house by being disobedient, and have returned once more by repentance. St. John Chrysostom rejected this interpretation, and said, "The elder son got frustrated at his brother's return and his peace, whereas the Lord says 'there will be joy in heaven at one sinner's repentance'." St. Cyril the great says, "If we point to the correctful son as being the saintly angels, we find the conversation as being inappropriate. This does not imply their feelings towards the repentant sinners, who turn from the sinful life to the admirable behaviour. For the Savior, the Lord of everyone says, (revise Luke 15: 7) that there will be joy in heaven before the saintly angels at the repentance of one sinner. But as for the elder son mentioned in the parable before us, even though he is accepted by his father, and though he leads a blameless life, yet he appears as being angry, and overriding his love, and seems as having no feelings, considering his father wrongful in showing loving feelings so natural towards him who has been saved. This is contradictory to the feelings of the saintly angels, who rejoice and praise God when they see the inhabitants of the earth being saved. For when the Son yielded to be born of woman according to the body, in Bethlehem, the joyful news was brought to the shepherds, saying (Luke 2: 11) "Do not be afraid; for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people; to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is the Messiah the Lord". When they crowned with praise and joy He who is born, they said 'Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, goodwill towards men.

As for interpretation accepted by most of the fathers, it is that the two sons refer to the relationship between humanity with God. This has been divided in two: the Jews and the Gentiles. The elder son represents the Jewish people that are considered eldest and prime in knowing God, for they have accepted the divine promises, the law and the prophecies before all the other nations. The younger son represents the nations that had no true relation with God. They rather squandered God's gifts such as the natural law. They lived a life of wastefulness through their indulgence in idol worshiping and the atheist defilement. But those Gentiles have come back to God so that the last came to be first, whereas the Jews were too late through their envy of the Gentiles. They stood out of the house of faith denying God and criticizing His love for the Gentiles.

St. Cyril the great thinks the elder son does not apply to the Jews; because these Jews did not lead a correct life. They rather diverged to the unbelieving faith and indulged in its unchastity. In (Jeremiah 2: 5) "What wrong did your ancestors find in Me that they went far from Me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves?" In (Isaiah 29: 13) "The Lord said, 'These people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, while their hearts are far from Me, and their worship of Me is a human commandment learned by rote'. This is why St. Cyril the great thinks the elder son applies more so to the Pharisees who pride themselves on leading a righteous life according to the law. But they proudly reject the Savior's love to the sinners and the lawyers, instead of rejoicing over their salvation.

Thirdly: The younger son was bold enough to ask for his share in the inheritance while his father was still living. He wished to enjoy his share by going out of his father's house. He thought being tied to his father's house is humiliation and bondage which he wanted to get rid of, to live according to his personal whims. But he soon squandered his money in waste.

It is surprising indeed that God the heavenly Father has granted man the gift of free will, as the greatest gift, yet man uses it against God Himself. Man believes this freedom will not be realised unless by disobedience and getting away from the circle of God's obedience and love, and following His will.

The portion that the Gentile squandered in wasteful living is the natural law that he misused; for St. Paul the apostle speaks of the Gentiles saying (Rom.1: 21, 22) “for they they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools”. But as for the Jew, he obtained a bigger portion that he squandered; for he did not only misuse the natural law, but he also misused the law of Moses. For, instead of being led to repentance and keenness towards the Savior to obtain the eternal salvation, he fell into pride. He considered himself better than others, and thus he did not enter the kingdom, and neither did he let others enter in. but as for the Christian who has fallen into personal righteousness, he is worse than those two, because though he is blessed with new blessings and tremendous divine gifts, yet he uses them in evil-doings. As St. Ambrosios says, “We have squandered the inheritance of our spiritual honor that we obtained, in earthly pleasures”. However the Lord Jesus opens by means of this parable the doors of hope for everyone. If we have squandered the natural gifts, or have sinned in the due commandment or the free blessing, yet, despite all of this, God is still waiting for us with open arms, accepting us as His children coming back to their Father’s house.

In a more explanatory note, we say that man, prior to the law, also obtained some motivation and natural instincts such as love, fear, anger, fatherhood or motherhood. All this was for man’s construction in the Lord; thus he would be able to love God, and fear evil and wrath against iniquity, and also to practice parenthood to raise up our children spiritually, socially and emotionally. So when man diverts, instead of loving God he loves his physical pleasures, and so love is transformed to physical passion, even when loving others, he is enclosed in his egoism. He asks for what is physical, or for himself, under the cover of love, just as Photiphar’s wife who believed she loved Joseph so much that she led him to bondage when he refused to offer her physical pleasure. Also, what Ammon did, when he loved his sister to the extent that he fell sick for his love to her. When he fell with her, he humiliated her and he hated her so much that he sent her away. What we say of love, applies to all other natural motives, such as our fear from evil is changed to the fear of people and cowardice from things to come, in addition to worry and confusion etc.

When we, too, accept the faith, and have obtained great divine gifts, and our potentials have become more extensive.... yet, if we neglect them the fall will be far worse! Thus the fall of the believer in sin, is probably way more serious than the unbeliever’s fall, for he misuses the gifts for construction, and transforms them to being destructive.

Let us go back to this son, and see him as running away from his father’s house, in the belief that he will enjoy life all the more. As St. Ambrosios says “He who is far away from the church, squanders his inheritance”. The martyr Kaprianos says, “He who stays out of the church is out of Christ’s camp”, also “He who does not have the church as his mother, God cannot be his Father”.

Fourthly: It is said, (Luke15: 13) “and traveled to a distant country”. What is this distant country to which man escapes other than the ego, the ‘I’. Man releases himself in absolute freedom, so foolishly, away from the heavenly life, which is “love”, to selfishness where he encloses himself. He becomes as if in a distant country, not only away form God, but also away form people, and away form his love to his own salvation. By means of the “I” man loses his inward clinging to everyone, even if he appears to others as a sociable, gentle and generous person in his givings. The “I” is a shut up inward lock where man imprisons himself and his freedom, and thus he loses his humanity, and lives in absolute isolation even from his very own children and members of his household.

St. John Chrysostom says, “The younger son did not travel to a distant country so as to be away from God in distance, because God is present at every place; he rather traveled away from god with his heart, for the sinner flees from God to be far away from Him”. St.

Augustine also says, “This departure is man’s reliance on himself, his personal strength, and thus he loses God’s work in him. On the other hand, drawing close to God means to rely on Him, so He works in us and thus we follow His example.

St. Ambrosios comments on the traveling to a distant country, saying, “The greatest departure is when man is separated not in far away distances, but rather by means of the habits. He does not go to different countries, but he adopts different diversions.

He who is separated from Christ is foreign to his mother-country, and this world becomes his mother-country. But as for us, we are no more strangers and sojourners, but are rather sheep with the saints and the people of God’s house, (Eph.2: 19) because (Eph.2: 13) “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ”. I wish we be not too hard on those coming from a distant country, because we too, were far away in a distant country as well. These are the shadows of death... and we have been brought to life in the shadow of Christ. This is why the church says (Songs of Sol.2: 3) “With great delight I sat in His shadow”.

Fifthly: (Luke15: 14) “When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need”.

When the soul flees from God, the source of satisfaction and the treasure of wisdom, it finds itself entering in inward emptiness and so we become as if in ‘famine’.

The human soul was created in the image of God and in His likeness. We shall have no satisfaction unless it be by Him, for He is the source of all the world. All the physical pleasures and passions and the temporal life with all its occurrences, will not fill up the emptiness within the soul which asks for the endless One to fill it up.

St. Ambrosios says, “The famine that overswept this country was not a famine of food; it was rather a famine for the good and righteous deeds and virtues. Is there anything more pitiful than this? He who is far away from God’s word becomes hungry, for (Luke4: 4) “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God”. By being far away from the spring, we are thirsty. By being away from the treasure, we are impoverished. By being far away from wisdom, we become foolish, and by being away from righteousness, we die. Therefore it was normal for this son to be in need for he has departed from God, He who is the treasure of wisdom and knowledge (Col.2: 3). He has left the depths of heavenly blessings and so he was a hungered; for there is no satisfaction for the lost man. Man becomes in constant hunger when he does not realise that the eternal food is the source of satisfaction”.

Sixthly: (Luke15: 15,16) “So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his field to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the ports that the pigs were eating, and no one gave him anything”.

St. Ambrosios says, “It seems this man refers to the ruler of this world. This son was sent to his fields, that the buyer apologizes for not going to the kingdom banquet (Luke14: 18). There, he takes care of the swine which the devils asked to enter in. as a result, the swine rushed to the edge of this world (Matt.8: 32). These pigs live on trash and rottenness.

He was eager to fill his tummy with the pods the swine were eating, and no one gave him anything. It was said their gods are their bellies”. (Phil.3: 19) The suitable food for them is the pods, empty from the inside and soft from the outside. This has no nutritional value but it fills up the belly. Its weight is more than its usefulness.

Some think the pods refer to the evil hosts, or the weakness of human righteousness, just as those prestigious preacher that are saying vain sermons, and are attracted by futile philosophy. Their outer appearance is brilliant but still useless. This outer ornament is not to survive for long. ‘No one gave him anything because no one except God is able to grant life.

St. Augustine offers the same interpretation; for he sees this man as ‘the ruler of the air’ that takes the soul which is far away from God into his fields, that is, he subdues the soul

under his authority. He serves the defiled souls, which are the swine, since he works for the account of various sins. As for the food he offers, it is the pods, that is, the hollow human doctrine that delights the devils, and fills up the sinners' minds, yet it does not satisfy the soul. Thus the sinner lives a life void of any happiness, and he feels as if he cannot find anyone to give him something of any satisfaction.

Seventhly: (Luke 15: 17,18) "But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and spare, but here I am dying of hunger' > I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you'".

This is the beginning of the repentance road; 'he came to himself'; What does this mean?

We said that the prodigal son, when he left his father and traveled to a distant country, he has only left the road of love, and became enclosed in his egoism, and in his human self. He has come to live in his selfishness, and made himself a god. He focused on his honor, and his physical satisfaction or his pleasures. By so doing he has justly released himself even from his own personality. If he is enclosed round his ego, then he is destroying himself and devastating his life.

In other words, I wish we could differentiate between 'self' and the love of man to himself, that is to say, his love to save himself. This is what the Lord Jesus affirmed when He declared he who destroys himself saves himself. This means he who destructs his ego 'I' that is in himself, he will live in the road of love, not only to God, to people and to the angels, but he also loves himself away from the selfish cycle. This is what the old law declared when we were asked to love our neighbors as ourselves. St. Augustine says he who does not love himself, that is to say, his eternal salvation, how could he possibly love his neighbor?

Sin is the perishing of the soul by man's entering 'a distant country', which is the selfish 'I'. Repentance means man's return to himself to declare his love to save himself. By this he returns to his heavenly Father who is able to renew the soul and to satisfy it inwardly. By this, when man returns to himself, he returns to his father's country. There he would practice love as a divine gift, and will be found in truth a live member in God's house. He opens his heart to God and His angels and to all His creation, even to those who resist Him.
+ If he has come back to himself, it is because he has departed from himself.

Because he has departed from himself, therefore he comes back first to himself, so he comes once more to his first situation from which he has fallen.

+ When he left himself, he left his father.

When he departed from himself, he released himself to outer matters.

Now he comes back to himself, and thus he returns to his Father where his soul would be in absolute and perfect safety.

St. Augustine

+ He returned to himself after he had departed from it, because to return to the Lord means to return to the soul. He who resists Christ, resists himself.

St. Ambrosios

Man's return to himself needs God's divine work to enlighten man's inner vision, so he discovers his absolute poverty and even his own death. At the same time, he realises God's work of salvation and His love to man, and consequently man is filled with hope. St. Peter came back to himself when the Lord looked at him. He therefore went out and wept bitterly but not hopelessly. As for Judas, he repented and realised his evil, but because he did not look to Jesus, the Savior of the world, he went away and hanged himself.

We are badly in need of sitting with our inner self under the care of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who shines on us with His Holy Spirit and thus He pricks our conscience over our sins. At the same time He comforts us with His free grace. He grants us the sighs of

the heart together with His overwhelming peace. He pours on us the spring of tears, so the regretful feelings are blended with the joy of His divine work. Thus we come back in truth to ourselves, and are safely thrown in our Father's embrace that are so full of love, and He folds us in His arms.

When the stray son came to himself, he realised the truth; that though he is a son, yet he was eager to eat of the pods with the swine, whereas the hired ones at his father's house, eat bread and not pods. He lived far away from his father's house in severe hunger whereas the hired ones are close to his father and are satisfied.

+ After suffering in a far distant country the same way wicked people do suffer, he fell under the ordeals that attacked him. He hungered and was badly in need. He felt he was perishing, and he realised that it was out of his own free will that he threw himself in the hands of strangers, away from his father. He has thus become in exile instead of being in his own house; in need instead of wealth; in famine instead of welfare and luxury. This is what he meant by saying (Luke15: 17) "And here I am dying of hunger". It is as if he is saying: 'I am not a stranger, but am rather a son to a good father, and a brother to an obedient brother. I am a free and noble person, and have now become more miserable than the hired slaves. I have fallen from the high and sublime position to the basest level.

St. John Chrysostom

+ O Lord Jesus! I wish You would put away the pods, and give us the blessings, because You are the One responsible in Your Father's house!

I wish You would accept us as slaves, even though we have come late, because You accept those who come at the eleventh hour, and You pay them the same wages. You grant them the same life, but not the same glory. For the crown of righteousness is not kept for everyone, but to him who could say (2Tim.4: 7) "I have fought the good fight".

Some think to postpone their baptism or their repentance until when close to death. But how do you know your soul will not be required this same night? (Luke12: 20)

St. Ambrosios

In this same way St. Ambrosios urges us to quickly return to our Father's house, so we the sons are not deprived of being blessed with what the hired ones obtain. Those are the ones who serve the heavenly Father for the sake of the wages. Let us hasten to Him, urged on by many factors, the first of which is that we do not know when our souls would be asked for. It could be right now. Secondly, so that we struggle in truth. For if God's gift to all those who enter His kingdom is "the eternal life", but (1Cor.15: 41) "indeed, star differs from star in glory". Also as the Lord of glory Himself says (John14: 2) "In My Father's house are many mansions".

Let us hasten now to our heavenly Father's house, struggling every moment in our estranged life. Let us say in truth (2Tim4: 7,8) "I have the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on, there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day".

Eighthly: (Luke15: 18) "I will get up and go to my father"; this is the experience of the resurrected life.

The impact of repentance begins with man's return to himself by means of the Holy Spirit, to discover he is in a state of hunger. He realises the ego, the 'I', has knocked him down to the ground due to the void situation in himself. He realises he has absolutely fallen to the ground, and has come to be under the judgment of eternal death. But the Holy Spirit uncovers his vision so that he sees in his Savior Jesus Christ, the risen from the dead "the, mystery of the resurrection". He rants the dead 'resurrection so they live 'in the experience of His resurrected life'. Repentance is not a passive work by which means man discovers his drawbacks and even his absolute devastation; it is rather a positive job in which the Christian believer accepts his Christ as the mystery of his resurrection and his life, so that he lives all

his estranged days experiencing the new life. He goes on from strength to strength, enjoying one glory after the next, and one grace in addition to the other. He is eager to reach the full measure of Christ (Eph.4: 13). Repentance is the practical blessing of the permanent resurrection.

+ Our way, likewise, is to entreat God, so He strips us off of the old man, and clothes us with the heavenly Christ. This is because the Lord when He wished to fill us with the satisfaction in tasting His kingdom He said “Without Me you can do nothing” (John15: 5).

Everyone of us has to oblige himself in entreating God to be counted worthy of obtaining and possessing the treasure of the heavenly Spirit, so he might be able without much difficulty and toil to fulfil of the Lord’s commandments in purity and flawlessly.

St. Macarius the great

+ The Holy Spirit is the power that resurrects life. By His means man has been accepted for adoption, and has transformed death to no death.

St. Basilious the great

+ The Renewal that we experience in this life, and our transfer from the physical earthly life to the heavenly and spiritual one, is made in us by means of the impact of the Holy Spirit.

St. Basilious the great

Ninthly: (Luke15: 18, 19) Confessing the wrong: “I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands’.”

The Holy Spirit who works in us for repentance, opens our hearts with the hope on God, the Giver of resurrection from the dead; but with the Spirit of modesty, He grants us to confess our sins. The prodigal son in confidence says ‘my father’ . in modesty he declares he has sinned and is unworthy of sonship, asking to be accepted as a hired hand.

+ When the soul yields itself totally to the Lord, with all its strength, the good Lord manifests these drawbacks and sufferings one after the other so the soul deviates from them.

St. Anba Antonious the great

+ Let us learn how to entreat the Lord. He said ‘My Father!’ How great God’s mercy and gentleness is! Even though He was dealt with wrongfully, yet He does not reject being called ‘My Father’ ‘I have sinned against heaven and before you;’ this is the first confession before the Lord of mercy, before the Judge of iniquity.

God knows everything, but He waits for us to admit our sins (Tom.10: 10) “one confesses with the mouth and so is saved”.

When a person blames himself, he alleviates the weight of his loss, and cuts off the sharp accusation. You lose nothing when you confess what is already known to Him.

Admit your sins, and Christ will have mercy on you, for He is our intercessor to the Father (1John2: 21).

Let the church also pray for you sake, and let the people weep over you, and do not get disturbed or doubt, because you will receive. The intercessor promises you forgiveness, and the landlord of the vineyard promises you grace, and the Defendant confirms your reconciliation with the fatherly kindness.

Rest assured this is a fact, and be comfortable for God is power! He is careful to intercede for you so He would not have died for your sake in vain. The Father also is careful to forgive you, for (Gal.2: 21) “for of justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing”.

‘My father, I have sinned against heaven and before you’; Sin harms the gifts of the heavenly Spirit. It was important for man not to deviate from the intestines of this mother ‘Jerusalem’, which is heaven.

He says ‘I am not worthy to be called your son’; it is appropriate for the fallen one not to be proud, but rather to return in lowliness.

St. Ambrosios

+ These words concerns him who confesses his sins, but he has not used them yet.

He is not speaking now to His Father, but He promises what He would utter when He comes to His Father.

Let us understand ‘the coming to the Lord’ means to stay in the church, in faith. In the church we practice the confession of sins in an active methodical lawful way.

St. Augustine

+ He was addressing the speech to Himself; but the speech was insufficient unless He comes to the Father.

Where is he to be searched for? Where is he to be found?

Rise up and hasten to the church so as to find the Father there, the Son and the Holy Spirit too.

The Father listens to you when you talk to yourself, and He quickly comes to meet you.

St. Ambrosios

Tenthly: (Luke15: 20) “So he set off, and came to his father”, this is the first step to begin work.

If the stray son has traveled to a distant country assuming it is his personal freedom, and squandered his father’s money as he pleased, then once he came to his mind and decided to come back to his father’s house, he realised the distance between him and his father however long it may be, this was no obstacle at all. He was attracted by his father’s fatherhood, and drew his mind to find the way of return is not too long or impossible. He rose to work as well, walking to his father, as if he was listening to the voice of Zachariah (Zach.1: 3) “Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘Return to Me’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘and I will return to you’, says the Lord of hosts”.

+ Let us work as well even if we are out of the boundaries. Let us be exalted to our Father’s house, and let us not linger on the journey. If we want, the return will be quick and very easy. We just have to leave the strange country which is sin. Let us depart from it, so we return hastily to our Father house.

Someone may ask, ‘**How do I return?**’

Just begin working, and everything else will be accomplished.

St. John Chrysostom

Eleventhly: (Luke15: 20-22) the encounter with the kind father: “But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son! But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly bring out a robe- the best one.....’”

This parable reveals God’s loving fatherhood. Even though He does not oblige man to return to Him, yet, when He sees him from afar coming towards him, he quickly runs to him not to blame him or rebuke him, but rather to embrace him and to kiss him. He listens to His son’s confession of the wrong he did, but God does not allow him to be humiliated. He does not let the sinner say ‘make me as one of Your hired servants! God rather asks for the son’s robe and his ring, honoring him in His house!

+ The Father listens to your when you are talking within yourself, and He hastens to meet you. When you are still far away, He sees you and runs to you.

He sees what is within your heart, and He hastens so no one would delay you. He even embraces you.

His encounter with you shows He has previously known you. His embrace to you is a manifestation of His mercy, and is an expression of His fatherly love.

He bends on your neck so He raises you, the one who has fallen under the weight of transgression. He wants you to return to heaven, for you have headed to the earth, and thus you ask for your Creator.

Christ falls lovingly on your neck, so He delivers you from the bondage yoke, and He makes you carry the easy and bearable yoke (Matt.11: 20).

He falls on your neck, saying (Matt.11: 28) “Come to Me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you”.

In this way the Lord embraces you when you repent.

St. Ambrosios

+ What do the words ‘he ran’ means? Due to our obstructive sins we ourselves cannot reach up to God through our righteousness. But it is God Himself who is able to come to the weak, and thus He falls on his neck.

He kisses the mouth; this means the Father accepts joyfully the one who confesses with his mouth, and is repentant with all his heart.

St. John Chrysostom

+ When He runs, He then falls on his neck; this is because the father does not leave His only begotten Son, who constantly runs towards us, we who have gone astray for so long (2Cor.5: 18) “All this is from ‘God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation”.

He put his arms around him, bending to embrace with his arms, that is, with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The repentant one is comforted with the graceful Word of God, that grants the forgiveness of sins; this is fulfilled with the loving kiss springing from the Father when coming back to Him on a long journey.

He did not say ‘Make me as one of your hired servants’, because when he was in need of bread, he was eager to be as even one of the hired slaves. But when he nobly received his father’s kiss, he stopped from saying so.

St. Augustine

Twelfth: The fatherly gifts: (Luke15: 22-24) “But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly bring out a robe- the best one- and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate”.

St. John Chrysostom says the father does not address his son who has just returned, but he rather addresses his slaves, or his agents. The repentant one has come entreating, but he receives the answer not through words addressed to himself, but rather through the merciful deeds offered to him.

Father Theophlactius sees those slaves as the ministering souls, or the priests who perform the baptism, and offer the word of edification, so the soul is clothed with Christ Himself.

+ He brings you the robe the ring and the sandals.

The robe is the robe of wisdom, by which the apostles covered the nakedness of their bodies, and with which every person is clothed.

They took the robe so as to cover up their physical infirmities with the spiritual power of wisdom. It was said about wisdom (Gen.49: 11) “he washes his garments in wine”. The robe is the spiritual clothing and the wedding garment.

The ring is nothing else but the true seal of faith, and the seal of truth.

The sandals refer to the gospel preaching.

St. Ambrosios

+ The first robe is that of the honor that Adam has lost. As for the slaves who offered it, these are they who preach the reconciliation.

The ring on the finger is the deposit of the Holy Spirit due to the partnership of grace, since the Spirit is adequately referred to by the finger.

The sandals on the feet are the preparation for the gospel preaching so we do not touch what is earthly.

St. Augustine.

These three items: the robe, the ring and the sandals, have been offered by the Lord Jesus to the sinful humanity, so as to raise from them sons to the living God. These sons wear the appropriate wedding garment for the heavenly banquet, and they also wear the ring for sonship, and cover their feet and protect them from the dust of this world and its transgression when crossing through the preaching word.

We can moreover say these matters were offered to the humanity returning to Him, so He may make it a wedding and a queen to Him, after His humanity has lived its life as a spiritual prostitute, running after another groom. At first, He offered humanity the garment ornamented with gold, as the psalmist says (Ps.45) "The princess is decked in her chamber with gold-woven robes".

St. John Chrysostom also says, "Here he does not mean a real robe, but rather righteousness. The robe decked in gold, has in its texture variable elements". The saint goes on saying and explaining that the church embraces people of variable distinctive talents, but yet all integrated, and thus one robe for the heavenly wedding is woven. As for the ring, it is the deposit or the earnest of the Spirit; for St. Paul the apostle says, (2Cor.1: 21, 22) "But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, by putting His seal on us and giving us His Spirit in our hearts as a first installment". This is the money deposit offered by the heavenly Groom to His bride, the church, so it lives by Him and enters the perfect wedding. The sandals refer to the preaching mission, so as to embrace every soul to the spiritual membership of the church, and he would thus have a share in the eternal wedding.

What is the fatted calf offered in the banquet, so everyone eats, be filled, and rejoices?

St. John Chrysostom says, "He is the Lord Jesus Christ who is called like this, for He offered His spotless body a sacrifice. He is called 'fatted' because of His riches and costliness, for He was able to save the entire world". St Augustine, too, gives the same interpretation, saying "He was slaughtered for every man who believes in Him being slaughtered". St. Ambrosius commented as follows: "By the partaking of the holy Sacraments, man can live by the rich body of the Lord, by means of the spiritual strength. He is the priestly sacrifice that was offered for our sins".

The Son has given up His body a sacrifice for the sake of humanity's salvation. The Father rejoiced for the sake of this joyful work, and He asked the heavenly hosts to come and see, and rejoice at man who has risen to the heavenly life after his death. But the elder son, who refers to the haughty Jews stood outside, unwilling to enter and rejoice with everyone else. The Lord Jesus says therefore (Luke15: 25-32) "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound. Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father 'Listen'. For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command, yet you have never given me ever a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends, but when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life, he was lost and has been found'".

St. Ambrosios comments on the elder son's attitude, saying, "The elder son's condemnation is because he came from the field. The field here refers to the concern given to the toil in the land, the ignorance with the deeds of God's Spirit. (1Cor.2: 11).

He complained for not being given a goat to kill, even though the Lamb of God was slaughtered for the forgiveness of sins, and not for any physical pleasure.

The envious one asks for a goat to kill, whereas the righteous one is eager to be slaughtered for the sake of God's Lamb!

Due to envy, the elder one got stricken with spiritual old age at an early time, and he kept outside due to his lack of love. The evil jealousy overflowed his heart, and this expelled him outside.

He is one of those who do not see the speck in their eyes whereas they criticize the speck in other's eyes.

He is frustrated because others obtain forgiveness and grace.

The spiritually evil hosts are unable to hear the joyful hymns and the Psalm reading!

The two sons refer to two nations: the younger one stands for the Gentiles, whereas the elder one stands for Israel, that envies the other one for being blessed with eternal blessings. The Jews objected to Christ's eating with the Gentiles, so they asked for a goat as a loathsome sinful sacrifice.

The Jew asks for the goat, that is, for Barabas; whereas the Christian asks for a lamb, who is Christ. This is why Barabas was released to the Jews, and Christ was offered a sacrifice to us. Since that time the corruption of sin has befallen them whereas we have obtained the forgiveness of sins.

The elder son refers to the Pharisee who justified himself in his prayer that was so full of pride. He considered himself not breaking any of God's commandments by practicing the literacy of the law (Luke18: 11). He cruelly accused his brother of squandering his father's inheritance with prostitutes, even though he had to be more cautious in his words because the Lord Jesus came for the sake of the tax collectors and the prostitutes.

The elder son was not expelled out, but he stood at the door, and did not wish to go in since he did not accept God's will which called the Gentiles to the faith. In this way the son became a slave (John10: 14) "Because the slave does not know the wish of his master". And when he knew it, he became jealous, and was tortured due to the happiness of the church, and he remained outside. Despite this, the loving father wanted to save him, for he told him 'You are with me at all times!, I wish you would stop your envy 'All what I have is yours, when you have the mysteries of the Old testament as a Jew, and you obtain the mysteries of the New Testament if you are also baptized.

+ Now because his elder brother was in the field, and then he came to the house, he heard music and dancing. He then called one of the slaves and asked what this could be. The elder son is understood to be the Jewish nation that was in the field, working for God so he would enjoy the earthly possessions. In the Old Testament in Particular. The earthly happiness was a promise to him who worships God.

He came to the house and heard the music, the harmonious tunes together is called music, because when all those who serve God in love are in harmony, they fulfil the apostle's words, (1Cor.1: 10) "that all of you be in agreement and that there be no division among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose". When Christians become as such, they give out music, that is, one harmonious sound that pleases God; in them is fulfilled the words written (in Acts4: 32) "they had one heart and one soul".

He asked one of the slaves, that is, he read one of the prophets; Isaiah or Jeremiah or Daniel, for all have preached the coming of Christ joyfully, for the sake of the nation-reconciliation.

The slave said to him that his brother has come back, and that his father has killed the fatted calf (Luke 15: 28). He therefore became angry and did not wish to enter. His wrath means the resistance of the Jewish people for the nations' salvation. Indeed, up to this day they are Jealous of the church, and resist it.

The following fact is that the father went out to him (Luke 15: 28) This might mean that at the end of times all the Jews will accept the faith through God's mercy. As the apostle St. Paul said (Rom. 11: 25) "a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. and so all Israel will be saved.

By his words 'And I have never disobeyed your command' he meant the Jews seemed as if they worshiped the one God; and when he complained 'And you did not give me even a goat', this is understood to be Christ. For Christ is the Lamb of God, and was condemned as a goat by means of the Jews, that is, He was condemned as a sinner.

Therefore Christ for us is the Lamb, and for them He is a goat. Those who believed Him to be a sinner, and not a righteous One, did not deserve the blessing of the banquet of a slaughtered goat or a lamb as a sacrifice.

When the father said, (Luke 15: 31) 'You are with me at all times, and all that I have is yours', he means by this the worshiping of the one God, and the writings of the old Testament and the prophets. These matters surely concern God, and these remained with the Jews forever.

Father Caesarius, bishop of Arles

+ This is the fatherly work of love, so tender and good. He does not only raise man from the dead, but He also gives him back His tremendous grace by means of the Spirit. Instead of corruption, He clothes man with an incorruptible robe. Instead of hunger, He kills the fatted calf, and instead of the long distance he journeyed, the father who has been awaiting his return to him, offers him sandals for his feet. What is even more amazing than this, is that he gives him an engagement ring of divinity to put on his finger. All of this put together, makes him in the image of Christ's glory.

St. Pope Athanasius

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Chapter XVI
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The Violent-Taking of the Divine Fellowship

In the previous chapter the Lord Jesus showed clearly by means of three parables, God's great eagerness for our friendship with Him. He declared His love and shedding Himself for our sakes, we the sinners, to carry us to His holy place as sons to God's house, and the place of the heavenly joy. But this awesome love has to be met with love and wisdom so as to seize it, in other words, in God's love to man, He did not make him a dumb machine that reacts with God's love involuntarily. He actually created him a master who has a perfect free will of his own. He could accept this fellowship or reject it. Now, the Lord offers us two parables that urge us to take by force His friendship of our own free will. These are the parables of the dishonest manager, and the parable of Lazarus and the rich man.

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1- The Parable Of The Dishonest Manager:

When the Lord of glory, Jesus, spoke in Parables of the extent of His eagerness to attract sinners from going astray, and how to make them enter His holy place, He then addressed His disciples in the presence of the Pharisees, who were known for their love of money (Luke16: 14), as well as their vain glory. He presented to them the parable of the dishonest manager who squandered his master's money. When the landlord asked him to give the account of his agency to take it away from him, he attempted to win to his side dishonest friend, so that whenever he is fired from his work his friends would then accept him in their houses. The Lord commended this manager, not in his squandering of money, nor in his dishonesty, but rather for his wisdom in winning friends on his side, and being concerned about the forth coming life. He thus offered the pleasures of the present time for the sake of future rest.

Before mentioning the father's words concerning this parable, we would like to summarize the aim of this parable in the following points:

Firstly: If the previous parables declare the divine fatherly love towards sinners, then it is the duty of sinners, in their repentance and their return to their Father's house to be well-equipped with wisdom. Just as this manager disregarded the present for the sake of his future rest, likewise it is appropriate for us in our repentance to live with the Spirit of wisdom that surpasses the temporal needs, and makes us cross over so as to ask for the forthcoming rest in heaven.

Secondly: The previous parable of the 'Prodigal Son' showed clearly the sinner's return to his father's house, in great repentance and regret. In this chapter he speaks to us of charity and the love of giving, not as of our money but what we have been made in charge of by God Himself. Thus we make friends from our owner's money by being accepted with them in heaven.

Now we come back to the same parable, for the evangelist St. Luke says (Luke16: 1-9) "Then Jesus said to the disciples 'There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. So he summoned him and said to him, 'what is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management,

because you cannot be my manager any longer! Then the manager said to himself ‘What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes. So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he asked the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ He answered, ‘A hundred jugs of olive oil’. He said to him, ‘Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty! Then he asked another, ‘How much do you owe?’ He replied, ‘A hundred containers of wheat’. He said to him, ‘Take your bill and make it eighty! And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. And I tell you make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth, so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes!’

In this parable we notice the following:

Firstly: Some think this parable was not new to the Jewish ears at that time. The rich man who owned the property refers to the Roman empire that left the tax issues in the hands of the tax collectors that collect money for its account, even though the Roman empire as an imperialist was greedy, yet it praised the tax-collectors who dealt calmly with people when collecting taxes. The sensible tax collector, in the long run could collect more for the country, as well as taking a bigger share, and yet not tire the payers. But as for the violent one, he destroys the payers, and he loses his own peace, as well as the country’s unease regarding his actions in the long run. The manager mentioned here, when he declined what was written in the documents, acted wisely. He alleviated the Jewish load of the taxes, and at the same time, the Roman empire was able to collect these taxes even if they were less, yet in an easier way.

Secondly: St. Cyril the great confirms in his comment on this parable as well as in many other places, that the Lord Jesus when He presents a parable, He does not mean for us to apply it from all aspects, but rather from the aspect that God wanted and meant. Likewise, it is not appropriate for us to follow the example of this manager in his squandering of the property money not in his cheating of the documents; we rather have to follow his example in keeping our wisdom and our vision of eternity.

+ The manager who was fired by his master from his job was praised because he protected himself from the future bad times.

We do not have to follow his example in everything, for it is not appropriate for us that we deceive our Lord, and offer charity through deception.

From another point, this parable was said so we realise that if this manager who acted deceitfully, has been able to achieve praise; so how much more will it be with those that please God in carrying out His commandments in their actions.

St. Augustine

Thirdly: The Lord Jesus says (Luke16: 8) “for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light”. A person who works for his temporal life is counted as a son of this age; whereas if he works for the account of the eternal kingdom of light, he is then counted as a son of light.

God wants the children of light to be working wisely for the purpose of this goal: the blessing of the kingdom of light. But unfortunately, they fall short of this by being careless and so they lose the heavenly wisdom. Thus, those who live in this world have become more sensible concerning their goal achievement.

+ The children of this age are meant to be those who focus their thoughts on the goods of the world. The children of light are those concerned about the spiritual treasures through the divine love.

In providing for human matters we sometimes behave sensibly, and are busy about it, so that when we depart we may find a shelter for our life; whereas when we address the divine matters, we do not think of our portion there.

Father Theophlactius

Fourthly: The landlord handed the manager the property in his hands. Likewise we, too, live as agents to God. All what we have in our hands is the work of His hands, or is a donation from Him, whether it be our talents our abilities our motives, our emotions or our possessions and even our bodies and our time. We, as His agents, will be held accountable for every word we say. God's purpose for this agency is not a materialistic one that is touchable; but it is to train us in 'honesty'. By being honest we are prepared to obtain the greatest portion in heaven. God is not concerned about the world except it be to see us children to Himself, having His qualities in us, that is focused on 'honesty'. God has been 'the honest one' (1Cor.1: 9; 10: 13; Thes.5: 24; 2Tes.3: 3; 2Tim2: 13; Heb.2: 17; 3:2; 1John1: 9; Rev.3: 14; 19: 11) God wishes His children to be honest like Himself. He commands us (Rev.2: 10) "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life".

As St. Ambrosios says, "If we are in charge of what is not ours, then we have to behave honestly, and carry the Spirit and quality of our Lord".

+ When we do not manage our treasure according to the pleasure of our Father, then we corrupt our honesty for the account of our pleasure, and are therefore counted as guilty.

Father Theophlactius

Fifthly: The Lord Jesus called what we possess, such as money potentials and capabilities as 'the dishonest money', why so?

This is because the distribution of these things among humanity is dominated by the law of injustice. There's a child who is born and he hinds out his parents are dedicating to him millions, whereas another is born and he hinds out they have left him as an inheritance endless problems and debts.

There's a man who has been gifted with intelligence, or health, or capabilities or talents, whereas another has been deprived of this. So, what we own, even though we have not unjustly usurped, yet we have been handed it in a world in which the law of injustice prevails. It is therefore appropriate to use it for our own construction in the other world where there is no 'injustice', so we possess our eternity.

Many of our fathers have lived wisely, being careful in carrying out this godly commandment; (Luke16: 9) "make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth, so that when it is gone (physically die) they may welcome you into the eternal homes". They urge us to practice it in some way or other. Among their words are:

+ How can we make friends of money, if we love money and cannot bear to lose it? By doing so we shall perish in addition to losing the money as well.

The scholar Tritilian

+ The temporal matters are called outward matters, since they are away from us. Let us change them to inward matters. If we are unable to carry its riches with us when we depart from here, yet we are able to carry our love. It is therefore more appropriate to send it before us, and so it prepares a place for us in the everlasting dwelling.

St. John Chrysostom

+ If you serve the saints, that is, the poor, then you will share them their reward.

St. John Chrysostom

+ By giving to the poor, we obtain the pleasure of the angels and all the other saints.

St. Ambrosios

+ Charity is the most skilful of all other arts. It does not build for us houses of clay, but it rather stores for us eternal life.

We need someone's help in all of the arts; but to manifest mercy we need nothing other than the will power alone.

St. John Chrysostom

+ Mere friendship does not protect us unless it is followed by good deeds, unless we spend our money in charity, this money that was collected in an unjust way.

St. John Chrysostom

+ He showed that all of man's possessions that are naturally under His authority are not really his own. He allows man to perform the absolutely good deeds through this money of dishonesty, for he shelters them who have an eternal dwelling place with the Father.

St. Clemendous El Sekenderi

+ It is quite often that wealth is for our own good, as the apostle said when he asked the wealthy people to be generous in their donations, and generous in their distribution (1Tim.6: 18,19) "They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life". As the gospel says, this wealth will be for the good to someone who makes friends by means of the dishonest money.

Wealth could also be directed to evil when we store it up, or when we live a life of luxury, and when we disregard the needs of the poor.

Father Tadros

+ Give your welfare not to those whom the laborers feed, that is, the landowners, but rather to those who have only bread to live on. Be concerned about the poor and the needy.

+ He speaks of the importance the church has to give to the poor, and not to the splendid church buildings.

Our Lord sanctified by His poverty, the poverty of His house. Therefore let us think of His cross, and count wealth as trash.

Why are we to be surprised at the Lord's words 'the dishonest money'? Why do we ask for and love what St. Peter was proud of not having (Act.3: 6)?

+ (In speaking of Lady Proba)

She sold her possessions and made friends for herself with the dishonest money. She will receive this in the eternal dwelling place.

With the church servants, whatever their rank may be, and the monks that are only monks by name who shamefully own possessions, whereas this chaste lady sells her possessions?

St. Jerome

In this way the Lord Jesus declares charity as a change to our possessions from this transient world, to an eternal deposit in the heavenly place above. He called the heavens 'eternal dwelling place' because the Jews were very much concerned about the feast of dwelling place. They regarded it a joyful feast indeed, in which they dwelt in a sheltering place of tree branches for a week. In this way, charity provides for us a portion for an eternal joyful feast, and so we live in heaven with the other saints.

Sixthly: The Lord Jesus comments also on this parable saying (Luke16: 10-12) "Whoever is faithful in very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?"

+ The little is the dishonest money, that is, the temporal money that has most probably been collected through covetousness and embezzlement. But those who know how to lead a righteous life, and are thirsty for the hope in what is sorrowful, and do not think on what is earthly, and rather think on what is heavenly, these ones absolutely disregard the temporal wealth. It offers nothing but the indulgence in luxury and sinful physical passions, and the glamour that is so vain and is short-lived. This is why on eof the saintly apostles teaches us

saying (1John2: 16) “for all that is in the world, the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches- comes not from the Father but from the world”. But these matters absolutely mean nothing to those who live a righteous and sensible life, for they are trivial matters, temporal and full of iniquity, and it provokes fire and condemnation. In lots of cases it destroys the body completely. This is why Christ’s disciple rebuked the rich, saying (James5: 1-3) “Come now, you rich people, wap and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire”. How do gold and silver rust? By storing them up in big quantities. This will be evidence against them before the divine Judgment seat of God that they were unmerciful. They have hoarded in their treasuries unnecessarily huge quantities, disregarding the needy ones, even though they were able, if they wanted to, to easily grant welfare, to so many, but they were ‘dishonest in the little things’.

But how can people become honest? This is what Christ teaches us, and I shall explain this.

One Pharisee asked Him to eat with him bread on a Sabbath day, Christ agreed to this. When He went there, He sat to eat, and many others came to eat with them as well. But there was none among them to represent the needy ones, rather, they were prestigious people, well-known and lovers of the foremost seats. They were thirsty for the vain glory, as if they were being clothed with the pride of riches. What did Christ tell His host? (Luke14: 12-14) “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous”.

This is, as I think, is the honesty in what is little; that man is kind-hearted to the needy ones, and that he supports those in trouble as much as he can.

If we are not honest with what is little, by not being formed according to God’s will, giving all our capabilities to our pleasures and our pride, then how can we accept from God what is right and true? What is this truth? He has granted us the divine blessings most plentifully, that ornament the soul and where there is formed godly beauty. This is the spiritual beauty, not that which fattens the body that will be corrupted by death. It is that which saves the soul, and makes it worthy of pride and honor before God, and it would thus win for itself the real praise.

Therefore, it is our duty to be honest to God, pure of heart, merciful, gentle, righteous, sanctified. These things imprint in us the lines of similarity with God, and makes us perfect for being heirs to the eternal life. This is therefore what the truth is!

This is the aim of the Savior’s words and its purpose. This makes man able to learn it from what follows, for He said (Luke16: 12) “And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own?”

For another time we say that what belongs to others is the wealth that we own; for we are not born with our riches. On the contrary, we were born naked, and we can truthfully confirm the words of the Holy Book (1Tim6: 7) “for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it”. Job, the patient one, uttered similar words (Job.1: 21) “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there”.

Thus, by nature, there is no one who is basically rich on his own, and lives in abundant wealth. This has been added to him from outside as an opportunity that crossed his way.

So, if the wealth passes, this does not harm his human nature. For we are not sensible creatures, skilful in every good deed due to riches, but our nature is able to do so, to live a

good life. Human nature is ours, and is equipped to do every good deed, as St. Paul the righteous one wrote (Eph.2: 10) “For we are what He has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life”.

Therefore when we are not honest with what belongs to others, I mean, in matters that are added to us from outside, then how can we receive what is ours? How can they become partners in the good deeds that God grants, that ornament the soul, and imprint beauty of God on it, and from in it in a spiritual way righteousness, sanctity, correct deeds that are practiced in the fear of God?

I wish those of us who possess earthly wealth, to open their hearts to those in need, and thus we appear honest and obedient to God’s laws, and followers to the Lord’s will in matters that are outside, and which is not our money. Then we will accept what is ours, that is, the amazing sanctified beauty that God forms in people’s souls. Thus He will make them in His image, as we were in our original state.

St. Cyril the great

+ What belongs to others: an amount of gold or silver. But what is yours is the spiritual inheritance. It was said on another occasion (Prov.13: 8) “Wealth is a ransom for a person’s life”.

St. Jerome

+ If we do not care about the visual matters, and if we disregard giving, then how can God manifest to us what is invisible?

St. John Chrysostom

Seventhly: The Lord Jesus puts a divisional line between accepting His fellowship, and being disturbed with the love of money, saying (Luke16: 13) “No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth”.

+ an absolute servant of Christ has nothing at all besides Christ. If he has something else besides Christ, then he is not perfect.

St. Jerome

+ ‘A slave cannot serve two masters; not because he has two masters, but just one master, since wealth has no right of authority. It is only man that burdens himself with the yoke of bondage, which is that of money.

Money has no just authority, but rather unjust bondage. This is why He said ‘Make friends to yourself with the dishonest wealth’.

Do not be a slave to money or the outer pleasures; for it is not appropriate that you confers any other master than Christ.

St. Ambrosios

+ It is impossible that man, all by himself, is divided between controversies, and lives blamelessly. This is manifested by His words ‘No man can serve two masters’.

You can never serve God and love wealth.

I wish every one of us to set aside from his mind completely, to be a slave to money. Let us bend our necks fully to Christ our Savior, in all freedom and with no barrier.

St. Cyril the great

+ The agent who mismanages his master’s affairs, and wastes his property, is afraid of facing his master. As a contrast, the agent who well provides and manages his master’s property, he is always happy to see his master.

St. Jerome

+ Show in what is little, what you wish to do when you have a lot.

Present some proof, just as the widow who had two pennies and how she offered them, she offered all that she had.

2- The Divine Fellowship and the love of Money:

When the Lord Jesus touched the god of the Pharisees, and when He put His hand on their real wound ‘the love of money’, they could no longer listen to Him. They began to mock Him, for the evangelist says (Luke16: 14,15) “The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they ridiculed Him. So He said to them, ‘You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of others; but God knows your hearts; for what is prized by human beings is an abomination in the sight of God”.

This was the habit of the Pharisees ‘the love of money’ that dominated the heart like a god, clothed in pride, in arrogance and haughtiness. Instead of confessing their malice, they pretended to be zealous for the law, and being accurate in carrying out the covenant in fatal literacy.

+ Because the Lord revealed their hidden cunningness, they confirmed their righteous pretence.

Father Theophlactius

+ The Lord told them It was their duty to sell their possessions and distribute them to the poor, and thus they would possess treasures in heaven that would never be robbed, and a treasure that would never be ruptured, and riches that would never be squandered. So why did they ridicule Him? Because the teaching was prudent, a way of hope for the future matters. It is a door that leads to the incorruptible life, because He taught them the way of true riches, and the way to obtain the crown of the heavenly call, and how they could become partners with the saints and the sons of the heavenly city above, Jerusalem which is in the heavens, our mother that is free indeed (Gal.4: 26).

Why did they ridicule Him? Because the wave of covetousness has prevailed in their hearts, and its dominance controlled their minds. Thus they were in humiliation even though involuntarily. They had fallen under the evil authority, and were chained by ties that could never be unknotted. The writer of the book of Proverbs says (Prov.5: 22) “and they are caught in the toils of their sin”.

Just as the horse that is difficult to bridle and to train, the rebellious one that does not obey the rider’s spur, likewise is the fallen man’s mind that follows his whims and absolutely drifts towards evil. He is disobedient and cannot be directed, and rejects any cure to his hatred.

+ When the Savior told them so much, and He could see they wanted no change to their deceitful goals and tendencies, and how they preferred remaining in their crude ignorance, the Lord then began to rebuke them strongly. He proved how hypocritical and deceitful they were, eager to achieve the appropriate glory of the righteous, but without being as such. They ask for none of God’s pleasures; but on the contrary, they desired eagerly the human dignitaries. This is why He said (Luke16: 15) “You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of others; but God knows your hearts; for what is prized by human beings is an abomination in the sight of God”. On another occasion the Lord said to them (John5: 44) “How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the One who alone is God? For the God of everyone is crowned with the honor of the righteous people who are truly good. As for the hypocritical ones that do not love righteousness, these steal through their deceitful words, merely the name as honorable ones.

“God knows your hearts”; the Judge can never be deceived for He knows the depth of your minds. He knows the real struggler and the robber of honor that others deserve by means of deception, whereas the real righteous ones are honored by God (Ps.53: 5) “For God will scatter the bones of the ungodly, they will be put to shame, for God has rejected them”.

St. John Chrysostom

+ It is not only adultery and prostitution that defiles those who practice them, but pride, too, defiles man more than they do.

St. John Chrysostom

3- The Divine Fellowship and the difficult commandment:

the Pharisees believed, due to their love of money, that they could steal the kingdom by deceptive means. They would appear to people in a different way than their reality. They were clothed in the robe of hypocrisy. Therefore the Lord assured them that the kingdom is taken by force through the depth of the commandment.

The Pharisees have opened a wide gate contrary to the spirit of the commandment. An example of this is when they permitted divorce even for the sake of food; that is, if the husband does not like the food cooked by his wife, he would divorce her. This is a matter destructive to the matrimonial life and shatters its concept.

Why did the Lord choose the example of marriage from among all the laws or the written commandments?

The Lord Jesus may have wished to link the divine fellowship and the matrimonial life. Our relationship with God is not based on fulfilling the commandment or the fulfilling of the law in an apparent way. It is based on the tie of fellowship, or you may say on the spiritual unity of marriage that cannot be untied. If we are honest in our relation with each other, particularly in the family relation, and be committed to the commandment in all its depth, the commandment of matrimonial love and unity that cannot be loosened, then in this way we are honest in what is little, and He will then give us a lot, such as love and the unity with God Himself.

This is the objective of the law, and this is the goal of the commandment: to take by violence the kingdom, by practically the commandment in its spiritual depth. Thus, not one of its letters falls in our practical life. In this way we shall taste the matrimonial life that detests divorce.

The Lord Jesus says (Luke 16: 16-18) “The law and the prophets were in effect until John came; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is proclaimed, and everyone tries to enter it by force. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one stroke of a letter in the law to be dropped. Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and whoever marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery”.

+ The Lord did not say the Mosaic law has ceased, but that it has become a beginning to the gospel preaching. It is as if what is the least, stops with the advent of what is better. Therefore let us take by force the kingdom of God.

Let us take Jesus by force and strong zeal, and not coldly. For taking by violence in the faith is righteousness, and being cold is a sin.

St. Ambrosios

+ He is preparing them to have faith in Him, because when the time of John has come, all matters have been fulfilled. I am He who has come.

St. John Chrysostom

+ The old law that has not been perfected through the requests in literacy, this has been fulfilled in the freedom of grace.

St. Augustine

+ “He who divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery with her”.

Some think that every marriage is from God, for it was written (Matt. 19: 6) “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one

separate”. If every marriage is from God, He would not have allowed any separation, for it is said (1Cor.7: 15) “But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so”.

Not every marriage is from God; for God has commanded the Christian not to marry a Gentile, as mentioned in the old law. The unity takes place when everything is in accordance, and the strings of the instrument is in harmony all together, and thus it gives out the beautiful music. By this we realise that the harmony cannot be fulfilled in this marriage where the groom is a Christian and the woman is a Gentile. The marriage and the harmony are fulfilled when the Lord unites them.

Do not divorce your wife, for if you do so, you confess that God has not united you. If you tolerate others, and offer them an excuse for their behavior, then do this with your wife as well.

Fear God, and listen to the Lord’s law ‘What God has joined let no man put asunder’. By means of divorce you not only pull down a heavenly commandment but you also destroy God’s work.

The Lord has spoken earlier about God’s kingdom, that not one bit will fall off from the law. Then He added that he who divorces his wife and marries another, he commits adultery. He who marries a divorcee, also commits adultery. The apostle commands us an identical commandment to this one (Eph.5: 32) “This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church”. Here you are in touch with a marriage where no man can doubt that it has been united by God, for He said (John6: 44) “No one can come to Me unless drawn by the Father who sent Me”. He is the only One able to unite this marriage. This is why Solomon said pointing to this mystery (Prov. 19: 14) “ a prudent wife is from the Lord”. Christ is the Bridegroom, and the church is the bride, the virgin with her love and chastity.

I wish no one to deviate from Christ because of any difficulty or iniquity, for the Father has brought him to Him.

I wish philosophy not to corrupt our faith, also the heresies! For this is divorce!

I wish the Bridegroom finds every bride weaving the threads of precious virtue, and lifts up her hands at night in prayer (Ps.133: 2), providing for her work, weighing her habits, and awaiting her groom’s coming in great eagerness. She says, “the groom is slow in His coming; I shall hasten up to Him so I can see Him face to face when he begins His coming in all glory. Come Lord Jesus, and find your bride undefiled and blameless, she did not defile your place, and neither did she neglect Your commandments”. She will moreover say (Song of Sol.3: 4) “I found Him whom my soul loves”. You will go to the wine-house, and will drink with the spirit, and you will reveal to her the mystery, and teach her the mysteries.

St. Ambrosios

4- The Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man:

When the Lord Jesus has spoken about usurping the kingdom by yielding to the Groom, the One and only, and by rejecting the love of money, and by being tied to the Lord’s law and His commandment, the Lord then presents to us a parable in which He reveals how the rich man lost the kingdom through the allures of wealth, whereas poor Lazarus usurped the eternal kingdom.

What follows are some of the comments said by our fathers regarding this parable:

Firstly: Some fathers think this parable is a real and actual, story. St. Ambrosios proves this by the poor man’s name ‘Lazarus’ as being mentioned. But some others think, this name is only a symbolical one, because the word ‘lazarus’ means ‘My God is a Support’. It is as if the secret of strength in this poor man’s life, is not poverty in itself, but rather the acceptance of the poverty sufferance in thanks through ‘God the Supporter’.

Secondly: St. Ambrosios comments on this parable saying “Not all poverty is necessarily sanctified, and not all wealth is detested”. In other words, poverty is not an end in itself, and wealth is not a sin in itself. It is man’s life that corrupts this or that. A life of luxury and being spoilt, unmerciful to the needy ones, this ruins wealth; and the sanctified and grateful life ornaments poverty.

This is also assured by St. John Chrysostom in more than one article, particularly his article “No one could harm man, unless man harms himself”. He showed clearly that what harms man is man’s behavior and his life, but not his wealth or his poverty.

St. John Chrysostom also says that poverty cannot harm man and make him grudgingly utter blasphemous words against God. It is the base soul that shatters man. He says, “It is not poverty that makes man as such; it is rather the base spirit, because Lazarus was poor, yes, he was poor indeed. In addition to his poverty he was stricken with physical weakness, far worse than his poverty in every way, which made his poverty harsh and cruel to the lost degree. Furthermore, he was absolutely deprived of anyone’s help in this very hard condition of finding anyone to fulfil his basic needs. This increased the bitterness of his poverty and his weak condition. Finding no one’s support, increased his pain and his bitter catastrophe.

There is a fourth hardship in addition to the three previous ones, which is the rich man’s absolute disregard of him, despite the luxury in which he lived.

If you wish, moreover, there is a fifth factor which kindles the fire all the more: it is that the rich man not only lives in luxury, but that he also sees the poor man twice or thrice, and maybe more times, every day, thrown at his gate. This was a deplorable sight for a deplorable catastrophe. To look upon him was enough to soften the hardest heart. Despite this, the sight did not motivate the hard-hearted man to help the poor one. The rich man rather, had his luxurious table set, with cups decorated with flowers, and the pure wine poured out plentifully. He had crews of cooks and courtly people working since early morning, and bands of singers and cup bearers and jugglers. He indulged all his time in pleasures and drunkenness, and eating greedily, in fine clothes and food and drink and other passions.

Even though he saw the poor man stricken with extreme hunger, bitter physical weakness, sore wounds, deprivation, sickness due to this condition, yet he did not think of him. The hypocrites and courtiers had their superfluous needs filled, but this poor one, who was deplorably poverty-stricken and yoked with many sufferings- he did not give him even the crumbs that fell from his table, even though Lazarus was very eager to have just some of it.

Despite all of this, none of these things hurt Lazarus, and he did not utter a cruel word of reproach. He was as a piece of gold that glitters more brightly whenever it got purified with the increasing fire.

Despite these hardships surrounding him, Lazarus over-ruled them and became more sublime, even though such things are very provocative.

Generally speaking, the poor are provoked in envy, and suffer with the thoughts of envy when they see the rich, and think a life stricken with poverty is not fit to live, after all.

The poor who find the basic necessities think this way, when they have someone supplying them with their needs. But how much more so is it with Lazarus! Was he not truly wise indeed, kind-hearted, since he saw himself poorer than all the others. Moreover, he was stricken with an infirmity, and had no one to supply his basic needs or be kind to him. He was thrown in the center of the town as if in the middle of a far away desert, suffering bitterly from the hunger pangs. He could see all the goods pouring on the rich man, as if from a fountain of wealth. He had no human comfort, but was lying there as constant food for the dogs to lick. He was so weak and wrecked that he could not even kick them away.

Do you not therefore realise that he who does not harm himself, nothing can possibly harm him? What harm has stricken him, whether it be his physical weakness, or having no one to defend him, or the dogs surrounding him, or the evil of being so close to the rich man, and his seeing all his luxury and puffed up pride? Have these matters weakened him so he opposes righteousness? Has he changed his goal?

Nothing at all has harmed him; rather, the more he suffered due to the rich man's cruelty, the more he got strengthened. He was more solid to obtain the crown of victory; these were as means by which his rewards increased, and a motivation to obtain his blessings. He bore his hardship courageously and with great stability.

Thirdly: St. Ambrosios thinks from the symbolical point of view, this wealthy man refers to the arrogant teachers particularly the heretics. As for poor Lazarus, he refers to the shepherds who preach through a contrite spirit.

The rich used to wear beautiful clothes very gorgeous indeed. In such a way the heretics hide behind the glamorous. Words and the deceitful phrases, as a gorgeous outfit, behind which the deviation of faith hides. This wealthy man had five brothers, biologically speaking. They were as the five senses that were stained by the heretics. They appeared as worshiping people, of intellectual knowledge, but their inward life was a corrupt one through the passionate physical senses, that were unsanctified to the Lord.

As for the poor one, he was called 'Lazarus', that is, 'My God is a Support'. The real minister is the one who does not rely on himself, but he relies on God his support.

God overflows on his inner life with tremendous blessings. He also works by man's means in his preaching and his service. He says with St. Paul the apostle (2Cor.4: 7; 3: 5) "But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us", and "Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God".

Fourthly: The Lord Jesus says (Luke16: 19,20) "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores".

I wish you notice accurately the Savior's words. he called him 'rich', but He spoke of the poor one by name. What do you conclude of this? It is that the rich man was unmerciful, and he had no name in God's presence. On another occasion, the psalmist says about those who do not fear God (Ps.16: 4) "or take their names upon My lips". But as for the poor one, as I have said, his name was mentioned by God's tongue.

St. Cyril

+ Our Lord referred to the poor man's name, but He did not mention the rich man's, because He knows the humble one and He praises him, but not so with the proud.

Pope Gregory the great

+ About His concern for the outer clothes of fine purple linen is the following: the dust and the earth have been covered with the fine purple linen and silk, or, the dust and the earth have carried on them the fine purple linen and silk. Just as his clothes were as such, his food was also likewise; his earthly dusty body ate the luxurious food.

St. John Chrysostom

+ Let us look at the rich man's pride, who was arrogant because of matters of no real value. He was dressed in very fine clothes, this was his only concern, very expensive clothes. He lived in constant banquets, every day was a day of luxury and sumptuousness. He was also a spendthrift and couldn't care less for spending as much as he wanted. But what was the result? He differed very little from the shapes in pictures or statues, for he was indeed the center of admiration for those indulging in passions. As for his heart, it was soaring up in haughtiness and pride. He believed himself to be above the rest, even though his mentality was not of any distinction or superiority; he was just an arrogant and vain person. His

pleasure was in the priceless food offered him, food and entertainment. He had many cooks working to arouse greed and offered him delicious delicacies. The cup bearers were dressed in beautiful outfits; he had singers and he loved the flattering voices of people around him. This was how the rich man lived. This is why Christ's disciple warns us, saying, (1Jhon2: 16) "For all that is in the world- the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches- comes not from the Father but from the world".

On the other hand, Lazarus was stricken with disease and poverty cast out at the rich man's gate. The rich one lived in the elegant halls and huge mansions, but as for the poor one, he was thrown out, ignored and an outcast. He was deprived of any sympathy or care, having nothing to eat and satisfy his hunger. He used to eat of the crumbs that fell off from the rich man's table. He moreover suffered from an incurable disease, indeed, even the dogs did not harm him, they were simply sympathizing with him. With their tongues they soothed his sore pain.

But the rich one was more hard hearted than the beasts, for he had no pity whatsoever on Lazarus, he was rather cruel and violent towards him.

St. Cyril the great

+ There is nothing more dangerous than luxury. Listen to what Moses says about is (Deut.32: 15) "Jacob ate his fill; Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked". Moses did not say that Jacob walked, but that the beloved kicked, showing how he has become haughty and out of control.

On another occasion Moses says that whenever you eat or drink (Deut.8: 11) "Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God", for with satisfaction you will forget. Therefore dear brethren, whenever you sit at the table remember to leave the table and go to pray. Fill your belly sensibly, so you would not be too heavy, and be unable to bend your knees and entreat God. I wish that after supper you would not go to bed but to prayer, lest we become more stupid than the unreasonable beasts.

I know will enough that many are critical of what I am saying, thinking I am introducing a new and strange habit in our life.

+ We have not been born or live so as to eat and drink, we rather eat so as to live.

At the beginning life was not for the sake of food, but it was food for the sake of life. But as for us, it is as if we have come into the world specifically for this purpose, to offer everything so as to eat.

St. John Chrysostom

Fifthly: Some fathers think this parable portrays a symbolic picture of the Jews and the Gentiles. The arrogant wealth represented the Jews that God has blessed them with great wealth, for He has presented to them the covenants, the law, the prophecies etc. it was more appropriate for them to offer the world some of this wealth in a spiritual way. They should have been the ones to preach the truth and the gospel of salvation. But they cherished the wealth in all its literacy, and they made use of God's gifts for their own account and their temporal honor. They wished to cast out the Gentiles as a poor one out of the gate of faith, though he was all covered with sore wounds.

The Jews disdained the poor one, that is, the Gentile world. The ungrateful Jews were therefore deprived of the blessings of the faith, and being blessed with the kingdom of God, whereas the gate has been opened to the Gentiles so that God wipes away their tears, satisfy their hunger, and cure them of their apparent and hidden sores and pain.

The Jews were similar to the wealthy man, who was disgusted at the wounds of poor Lazarus, and could not bear to smell his wounds in his splendid banquets, so he would be among his guests, for the wealthy man was tired even of the natural air, as St. Ambrosios says. The Jews found pleasure in seeing the misery of the poor ones. They scorned the unfortunate souls, and so God sent the Gentiles help so He carries them to His kingdom.

+ This wealthy man refers to the Jews who prided themselves on their personal merits. They (Rom.10: 3) “For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God’s righteousness”.

The fine purple linen are the honor of the kingdom, for it was written in the gospel, concerning the Jews (Matt.21: 43) “Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom”.

The splendid banquet is the vacant usage of the sinner to the law, for the sake of their personal self-praise. They have misused it, and they counted the law as a means of fulfilling their vain pride instead of making use of it for their own salvation.

The beggar who was called Lazarus, which means ‘the one in need of support’, means the Gentiles who were blessed with greater support, since they were not as rich as the others. Actually, the Gentiles, or Lazarus, hungered for the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table. They were eager to obtain the knowledge of the spiritual law as a heavenly blessing. The falling crumbs from the table are the words of the law that fell to the ground due to the Jews’ pride, when they used to speak arrogantly to the people. As for the sores that covered the body of Lazarus, this is the confession of transgressions that were apparent on the surface, as if they gushed out from the inside, as unclean blood.

+ It is appropriate for us, dear brothers, to differentiate between the wounds and the lesions. The wounds are from the outside but the lesions are from the inside. Therefore the lesions mean the confession of sins, for they cover the skin on the outside, and this shows the regaining of health from the inside. Therefore when man confesses his sins in humility, he seems as if he has been covered with lesions from the outside, and that he has become in good health inwardly. But if he is like that rich man who ornamented his body, and has disregarded the confession of sins, then he is gaudy from the outside whereas inwardly he is full of sores. Likewise was this rich one who was dressed in fine clothes, whereas his soul was diseased with leprosy. This is why the rich man’s soul was in the angels’ eyes as the poor man’s body in the human eyes. But as for the poor man’s soul, this was as the rich man’s body.

After death the situation was reversed: Lazarus has become beautified with the precious gems of righteousness after his wounds and sores and has been carried by the angels to Abraham’s embrace. As for the rich one, after his fine purple clothes, he was stricken with the leprosy of sin and descended into the bottomless abyss.

However, the rich one was not tortured in the abyss due to his wealth, but due to his cruelty and arrogance.

In addition to this, we may assume that the dogs licking his wounds as worse than the people who indulge in their sins, since they do not cease to praise their actions with their long and evil tongues.

+ ‘Abraham’s bosom’ means the comfort granted to the blessed ones who belong to the heavenly kingdom, for they are welcomed there after this life. As for being buried in the abyss, this is the deep end of the punishment that befalls the arrogant and the cruel ones after this life.

Indeed, he was in need of cooling his tongue when it was absolutely burning hot. This means that “death and life are in the authority of the tongue” (Prov.18: 21) and (Rom.10: 10) “One confesses with the mouth and so is saved”. This is why the tongue fell under more burning, not only because it refused to confess giving the poor one something, but also because it uttered very cruel words. The tip of the tongue is meant to be the grace of the Holy Spirit as the Lord Himself said (Luke 11: 20) “But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons”. In fact, the tip of the tongue is meant to be the least of the merciful acts by which help is given to the people through the Holy Spirit.

Father Caesarius, bishop of Arles

+ Who are these represented by the rich man wearing beautiful robes, and indulging in daily banquets? Is it not the Jewish people who offered their worship by means of outer matters, and by using the joy of the old law that has been handed to them, for vain motives and not for real benefit?

Who is Lazarus covered with sore wounds, other than the Gentile people? These are the ones who have converted to God, and were not ashamed to confess their sins. They had been inflicted with many inward wounds that were apparent in sore lesions and bruises. This is just like the inward infection in the body that affects the skin, and thus the infection appears on the surface with such skin wounds and bruises, when we confess our sins and our wounds are apparent on the surface. In the confession, we confess in a useful way the sin virus which hides its poison inside the soul. The apparent bruises come to the surface show the infections wounds inside. Likewise is the situation when we confess our sins and reveal our hidden wounds.

Poor Lazarus was hungry for the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, but no one gave him anything, because they were an arrogant people who rejected the Gentiles coming to join their knowledge of the law. The Jews knew the knowledge of the truth, but they grew in arrogance and not in love. They soured in their corruption and wealth which was given them.

The Jewish people accepted these words of knowledge in abundance, therefore they fell from their tables as crumbs of bread. As a contrast, the dogs came to lick the poor man's bruises who lay on the floor.

The Holy Book sometimes means by the word 'dog' as 'the preacher', because when the dogs lick the wounds, they are healed. Likewise the devout teachers when they teach us to confess our sins. We say that they lick up our mental bruises with their tongues; when they urge us they save us from sin, as if they are bringing us back to good health.

+ God Himself tells us through the psalmist that the preacher's tongue means 'the dog' when He says (Ps.68: 23) "so that you may bathe your feet in blood, so that the tongues of your dogs may have their share from the foe".

From among the unbelieving Jews, the devout preachers were chosen, who, if I may say, they bark so as to confirm the truth. These are God's guarding dogs that bark at thieves and robbers. As a contrast we read when He speaks of the rejection of some (Is.56: 10) "they are silent dogs that cannot bark".

The devout and saintly preachers condemn sin, and urge us to confess them, saying (James5: 16) "Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed".

The dogs lick up Lazarus wounds, and in this similar way the saintly teachers accept the confessions of the Gentiles, and thus they heal the wounds of their souls. The name 'Lazarus' applies to this interpretation, since it means 'the one supported'; he is supported so he be healed by correction and preaching.

It could also be understood that the licking of the dogs as being the smooth flattering tongues. This occurs when they praise us in servile flattering words about deeds that our own conscience pricks us about as being malicious deeds.

Pope Gregory the great

Though some fathers think poor Lazarus as being a symbol for the Gentiles, and that God has offered them the preachers, if we speak correctly in saying they are as similar as the guarding dogs, these declare to the Gentiles the healing of their inner and outer bruises by accepting the missionary word and the confession of sin. Despite this, St. Ambrosius has a different interpretation. He stood the whipping, and his body has become like stricken with wounds and bruises. The Gentiles came up to accept his teachings of the faith through this

beaten and trodden down body. The Gentiles were similar to the hungry dogs for the children's bread (Matt.5: 26) they were filled by means of the apostle's wounds in his gospel teaching. In other words, the children have refused the living bread, for they have not accepted the fulfillment of the prophecies in the Messaiah. The Gentiles came, counting themselves even as dogs, asking for the crumbs falling from the prophet's table, so they be felled everlastingly. In this way the children hungered, whereas the dogs were filled- for this was how the Jews mockingly called them.

St. Ambrosios goes on with his words saying, "Oh you blessed bruises that heal of the eternal torment! Oh, you marvelous crumbs that cast out hunger forever (Matt.27: 15) You satisfy' the miserable one that accepts you with eternal food.

He moreover says, "wealth has become poverty, and poverty has become wealth. Wealth has come to be tormented for it has become deprived of every pleasure after it had been living in indulgence. He wishes, when being in hellfire, that the poor man wets the tip of his finger with some water to cool his tongue. He needs water, the food of the spirit at the time of disaster".

Sixthly: When the Lord Jesus had given a picture of Lazarus and the wealthy man in the world, He presented the other picture at the time of their death, for He says (Luke16: 22) "The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried".

The temporary short-lived picture passed in which the rich man lived in his indulgences at that time, and Lazarus being thrown on the ground, eager to eat of the crumbs that fell at the table. Instead of this picture, an everlasting and contrasting picture replaced it, in which the rich man is deprived of his father Abraham, for he can see him far away from him. Previously, he prided himself on being Abraham's son, though without any of the practical faith, whereas the poor Gentile was placed in eternity, for he has come to be in Abraham's bosom, enjoying with him the heavenly kingdom.

In an excerpt attributed to St. John Chrysostom, the following words came, "All of a sudden, the great torment has been changed to a blessing. The miserable one was carried, after all his ordeals, for he was unable to walk, and this is why the angels carried him. One angel was not enough to carry him, but many have come to do so. They formed a joyful host of angels, each angel rejoicing to touch this great weight. They were thrilled to do so, carrying this body, so they offer humans to the heavenly kingdom. He was carried to Abraham's embrace so Abraham would hold him and comfort him. Abraham's bosom is paradise itself".

+ Notice carefully the Savior's words: regarding the poor one, it is said he was carried by means of the angels to Abraham's bosom, whereas nothing was said about the rich man, except for the words 'he died and was buried'. Those who put their hope in Christ, find in their departure from the world, salvation from the torment and suffering. Solomon taught us something of a similar nature (Wisdom of Sol.3: 2,3) "In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be a disaster, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace. For though in the sight of others they were punished, their hope is full of immortality. "They are given a measurement of solace appropriate to their hard work, and it even surpasses their work much more, for the Lord says on another occasion (Luke6: 38) "A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap.

Just as the sailing ships face high waves and strive with the strong and fierce winds, jet, when they reach the ports they settle and are not rocked by the waves any more. Likewise in the same way, I think people's souls when they are released from the toil of this world and dwell in the above places they are just as in the harbor and ports.

Concerning the rich man who led a life of cruelty, and knew no mercy, when the body separated from him, it was death to him, for he leaves the pleasure to go to the torment. He goes out of glory to torture, out of light to darkness. The rich man had to suffer from these things because he lived in indulgence and yet with shut hands, not ready to practice any mercy. To increase his torment even more than being in hell fire, was the fact that he could see Lazarus in Abraham's bosom.

St. Cyril the great

+ I know will how frightful it is the punishment that befell the arrogant rich man's thoughts, he who used to dress in fine purple liven, and did not wish to help Lazarus.

The poor one that we scorn, and could hardly help looking at, because if we do we feel like throwing up, he is only a person like us. He is made of the same dust as we are, and was formed of the same metal as ours. What he suffers from now could happen to us. Let us look at his blisters and wounds as if they are ours.

St. Jerome

+ Here He is offering misery instead of satisfaction, and is offering satisfaction instead of misery.

St. Jerome

+ He speaks of the death of the rich man's soul prior to that of his body, for He says, "Let us put the rich man in the story of Lazarus before us, and let us know what the soul's death is, for he had a dead soul, as his actions prove.

He did not practice and of the soul's acts; he only ate and drank and merely led a life of luxury and affluence. This is the case with the cruel people who are merciless up till this day, for they have a dead soul, as in the rich man's case. The warmth springing from the love of our neighbors, fled from him, and thus his soul was more dead than the death of his own body. But as for the poor man, the situation was a different one; he was standing on the peak of the glowing heavenly wisdom. Even though he struggled with hunger continuously, and he had none of the mere basic necessities, yet he said not one word of blasphemy against God. He rather bore everything nobly. This is not an easy task for the soul; it rather reveals a strong healthy soul.

St. John Chrysostom

+ Jesus said that the poor man died and that the angels carried him. I wish at this point to wipe out an evil disease that has spread in your souls: there are many simple minded people who believe the souls of those who have died a violent death, such as those being murdered, that they become devils. This is absolutely impossible. It is not the souls of those who die by violent means that become devils, but rather the souls of those people who live in sin. It does not mean that their human nature changes, but that their conduct in their life followed the model of the devils. This is what Christ made clear enough to the Jews when He said (John8: 44) "You are the sons of Satan". He called them Satan's children not because they have changed into Satan's nature, but because they practice his deeds. This is why He adds "and you choose to do your father's desires". In the same way, John says (Matt.3: 7-9) "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'.

+You can see here that it is said 'the angel carried him'.

One was led as a prisoner, and the other was carried on the shoulders as a victorious one!

As in the arena, when the fighter is injured in many- wounds and blood gushes out of him, and a crown of victory is put on him, and the by standers clear him loudly, and carry him to his home in great admiration, likewise did the angels lead Lazarus. But as for the other one, some of the evil hosts came to ask for him, they may have been sent for this purpose, so as to prick his conscience for his deeds.

St. John Chrysostom thinks the evil man at his death, his soul is led by his sins, so they be the secret behind the constant pricking of his conscience.

+ The rich man died and was buried. He has prior to that buried his soul in his body just as in a grave. He had worm the body as a grave for his soul, though the physical pleasures.

St. John Chrysostom

Seventhly: the Lord Jesus speaks to us of the rich man, cruel at heart, and the torment in which he suffered, whereas Lazarus was happily blessed in Abraham's bosom, saying (Luke 16: 23) "In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side".

+ The painful yoke of the poor man was all the more severe by being thrown at the rich man's gate. He could see the rich one inside living in extreme affluence and entertainment. Thus when the rich man died, his torment increased, because as he was in Hades, he could see Lazarus' happiness. The situation did not stop with his own personal suffering, but comparing himself to the honor given to Lazarus, the torment was way more unbearable.

The rich man looked up to see Lazarus, but not to scorn him. Lazarus has now come to be at the top, and he at the bottom. Many angels came to carry Lazarus, whereas he was caught in a maze of endless torment.

All of himself was in anguish and pain; nothing was free except his eyes so they look at others' joy. It was allowed that his eyes could see, so his torment increases when he sees himself not being blessed like those other ones.

The rich man saw Lazarus in the embrace and bosom of Abraham, because Abraham was so full of love. As for himself he was condemned with the cruelty murder. Abraham was sitting next to his house, looking at the passers by, so he takes them into his house. But as for him, he used to cast out even those at his gate.

St. John Chrysostom

Though the Holy Book speaks of Abraham as being very wealthy, yet he was a charitable man, accepting in his embrace the poor and the needy just as much as he would to those who donate charity, those similar to himself. As for the indulgent and spoilt ones, who did not care about their brethren, these had no place in his heart.

The Lord Jesus continues the parable, saying, (Luke 16: 24) "He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames'".

+ One was asking for the crumbs that fell from rich man's table, and the other asks for a drop of water from the poor man's finger. But the poor man got the crumbs much more easily than the rich one in his eagerness for a drop of water. The answer came to him (Luke 16: 25) "Child, remember that during your lifetime you received good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things".

Father Caesarius, Bishop of Arles

+ The burning flames in which the rich man was tormented, and the drop of water he asks for, are not materialistic. They are rather like a vision to those asleep, and the hovering persons; these could visualize unmaterialistic matters as if in relief and real. Even though this person, when he was in this state of no body, that is, a mere spirit, yet he saw himself as if he were in his physical state, for he could never distinguish his state, and express himself in a different way.

St. Augustine

+ His tongue that once spoke in great arrogance, now he wishes to cool it, because wherever there is sin, there is punishment. His tongue transgressed more and so his agony is more.

+ He wished to cool his tongue whereas his whole body was in the flames. This expresses what was written (Prov. 18: 21) "Death and life are in the power of the tongue". Also in (Rom. 10: 10) "One confesses with the mouth and so is saved". Through pride, he did not

confess Christ for his own salvation. As for the finger tip, this means the very least of the deeds man makes by the Holy Spirit.

St. John Chrysostom

+ Oh! How wonderful God's wisdom is, that could not be justly uttered! How just His rewards are that He offers to the good and the evil deeds!

He mentioned before that when the rich man was on earth, the poor one was eager to have the crumbs that fell from his table, and that no one gave him anything. Now he tells us that the rich man in his agony was eager that Lazarus wets his tongue with water, for may be a drop of water could cool his mouth. From this we learn, dear brethren, God's severe decisiveness. The rich man who did not want to give the poor beggar the crumbs that fell from his table, was now in Hades begging for something so trivial. He was crying out for a drop of water, the same person who refused to offer some bread crumbs!

We have to know the reason why the rich man asked for a drop of water to cool his tongue. This is because he who entertains and makes many banquets is usually a talkative person. This man was of this kind of people. He made his banquets and celebrations to go with the life of luxury. He was condemned with flames, and his tongue became burnt more than any other member of his body. His first mistake is that he ate too much, together with a lot of talking. His second mistake is his cruelty.

Pop Gregory the great

+ Finally the rich man became a beggar, and asked of the poor man. he asked of his table, he who was hungry and cast out for the mouths of dogs.

The situation was reversed; each one knew who is the real rich man and who is the truly poor one. Lazarus was revealed as the richest of all, and the other one as the poorest of all.

Just as in the theatres, the actors wear the masks of kings, leaders, physicians, teachers, professors and soldiers, but in reality they are not like that. Likewise is the richness and the poverty, these are mere masks. If you are in a theatre, and you see a man wearing a king's mask, do not revere him, or think he has become a king, and do not desire to be like him. Likewise is the rich one here too, he is probably very poor at the bottom of his heart. If you take away his mask, and reveal his conscience and go into his thoughts, you will most probably find in his the poverty of righteousness, and you will find him belonging to the lowest of categories.

St. John Chrysostom

(Luke 16: 25, 26) "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us'".

We notice in this answer the following:

(One) Abraham calls the rich man 'Child', this may mean he does not deny his sonship to himself, biologically speaking. This sonship was of no use to the rich man, it rather condemned him, because he did not conduct himself in the spirit and faith of his father. What we say of the rich man at this point, could be applied to every believer who was privileged with the possibility of his salvation, and yet has not made use of it. Such a one is he who has accepted the faith, and has been baptized, and has had access to the new covenant ... etc. These gifts that qualify him to practice the practical life of partnership, condemn him in the last day. If he has obtained God's sonship through the baptismal water by the Holy Spirit, this sonship will keep pricking his conscience, and will become all the more the secret behind his torment.

+ Notice the kindness of the patriarch father in calling him ‘Child’, yet he offers him no help, since the rich man deprived himself of any healing.

He tells him ‘Remember’, that is, meditate on the past. Do not forget you have rejoiced in your wealth, and have indulged in your riches, for you though this was good to you. You were unable to triumph when you were on earth, and so you will not triumph here.

He says that Lazarus had his misfortunes and misery, not because Lazarus considered poverty, hunger and severe disease as evil inflicted on him, but this was what the rich man considered regarding Lazarus.

When we fall under the heavy yoke of sickness, we think of Lazarus; we then accept these hardships joyfully in this life.

He says that the rich man has lived an indulgent and affluent life. It is as if Abraham is telling him if you have done anything good, you have taken the reward you deserved. You have been rewarded in this world because you have lived in all this wealth. You have enjoyed many pleasures of affluence and splendor; and if Lazarus has done anything evil, he bore the poverty and hunger and very abject misery. Both of you came naked: Lazarus came naked of his sins and receives comfort, whereas you came naked of any righteousness, and so you receive uncomfoting punishment. This is why he is being comforted now, whereas you are in agony and torment.

You might say ‘Is it not possible to obtain forgiveness here and there? That is, is it possible for man to live physically comfortable here and eternal comfort as well? Indeed, this is a difficult matter and is quite impossible. When there is no poverty covetousness springs up, and unless we are approached by ordeals, we shall be overcome with corrupt thoughts. We need to struggle fervently so as to bridle wrath, and suppress the malicious instincts, and make yield the vain and haughty glory. We have to snatch away the arrogance and loftiness and live a serious life. He who does not live these things will not be able to save himself.

St. John Chrysostom

+ “Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things”

your good things were given to your passions and to the flattering tongues. You have not remembered for once the sick and suffering one. You had no pity on Lazarus when you saw him cast out at your gate. You have seen the man in unbearable abject misery, a prey to intolerable sorrow; for he was suffering from two things, both of which were too terrible to bear: his severe bruises and his basic needs of life. The animals soothed Lazarus’ wounds, for he was in great pain, they came to lick his gashes, but you were more hard-hearted than the beasts. The Holy Book says (James2: 13) “For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy”. You could have shared Lazarus, and you would have had a share with him in his comfort; God would have given you his share as well if you had only made him share your money. But because you have not done so, you alone are in agony. This is appropriate to the cruel-hearted one who does not share the sick one his pain, and does not have any concern for him.

St. Cyril the great

Now, what does He mean by the words “Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed”, in some translations you have it as ‘a firm chasm’?

He might have meant that the time is over and past, and that there is no opportunity for any repentance or falling, for what man has obtained, he will live it eternally. No wicked one can leave Hades and go to paradise, and no chance for the kingdom’s children after they depart, to fall again. As father Theophlactius says these words reveal the mistake Oreganus’ followers say that everyone will be renewed on Christ’s last coming, and that no one will perish.

The repentance time is over, and as St. John Chrysostom says “There will be no more any time for repentance. There are many things the rich man grieved over, but his grief

served him nothing”. St. Ambrosios says “Between the rich and the poor man there is a great chasm, for it is not possible that the reward be changed after death”. St. Augustine says that the divine judgment of God will not change, and the righteous will never be able to have their intercession to anyone even if they wish to. This is assured by St. John Chrysostom in his words “It is as if he is saying ‘We are able to see, but we are unable to cross over. We can see what we have escaped from, and you can see what you have missed. Our joy increases, for we can see your agony from which we have escaped, and your agony increase by your seeing our joy’”. (Luke 16: 27-31) “He said, ‘Then father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house- for I have five brothers- that he may warn, them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment, Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them’. He said, ‘No father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent’. He said to him, ‘if they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead’.”

We notice in this discussion between Abraham, the father of all believers and the rich man, the following:

Firstly: The rich man was a difficult man who offered none of his possessions to help the poor, but he had a loving feeling to his five brothers. This feeling remained even after he died, but it was an impotent feeling, an inactive one, because time has been wasted and gone’. He wishes to save his brothers, but it was after he lost his own salvation, and he has no acceptance with God by praying! In other words, how can someone who has lost his own salvation ask for the sake of others salvation.

+ It was too late for the rich man to take the role of a teacher, for there no longer any time for teaching or learning.

St. Ambrosios

+ Sometimes the hearts of evil people learn how to practice love through their fall under punishment, but this is futile. Because they cling to their sin, they do not love themselves.

Father Gregory the great

Secondly: The rich man asked Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers because he saw himself not fit for this job. As St. Augustine says, “He felt himself unworthy to confess the truth. If he is unable to obtain a drop of water to cool his tongue, then he does not expect to be allowed to leave Hades so as to preach the truth”.

Thirdly: Abraham refused to send Lazarus and thought it enough to have the Mosaic law and the books of the prophets. This is to confirm the fact that the Lord Jesus by saying this parable, shows that the Old Testament is the basis of the Christian faith. What the gospel declares, has been set as basis by the law and the prophets. He, moreover, shuts up the heretics’ mouths, such as the Agnostics who reject the Old Testament and think lightly of it. This is on one hand, and on the other hand, He wished to confirm that he who scorns the word of God will not profit from anyone even if he is risen from the dead.

The Jews have scorned the law, and have not listened to the prophets. This is why when, not only Lazarus risen from the dead, but Christ Himself, the Resurrected, and He who raises from the dead by giving life, they still did not listen to Him.

St. John Chrysostom says, “Indeed, he who does not listen to the Holy books, would not care about the dead risen from the dead. This is what the Jews witness; for they once wanted to kill Lazarus, whom the Lord has risen from the dead. On another occasion, they laid their hands on the apostles, disregarding the fact that many have risen from the dead at the time of the crucifixion. Notice, too, that any dead person is only a slave; but what the Holy Book says is said by the Lord Himself. Therefore, if a dead person rises, or an angel from heaven comes down the Holy Book is more true than everyone. For the Lord of the angels, the Lord of the living and the dead, is the One who set the Book. If God knows that

the resurrection of a dead one will profit those alive, He would not have restrained from doing so, for He offers everything for our own good”.

Fourthly: From this discussion we can also see a positive side: the rich man, who has been deprived of the eternal kingdom, and has lost every hope even in obtaining a drop of water to cool his tongue for just a moment, he is concerned with his heart for his biological brothers is the world. Would not the preachers and the saints, who have been trained in the world for being very kind and eager to save the entire world, pray for the fulfillment of this mission, eager that God be glorified in every soul?

If it is to that extent with the preachers and the evangelists, how much more will it be with the Lord Jesus whose spring of love is so incessant? St. Augustine says, “God forbid we would say that He whom death could not destroy, that death would end His love. The rich man, though so haughty and wicked, manifested his love to his five brothers even after his death. Can we ever doubt that Christ’s love ceases at His death? God forbid, dear brothers”.

Fifthly: Who are these five brothers who need Moses and the prophets to be saved? St. Augustine thinks they are the Jews who are symbolized by the number five, because they are under the law recorded in the five books of Moses. They do not accept the Lord Jesus the Resurrected from the dead unless they accept the law and the prophets spiritually.

St. John Chrysostom thinks they refer to the five senses that have not been sanctified as long as you live in this world in a state of luxury and affluence. If these senses die with Jesus Christ, they will be sanctified by Him! The rich man represents man who lives indulgently in his passions and his pleasures. Then he loses the closest ones to himself, the sanctification of his senses, as if they were five brothers.

Sixthly: Irenaeus the saint thinks in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, the following points:

- (One) When the soul leaves the body it is not enrobed in another body, as those people who claim the cloning of the spirits. Otherwise the rich man would have come down to earth in another body instead of the eternal anguish.
- (Two) The spirits know each other even before being clothed glorifyingly in the last day.
- (Three) Even though the spirits have a beginning, yet they remain immortal, either in the kingdom or in hellfire.

Chapter XVII
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Faith and the Divine Fellowship

The Lord Jesus Christ came to search for us as a Shepherd looking for the lost sheep to embrace him and to uplift him to heaven. As a Father, He asks for His prodigal son to make him a joyful banquet, and He also asks His bride, the church to search diligently for us as a lost coin, until she finds us and washes us with His blood, and thus carry His divine image (Luke 17: 15). As we have seen in the previous chapter, to receive this friendship, we are committed to leading a life of wisdom, asking what is for our own construction in the eternal life, and not for the temporal pleasure (such as the dishonest manager). Let us bear the suffering thankfully as poor Lazarus, and not follow the example of the rich man who indulged passionately in his pleasures, and was cruel hearted to his brother. Now He is offering us the basic factor for this fellowship, which is the faith. This has to be interpreted actively in our life through our actual behavioral life, and the inward facts in the soul, in the expectation of the Lord's coming.

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1- Avoiding obstructions in our conduct:

Our fellowship with the Lord Jesus is based on a hidden partnership inside the heart, through which we are blessed with the new life by means of His Holy Spirit. This partnership is best manifested practically in our actual conduct; particularly in avoiding offenses by having a lovable heart specially to those who have unjustly treated us. We therefore have to declare our Christ, the Lover of mankind, who has loved us even though we were still enemies. He has reconciled us with His Father (Rom. 5: 10) "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son".

As for avoiding offenses, the evangelist says (Luke 17: 1, 2) "Jesus said to His disciples, 'Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come. It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble'".

The Lord Jesus confirms that the obstruction is present. But His assurance does not excuse, those who cause others to stumble, from the judgment or responsibility, for no one is obliged to act as a stumbling obstruction. He is a physician diagnosing the disease, and He sees in humanity some who have absolutely rejected the food, by rejecting the faith in Him, and so they slide to perdition and become an offense to others.

These words followed how the Lord Jesus revealed the money obstacle, that was worshiped by the Pharisees in their innermost hearts, and have cherished a god other than God. They have become a stumbling block in the salvation way. It is as if the Lord Jesus when He tackled in the previous chapter the subject of 'the love of money', He asked His disciples to beware this stumbling god to the soul. Otherwise they will become like the Pharisees. An offense to the people.

+ What are these offenses or obstructions the Lord Jesus says have to happen? There are two kinds of obstruction: the ones against the glory of the greatest Being, resisting the Jewel who is above all, or the other offenses that occur every now and then against ourselves. All what it brings the harming of our brethren, our partners in the faith.

The heresies and the new concepts that resist the truth, are in fact offenses that resist the glory of the most sublime godliness. It with draws those caught to god, and thus corrupts their correct and accurately sanctified edification. Concerning these offenses the Savior Himself says (Matt.18: 7) “Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks!” Those offenses have to come, but woe to this person by whom they come. Such obstructions that the evil heretics urge are not addressed to one particular person, but rather to the whole world, that is, to all the earth inhabitants. The devout St. Paul rebukes those ones who provoke these stumbling blocks, saying (1Cor.8: 12) “But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ”. These stumbling blocks should not overcome believers, and therefore God says to the ministers of the correct Word of Truth and those skilful in its teaching (Is.62: 10) “Go through, go through the gates, prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway, clear it of stones”. The Savior has set a bitter punishment for those who put such stumbling blocks in people’s way.

St. Cyril the great

The Lord Jesus assures us (Luke17: 1) “Occasions for stumbling blocks are bound to come” as a real fact at every age, since the adversary does not cease to attack the believers through the heretics, as well as through the errors of some priests, servant and believers from among the congregation so as to destroy the weak souls. The Lord Jesus warns us of two aspects: that we be not stumbling blocks to others, and that, we are not hindered as little ones in the faith through others mistakes.

When discussing these evangelical expressions (Matt.18: 6,7; Mark.9: 42) we have seen that it was a Jewish custom when they have lost all hope in someone, and when they wish him to be set as an example to others, they would tie his neck to a rock, and throw him in the sea, and he would never appear again. This is how Pope Gregory the great sees the servant or the priest who acts as a stumbling block to his congregation, he has to leave his job as a shepherd and flee so as to save his soul and disappear. This is better than being condemned for the souls he has obstructed in his service instead of being the means of saving them by the cross.

We emphasize with St. John Chrysostom his words, if this is the punishment for him who obstructs the little ones, then what is the reward for him who saves the weak and obstructed souls? “If the salvation of one single soul had not been so very great to Christ, He would not have threatened with such a punishment for him who acts as a stumbling block to someone”.

2- Having a Forgiving Heart for those who have Wronged Us:

If we wish to have a well-based and deep fellowship with the heavenly Savior, then we have to embody His work in us. We have to be concerned about the salvation of every soul, and should not allow ourselves to be a stumbling block to those ones weak in the faith, neither should we ourselves be obstructed in our salvation way due to others’ drawbacks. The first drawback for an offense is to be intolerable at heart, and not to have enough love towards others particularly to those who have unjustly treated us. This is why He says (Luke17: 3,4) “Be on your guard! If another disciple sins,. You must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, ‘I repent’, you must forgive”.

In a loving heart, if a brother wrongs us, rebuke him. This is not to justify ourselves or to throw the blame on him, but so as to win him over in love, and win the salvation of his soul. This is why the Lord Jesus says on another occasion (Matt.18: 15) “go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one”. It is as if the purpose of this rebuke that is full of love is ‘to own himself’ as a gain to us, and thus we do not lose him as a member in the sanctified body.

The Lord Jesus did not put a limit to love. He rather asked us to forgive those who have wronged us, and come back to us repentently seven times in one day. This means he repents endless times, because the number seven refers to perfection.

If the Lord Jesus asks us to forgive those who have wronged us in this way everyday, how much more so He would forgive us whenever we come back to Him? With these words of His, He opens for us the door of hope, that is incessant, so we come back to Him in repentance, and confessing our sins.

+What wisdom does God have! After He had mentioned the parable of the rich man’s suffering in the place of pain and agony (Luke16) He resumed His words commanding us to forgive those who come back in repentance and regret, so no one would despair in departing from his sins.

What great wisdom! Man should not be hard-hearted in offering forgiveness to others, and should not be careless in his mercy. He should not clash with others in violent rebuke, and should not continue in careless wrong-doing. This is why He said on another occasion (Matt.18: 15) “go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone”. The friendly rebuke is much better than the open accusation. The former implies shame, but the latter arouses wrath.

It is better that the one who has wronged you would consider you as a friend and not as an attacking enemy. It is easier for man to accept the advice than to yield to violence. This is why the apostle says (2Thes.3: 15) “Warn them as believers”. Fear is a weak guard when persisting, whereas shame is a good teacher for duties.

+ It is well said “if a disciple sins against you”; the situation is different when sin is against God or against man. this is why the apostle who is the real interpreter to the prophecy, says (Tim3: 10) “after a first and second admonition, have nothing more to do with anyone who causes divisions. The deviated faith is not forgiven, as well as an error or sin against man.

St. Ambrosios

+ You are called ‘a son’; if you therefore reject to follow God’s example and forgive your brother, then why do you ask for His inheritance?

+ I wish you to forgive, since I see you asking for forgiveness.

St. Ambrosios

If He has asked us to admonish our brother who has sinned against us then let us not stop at the admonition, but rather let us take him lovingly to forgiveness. But to what extent should this be? To seven times, that is, endlessly.

+ He says if the person who has sinned against you repents and knows his mistake, forgive him, not only once but many times.

It is appropriate for us not to seem incomplete in sharing love, and careless in our loterance. It is possible that everyone fails and sins more than once. We rather have to follow the example of those who treat our physical diseases. They do not treat the patient once or twice only, but whenever they fall sick, they do so.

Let us remember that we ourselves are exposed to infirmities, and we can be subjected to certain whims and drawbacks. We therefore ask those who have the right to admonish, and it is in their authority to do so, to discipline us, and to be tolerant with us, and to forgive us. Likewise it is our duty to have sharing feelings, and that we feel the weakness of others, and bear the yoke of each other. In this way we fulfil Christ’s law (Gal.6: 2).

St. Cyril the great

St. Ambrosios offers us an explanation of our forgiveness to our brother, who has sinned against us, seven times every day. The number seven reminds us of the seventh day in which God rested of all His work (Gen.1: 2). Thus the seventh day is sanctified among the Jews, also the seventh month, and the seventh year...etc.

The Lord rested on the seventh day, which means He found His rest after He has created man on the sixth day, and has made the whole world for his sake, and the Lord rejoiced with it. Likewise when He sees that we forgive our brethren incessantly, He rests in us, for He finds His divine work is fulfilled. This is the Lord's joyful Sabbath, when He finds His children having His quality of the Lover of mankind, and forgive others sins in a warm and loving heart.

The Lord's Sabbath is not a mere day, but rather 'a life risen in Him'. He who keeps it, lives in resurrection through Him. He does not yield to the death of hatred, or the vengeance corruption, but he rather lives in freedom with god's all encompassing love.

3- "Increase Our Faith":

The apostles may have relised that what the Lord Jesus commands is above the natural standards, and so they asked for God's help. Thus they would be able to forgive by nature others' mistakes by means of faith, for the evangelist says (Luke17: 5,6) "The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!' The Lord replied, 'If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea' and it would obey you'".

In the above words we notice the following:

Firstly: If 'faith' is the secret behind the power of the church, without which we shall not be blessed with Christ's nature, that which is risen and is active in us, and without which we are unable to offer the true and forgiving love to others' mistakes, then this 'faith' is God's gift, with which we are blessed if we ask Him with the apostles 'Increase our faith'. This is God's gift but not with a negative aspect on our side.

+ What necessarily gives joy to the saintly souls is not to obtain the earthly temporal goods, because such things are corruptible, and are easily lost. It is rather to be blessed with the honorable and blessed goods that are spiritually blessed, and are God's gifts. One of these blessings is 'the faith' that has special appreciation. I mean to enter the faith in Christ our Savior of us all. St Paul knows Him as our greatest blessing, for he says (Heb.11: 6) "And without faith it is impossible to please God". 'It is this faith those of old have achieved martyrdom to God.

Notice how the saintly apostle followed the example of the saints' conduct in the Old Testament. What have thy asked of Christ? 'Increase our faith'. They did not ask for mere faith, lest you think they had no faith. They rather asked of Christ to increase their faith and to strengthen it in them.

Faith partially depends on us, and on the other hand it is the divine and blessed gift. At the beginning it depends on us; we can either accept it or reject it. We have the authority to trust in God and to believe in Him. As for making the faith strong and firm this requires the divine grace. For this reason, because all things are possible with God, the Lord has said, (Mark9: 23) "All things can be dome for the one who believes". The strength that falls on us through the faith is from God. The devout St. Paul knows this and he tells the Corinthians (1Cor.12: 8,9) "To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit". You can thus see him putting the faith in the list of spiritual blessings. This is what the disciples asked to obtain from the Savior. He therefore

granted them this after He provided the fulfillment of the descent of the Holy Spirit on them. For before the resurrection their faith was fragile and little. The saint spoke of the disciples' attitude at the tempestuous sea as an example of their little faith (Matt.8: 26; 14: 31; Luke8: 25; John6: 19). There is no surprise when they ask for their faith increase from Christ the Savior of us all. He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but rather to wait the Father's time to be clothed with power from above (Acts1: 4). When they were blessed with the power from above, they have truly become brave and strongly kindled in the Spirit. They scorned death, and had no fear of any hazards the unbeliever threatened them with; rather, they have become capable of performing miracles.

St. Cyril the great

Secondly: In the apostle's words 'Increase our faith', the true faith has been unfolded. It is not a solid thing that we have received and then it stopped. It is rather the experience of an existing life'. It is our faith in accepting God's work in us, with no hindrance or cessation until we reach the desire of our teacher St. Paul the apostle (Eph.4: 13) "to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ". As, St. Augustine says, "Our faith increases when 'God's wisdom' is declared openly, face to face with His saints".

Our faith are not just words we keep repeating, neither is it a philosophy we have adopted. It is life and working experience with God who works continuously in us. He works by our means to give witness to Him at all times, and so we bring souls to the account of His kingdom.

Thirdly: The answer the Lord Jesus gave was (Luke17: 6) "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree 'be uprooted and planted in the sea' and it would obey you". This unfolds our need not for a materialistic increase in the amount-wise, but in an increase regarding the quality of our faith. There is no comparison between the mustard seed that the Jews considered the smallest of all seeds, and the mulberry tree that is so huge. Our live faith as the little mustard seed is able to make impossible things, such as the uprooting of the mulberry tree, with all its root from the earth, and planting it in the sea amidst the waves! The live faith is the maker of all impossibilities.

Fourthly: The two saints Ambrosios and John Chrysostom think the mulberry tree here refers to Satan. If our life has become an earth, the enemy will plant a mulberry tree there. With faith we can cast out Satan and all his works from our life, and there will be no place for him in us. He will be thrown in the sea, in the very deep sea. This is just as when the Lord allowed the devils to go out of the man in the Gadarenes, and enter the swine; thus the whole swine herd rushed from the cliff top down to the water and were choked (Luke8: 33).

Pope Cyril the great thinks the mulberry tree here means the power faith has to fulfill what seems impossible to us. With faith the tree is uprooted from the earth despite its deeply tangled roots, and with faith it is planted firmly in the moving sea waters. It is as if faith makes what is impossible, for he says "He who trusts in God does not rely on his personal strength, but he attributes all what he accomplishes to Christ. He confesses that through Christ all goodness in human souls is fulfilled, and that it is appropriate for people to prepare themselves to accept this great blessing. Faith has the authority to move what is firm and well based in the earth. There is nothing at all that faith is unable to do whenever it is necessary to do so. The earth has actually shaken when the apostles prayed, as mentioned in Acts of the Apostles (4: 31). On the other hand, faith can stop what is movable, just as when the rapid river flow in Jordan did (Josh.3: 16), as well as the movement of sunshine was stopped, that never ceases to do so in the sky (Josh.13: 10). What has to be noticed very well is that God does not wish to offer what is brilliant and amazing in a false or purposeless way. Such a thing is far away from the essence of God who knows no pride or haughtiness. He only makes what is for the good of people and for their peace. I say this so that no one expects the sanctified faith and the divine power to make changes that are useless, such as changing

certain properties and transforming them into others, or moving mountains or fields. This will be fulfilled if there is real benefit, and hence, faith will have nothing to keep it back from acting”.

Faith is the mystery in the power of the church, not for performing awesome deeds of no purpose, but it is primarily to obtain the life risen in Jesus Christ . thus we may live in a loving and forgiving Spirit for other’s mistakes, and with faith we can cast out the evil spirit and all its deeds. We thus uproot it from our lives as the mulberry tree, and throw it in the sea depths and in the abyss of the oceans. What ruins our faith is when we rely on our own personal righteousness and thus we forget that what we were gifted with such as being God’s sons, and the sanctified deeds, and the ability to carry out the commandments- all of these are free gifts from God. In reality, we are idle slaves, whatever our conduct may be like. This is what the Lord Jesus confirmed, for what He said directly after speaking of the faith (Luke 17: 7-10).

“Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field ‘Come here at once and take your place at the table’? Would you not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink, later you may eat and drink’? Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves, we have done only what we ought to have done’”.

What did the Lord Jesus mean by this parable?

He wished to assure us of our real position when away from His grace, that we are worthless slaves, that is, God’s slaves that have not given Him His due right as should be. For if we make Him foremost in our life, and offered everything for His account, we remain indebted to Him with our own life. We feel deep inside us we are worthless, but by His grace we have become sons to Him. What we practice is of His gifts, freely given to us, and is not a price for our personal struggle or is due to our own goodness.

+ The Lord wished to manifest that despite committing us to every commandment, yet He grants His sonship to people in deserving His blood. This is why He said, “When you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, “We are worthless slaves, we have done only what we ought to have done”. Likewise is the kingdom of heaven; a gift given by the Lord to the believing slaves, and not as a reward to our work.

The slave does not ask for freedom from him bondage as a reward for his work. He only tries to offer all his effort as a debtor, and he waits for freedom as a gift.

(1Cor.15: 3) “Christ died for the sake of our sins”, and He grants freedom to those who well serve Him, for He says (Matt.25: 23) “Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your Master”.

+ Some assume they believe in the Truth, though they do not commandments, expect the kingdom as a just reward for their own personal merits. Both of them act wrongfully against the Truth.

+ Christ has died for our sakes (2Cor.5:15) “And He died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died and was raised for them”. It is clear that we are committed to serving Him till death. Then how is it that we regard sonship as a just reward for our personal deeds?

+We are the ones who are granted the eternal life. We perform the good deeds not for the sake of reward, but rather to keep the purity that was granted to us.

St. Mark the hermit

+ In the previous words, the Lord addressed us in an important and long discussion, to show us the ways that lead us to honor. He declared the glories of the blameless life so we progress in it, and develop in it zealously until we reach an amazingly awesome level, and so obtain

the reward for our call from above (Phil.3: 14). Man's natural thoughts tend towards vain glory—which is a very serious transgression that God hates. Moreover, the serpent, which is the source of evil leads people to such thinking. They therefore assume that God has granted them the honors from above for the sake of their glorious life and distinction, that is, for the sake of their personal merits. This is why the Lord wished to pull us away from these tendencies that imply the vain thoughts of glory. He put before us these lessons that have just been read to us. By this parable He teaches us that the royal and divine authority of God asks of the slaves to submit to Him as a debt they are entitled to fulfil. He says that the Lord offers no thanks to the slave, and even if He does, He did not need to, because he is only a slave.

I ask you to notice here that the disciples and all those who yield to Christ the Savior's track, they are all urged to persist. But they do not do the service as a favour on their part, but it is as if they are fulfilling the obedience debt the slaves are committed to doing. In this way the disease of malignant vain glory is detached.

If you do what is your duty to do, then why do you boast? Can you not see that if you do not fulfil your debt you are in danger, and if you fulfil it, then you deserve no praise for this? This truth was well learnt by the slave, the amazing St. Paul, and he was absolutely aware of it. For he says, (1Cor.9: 16) "If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel". Also (Rom.1: 14) he says "I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish".

If you therefore do good, and have kept God's commandments, and have obeyed your Lord, then do not ask for God's honor as a meritable thing to you; rather, draw closer to Him and plead for the goodness of His gifts.

Yes, even though we are slaves yet He calls us His children, and He crowns us with His children's glory.

St. Cyril the great

+ As long as we are alive, we have to work continuously. Admit that you are a slave, committed to performing many services. Do not be slothful, since you are called God's son.

Yield to the work of grace, without ignoring nature- that you are only a slave.

Do not boast if you are a good slave, for this is a duty you are committed to doing. For the sun does its job, the moon also obeys, and the angels minister, and the chosen vessel the Lord used for the Gentiles says, (1Cor. 15: 9) "For I am least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God". On another occasion, when he referred that he did so ignorantly, he added (1Cor.4:4) "But I am not thereby acquitted".

Therefore, I wish we would not seek to obtain glory for ourselves; and not to be ahead of God's judgment. Do not guess the Judge's judgment, but let us wait for this till the right time comes, for He is the real Judge.

St. Ambrosios

+ St. Augustine links the apostle's request to the Lord Jesus to increase their faith, and with this parable mentioned by the Lord. In it he could see the slave who goes to the service in the field to upturn the soil, or the shepherd tending the sheep to enter his master's house to eat and drink there, as if through the increasing faith he moves from the service in this world to the life of meditation, or to go from the life of struggle and toil to being blessed in the eternal kingdom- for He says, "Those who do not truly understand this faith, assume that the Lord did not answer the disciples' request; for it seems there is difficulty in linking their request to increase their faith and this parable, unless we believe that the Lord means by this parable to go out from faith to faith. That is, from the faith by which we serve the Lord to the faith by which we are blessed with the Lord. Our faith increases at the beginning when we accept the gospel word, then are blessed after this with the existing Truth. We thus achieve the joyful meditation and the perfect peace, that is granted us in the eternal kingdom of God.

I wish the slave toiling in the field or shepherding the flock, that is, doing his temporal job honestly, and serving the foolish people as a flock, that he returns home after work, that is to unite with the church, and be blessed with a life of mediation.

+ As the slaves of Christ keep working, that is, proclaiming the gospel, our Lord eats and drinks the faith of the Gentiles and their confession to Him.

He goes on to say (Luke 17: 8) “After this, you eat and drink”. It is as if the Lord is saying “After I am pleased with your preaching mission, and I Myself feed on the food of your repentance, at this point you come and be blessed with the eternal banquet, the banquet of immortal wisdom.

St. Augustine

4- Gratitude and the Faith- the ten lepers:

We have mentioned that the faith is the mystery behind the power of the church, with which we are blessed with God’s fellowship. This faith is not possessed by one nation only or a certain race, but it is rather offered to all humanity. This was made clear by the evangelist when he mentioned the encounter of the Lord Jesus with ten leperous men who asked Him to have mercy on them. At this point He commanded them to go and show themselves to the priests. As they were running, they were healed. Then one of them returned to give thanks to Him, and he was a Samaritan, but it was only he who deserved to hear from among the others (Luke 17: 19) “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well”.

We notice in this miracle of the cleansing of the ten lepers, the following points:

Firstly: The evangelist says (Luke 17: 11, 12) “On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As He entered a village, ten lepers approached Him, keeping their distance”.

The Lord was heading towards Jerusalem, but He actually went through Samaria and Galilee, Jerusalem was the center for the worship of the Jewish people, for He has come to the lost sheep of Israel to regain them without disregarding Samaria. Also in Galilee there was a big number of Gentiles, and He wished for the fellowship of everyone.

The Lord Jesus remains moving towards His Jerusalem, that is, His heavenly city or eternal kingdom, where the temple is, that is not made by hands. He goes there, carrying the members of His body of every nation and tongue, from Samaria to Galilee.

He encountered the ten lepers out of the city. According to the law of Moses, the leper does not live among the people in the city or the village- he rather lives out of the walls or amidst the graves. He also has an open cloak, his head uncovered, and he covers his moustache, calling out ‘defiled, defiled’ (Lev. 13: 45). We have seen in the book of Leviticus in our interpretation of it, what this ritual means. This reveals the ugly defilement of iniquity, and destroying it for man, and depriving him of sharing the sanctified community.

These ten men represent humanity that has become, through sin, deprived of the ‘sanctified partnership’. This humanity lives out of the fence walls in enmity with heaven and the heavenlies. It carries its defilement on itself. The Lord Jesus has met them out of the village, for He has come down to us from His heavens as a stranger, so He meets us and carries us on His shoulders, and enters with us to His holy heavens.

Secondly: These men stood physically from afar, but they drew very close to Him in their faith, for (Luke 17: 13) “They called out saying, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us”.

Being leperous, they were deprived of living among people. They might not have witnessed with their own eyes any of the miracles that the Lord Jesus made. They just heard of it, but in their faith they drew very close to Him and have obtained the cleansing, whereas many of the Pharisees and the Sadducees saw the Lord Jesus and have witnessed His amazing deeds, but due to their lack of faith they deprived themselves of His fellowship.

Thirdly: The Lord Jesus commanded them to go to the priests to show themselves to them. This is to confirm that He did not come to break the law but rather to fulfil it, and also to show the Jewish priests an actual evidence of His power to heal and to cleanse. This was not done by the law, and they may believe that His grace is above the law. In this action, also, the Lord Jesus directs us to submit to the church. He also teaches the servants the spirit of modesty. On the other hand, He is giving a chance for those ones who have been healed, to offer a sacrifice of gratitude to God.

Fourthly: Something that no one expected happened all of a sudden: one of the ten, when he saw he has been healed, returned to give praise to God in a loud voice. He offered worship and thanks to the Savior. He fell on his knees at Jesus feet in gratitude, and he was a Samaritan, even though none of the other nine who were Jews returned to give thanks. This is why the Lord said (Luke 17: 17,18) “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then He said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well”. Then ten were physically made clean, but this foreigner has usurped his own salvation and purification by means of his practical life of faith interpreted in thanks and true worship.

Fifthly: St. Ambrosius thinks those ten lepers have a symbolic meaning. They refer to those who rejected the correct faith, and lead a life of heresy and new concepts. These live out of the city for they are deprived of the church membership. If they offer repentance and encounter the Lord in their return to the true faith, He asks them to show themselves to the priest, which is, to return to the church membership so they are granted acceptance and forgiveness.

As for the nine who did not return whereas only one of them returned, and he was a Samaritan, to worship the Lord till the ground, offering a sacrifice of thanks and praising Him, this could be explained that it is not enough the heretics return to the faith theoretically or wordily, they rather have to return whole-heartedly and in deed as well. The Samaritan represents the serious man in his faith, because the word ‘Samaritan’ means ‘guard’. He who is alert and is on his guard by means of the Holy Spirit for the salvation of his soul, comes to the Lord in a contrite spirit, worships Him in lowliness, and thanks Him for His overflowing love in being accepted as a partner in His Holy Body, that is, the church.

St. Augustine thinks the grateful one is the church of Christ, for it is only one, and should not stand in division.

Sixthly: The Pope saint Athanasius the apostolic presents to us in his elaborate sixth epistle this Samaritan leper is a living example of the life of gratitude that unfolds a heart clinging to the Donor of gifts, more than the gift itself. He says, “The Lord loved the one who offered his thanks, whereas he was frustrated with those ungrateful ones, for they did not know the Savior. They were rather preoccupied with their healing of leprosy more than with Him who has deansed them.

5- The Faith in the Inward Kingdom:

The Lord spoke to us of the faith as the way to be blessed with God’s kingdom, and He cautioned us of a shut up heart that corrupts the faith; as well as pride and arrogance. He asked us to follow the Samaritan’s example; how he had practical and active faith by means of his open witness to the Lord Jesus, in a spirit of lowliness and thanks giving. On listening to the Lord’s words, the listener’s hearts were kindled in eagerness to be blessed with this fellowship. The Pharisees then began to ask, not as to how they could be blessed with it, but they asked about the timing of this fellowship. They asked, (Luke 17: 20) “When will the kingdom of God come?”

This is not an unusual question; the aim of the adversary is to preoccupy us, away from the salvation of our souls, with other temporal things. We notice this clearly at the present time; such as in the United States of America, many scholars study the book of the Revelation, not as a book from heaven to kindle the heart towards the eternal coming of Christ, but rather to search for the end of this age and its time. Thus the Lord Jesus warns us “You are not to know the time or the age”.

The Lord Jesus answered their question by directing their thoughts from the searching of the time and knowing the age to being concerned about their blessing by the kingdom as a present one: and inward kingdom in the depths of the soul. In other words, He wants us to be concerned about our relationship with Him, on the level of the inward heart, instead of being preoccupied with other matters, and the mere philosophical discussions.

+ He has given the answer beneficial to all mankind: that God’s kingdom does not come by observation; look for God’s kingdom inside you. He says not to ask about the time in which God’s kingdom comes, that is, this depends on your self-will, and it is in your authority to accept or reject it. Every person who accepts the justification in Christ’s faith, and is adorned by every righteousness, is counted worthy of the heavenly kingdom.

St. Cyril the great

+ The kingdom of God is in you means the joy the Holy Spirit implants in your hearts. This is and icon and a first step to the eternal joy the souls of the saints are blessed with.

St. Gregory, bishop of Nicus

+ To reach the heavenly castle is easier than reaching Britain or Jerusalem, because God’s kingdom is in you.

St. Anthony, and the hosts of Egypt’s monks, and those between the two rivers, Pontus, Cabadocia and Armenia, have not seen Jerusalem; yet the door of paradise has been opened to them.

The devout Hillarion, though he was an inhabitant of Palestine, has not seen Jerusalem except for one day, for he did not wish to ignore those blessed sites since he was so close to them. At the same time he did not wish to limit God to any local boundaries.

St. Jerome

+ Inside yourselves, you either have the knowledge of truth, or your ignorance of it; the joy in righteousness or the joy in malice; in this way we prepare our hearts either for Christ’s kingdom or Satan’s kingdom.

Father Moses

I wish, therefore, that with the live and active faith, we accept the glorification of Christ’s kingdom in us. He would thus be declared king in us, and would direct our feelings, senses, thoughts and all our spiritual, psychological and physical potentials to His eternal kingdom account. In this way our security against the adversary’s attacks and against evil, to exist on the inward depths in the Lord, and that it could actually never be overcome. This is what Father Biamon confirms, saying, “We cannot flee from the ordeal tempests and the adversary’s attacks, if we depend when protecting our patience, not on the strength of our inward man, but to just shut the door of our cell, or merely delve into the desert, and accompany the saints, or any other protection of any sort”.

6- The Inward Kingdom and the Everlasting One:

When the Lord has directed our attention on His inward kingdom so we obtain it in us, instead of being preoccupied in knowing the time and the age, the Lord then spoke again to prepare us for His last coming since it is the extension of His present coming and His dwelling in us. In other words, His dwelling place is in us, and the declaration of His kingdom is in our deep souls, a first deposit to kindle our hearts for His last coming. It is as if

our fellowship with Him begins right now, so that it grows all the more when we encounter Him face to face.

These words of the Lord Jesus explain the following points:

Firstly: The Lord Jesus showed how He would come at a time when the believers would covet one day of the days the Lord was on earth when they discover His personality, and taste the sweetness of His fellowship, for He says (Luke 17: 22) “The days are coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it”.

St. Cyril the great thinks that when the Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples of His inward kingdom in them, He wished to reveal to them the suffering the church will undergo, and how the believers would fall under it. This will be counted by everyone that the days when the Lord Jesus was on earth, these are regarded as being easy when compared to what the believers will experience later on. They will covet the days the disciples lived in with the Savior, when the Lord bore all alone the pain whereas they were restful. In this way the Lord did not wish to scare them, but rather to prepare them to bear the hardship and face the difficulties courageously, for He has informed them of it ahead of time.

+ By saying so, did the Lord scare His disciples?

Was He weakening them ahead of time? Was He making them unable to tolerate the difficulties and the tribulations that were too hard to bear?

This is not what He means, He rather, on the contrary, wished to prepare them to accept all what saddens people, and thus be ready to endure it in patience, and be selected and enter God’s kingdom.

He has previously warned them before His coming from heaven at the end of the world, that the tribulations and hard times will come ahead of Him, and that they would long for seeing one single day of the days of the Son of Man. That is to say, to see one of the days in which they spoke with Jesus. Even though the Jews, till these present times, have used no little violence against Him when they tried to stone Him, and have persecuted Him more than once, and have led Him to a cliff to throw Him from its top, and have mocked Him and deceived Him, and have left no malice undone by them, then how does He say the disciples desire eagerly to see one day of His days? This is in comparison to the many evils that would befall us, and thus this will be considered few and desirable.

St. Cyril the great

+ If their life at that time was not a difficult one, because Christ was concerned about them and He sheltered them, the time will come when Christ will be uplifted and thus they will be exposed to danger. They would stand before kings and rulers, and they would desire eagerly the first days and their peaceful time.

Father Theophlactius

Secondly: Warning them of being misled:

When the Lord spoke to them indirectly of the suffering they would encounter before His coming, He began to warn them of being misled. This represents a more bitter danger because it implies deception to the disabled souls who are unable to discern between the coming of the anti-Christ and the coming of Christ Himself.

The Lord made clear the discernment between them saying (Luke 17: 23, 24) “They will say to you, ‘Look there!’ or ‘Look here!’ Do not go, do not set off in pursuit. For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in His day”.

There is no doubt the coming of the anti-Christ will be full of deception, for many will follow him and cry out his name in every misleading place. There will also be deceiving wonders of Satan’s doings, and the world will tend to him, and will search for him here and there. As for the real Christ, He will come gloriously on the clouds as St. Paul the apostle said (1 Thes. 4: 16) “For the Lord Himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and

with the sound of God's trumpet will descend from heaven" he will come in His splendor as lightning to be seen by all and He will need no one to proclaim Him. He will come to judge the living and the dead, shining in the hearts of all, and in the thoughts of all. Then everything will be clear to everyone, and the hidden secrets of men will be revealed!

+ He will come down from heaven at the end of times, not in a mysterious or hidden way but in the glory of His divinity, for He (1Tim.6: 16) "dwells in unapproachable light". He declared this when He said His coming will be as the lightning. Indeed, He has been born in the body from a woman to fulfil the provision for our sake. For this reason He denied Himself, and became poor, and He did not manifest Himself in the glory of His divinity. He became lowly for the sake of the time, and to fulfil the provision. But after the resurrection from the dead, when He ascended to the heavens, and sat with God the Father, then He will descend again but not without His glory, and not in the modesty of humanity, but in the awesomeness of the Father, guarded by the angelic hosts who stand before Him, for being the God of everyone, and the Lord of all. He will come as the lightning and not in secret.

St. Cyril the great

+ Just as the lightning that does not need any proclamation of its coming, but it is rather seen in a moment in the world, likewise even to those sitting in their homes, the Son of Man will come, and will be witnessed at every place in one moment due to His brilliant glory.

St. John Chrysostom

Thirdly: Christ's Rejection:

The Lord urged His disciples to accept His fellowship to them on the everlasting level or the final level. He declared there is no doubt about His coming, coming as the lightning before everyone in the glory of His godliness. But before this glory there comes the world's rejection of Him, for there is no way to glory unless by means of suffering and agony. Thus He urges us to accept the 'rejected Christ' so He accepts us in His glories.

The Lord Jesus assures His disciples (Luke17: 25) "But first He must endure much suffering and be rejected by this generation".

The Head, that is Christ, endured much suffering and was rejected. But here He comes glorified, and we too, His body will not share Him His glories unless we are rejected by this generation, and be pressed under a lot of agony. As St. Paul the apostle says (Rom.8: 17) "in fact, we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him".

Fourthly: Watchfulness and Being Wakeful:

The Lord Jesus does not cease to direct His disciples to a life of constant watchfulness, so that the Lord's coming would not be a sorrowful surprise to them. Rather, it should be a truly joyful wedding the soul eagerly waits for inwardly.

The Lord mentions two parables to us: the first one is the flood in Noah's time, when the people were indulging in their own pleasures (Luke17: 27) "They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed all of them. "The second parable is the burning of Sodom in the days of Lot (Luke17: 28) "they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building". Selling or planting and building. The sin is in man's indulgence and preoccupation that makes him absolutely forget his own soul's salvation. All of these actions could be sanctified and blessed when practiced by the spiritual man who is sanctified in the Lord. He is concerned about the Savior's coming in expectation of the eternal wedding.

+ To show He will be manifested in an unexpected way, at a time that man does not know of, at the end of the world, He said that the end would be in the days of Noah and Lot.

What does this mean, then?

He asks us to be constantly watchful, and ready to answer before God's judgment. As St. Paul says (2Cor.5: 10) "For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil".

He will then put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left; and then the King will say to those ones on His right hand (Matt.25: 33) “Come, you that are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”. As for the goats, He utters a fearful judgment, for He sends them to unquenchable fire.

St. Cyril the great

Fifthly: Warning us of Retreating:

Because He calls us to accept His present friendship as a first step for the immortal and eternal fellowship, He does not only ask us to be watchful, but also to grow continuously in our relationship with Him without any regression or retreat. He therefore provided us with three parables:

- (a) He who reaches the rooftop does not come down to the world floor levels searching for his possessions. He rather stays up on high, on the rooftop, watching with the eyes of faith active in him, the coming of the Groom from heaven.
- (b) He who goes to the service field to work for the account of god’s kingdom, does not go backwards to ask for the temporal matters.
- (c) He who leaves Sodom, does not look backwards as Lot’s wife, and becomes a pillar of salt.

These are the examples the Lord presented to us, saying: (Luke17: 31, 32) “On that day, anyone on the housetop who has belongings in the house must not come down to take them away; and likewise anyone in the field must not turn back. Remember Lot’s wife”. We have previously explained the spiritual concepts of these words in St. Matthew’s interpretation (Matt.24: 17, 18; Mark 13: 15,16) as well the words of some of the fathers concerning this topic.

St. Cyril the great thinks the man on the housetop is the rich one who has become as someone on the surface, known by everyone, famous among those around his house. I wish he would not put his heart in his treasury inside his house, but rather be concerned about his spiritual life, for the wise one says (Prov.10: 2) “Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death”.

As for St. Hillary, the bishop of Poitiers, he thinks the lofty one on the housetop is the perfect man is his heart, the one spiritually high and renewed continually; he need not be confused by temporal matters. St. Ambrosius thinks this is the man who is uplifted with St. Peter the apostle to the rooftop to realise the church mystery (Acts10: 9) that does not attribute defilement to certain people; it rather opens the preaching door to everyone.

As for the one in the field, St. Cyril the great sees him as the man who has devoted his life to struggle and work for the sake of spiritual fruit, (Luke9: 62) “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God”.

As for Lot’s wife, she has been saved in going out of Sodom and not getting burnt. But she did not complete her way of salvation, and thus she lost everything by her heart’s return backwards.

We conclude our words about these parables by St. John Caspion’s words, “When we reach safety at the surface top of the gospel, why do we come down to take something from the house, something you did not think much or prior to that? When you are in the field working in righteousness, why do you regress and try to wear the matters of this world another time after you have taken them off and discarded them?”

Sixthly: The Concern about the Soul’s Salvation:

Indeed, man might work and think he is struggling in the way of the divine fellowship and being blessed with the kingdom. But he is unaware he has lost his goal by his deviation in being blessed with his own salvation. This salvation has the price of ‘Christ’s previous blood’; thus He is worthy that we reject everything and endure everything, for His

sake, for He says, (Luke17: 33) “Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it”.

St. Augustine often spoke out of experience he lived; in short, that he who loves himself loses his soul; and he who hates himself or destroys himself, loves his soul. In other words, when man is enclosed in his ego, and thinks he lives for himself, feeding on his physical passions, or asks for temporal honor, he is actually destroying his own soul in this world and in the age to come.

As much as man loses himself, so he lives freely out of his ego, and works for God’s kingdom and for the sake of people’s peace, and growth, he loves his soul and saves it by the loving God! Let us endow ourselves with the nature of giving, that is, the nature of our Friend the Lover of mankind. Thus we shall be blessed by the true life here and in eternity also.

Father Theophlactius thinks the words here concern the believer’s attitude particularly in the days of the ‘anti-Christ’ when the believer will be subjected to many tribulations and death as well.

If man asks his soul be saved, that is, to save his temporal life, then he is destroying himself. But if he does not care about the tribulations, even unto death, then as he is destroying his temporal life, he is actually saving it, for he does not yield to the despot, the ‘anti-Christ’ for the sake of holding on to life.

St. Cyril the great says, “It is appropriate for those who are used to living in affluence, to stop this pride on this very day, and be ready to endure the toil. Likewise, those who struggle well, it is appropriate for them to persist courageously until they reach the sign set before them, for (Luke17: 33) “Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it”. St. Paul showed clearly the path by which man loses himself so he saves it. He said concerning the saints (Gal.5: 24) “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires”. Those who have truly come to Christ our only Savior, crucify their bodies and offer them to death, through their constant struggle and persistence for the sake of righteousness and the deadening of the natural passions. It has been written (Col.3: 5) “Put to death therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire and greed”. As for those who live a life of lust, they may assume they are gaining for themselves a life of pleasure and pampering, whereas in fact they are losing and destroying their life, (Gal.6: 8) “If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh”. Surely he who loses his life saves it. This is what the martyrs did; in devotion they endured the difficulties until death and the shedding of their life. They crowned their heads with the true love to Jesus Christ. But as for those who denied the faith due to their weak minds and will, and have escaped from the death of the body; these have become killers to themselves. They will slide to Hades, and will endure torment because of their wicked cowardice”.

Moreover, the Lord Jesus wished to assure us that the concern about the soul’s salvation is usually a hidden matter, that no one knows about except God and the soul itself. As for man, it is difficult that he passes judgment on his brother whether he is concerned about the salvation of his soul, or not. This is why the Lord Jesus says, (Luke17: 34- 36) “I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding meal together; one will be taken and the other left. Two will be in the field, one will be taken and the other left”.

The Lord has presented to us three kinds of people, in each kind there is the one worthy of the kingdom, and the other has deprived himself of this kingdom. So what are these three samples of people?

(a)St. Augustine thinks these three kinds of people represent three categories of people. In each category there are the two kinds. The first category are those two sleeping ones; this is the category of those who have no work neither in the world nor in the church. He may have

meant the elite and prestigious people who live on their property earnings. These love the peaceful life referred to by the bed. As for the second category, this is symbolized by the two who were grinding. They are two women who work under the authority of their men. This is the category of those who work as with the grinding stone, and offer from the toil of their hands, which is the bread for the believers. These are they who perform their jobs of this world in honesty, and offer of their hard work charity to the poor. As for the third category that is symbolized by those who work in one field, these are the ministers and priests who work in the Lord's vineyard. It is as if there are children of the kingdom among the rich, as well as among the strugglers in their daily life, and also among the ministers of the Word. There is also those who have no share in the kingdom among all of these categories. It is as if our fellowship with the Lord Jesus, and our blessing with His kingdom, this does not depend on our outer circumstances, and the kind of job we have, but rather on our hidden and inward life.

(b) It may also mean that the two sleeping in one bed, could be a man and his wife. Even though they have become one body, and have come to know the secrets of each other, yet each of them has his private life with God, that the other one is not aware of, for he cannot investigate the depths of his heart or be aware of the innermost thoughts he has. As for the two women working on the grinding stone, these point to the friendship of colleagues at work, whereas the two laborers in the field refer to friendship in the service. In every circumstance for each person, there is the hidden and secretive life with his heavenly Friend.

In addition to this, we notice the three examples included: a man and a woman, two women and two men. This means the human friendship on every level and between both sexes it could not penetrate the depths of the heart to be aware of other's friendship with God.

(c) In the first example He says, (Luke 17: 34) "I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed, one will be taken and the other left".

The period before the coming of the Lord Jesus will be a period of jet darkness, 'on that night' are the Lord's words. It is a bitter night in which the anti-Christ will appear, as well as the false prophets. There will be a regression even, if possible, among the elect, who will be misled.

St. Ambrosios says, "The presence of those ones who are against Christ, means it is the hour of darkness, for the anti-Christ will pour a dark cloud over the human minds when he proclaims himself he is the Christ in the wilderness. Thus they will deceive the fluctuating hearts and mislead them. But as for the Lord Jesus, He will come as the powerful lightning, who pours on the world His glittering light. He will shine in His brightness and His lightning, so we see the glory of the resurrection in the midst of this night".

St. Augustine says, "He says 'at that night' which means, in the midst of these hardships".

St. Cyril the great thinks the bed here is the symbol for rest, and those sleeping together are the rich and wealthy, some of whom are malicious and covetous, whereas others are kind and merciful. Both parties have obtained wealth, but one of them poured the wealth and gained friends in the eternal shelter. The other party worshipped the money and the wealth.

(d) If the first two refer to the rich, St. Cyril the great thinks the two women refer to those who are poor. Not every wealth is wicked, and not every poor one is righteous, for He says, "Some tolerate the burden of poverty in a mature way, and live an honorable, righteous and sensible life; whereas others have a different personality, for they rob and practice wicked and base deeds".

(e) St. Ambrosios thinks these two women who were grinding together represent the church and the Jewish syndicate. They grind the wheat to offer bread to God, for they both interpret the Old Testament, in its covenant and prophecies. But the Jewish assembly in its ingratitude,

is left out; whereas the church of the new covenant that has received from the syndicate the Old Testament books, this church is now blessed with the heavenly wedding.

What applies to the two women applies to the two men who were working in the same field. The assembly, in their literal thinking was unable to offer the fruit of the Spirit that rejoices God's heart. But as for the church of the new covenant, this offers 'its Head' as real fruit of primeness that God the Father smells, and He is pleased with it.

Seventhly: (Luke17: 37) "Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather", we have previously spoken about this elaborately in Matt24: 28.

When the Lord Jesus was hung on the cross, and He accepted death out of His own will, the believers came as vultures round Him to find in Him their spiritual food that grants the resurrection and the life. And when the anti-Christ dies, the wicked ones also gather round him as the vultures that ask for what befits its nature.

+ What are these vultures? And what is this corpse?

The spirits of the righteous one similar to the vultures, for they soar above and leave the world matters behind. They also live for very long, and this is why king David speaks of himself (Ps.103: 5) "So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's".

When we know the eagles, we never doubt the corpse, particular by when we remember that Joseph has taken the body from Pilate (John19: 38) Do you not see the vultures round the body? Such as Mary Jesse's wife, and Mary Magdalene, and Mary the Lord's mother, and the disciples- all of whom surround the Lord's tomb? Do you not see the eagles when the Lord comes on the clouds, and every eye sees Him (Rev. 1: 7)? As for the body, it is this about whom was said (John6: 55) "My body is true food"; round it the eagles fly with the wings of the Spirit. These eagles are they who believe that Jesus has come in the flesh. (1John4: 2).

This body is also the church; there, we are granted the grace of the baptism, the spiritual renewal, and thus there will be no old age, since youth and life are renewed.

St. Ambrosios

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Chapter XVIII
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The Live Prayer and the Divine Fellowship

The essential topic in the former chapter is ‘the faith’ which is the way to obtain the divine fellowship of God, through our being blessed with the inward kingdom in the heart as a down ‘payment for God’s kingdom in eternity. This faith is put into action through the constant prayer life, or the sincere worship blended by the Spirit of lowliness. And ascetism in addition to the acceptance of pain. Thus our inward eyes are opened on the kingdom. This is the subject of this chapter!

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1- The Fervent Prayer (the widow and the unjust judge):

The Lord has previously declared that the ‘Cross’ is the way to the kingdom, for the Son of Man has to suffer and be rejected so He rules in us. Likewise, in the same manner His church has to suffer, and carry His cross in expectation of His last coming. Some may ask, ‘How can we bear the cross and accept the agony happily for the sake of the kingdom? The answer is as follows ‘Prayer at all times!’ (Luke18: 1) “Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart”.

+ When the Lord has spoken of the tribulations and hazards that will befall us, He added the remedy on the spot, that is, the zealous and constant prayer.

Father Theophlactius

+ If you have not yet obtained the gift of prayer or praise giving, be persistent and you will obtain it. Do not lose heart or despair in waiting, and do not give up if you do not obtain it, for you will surely receive the gift later.

St. Ogris

+ He did not command us to pray in elaborate words, let us come to Him just by saying it. For we do not come to let Him merely know, but rather to struggle with Him, and cling to Him by our constant request and modesty, remembering our sin perpetually.

St. John Chrysostom

+ He who has redeemed you, shows you what He wants you to do. He wants you to be in constant prayer. He wishes you to meditate in your heart on the blessings you are asking for. He wishes you ask of Him, and so obtain His goodness that He longs to give to you.

He will not hold from you His blessings if you pray. But in His mercy He urges humans not to despair in praying.

Accept the Lord’s encouragement to you joyfully. Try to fulfill what He commands you to do, and to cease doing what He forbids you to do.

Finally, meditate on what you are granted as an awesome privilege that you are talking to God in your prayer. Show Him your needs, and He will answer you not with words, but with His mercy, for He does not take your questions lightly, and He does not get bored unless you yourself stop your prayer.

St. John Chrysostom

+ Let not prayer be a mere job for a certain time, but it is rather a constant state for the spirit.

St. John Chrysostom says “Make sure you do not confine your prayer to a certain time of the day. Go to pray at any time as the apostle says on another occasion (1Thes.5: 17) “Pray without ceasing”.

The apostle tells us to pray (Eph.6: 18) “in the Spirit”. This means prayer should not be only outspoken audibly, but also inwardly; it is the mind’s work in the heart. In this way the essence of prayer is the uplifting of the mind and the heart towards God.

+ St. Paul wrote to the people of Thesolonica (1Thes.5: 17) “Pray without ceasing”. In other epistles he commands (Eph.6: 18) “Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication”. (Col.4: 2) “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving”. (Rom.12: 12) “Persevere in prayer”. Furthermore, the Savior teaches us the need for constant prayer in persistence through. The parable of the woman who in fervence overcame the unjust judge by her persistent questioning. From all of this it is clear that constant prayer is not an occasional matter, but rather an essential quality for the Christian Spirit. The Christian’s life, according to the apostle, is hidden in God by Christ (Col.3: 3). The Christian, therefore, has to live in God perpetually, with all of his thoughts and feelings. When he does this, he is only praying incessantly!

We have also learnt that every Christian is ‘the temple of God’ in which ‘God’s spirit dwells’ (1Cor.3: 16; 4: 19; Rom8: 9). This Spirit dwells constantly in him, and intercedes for him, praying inside him (Rom.8: 26) “But that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words”. in this way, He teaches him how to pray without ceasing.

+ I remember St. Basilios the great answered the question ‘How did the apostles manage to pray without ceasing? Saying that in all what they did, they thought of God, living in constant devotion to God. This spiritual state was their constant, non-stop prayer.

Father Theovan, the hermit

The Lord Jesus spoke of the parable of the widow and the unjust judge to motivate us to constant prayer (Luke18: 2- 8) He said “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent? For a while he refused, but later he said to himself ‘though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming’. And the Lord said ‘Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to His chosen ones who cry to Him day and night? Will He delay long in helping them? I tell you, He will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?’”

In this way the Lord Jesus urges us to pray continually, and not to despair; the prayer that springs from the faith in God, the One who answers our prayer. Thus He declares that at the end of times, when many deny the faith, and when love cools, prayer also ceases. As a result of this, man loses his touch and his fellowship with God. This is what He meant by the words, ‘Will He find faith on earth?’’, the Lord proclaims His grief for the deprived humanity when losing the divine fellowship.

+ The Holy Gospel urges us to be committed to prayer and the faith, and not to rely on ourselves, but rather on the Lord. Is there any more encouragement for prayer than the parable of the dishonest judge that was given to us by the Lord? Even though the dishonest judge had no fear of God, and had no respect for any man, yet he listened to the persistent woman, and was overcome by her insistence, and not out of his gentle heart. If her request has been heard by him who hates to be questioned by anyone, then how much more so will it be with Him who listens to us and urges us to ask of Him?

In a contrasting comparison, because the Lord teaches us to pray at all times and not to be negligent about it, He adds saying if the Son of Man when He comes, will He find such faith on earth? If faith fails, prayer is obsolete, because who is he who prays for someone he does not believe in? This is why when the devout Apostle urges us to pray (Rom.10: 13) "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved", and to show that the faith is the prayer source, he went on to say (Rom.10: 14) "And how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed?". To pray, we have to believe; and not to make this faith by which we pray get weakened, let us pray. Faith overflows in prayer, and the prayer overflow grants the essence of the faith strength. Therefore, for our faith not to become weakened during tribulation, the Lord said (Luke22: 46) "Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial". What do the words mean 'that you may not come into the time of trial'? They mean when you depart from the faith, and it ends by the growth of the faith. Dear brothers, to know more clearly the Lord's words 'Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial', He means that the faith is not weakened and perishes; He says in the same place in the gospel (Luke22: 31, 32) "Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail". He who protects our faith prays, therefore will not he who is subjected to hazards pray?

In the Lord's words (Luke18: 8) "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?" The Lord speaks here of the perfect and absolute faith, for it will be a rarity on earth.

St. Augustine

+ The source of every blessing is Christ, (1Cor. 1: 30) "Who became for us wisdom from God". In Him we have become wise, and have become filled with the spiritual gifts. The knowledge of these things in which we develop in every way in the sublime and sanctified life, and the growth in righteousness, this is only a gift from God that man is equipped to win and to grasp.

We may find someone who asks God (Ps.25: 4) "Make me to know your ways, O Lord, teach me Your paths". There are many paths that lead us forward towards the incorrupted life. But there is only one particular way, useful to all who walk in it which is that of prayer. The Savior Himself was careful to teach it to us, by presenting to us this saure parable in our hands, so we struggle in prayer, for it is said (Luke18: 1) "Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart".

I assure you, it is the duty of those who consecrate their life to the service, that they do not neglect their prayers, and that they do not count it a heavy burden, a tiresome one. Rather, they have to rejoice for the freedom granted them by God, for He wishes them to speak to Him, as children do with their Father.

Is this not considered a favor worthy of every appreciation? If an honorable person of authority in the world allows us to speak to him freely, do we not count this a worthy cause of great joy? Then why is it that we doubt if God allows each one of us to address his words to Him in whatever way he wants? By this, God has offered to those who fear Him such a great honor as this, so they could obtain it.

Let us delete any slothfulness, which makes people be harmfully silent about their prayer. Let us rather draw closer to Him in praise and joy, since we have obtained a commandment to speak with the Lord of everyone and the God of all. We have Christ our Intercessor who grants us with the Father the achievement of our requests. St. Paul the devout says (2Cor.1: 2) "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ". Even Christ Himself says to His saintly apostles (John16: 24) "Until now you have not asked for anything in My name. Ask and you will receive". He is our Intercessor, He has redeemed us, He is our Comforter and He grants us all our requests.

It is our duty to pray without ceasing as the words of the devout St. Paul say (1Thes.5: 7). As it is well known to us, and well assured to us that He to whom we offer our requests,

He is able to fulfill for us everything indeed. It has been said (James 1: 6,7) “But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord”. He who doubts therefore, indeed commits a scornful thing. If you do not believe He is drawing closer to you, and rejoices you, and fulfils your want, then do not come close to Him in the first place, lest you be accused of scorning the able One, for you are doubtful and stupid. Therefore, let us avoid this debased disease of being doubtful.

God listens to those who offer their prayers not in negligence or carelessness, but in seriousness and constance. This is what the parable we have assures us of. The unjustly treated woman has overruled the dishonest judge, who does not fear God, not does he have respect for any man. he has finally given her her request, even if he did so unwillingly. How much more so would it be with Him who loves mercy and hates injustice? It is He who offers His hand continuously to His loved ones. He accepts those who draw closer to Him day and night, and He avenges them for they are His elect.

+ But some may say “Here in Christ telling His saintly apostles ‘have your enemies, pray for those who harm you’ then how is it that we cry out against them, and ask for revenge without scorning the divine commandment of God?”.

When we are personally wronged by people, let us regard this as glory for us that we forgive them, and thus be filled with sharing love. Let us follow the example of our saintly fathers, even if we are stricken and mocked at, indeed, even if they exercise every violence against us. It befits us we are freed of every defect, and be exalted above all wrath and envy. Such glory is appropriate to the saints, and makes God rejoice. But if a sin is directed against the glory of God such as the heresies and resisting the preaching word in truth, then let us draw closer to God and ask Him for His help, and cry out against those who resist His glory, as did the great Moses, for he said (Numbers 10: 35) “Arise, O Lord, let Your enemies be scattered, and Your foes flee before you”.

Likewise is the prayer uttered by the saintly apostles “Look to their threatening”, which means, wipe out their resistance, and grant Your servants the freedom to speak out Your Word.

St. Cyril the great

+ We also find the martyrs in St. John’s Revelation (Rev.6: 10), who ask for vengeance even though we were asked quite clearly to pray for our enemies and our persecutors. We have to understand that the wicked one perishes in two ways: either by being converted to righteousness, and thus his malice dies, or by being punished if he misses the opportunity for repentance. Even if all humans are converted to God, Satan will remain condemned to the end. Therefore, the righteous ask for the life to come, and it is not false that they ask for vengeance.

St. Augustine

In other words, if this widow represents the church as well as every church member, then she does not ask vengeance on people in a spiteful and revengeful spirit, she merely asks for the destruction of malice from the life of the evil ones, by their acceptance of the faith; she could also be asking for the end of the days when God’s children obtain the inheritance, and the adversary and his hosts will be cast away in eternal perdition.

2- The Modest Worship (the Pharisee and the tax-collector)

Because the Word of God, due to His love for us, has come down to us in the Spirit of lowliness so He carries us in him as members of His holy body, then it is appropriate for us,

so as to be firm in this gift, and in truth be counted as lovers and friends to carry this spirit of lowliness in us. This is why He presented to us this parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector. As St. John Chrysostom said in his fifth sermon against Anomoeans, that the Pharisee rode a vehicle pulled by righteousness with pride, whereas the tax collector's vehicle was pulled by sin with modesty. The former was destroyed and fell, whereas the latter became exalted above after the tax-collector's sins were forgiven because of his modesty.

+ When I finally referred to the Pharisee and the tax-collector, I assumed they had two vehicles which are righteousness and malice; I actually referred to the reality of both of them, and how important the modesty of the spirit is, and how corruptive pride can be.

Pride, when accompanied by righteousness, fasting and tithing, its vehicle deteriorates. But as for the modesty of the Spirit when accompanied by sin, yet it is ahead of the Pharisee's horse, even if the driver is poor in the righteous deeds! Because he who was more evil than the tax-collector, yet due to his modest spirit, and when he called himself a sinner, and indeed he was, he was exalted more than the Pharisee who spoke of his fastings and paying his tithes.

The evil was wiped out from the tax-collector, for the mother of all evils has been taken away from him, which is the false glory and pride. On this basis St. Paul the apostle teaches us saying (Gal.6: 4) "All must test their own work, rather than their neighbor's work, then that work will become a cause for pride".

As for the Pharisee, he approached accusing openly the entire world, thinking himself to be better off than all other humans. This is unacceptable even if he prefers himself to only ten, or five, or two, or even one person. But he did not stop in preferring himself to the entire world, he rather accused the entire world as well. In this way he was the last of the whole procession.

Just as the ship that goes fast due to the endless rough waves and tempests is finally wrecked on the rocks inside the harbor and loses all of its freight of treasures, likewise did the Pharisee when he offered his fasting and his overflow of virtues, yet he did not control his tongue. As a result, his soul was wrecked inside the harbor, and he returned to his home after prayer that is, inside the harbor; but he was totally wrecked. Instead of achieving any beneficial thing, he was entirely devastated.

Dear brethren, when we know all of this, let us look upon ourselves as last of all, even if we have reached the peak of every righteousness. We know well that pride is capable of making even the heavenly ones fall unless they be careful, whereas the modesty of the thoughts exalts from the abyss of sin those who know how to be sublime. This is what made the tax-collector go ahead of the Pharisee.

Pride, which is the soul's arrogance, is stronger than even the incorporeal hosts, that is, Satan; whereas the soul's modesty, and man's knowledge of his own sins that he has committed, these made the thief go ahead of the apostles to paradise.

I do not say this so we neglect righteousness, but rather to avoid pride. This is not to make us commit sin, but rather to be exalted in our thoughts, for the modesty of the spirit is the source of wisdom that pertains to us personally.

St. John Chrysostom

+ When the Pharisee prayed and thanked God for his righteousness, he did not lie, but he said the truth, and he was not condemned because of this. But when he looked upon the tax collector and said 'I am not like this tax collector' he committed the sinful accusation.

St. Dorotheus

+ Even though the Pharisee fasted two days a week, yet he benefited nothing, because he prided himself of this over the tax-collector.

St. Athanasios the apostolic

+ The tax collector's prayers overcame God who is never overcome.

+ Arrogance is contrary to modesty; through it Satan lost his sublimity as an archangel. Think well, brother, what is this sin that God resists?

St. Jerome

+ In all of his words the Pharisee asked nothing of God, and so he obtained nothing. He went up to pray but he did not think of praying to God, but rather of glorifying himself. Even more so, he thought lightly of him who was praying.

+ The tax collector stood afar, but actually he was very close to God. By his conscientious senses he was far, but by his piety he drew near.

+ He dared not look up, because his conscience pressured him to look down; but his hope has exalted him up.

+ The Pharisee became blameworthy for being arrogant, and not for thanking God.

St. Augustine

+ Let your sinful heart be shown in your confession, and so you belong to Christ's fold; for the confession of sin calls for the physician's healing; have not the Pharisee and the tax collector gone up to the temple? One thought his situation was good, whereas the other showed his wounds to the Physician. Surely the Pharisee was not wholesome, but he claimed this, and so he left unhealed. As for the other, he looked down below, and dared not look up to the heavens. He beat his chest saying, "Have mercy on me, for I am a sinner". So what did the Lord say (Luke 18: 13, 14) "I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted".

As you can see, he who asks for boasting does not go in, but he rather falls. As for he who humbles himself, he goes in through the door by means of the Shepherd and does not fall.

St. Augustine

+ The Pharisee uttered what is true. He said it not in the presence of anyone's hearing, yet he was condemned. What punishment is there for which the gossiping women fall in when speaking falsely everywhere, even in matters that they do not believe in?

Let us set up a door and a lock on the mouth (Sirach 28: 25). Endless wickedness spring up from gossiping. Because of gossip, families are shattered, friendships are broken up, and catastrophes occur. You man, do not be concerned about what pertains to your neighbor, and do not judge him.

St. John Chrysostom

+ One has prayed and so he was judged, because he did not offer his prayer wisely.

It is said 'two men' went up to the temple to pray. Christ calls those who pray 'humans' without regarding their riches or authority. He looks upon all the inhabitants of the earth as human, without any partialities on any side.

+ The mistakes of the Pharisee are numerous; first, because he was arrogant and insensitive. He praised himself even though the holy Book cries out (Prov. 27: 2) "Let another praise you, and not your own mouth- a stranger, and not your own lips".

+ Be sensible, you Pharisee, and put a door and a lock to your tongue. You are talking to God who knows everything; Wait for the judge's verdict. None of the skilful ones in their wrestling puts the crown on himself, and no one accepts the crown of himself, but he rather waits till the verdict is uttered. Bend with your arrogance, for pride is loathsome to God, and is detestful in His eyes. Though you fast, yet in your lofty mind you profit nothing from this abstinence, your toil is not crowned because you blend the dirt with the sweet fragrance. Even according to the Mosaic law, you cannot make an offering to God that has some defect, (Lev. 22: 21) "When anyone offers a sacrifice..... from the herd or from the flock, to be acceptable it must be perfect". Therefore, every fasting accompanied by pride, you have to expect, to hear about it from God "This is not the fasting I choose, (Is 58: 6). You do pay the tithe, but when you judge people in general, you wrong the one you have honored. Such

behavior is foreign to someone who pass God, for Christ has said, (Luke6: 37) “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned”. Also one of His disciples says (James4: 12) “There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbor?” No one in good health scorns a sick person laying on his bed; he rather fears lest he himself falls under the same pain.

+ But what about the tax-collector? He says he was standing afar; he dared not speak or lift up his eyes above. You can see him void of any daring word, as if he had no right to do so. But he was stricken with his conscience blaming him. He feared even to be seen by God, for being a man who has neglected His covenants, and for his leading a loose life, an impure one.

You can see him at this point accusing himself in a clear way. He was afraid of the Judge, and beat his chest in confession of his sins. He was unfolding his sickness as to a physician, asking for mercy. What was the result? Listen to what the Judge said (Luke18: 13) “this man went down to his home justified rather than the other”.

St. Cyril the great

+ The Pharisee prayed within and to himself, and not with God, because the sin of arrogance brought him back to himself.

St. Baselious the great

+ He did not only scorn all the human race but he also attacked the tax- collector. His sin might have been less if he had not attacked the tax- collector. But with a word he attacked those who were absent, and hurt him who was present.

St. John Chrysostom

St. Basilious the great, moreover, wished in his comment about the Pharisee’s behavior to show the clear difference between the arrogant thinking that is full of pride, and that of the sublime and noble thinking that soars above every whim, that is not destroyed by any despair, and which is not preoccupied by what is temporal. In other words, modesty does not mean the debased thinking, but rather its sublimity and loftiness in being united with the humble Lord Jesus. Thus we can carry with St. Paul the apostle the thoughts of Christ.

Finally, this parable implied a general symbolic picture: the Pharisee represents in general, the Jewish people who regarded themselves as righteous by the law than all other people. But as for the tax- collector, he refers to the Gentiles who were eager for the salvation, despite their lack of knowledge, and their being deprived of all that has gone before, which the Jews were blessed with, such as the covenants, the promises, the law and the prophecies.

3- The Return to the Simplicity of Children:

When the Lord offered us the parable of humility as the right way by which our prayers are answered, and thus be blessed not with material request, but with what is far greater, the fellowship with our humble heavenly Groom, now the Lord offers us a practical lesson to reveal His humility and His simplicity. He shows clearly how He is open- armed to the little children, that is, to the simple souls that love humility; for the evangelist says (Luke18: 15- 17) “People were bringing to Him even infants that He might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. But Jesus called for them and said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not stop them; for’ it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it!”

The Lord Jesus has come to the entire humanity, to the Jew as much as to the Gentile, to men to women, to the elders and to children and youths...etc. he came to everyone to establish fellowship with them. The church fathers have tasted of the sweetness of Christ’s fellowship. They have truly felt it is not appropriate that anyone be prevented, even if a little

child, of meeting Him so as to be blessed with their Savior. Even if he did not commit any actual sin, yet it is to have his nature blessed, the nature that he has received as being corrupted. This nature is renewed by the Lord Jesus in the baptism water, and accepts the Lord as a Friend to him.

+ Let the little ones come, let the sick come to the Physician, let those who are lost come to their Savior, let them come, and no one forbids them from coming.

If the branches, that is the children, have not yet committed any sin, yet they perish due to their origin (Ps.115: 13) “He will bless those who fear the Lord, both small and great”. Let the Physician touch the little ones together with the big ones.

If the loss is so common, then let the salvation be general. All of us have become lost, and have all been found in Christ. I wish He isolates no one from his salvation.

St. Augustine

(Revise the words of the saints: St. Cyril the great, St. Ambrosios, St. John Chrysostom and others in their interpretation of the gospel according to St. Mark (chapter10: 13-16).)

4- Being Released form the Bondage of Money:

This chapter focuses on prayer as the major way to be blessed with the divine fellowship. We have seen how prayer blends with the faith that motivates us to it, so we pray incessantly and with no boredom. In addition to this, prayer is not a mere life of worship; we rather blend with the believer’s characteristic that urges us to be as simple as children in the wisdom of the Spirit. Now, He warns us of a dangerous adversary who makes us lose the Spirit of prayer, which is that of money- worshiping. One young man has encountered the Lord Jesus, and he wished to follow Him, saying (Mark10: 17-25) “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” His love to riches stood an obstacle in his following the Lord Jesus.

We have previously spoken elaborately of this encounter and the conversation that was said between the Lord Jesus and this young man, when studying the gospel according to St. Mark. I have also mentioned some words said by the fathers regarding this point. I wish you to refer to it. I think it enough at this point to speak of other excerpts to some fathers so as to add to the previous one.

+ I do not hesitate to call this ruler a covetous one, and I rebuke his attitude with the Lord Jesus, but I do not say he is like the Pharisees who were testing the Lord.

St. John Chrysostom

He did not tell us to sell what we have since these are naturally evil things, otherwise God would not have made them. He did not command us to throw them away as bad things, but rather to distribute them and give them away. No one is condemned because he possesses something, but because he ruins what he possesses. According to God’s commandment, let us put these things aside for the forgiveness of our sins and so as to be blessed with the kingdom.

St. Basilios the great

+ Even if you are rich, the Physician is able to heal you. He will not take away the wealth, but He will take away the bondage to wealth, and the greed and love of covetousness.

St. John Chrysostom

+ God is able to satisfy the poor without our own mercy and kindness to them. But He asks the donors to be tied in love to those who accept their donations.

St. John Chrysostom

+ God is good; He alone is perfect in goodness. Since you are in His image, it is appropriate for you to be good. He is generous with everyone; therefore you have to be generous as well.

Avoid greed, and do not be miserly with your neighbor in any materialistic vain thing, for this is the worst catastrophe and ignorance.

Father John of Kronsdat

+ A Man of God is the one who has died of his essential needs due to his many kind deeds.

He who has mercy on a poor one is caught in God's care. He who impoverishes himself for God's sake, will find endless treasures.

St. Isaac the Syrian

It is amazing that when man gets rid of the love of the world, and when he is released of the bondage chains of the love of riches, and the money-greed, the Lord grants him much more blessing, even those that are temporal ones, in addition to the eternal glory. This is what our real Friend assured us of when He answered St. Peter, who has said (Luke18: 28) "Look, we have left our homes and followed You". And he said to them Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life".

We have previously mentioned the sayings of some fathers and their remarks on these words of the Lord Jesus, in the interpretation of St. Matthew 19: 26, 27; St. Mark10: 28- 30; I wish you to refer to them.

5- Accepting the Cross:

It is appropriate for the Christian to be released from the bondage of the love of money, and from the chains of asking for temporal wealth, so the Christian's soul be exalted by means of the Holy Spirit, in the release towards the heavens, so as to live with her Groom eternally, carrying His own qualities. Therefore it is quite impossible to be blessed with the crucified Christ in His glory, without sharing Him the cross. This is why the Lord Jesus directed the attention of His disciples towards His cross, His pain, and His death as a true way to glory.

St. Luke the evangelist says (Luke18: 31-34) "Then He took the twelve aside and said to them. 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For He will be handed over to the Gentiles; and He will be mocked and insulted and spat upon. After they have flogged Him, they will kill Him, and on the third day He will rise again'. But they understood nothing about all these things; in fact, what he said was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said".

We have previously commented on, through the father's sayings, on these holy words in the interpretation of St. Matthew20: 17, St. Mark10: 32-34; St. Mark8: 31-33.

However, the Lord has previously declared to His disciples about His sufferings so He prepares them for accepting them as a major quality in the life of their heavenly Friend. He constantly declares openly our commitment to accepting His sufferings so we embody His quality in us. Thus we will be equipped to enter the honorable circle of the Cross, and be partners with the Crucified.

+ The Savior has seen ahead of time the hearts of His disciples become disturbed about His sufferings; He therefore informed them of what He would endure as suffering and of the glory of His resurrection.

Pope Gregory the great

+ The Lord spoke privately with His disciples about His passion, for it was not appropriate for Him to declare this to the multitudes lest they be disturbed. But He told the disciples of this ahead of time so they be able to endure it when the time comes.

Isaiah had prior to this declared of it saying (Is.50: 6) "I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide My face from

insult and spitting”. He also proclaimed the cross (Is53: 13) “He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors”. But David prophesied about Christ’s resurrection (Ps.16: 10) “For You do not give me up to Sheol, or let Your faithful one see the Pit”.

St. John Chrysostom

+ God’s way is a daily cross. No one has ascended up to heaven easily. We know where the restful way goes to, and where it ends. But he who dedicates himself to God whole-heartedly, God will never leave him unattended. He will rather make this man be concerned for the sake of truth, and it is then that he realises all these sorrows sent to him were only an evidence of God’s care of him.

St. Isaac the Syrian

6- The Enlightenment: The opening of the blind man’s eyes.

The Lord asked us to persist in incessant prayer so we be constantly in His presence, and be blessed in talking lovingly to Him. The life of prayer is necessarily accompanied by the Spirit of humility, as the tax- collector did, blended with the simplicity of children, and the release from every bondage of the love of money, as well as accepting the cross joyfully. The purpose of this life is to open the inward vision so as to witness the heavenly Friend. It is at this point that we hear the blind man’s prayer, sitting on the roadside begging. It is an effective prayer, though of few words, for (Luke18: 38) “Then he shouted, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’”. With his heart’s cries, so full of faith, he managed to stop the entire procession and find the Lord Jesus ordering them he be brought to Him. When he drew near, the man heard the Lord say (Luke18: 41) “What do you want Me to do for you?”

I repeat, with the kindled prayer, the blind man was blessed in getting closer to the Lord, hearing His voice, and obtaining the blessing of vision, and following Him. The evangelist says, (Luke18: 43) “Immediately he regained his sight and followed Him, glorifying God; and all the people when they saw it, praised God”. His vision was opened so he sees the Lord, and his tongue to glorify God, and he was the cause for all the people to praise God.

We have previously spoken of the opening of this man’s eyes in our study of the gospels of St. Matthew (20: 29etc) and St. Mark (10: 46etc). I find it enough here to mention some few comments:

+ The Lord fulfilled this miracle on the way to manifest He does not walk, even in the street, without doing good. He offered Himself an example to His disciples, so we be useful in everything, and nothing false would be in us.

Father Theophlactius

+ Blindness refers to the human race, that was in our first father who did not find the brightness of the heavenly light. Thus darkness prevailed over the human race.

‘Jericho’ means ‘the moon’; it is the moon that diminishes every month, referring to our weakness in accepting death. But our Creator’s approach to Jericho granted the blind man vision. This means that He took the infirmities of our bodies, and so He brought back the vision it had lost.

Those who went ahead of Christ when He was coming, represent the physical lusts and much vice that work in our hearts, and that confuse our thoughts, and corrupt our prayers. But the blind man was crying out way louder, because whenever the restless thoughts attack us, we have all the more to pray fervently.

Pope Gregory the great

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Chapter XIX
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The Forth Gook
Our Faithful Friend
Our Friend in Jerusalem

The story of Zacchaeus the chief tax-collector who hosted the Lord Jesus at his house completes the story of the healing of the blind man. The opening of the eyes refers to humanity's need of obtaining the inward spiritual vision so it could follow His salvation journey. Thus humanity would enter with Him into Jerusalem, and accept His cross, and be blessed with His resurrection. The hosting of Zacchaeus to Him points to the Lord's wish that we not only witness Him and follow Him wherever He goes, but also that we open our hearts so He enters in just as in His house or in His Jerusalem, and that He declares His salvation in us. The evangelist also mentions to us the parable of the ten pounds, so the Lord declares that even though He wishes to enter every house, even the tax-collectors' homes and the sinners' homes, yet He asks for the honest hearts. He wishes we embody His quality of 'honesty', so He grants us a greater inheritance, an authority and a kingdom of an eternal standard. He gives ten cities to one, and to the other five... etc.

In this way our Friend wishes to open our eyes so we open our inward homes with Zacchaeus, and thus He rules in us. We also rule through Him, and be blessed with His heavenly places. This is the aim of our heavenly Friend's entrance into Jerusalem, and is the purpose of all of His salvation deeds.

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1- Zacchaeus Hosting The Lord:

We have already said that the opening of the blind man's eyes represents the opening of the inward vision, to be blessed in realising God's work for salvation, that the Lord was determined to fulfill by entering Jerusalem,. On the other hand, we have Zacchaeus who hosted the Lord Jesus, and this refers to the opening of the inner house for the Lord to dwell in, and would thus become His inward Jerusalem that He will enter, as if in a heavenly procession, to declare His glorious cross in it.

We can draw the following comparison between the opening of the blind man's eyes, and the hosting of Zacchaeus to the Lord Jesus:

Firstly: The blind man met the Lord which he was sitting on the roadside, begging (Luke 18: 35). As for Zacchaeus, he met the Lord inside the city, and he was on a sycamore tree (Luke 19: 4). Both of them were blessed with the Lord's grace. But as St. Ambrosius says "The Lord would heal him, but as for the other, the Lord invites Himself at his home without hearing a word of invitation, for the Lord knew what was in his heart".

Who is this on the way begging for the opening of his eyes other than every person who has not experienced inwardly the grace of God? But he did come to believe through hearing, and thus he ran, as on the roadside asking for the grace of enlightenment. Then the Lord opened his vision to lead him to the pastures of His sacred church. As for Zacchaeus who went up on the tree, he represents every person who is blended spiritually into the

church, which is the sycamore tree, or, he has been exalted by the Holy Spirit to the wooden cross, and shares the Lord in His passion. He thus is blessed with the Lord's dwelling in his inward home.

Secondly: The Lord Jesus left the blind man to cry out, and the evangelist says (Luke 18: 39) "But he shouted even more loudly". But the Lord did not wait for one word from Zacchaeus' mouth, He rather hosted Himself in his home. Why so? The former may refer to the active and struggling life that through love cries out incessantly, and thus the Lord opens the eyes to witness His kingdom. The latter refers also to the struggling and meditative life through a deep and divine love. This is exalted by means of the Holy Spirit to the cross, to see as through the sycamore tree, its Groom chanting out, asking to dwell in her constantly. He goes into her heart, and dwells in her depths, and she goes to Him, tasting of His divine loving mysteries that is indescribable.

I do not mean by so saying there are two divisions in the church- the workers, and those who meditate. But even if every person has his personal talent by which the Spirit distinguishes him, yet it is appropriate for the believer, in his true spiritual work, to live in contemplation of God's mysteries. In his true contemplation, let him remain a struggling laborer, till the last breath. It is one life 'in Christ Jesus our Lord' in which we live working by means of His Spirit. We are exalted as if with His wings, to be blessed with the partnership of His mysteries. In other words, let each one come forward, crying out with the blind man without any interruption, and up on the tree top with Zacchaeus on the sycamore tree. Thus our vision is opened, and we are blessed with His partnership and His constant dwelling in us.

Thirdly: This blind man sitting on the roadside begging, may represent the church members who came of Jewish origin. They were as if on the roadside who knew through the symbols, the shadows and the prophecies the Messiaiah and His work of salvation. These were under the law like blind men and hungry men, incapable of witnessing the divine mysteries. They were like poor beggars, for the law was unable to uplift them to God's embrace to see and to be satisfied. Rather, the law led them on the way to the Savior, to open their vision and see Him, for he is the joyful and satisfying Truth.

As for Zacchaeus, he represents the church members who came from a Gentile origin. These were similar to the chief tax- collector who was rejected by the Jews. They were as if short in stature with no previous spiritual experience; but once they were exalted through faith on the wooden cross with their Redeemer, they have become blessed with God's divine voice calling them to dwell in their midst, and to appoint them members of His household.

The blind man, being a representative of the triumphant Jews, asked the people and he was told that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by (Luke 18: 37). These multitudes are the fathers and the prophets who spoke to them of Jesus of Nazareth, who was passing among the Jewish nation to fulfill His work of salvation. As for Zacchaeus, he did not ask because he was as a stranger to the fathers and the prophets. But through faith, he went up on the cross to witness the Lord amongst the people. He also saw Him manifested by the fathers and the prophets whom he came to know through the Messiaiah and His cross.

Let us go back to the details of the story; that of Zacchaeus' encounter with the Lord Jesus as narrated by the evangelist St. Luke (Luke 19: 1- 4).

"He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax- collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see Him, because He was going to pass that way".

At this point, we notice the following:

Firstly: Some think the word 'Zacchaeus' means 'the justified' because Zacchaeus represents the triumphant Gentiles who have been justified by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Secondly: Zacchaeus was a chief tax-collector; we know that this job was detested by the Jews, and was looked upon as a job for the account of the occupying Roman empire, that had the scent of betrayal to the Jewish nation. This is what the tax-collectors. Were generally described as – lovers of money, in a greedy covetous spirit, merciless regarding their Jewish brethren. At any rate, many scribes and Pharisees, due to their religious positions, and due to people's regard of them, they managed to meet the Lord physically. They even asked Him to come to their banquets; and yet He never refused to go, for they may pull away from their apparent worship to the concept of the spiritual divine faith. But they rarely met Him on the spiritual level, or by being blessed with His divine thoughts. But as for this chief tax-collector, in people's eyes he represented the essence of defilement, and the last one to be interested in what comes from God. Yet, due to his hidden and hearty eagerness, he wished to see who Jesus was. He translated this eagerness to a simple job, which is that of climbing the sycamore tree to see who will be kind to him, by opening the doors of hope to every human soul so as to encounter the Savior of sinners. As St. Ambrosios says, "We are presented here with the chief tax-collector; so, who of us would ever despair of himself, after obtaining grace after a deceitful life?"

Indeed, the tax-collector category was included among the adulterers (Matt.21: 31), for these were two very detestful categories. The former were busy asking for wealth on others' account, whereas the latter category were looking for the physical lust on account of sanctifying the people. It was as if the two categories were destructive to the people. Despite this, the chief tax-collector was able to usurp by faith the Lord's entrance to his house, and even to his heart. As St. Cyril the great says, "Zacchaeus was the chief tax-collector, and he was totally given to covetousness. His only aim was to increase his gains, for this was the tax-collector's job. St. Paul called greed the worshiping of idols (Col.3: 5). This may be appropriate to those who do not know God, for they are preoccupied with greed. Because those tax-collectors practiced this sin openly, with no shame whatsoever, thus the Lord included them with adulterers, saying to the chief Jews (Matt.21: 31) "the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you". But Zacchaeus was no more counted as one of the tax collectors. He has become qualified for mercy at the hands of Christ who asks for those who are far to draw closer to Him. He also gave light to those in darkness.

St. Jerome thinks the sycamore tree here refers to the good deeds of repentance, where the repentant person tramples on the previous sins with his own feet. Through this, he looks up to the Lord as if from the tower of righteousness. For a second time he says, "Zacchaeus who was converted in a moment, became worthy of accepting Christ as a guest to him".

Thirdly: St. Luke the evangelist mentions that Zacchaeus was a rich man (Luke19: 2), and that he wished to see who Jesus was. He put into action this inward keenness into a job that has cost him much; for it was not an easy thing for a prestigious man, as the chief tax collector was, to climb a sycamore tree as a child would, and that people would see him there. The evangelist may have wished to confirm that not every wealthy man is wicked; but that every person- whatever position, abilities or circumstances he had- carries inwardly the natural law that takes his heart, if he wished so, towards seeing God's Word and being blessed with Him. God does not leave Himself with no witness in man's life. The rich as well as the poor, if they wish, could go to the Lord and in the sharing of the free work of grace.

St. Ambrosios says "Let the wealthy people know that wealth in its essence is not a sin, but rather the misusing of it is sinful. The money, that represents the stumbling block regarding the evil ones, is a means of practicing righteousness regarding the rich. Zacchaeus was rich, and therefore let us learn that not all the rich are covetous". St. John Chrysostom says, "Abraham indeed ruled over the poor's riches. All those who possessed wealth, in a sacred way, spent it for being God's gift for them". He moreover adds, "The Lord did not

forbid people from becoming rich, but rather to be slaves to their wealth. He wishes us to use it as a necessity, but not to be guards to it. The slave keeps guard, whereas the landlord spends the money.

Fourthly: On one hand, the sycamore tree refers to the cross by means of which the believer encounters his Christ, and hears His divine voice, and his inward home is opened in acceptance of the Lord being transfigured in him. On the other hand, a thought integrated with this one, the tree refers to the church which is the good Shepherd's shoulders, so as to offer him as a true fruit of love to her Groom. In other words, the church's major role is to carry the entire world, even if he is someone as the chief tax collector. The church carries him on her shoulders, not to condemn him or hurt his feelings, but rather to grant him the possibility of meeting his Savior. The church carries him in love and kindness, and thus kindles his heart more zealously towards the heavenly Groom. This is why, in truth, it has been said that the church is a true encounter between Christ and the repentant sinners. In it, the Lord finds His pleasure, for He can see the church offering Him in love, those souls He has died for. The sinner also finds the doors of hope wide open continuously, and the hearts and arms are ready in love to carry him to his Savior.

Fifthly: The encounter between the Lord Jesus and Zacchaeus who was up on the sycamore tree may imply a symbolic meaning of the Lord's salvation work: the sycamore tree here refers to the church that presents the sinful humanity to the Savior. The amazing thing is that the Savior leaves the surrounding crowds, joyfully gathering around Him, that is, He left the angelic hosts and the heavenly glories, and He denied Himself so as to look upon the man who has fallen; despite his evil and corruption, He meets him on a spiritual level, so as to tell him He has invited Himself in Zacchaeus, hurry and come down for I must stay at your house today. Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham". It is as if this mission represents the mystery of incarnation by which the Lord has entered our house, for He has embodied our nature. He does not dwell in this incarnation for a while, but He carried it in Him, and hid with His divinity so as to sanctify our nature eternally.

Sixthly: We may also say that the fig-tree refers to the faith seed that grows inside the heart so as to become a huge tree.

Man dwells inside it and through it he sees the Lord Jesus whom he has not seen before. At this point he is blessed with the Lord's dwelling in him, and he has left his malice.

By means of the tree of faith, Zacchaeus met the Lord despite his personal obstruction for being of such a short stature, as well as the crowds surrounding the Lord and making Zacchaeus unable to see anything. By the live and active faith, we are able to overcome every weakness we have, and soar above every situation so as to meet our Lord Jesus. We shall see Him, and He will see us righteous in Him. We shall hear Him calling us, and listen to His voice, and respond to His words.

St. Cyril the great says:

"He wished to see Jesus, and so he limbed a sycamore tree. In this way the seed of salvation grew inside him. He has seen Jesus with the eyes of godliness such is Zacchaeus' faith. Thorough this vision, he also saw the Lord through the human eyes. The Lord therefore was gentle to him and encouraged him, telling him (Luke 19: 5) "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down".

He wished to see Him, but the crowds obstructed him; but the crowds did not obstruct him as much as the obstruction of his own sins. He was short in stature not only physically, but spiritually as well.

There was no other way by which Zacchaeus could see the Lord except by going higher and climbing this sycamore tree that Christ was going to pass by.

This story implies a symbolic meaning; for no one could see Jesus and believe in Him unless he goes up a sycamore tree. This means his subduing his members that are on the earth, such as adultery, unchastity... etc.

Furthermore, Pope Gregory the great gave a similar interpretation to the concept of St. Cyril the great in the previous last phases. He saw the sycamore tree as a tree bearing fruits of small value.

Therefore, no one would be able to see the Lord Jesus unless he is exalted by faith above the temporal and vain matters such as the sycamore tree. He is exalted up on it by his meditation on the heavenlies, and his being blessed with the heavenly wisdom.

Seventhly: St. Ambrosios thinks when Zacchaeus, being of such a short stature, climbed up the sycamore tree to see the Lord Jesus, this refers to the believer's exaltation, who, due to sin, has become of such a short stature. He has been deprived of seeing the Lord, above the literacy of the law. He is no more under the law, but rather exalted by the Spirit above the law, so as to see with grace, the Lord Jesus. It is as if the climbing of the sycamore tree is the release from the literal thinking in the interpretation of the Holy Book, to the blessing of the deep spiritual thinking by means of the sacred wooden cross.

Eighthly: When the Lord Jesus entered Zacchaeus' house, Zacchaeus heard this divine saying (Luke 19: 8) "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham".

What does He mean by the salvation of this house?

(a) When a member in the family is sanctified, he could, by the Lord Jesus who dwells in him, to be a mystery of blessing and salvation to the rest of the members. The book of Acts reveals strongly how some people's encounter with the Lord Jesus urged their household to meet Him as well, and become blessed with His salvation in their life. We cannot deny that a member of the Lord Jesus could be accepted, and another rejected. Even the Lord warned us by His words saying that a man's enemies are his own people. Also He said that the father would rise against His son, and the son against his father ...etc. This warning is continued by the words of the Lord Jesus Himself, about the believer's mission, and how it is as the light of the world, able to, by means of Jesus the real light, to attract the people of the household to the Sun of righteousness.

(b) When a person is sanctified by the Lord Jesus. Entering into his life, the inward members of his household are sanctified as well. I mean, when the believer accepts the Lord Jesus, he presents to the Lord all the people of His household, that is, his body in all its potentials, his motives, his emotions and feelings, his thoughts and his capabilities. For God does not sanctify the spirit alone, but the body and the soul as well.

(c) He calls the house 'son to Abraham'; He no doubt, does not mean the actual house, but rather its inhabitant, or inhabitants who were blessed with the work of the Lord Jesus in them.

Zacchaeus was called Abraham's son not because of his biological lineage, but because of a greater thing, because he has had the same active and live faith of Abraham. By faith, Abraham left his land, his people, his household, and went after the divine call of God to a land in which he roamed so as to offer it an inheritance to his sons. Now, his son Zacchaeus has the same faith; he left his entire possessions to which he had previously clung as a land in which he dwelt, and also his own people that were as his own household. He was tied strongly to all of his possessions. But now he has loosened himself from all of these ties, and was offering his belongings to the poor. He moreover offered the rest to be given doubly to them he has previously dealt with wrongfully.

We may also say that Zacchaeus, when he was the chief tax collector, he was biologically speaking, Abraham's son. But now, that he has comes to know the Lord, he became a son to him according to the faith, and he even became God's son in Christ Jesus.

Ninthly: St. John Chrysostom thinks Christ's coming to Zacchaeus home has made Zacchaeus rejoice (Luke19: 6). He has become as if with wings flying above what is temporal. This is why he said "half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor".

We may say that sin wounds the soul and makes it lose its joy; thus it lives tied to the world and temporal things, and it loses its eternal hope and inward happiness. But when the Lord is transfigured in the soul, and when the soul hears His voice, it is filled with hope and is exalted above any earthly attachment, so it lives as if with the wings of the soul soaring up from one glory to the next. It is blessed with grace on top of grace, released from one strength to the next in real joy.

Tenthly: St. Augustine compares Zacchaeus who hosted the Lord joyfully, and the centurion who believed himself not worthy enough for the Lord to enter his house (Matt.8: 8) saying, "there is no contrast between them both, and neither of them is better than the other. The former accepted the Lord joyfully in his house (Luke19: 6) whereas the other said he was not worthy enough for the Lord to enter under his roof (Matt.8: 8). Both of them honored the Savior, even if in different ways. Both of them were miserable in their sin, and yet they obtained the mercy they asked for".

Eleventh: Because the Jews did not realize the purpose of Christ's work (Luke19: 7) "All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner; instead of rejoicing for the sinner's salvation, they grumbled against the Savior because He opened His heart to them and entered their homes so He rules over their hearts. As St. Cyril the great expresses "He raised them from the dead; why do they blame Christ, if He has raised him from perdition due to his fall and burial in spiritual corruption? To teach them this He said, 'Today, salvation has come to this house, for he is also a son to Abraham, because wherever Christ goes, there is necessarily the salvation. Let Him be inside us; if we believe, He is in us. By faith He dwells in our hearts, and we ourselves become a dwelling place for Him. It was appropriate for the Jews to rejoice because Zacchaeus has been saved in an amazing way, for he too, was counted among Abraham's sons that God has promised the salvation in Christ by means of the saintly prophets, saying, (Is.59: 20) "And He will come to Zion as Redeemer, to those in Jacob who turn from transgression, says the Lord". Christ has risen to save the inhabitants of the earth from their sins; He asks for those who have been lost, and saves those who have perished. This is His mission; you may say this is the fruit of His divine kindness.

Twelfthly: When the Lord Jesus entered Zacchaeus' home, He shone with the brilliance of His light on him. He cast out every darkness without His rebuking him with a single word, or even telling him one commandment. The presence of Christ Himself 'God's incarnate Word', was power enough to be able to pull out Zacchaeus from the love of money to his love for the poor, and his eagerness to give back more doubly to those he has previously wronged, even if this meant to pay them all what he possessed as a price for this.

In an excerpt attributed to St. John Chrysostom, it has been said, "Zacchaeus was not expecting the judgment of the law, he rather judged himself. Look, here is a miracle; He obeys without being taught. Just as the sun shines with its beams on the house and brightens it up by deeds and not by words, likewise does the Savior shine with the brilliance of His righteousness, so as to shatter the darkness of transgression, and thus the light shines in darkness".

Moreover, it is appropriate for us to notice that Zacchaeus did not offer his money to the poor and those who were unjustly treated; he rather offered his heart first to God. It is then that this came as a natural gift and without any cost, and truly joyful to God. St. Jerome says, "If we offer Christ ourselves as well as our wealth, He accepts the offering joyfully".

Thirteenthly: Our Lord Jesus Christ uncovers to us His salvation mission, opening to us the door of hope to everyone, saying (Luke19: 10) "For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost".

The scholar Tritilian uses these words in answer to the Agnostics who scorn the physical body, and consider it not obtaining any salvation, and that it does not rise on the last day, saying, "What do you think of those who perished? He is undoubtedly man, man in his entirety, and not part of him. For sure, it is man entirely. If sin has devastated him entirely, then he will be saved entirely as well".

St. Augustine uses the same words in rebuking the followers of Pelagius, who deny the basic sin. This is why he addresses the Lord Jesus on their behalf, saying, "If You have come to ask for, and to save what has perished, then You have not come for the children, because they have not perished, but have rather been born in the state of salvation. Therefore you go to the adults.

St. Augustine speaks to us of the salvation mission of the Lord Jesus and His coming to search for them who have perished, saying, "He has also found the lost ones; they have disappeared here and there behind the thistles, and so He came to them, to find them after He was being born by the thorns of His suffering. He actually came and found them, and saved them. They have been saved by Him who has been slaughtered for their sake".

2- The Parable Of The Ten Pounds:

The encounter of the Lord Jesus with Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector in his house, and the Lord's declaration of the salvation of His household, this is a fulfillment of the real joyful wedding. Zacchaeus' heart was exalted above every earthly thought, and thus he offered much more than what the law had ordered. He offered half of his money to the poor; and he also asked to give back four times as much to anyone he has dealt with wrongfully. In this way the Lord Jesus declares the divine wish in sanctifying every soul so that everyone would be a real kingdom to Him. Now, after declaring this present kingdom, the active one in the human life, the Lord wishes to declare this is only a first step to the eternal kingdom. He therefore offered us the parable of the ten pounds so we know that even though we are happy here with Christ's encounter, yet we live struggling in leading an honest life so as to obtain the perfect eternal glory of His kingdom.

The evangelist says (Luke 19: 11) "As they were listening to this, He went on to tell them a parable, because He was near Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.

It seemed that a new concept began to prevail among the Jews, when they saw what amazing deeds the Lord of glory, Jesus, made, and that the Kingdom was drawing very close. This means that the Lord reigns in Jerusalem, and that He establishes His kingdom on earth. This is why even the disciples were sometimes preoccupied with the position each of them would have in this quickly expected kingdom to come. It is as if the Lord Jesus wished to direct their attention away from the greatness of the kingdom by an earthly temporal thinking of being prepared for the eternal kingdom, by acquiring the quality of 'honesty'.

We have previously spoken of this parable in our above study (Matt. 25: 18). Now, I think enough said if we point out the following:

Firstly: The Lord Jesus says, (Luke 19: 12, 13) "A nobleman went to a distant country to get royal power for himself and then return. He summoned ten of his slaves, and gave them ten pounds and said to them 'Do business with these until I come back'.

Who is this nobleman other than the Lord of glory Himself, the Word who has become incarnate? He is a nobleman, actually 'the Only Begotten One'. He is unique in His eternal sonship to the Father. He denied Himself by His incarnation, so He converts us, we who have become slaves to transgression, to become God's sons, by being united with Him, and getting firm in Him. We therefore become noblemen with Him.

St. Cyril the great remarks on the expression ‘noblemen’ saying, “This parable represents, briefly speaking the core of provision that has been offered us. That is, Christ’s mystery from the beginning to the end”.

God’s Word has become man; and even though He has become like the sinful body, He was called a slave (Phil2: 7). But He was born free, a ‘nobleman’, for He was born of the Father in an unutterable birth. Indeed, He is God who is above all in nature and glory, reigning over us and even over all other creation by His absolute and incomparable perfection.

He is a ‘nobleman’ in being God’s Son; He has obtained this title, not like us, out of God’s goodness and His love to mankind, but because this concerns Him by nature, as being born of the Father, high above every other creation.

Therefore, when He has become the Word, who is the image of the Father, and the co-essential to Him, when He has become man like us (Phil.2: 8-11) “And being found in human form, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death- even death on the cross. Therefore God also highly exalted Him, and gave Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is lord, to the glory of God the Father”.

Surely, the Son is God by nature, then how is it that God has given Him this name that is above every other name? We say, that when He has become man, that is, when He has become human like us, He took the name of a slave, and He accepted our poverty, our humiliation, and after the fulfillment of the incarnation mystery, He has been exalted to the glory that is His by nature, and not as a foreign thing to Him that He is unused to. Neither is it as a foreign matter offered to Him from someone else, but that He rather obtained the glory that pertains to Him. In His words to the heavenly Father, He says (John17: 5) “So now, Father, glorify Me in Your own presence with the glory that I had in Your presence before the world existed”. He was clothed in the glory of divinity for being there and existent before all the ages and before the world, for He is the God born of God. When He became man, as I have said, there was no change in Him, nor any trading or exchange, but He remained just as He is permanently, by being born of the Father like Him in everything. He is (Heb.1: 3) “He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being”. Indeed, He has everything pertaining to God the father, for He is One with Him in essence, co-essential to Him in not having any change, like Him in everything”.

St. Basilios the great also remarks on the words ‘nobleman’ saying, “He is a nobleman not only regarding His divinity, but also regarding His humanity, for being of David’s lineage, biologically speaking”.

If this man, this ‘nobleman’ is God’s Word incarnate, then what does He mean by the words (Luke19: 12) “went to a distant country to get royal power for himself and then return”.

By the distant country, He may have meant the human nature that due to disobedience, has come to be far from God. It is as if this is a strange country to Him, particularly the Gentiles that have resisted the divine worship, and have excluded themselves away from God’s kingdom. He has come to us, we who were strangers and far away, so He might reign over us, and bring us closer to Him as members of His body. Thus He would carry us in Him as our own Head, and take us back to His kingdom, so we find by His means, a place in the Father’s embrace. This is what St. Paul the apostle proclaimed clearly, saying (Eph.2: 11-19).

So then, remember that at one time, you Gentiles by birth, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by those who are called ‘the circumcision’- a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands- remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the

commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace; in His flesh He has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.... So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints, and also members of the household of God”.

St. Basilios the great says “He went to a distant country, not the geographical distance, but the actual state. For God Himself is very ,near to each of us, whenever we are linked to Him through the good deeds. He is also far away whenever we leave Him and get far away from Him by our being so close to perdition. He has come to this distant country on earth, so He accepts the Gentile kingdom, as the Psalm says, (Ps.2: 8) “Ask of Me, and I will make the nations your heritage”.

Moreover, St. Augustine says, “The distant country is the Gentiles’ church that is extended to the ends of the earth. He has come to fulfill the gentile’s fullness; then He will return so as to save all of Israel, by their acceptance of the true faith, and their rejection of the stern Zionist concepts”.

The Lord has come down to us just as to a distant country by His acquiring our humanity. He established His kingdom in us, so that He returns us to His heavens as a kingdom of His own. As St. Ambrosios says, “He described Himself regarding His godliness and His humanity. He is rich, regarding the perfection of His divinity, and He has impoverished Himself for our sake. Even though He is the rich and the eternal King, and Son of the eternal King, yet He said He went to a distant country by acquiring our flesh; for He went the human way as if on a journey to a foreign land. He came to this world to prepare for Himself a kingdom of us. Thus, Jesus came to this earth to receive for Himself a kingdom of us, we to whom was said ‘God’s kingdom is in you’. At this point, the Son hands over His kingdom to the Father. By His yielding it, Christ does not lose it, but it rather grows. We are Christ’s kingdom and the Father’s kingdom, for it is said (John14: 6) “No one comes to the Father except through Me”. When I am on the way, I am for Christ; and when I cross by Him, I am for the Father. But wherever I may be found, I am through Christ, and am under His control”.

Now, what does He mean by the ten slaves to whom He gave ten pounds to trade with, till He comes to them again?

St. John Chrysostom thinks the number 10 refers to perfection. It is as if the Lord Jesus has offered to all the slaves, that is, to the entire human race, indiscriminately among the races, or nations, His different absolute gifts so they kindle them till He comes; thus He will reward them so they kindle them till He comes; thus, He will reward them for their honesty in performing their job.

He gave the ten slaves so that no one could protest and say that God’s message of salvation does not personally concern him. He has granted to every slave one of the ten pounds; that is, He offered His work and talents to anyone who desires it, without any partiality or discrimination.

Some think that the pound is equivalent to ten coins. This is a number that represents absolute perfection. It is as if the Lord, when He offered the pounds, that He wished everyone to trade in His great gifts to obtain honor and glory of a magnificent standard.

St. Cyril the great comments on these pounds distributed for the ten slaves, saying, “The Savior distributes His variable divine gifts on those who believe in Him. It is as if we confirm that this is the meaning the pounds stand for. Up till this day, the Lord continues to distribute as the Holy Book shows clearly, for St. Paul the devout one says, (1Cor.12: 4-6) “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of

them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good". He, furthermore, makes clear what he said by the manifestation of the variable talents, in this way; (1Cor.12: 8,9) "To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit. "In this way, he shows clearly by these words the variable gifts".

Secondly: The Lord Jesus differentiated between His ten slaves who have received the variable gifts; they are the ones who refer to the believers, some of whom struggle with the Spirit so as to win ten pounds, and some of whom gain five. Also, some are careless and are neglectful, and put the talent as if in a handkerchief; and between those who have rejected Him altogether, for He says (Luke19: 14) "But the citizens of his country hated him, and sent a delegation after him saying, 'We do not want this man to rule over us'." As St. Cyril the great says "Indeed, the difference is great between those who have received the talents, and those who have denied His kingdom altogether. These are rebellious people who throw away the yoke of His scepter, whereas the others work for serving His glory". The rebels of His kingdom may refer to the Jews who are the people of His city, for He said (John15: 24) "But now they have seen and hated both Me and My Father". As the evangelist St. John says (John19: 15) "The chief priests answered 'We have no king but the emperor, Caesar'."

What does the Lord mean by saying, (Luke19: 14) "sent a delegation after Him"? St. Augustine answers "They sent a delegation after Him because after His resurrection they persecuted His apostles and rejected the Gospel message".

Thirdly: The Lord says, (Luke 19: 15) "When he returned, having received royal power, he ordered these slaves, to whom he had given the money, to be summoned so that he might find out what they had gained by trading". What does it mean 'having received royal power'? We may say with St. John Chrysostom that the Lord Jesus reigned over all mankind rightfully, for He is the Creator of everyone. He also reigned by the right of justification and righteousness, for He reigns over the righteous people, and they obey Him willingly. In this way He has two kingdoms: the first one is an obligation on us for being of His creation. The second one is optional; so we accept His reign over us through the work of His grace. This is what He meant by the words 'having received royal power'.

St. Augustine says "He returns after taking His kingdom, for He comes in all glory, Him who who had previously appeared to them so modestly, saying (John18: 36) "My kingdom is not of this world".

Fourthly: Who is he who has gained with the silver pound that is his master's, another ten pounds? And who is he who has gained, with his master's pound, another five pounds? Who is he who has received a silver pound from his master, and has put it in a handkerchief, or has buried it in the ground? (Matt.25: 18)?

Undoubtedly, the ten silver pounds that the Lord has distributed to His slaves, are no other than "The Word of God", about whom was said it is like silver purified with fire (Ps121: 3), particularly the law, to which it is referred by number 10, for it has in its essence the ten commandments! The first took the divine commandment, not to bury it, but rather to gain ten pounds, that is, to achieve the angelic life, since the heavenly hosts are nine (including the cherubims and the seraphims) and thus he becomes the tenth host. As for the second one, who has gained five pounds, this refers to the one who is sanctified in his five senses by the Word of God. This means the sanctification of the body with its senses. As for the one who buried the silver pound in his handkerchief or in his land, it is he who hides the Word of God in the prison within himself, or within the limitation of his body, as did Zacchaeus prior to meeting the Lord, when he was besieged by his personal lust and greed.

Some think the first man who has gained ten pounds, that he refers to the servant who preaches the Truth, for with the Spirit of the Gospel, he gains the spiritual understanding of

the law (The number10). As for the reward, it is rule over ten cities. As St. Ambrosios says “These cities are the souls that are in His hands that are kindled with the divine talent or the Mesaiah coin, the Gospel Word. There is no greater reward for the true minister than to see the souls have accepted the Word and have yielded to the Spirit of Truth. He considers himself as if he has ruled with Christ over this soul, not to dominate, but to shed himself in loving service. As for the second man who gained five pounds, I think he represents the righteous man who, even if he has no talent for edification and preaching the Word, yet, through the sanctification of his five senses, he witnesses and thus he wins souls to the Lord. He therefore becomes as if he reigns over five cities. As for the last one, the one who put the talent in a handkerchief, as father Theophlactius says, the kerchief is used to tie the dead one’s face. It is as if this man, according to the Lord’s talent, it is dead, and so he buries it and deadens it.

As for the rest of the parable, you can go back to its interpretation in our book ‘The Gospel according to St. Matthew 25: 14-30, so we do not repeat ourselves. I find it enough to mention at this point the two following comments:

+(Luke19: 26) “To all those who have, more will be given”, he who has the faith, will be given the knowledge; and He who has the knowledge, will be given love; and he who has the love, will be given the heritage.

St. Clemendous the Alex.

+ (Luke19: 27) “But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them- bring them here and slaughter them in my presence”.

I wish no one be, careless in meeting the King, lest he be cast out of the Groom’s wedding.

I wish no one among us who receives Him sorrowfully, lest he be condemned as an evil citizen who rejects welcoming Him as King over him.

Let us come to Him joyfully, all of us. Let us welcome Him happily, and hold on to our banquet in all honesty.

Father Methodius

3- His Entry into Jerusalem:

We have previously spoken about the entry of the Lord Jesus into Jerusalem in our study of the Gospel of our teacher the evangelist St. Matthew (21: 1-11). Also the Gospel according to our teacher the evangelist St. Mark (11: 1-10). This is why I think it enough here to mention the following as a continuation for the previous two interpretations:

Firstly: our greatest Friend has opened the eyes of the blind man, so he gets aware of the divine fellowship, and so he sees deeply God’s love to him, and thus he accepts God’s fellowship (Luke18: 35: 42). The Lord invited Himself to go into Zacchaeus’ house to show His eagerness to enter our inner house, and sanctify us however much our sins may be. It is as if He has heard Zacchaeus’ answer to the invitation, this inward voice that has been expressed practically by Zacchaeus climbing the sycamore tree, and how he has rejoiced for the Lord’s visit. The Lord therefore offered the salvation to him and to his household, and He declared His fellowship to him. When the Lord mentioned the parable of the ten pounds, He made clear that this fellowship that the Lord has initiated to us freely, requires of us to be serious about it. He grants us His divine gifts, unconditionally on our part, except that we accept the gifts and kindle the talents. He befriends us on condition we accept responding to him, and embody His qualities in us. Now, the Lord enters Jerusalem to proclaim the price for this fellowship on His part: this is the offering of His life given for our redemption. This is why the evangelist says (Luke19: 28) “After He had said this, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem”.

He has come down to us, so He takes us up to Jerusalem, offering us His fellowship and His kingdom!

The evangelist continues, saying (Luke 19: 29) “When He had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, He sent two of the disciples”. As we have mentioned previously, we said number 2 refers to love that makes the two become one. Because love came in two of the commandments; God’s love and the stranger’s love, thus He began His ministry by sending the disciples to bring the donkey and the colt, when He was close to the two villages, that is, by means of love. Without love, we are not blessed by the Lord’s entry into our Jerusalem.

It has been said that Bethphage is a village at the Mount of Olives that concerns priests only, whereas Bethany comprised the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha, and they were of the common people. The sending of the two disciples occurred when they were close to the two villages. I can be bold enough at this point to say that the apostolic work in the church does not stop at Bethphage, that is, the priestly job alone, or the job of providing for the church; it is rather completed by the people’s work as well. Our apostolic church is Christ’s body, that embraces the priests as servants to the congregation, working for the account of their salvation and development. It embraces the congregation also, not as passive listeners, but as laborers with the priests in the unity of the Spirit, as true witnesses to the work of salvation. In the first church, there happened (Acts 8: 1) “That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria”. Those scattered ones began teaching the Word (Acts 6: 4). The apostles stayed in Jerusalem, facing the persecution strongly, and the people were released, not to flee but rather to preach and to be witnesses. I say, how important and needy it is at every age for the church to have its members work and toil, whether he be a man or a child. This is not only because the congregation needs him, but also to practice his membership in truth, and be a live laborer in the church, otherwise, if he is passive he will lose his vitality, and his motion will be paralyzed, and he will be a load in his own eyes as well as in others’ eyes.

Secondly: The Lord Jesus went to Jerusalem to shed His life for the sake of His friends, offering the entire price, enduring the cross to the end. In His tremendous love, He wished His disciples to share in this work, so He asked of them the very very least, for in His love to mankind, He wished man to have a role, even if its apparent value is so little, yet it is a vital role in the Lord’s eyes, the Lover of mankind. The Lord therefore said to two of His disciples (Luke 19: 30) “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here”.

We have previously spoken of the symbolic meaning of this action; but what we wish to point out clearly at this point, is that the Lord asked for their work however little it may seem in our eyes. This is similar to the father who offers all that he can to his son, then he asks his son for something seemingly very trivial, so that the son pays back to his father love for love. The son responds to his father’s friendship in a friendly way, and thus the father trains him to work zealously.

St. Basilios the great says, “It is appropriate for us, even if we are assigned the least job, to perform it in great zeal and love; we know well that what we perform through God is not trivial, but is rewarded with the heavenly kingdom”.

Thirdly: What does this tied colt, not ridden upon by anyone, that the disciples have untied and brought to the Lord Jesus mean? In our previous study of the gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark, we have seen how the donkey and the colt were a symbol of the Jews and the Gentiles. Everybody was out on the roadside, tied by the chains of disobedience, awaiting the gospel ministers to untie them from those chains by means of God’s Holy Spirit. Then they would become Christ’s modest and also kindled vehicle, ready to go to the eternal Jerusalem.

St. Ambrosios has another interpretation, for he says, “The donkey and the colt refer to Adam and Eve who were cast out of paradise. Both sexes were cast out, and those two sexes were called in those animals. St. Mark says (Mark11: 4) they were tied outside the gate”, because he who is not with Christ, remains outside, on the roadside. But he who is with Christ, remains inside. It was tied at the door, having no place, neither a manger nor any food to eat. It was tied by others so they may own it. But as for the Lord, He unties us to keep us in His hands; for grace is much greater than the chains”.

Fourthly: What beautiful words are the following (Luke19: 35) “Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it”. They brought the colt which belonged to others; they did not offer it to the Lord to sit on except after they threw their clothes on it. It is appropriate for the priest to urge everyone to make an offering to the Lord, through the priest’s preaching of the gospel. But it is appropriate for him when making offering to the Lord for others, that he too participates in giving. He may not have a colt to offer, so let him offer his clothes! He may not have the money, then let him offer the deadening of His body! In other words, the priest does not take for himself, he rather offers to the Lord Jesus, not only what belongs to others but also what God has granted him, even if it were his essential clothes.

St. Ambrosios sees what is even more than this; since the clothes refer to the body, the disciples’ taking off their clothes refers to their offering their martyrdom to the Lord Jesus, by shedding their bodies even unto death.

Fifthly: There is no doubt the disciples’ clothes were of a cheap kind, not of any value particularly because they have been used. But these clothes were similar to a throne on which the Lord Himself sits when coming into Jerusalem! Likewise, since the cloak symbolizes the body, then our bodies, in all of their righteous deeds and goodness, these bodies are counted valueless as long as they are out of Christ. But if we offer them unto the Lord, then He accepts them as an offering of love. The Lord then sanctifies the body, with its emotions, its feelings, its good deeds, and He smells in all of this a phasurable scent!

We can also say, there is no acceptance of a good deed as long as it is tied to our body or to ourselves. But if we take off our own selves, away from us, the Lord accepts every good deed as a cloak for Him to sit on, and also bless.

If the two disciples refer to the mission for the Gentiles and the mission for the Jews, then the clothes refer to the preaching job itself. There is no success or any acceptance of a preaching job unless the apostles work in submission to the Lord Jesus who works in them. This is what the setting of the clothes under Him means.

If the two disciples refer to the men of the Old Testament, the fathers and the prophets, as well as the men of the New Testament such as the apostles and the disciples, then, the purpose of the two testament men is to offer their work of prophecies and the preaching of the Lord Jesus, so they be hidden in Him and under Him, and thus He sits and reigns! They do not work for their own account, but rather to make the Lord rest by reigning in the believer’s hearts in the two testaments.

If the two disciples refer to love for they are two, then their putting their clothes under the Lord Jesus, this refers to the conversion of love into work! The Lord Jesus wishes to be restful concerning our love, the active one and not the theoretical one.

Sixthly: The Lord Jesus rested on the colt on which the disciples put their clothes. But as St. Ambrosios says, “The Lord of the world has no joy on being on the colt’s back unless this implies a hidden mystery. It is that He sits inwardly as a King enthroned in the depths of the human souls. He sits as a divine Knight, in the power of His godliness leading the mind’s steps. Blessed are those who carry on their soul’s backs such a Knight! Indeed, blessed are they who have put in their mouths the bridle of the divine Word instead of uttering falsehood”.

St. Ambrosios goes on to say a beautiful remark on our carrying the Lord Jesus secretly, saying, “Learn how to carry Christ, for He has carried you as a Shepherd, bringing back the lost sheep (Luke15: 6). He is joyful at your purification. Learn to be under Christ, and thus He will exalt you to God the Father above.”

Seventhly: The Lord Jesus was drawing close to the slope of the Mount Olives (Luke19: 37). We have said previously in the interpretation of the gospel according to St. Mark the apostle, that this mountain refers to the church in which the Lord implants His believers as the olive trees, bearing the oil of the divine grace, the olive oil, whenever it is processed in the grinder with his heavenly Groom. This mountain, that is exalted by means of the Spirit, motivates everybody’s hearts to live above what is earthly. It is a mountain that is continually green, a sign of the constant church life.

When drawing close to this mountain, the evangelist says, (Luke19: 37, 38) “the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they have seen, saying, ‘Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!’”

When the Lord draws near to us, just as to the Mount of Olives, He declares His fellowship so divine, and the impact of this love in our inner depths. Thus all of our being is converted by the Holy Spirit violin that plays such a magnificent praise song that no words could possibly express. Then, each of us becomes joyfull and chant in praises, as if carrying in himself a crowd of disciples to the Lord chanting with him. The vision is opened so it sees the amazing deeds, and every being declares accepting the Lord Jesus as King and Lord, saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven”. The soul is then exalted to see itself in heaven where it is blessed with the peace of its heavenly Groom, and in sharing His glory above, saying “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven”.

St. Cyril the great says “The disciples praised the Lord and Savior of us all, and called Him the King and the Lord, and the peace of heaven and earth. I wish we, too, give Him praise as with the psalmist’s harp, saying (Ps.104: 24) “O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all”.

The chanting of praise “Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven” (Luke19: 38); The entry of the Lord Jesus into Jerusalem to offer the Passover in our place, this pulled away the animosity that existed between the Father and humanity, or between heaven and earth. Therefore peace has come to be in heaven, because God no longer is an enemy to us, but He has rather become a true Father. As for the glory above, this means the opening of the heavens in all its glories for man, so he be praised in the highest heavens.

Our peace and our glory is peace and glory to the highest heaven.

We may also say with St. Augustine that the heaven is the human soul. The work of the Redeemer Christ, has brought back to the soul its inward peace, and being blessed in the exaltation to the highest so it glorifies its eternal Groom.

Eighthly: The evangelist St. Luke speaks of the Pharisees’ response saying (Luke19: 39, 40) “Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, ‘Teacher, order Your disciples to stop’. He answered, ‘I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out’.”

The Pharisees wished them to stop; but the Lord Jesus answered that the very stones would cry out as witnesses of His kingdom. As many of the fathers say, the Gentiles, when they worship the rocks, they become spiritually as hard rocks. Those ones who have got hardened in their spirits, their hearts and their thoughts, these have accepted the faith in the Lord Jesus, and so they shouted out.

Indeed, these have become silent; for the Jewish nation has denied Him when they saw Him crucified. The Jews have become silent, and so the Gentiles cried out in their faith-acceptance.

St. Ambrosios thinks the Lord's words have been fulfilled literally when the Jews were silent in praising and glorifying Him at the crucifixion moments, and thus the rocks have actually cried out, when there occurred an earthquake and the rocks creaked, and the graves opened...etc.

+ What are these rocks other than those who worship the rocks? If the sons of the Jews are silent, the Gentiles whether young or old, cried out.

+ We came from among the Gentiles; our fathers used to worship the rocks.

St. Augustine

4- His Weeping Over Jerusalem:

The Pharisees asked these should be silent, and in bitterness the Lord answered that if these are silent the stones would cry out (Luke19: 40). Indeed, those have become silent in praising Him, and have rejected the work of salvation, and thus the stones, which are the Gentiles cried out to the Lord as witnesses to Him, manifesting their faith. This matter was grieving to the heart of the Lord Jesus, who came offering His hand in friendship to all, and yet His very own have not accepted Him. They rather fought Him instead of befriending Him. This is why He began to pity and grieve over His own people. As the evangelist says (Luke19: 41, 44).

“As He came near and saw the city, He wept over it saying, ‘If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.’”

+Jesus affirmed that all of His blessings He mentioned clearly in the gospel, showed how He offered Himself as an example. He said “Blessed are the meek”, and then He confirmed later on (Matt.11: 29) “learn of Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart.” When He said “Blessed are those who weep”. He too wept over the city.

+I so not deny that the first Jerusalem was destroyed due to the wickedness of its inhabitants, but I ask myself: is it not appropriate for you to weep over your spiritual Jerusalem?

If someone errs after receiving the mysteries of the Truth, then he is to be wept for, because he was of Jerusalem and now he is no more.

Let us weep over our Jerusalem, for due to iniquity, it is surrounded by the enemies, which are, the wicked spirits. These besiege the city, and do not leave one stone on top of the other, particularly if this person has previously been chaste for a long time. He is then impassioned by his physical lust, and he loses his chastity and purity, and thus falls into adultery, and there is not one stop that is left on top of the other. As Ezckiel the prophet said (Ez.18: 24) “None of the righteous deeds that they have done shall be remembered”.

The scholar Oreganus

+ Jeremiah the prophet openly condemned the ignorance of the Jews and their arrogance, and rebuked them in this way (Jer.8: 8) “How can you say, ‘We are wise and the law of the Lord is with us’, when in fact the false pen of the scribes has made it into a lie? The wise shall be put to shame, they shall be dismayed and taken, since they have rejected the word of the Lord”. They have rejected God's word because they have no wisdom, and are unaware of the holy books, despite the Pharisees and the scribes appearing as having a good reputation, and that they are knowledgeable in the covenant and the law. They have not accepted the only begotten Son when He became incarnate, neither have they bent their necks in obedience to the advice He gave them in the gospel. By their evil conduct they denied God's word, and thus they have become rejected by God's just judgment. God tells Jeremiah (Jer.6: 30) “They

are called 'rejected silver' for the Lord has rejected them." It has also been said (Jer.7: 29) "Cut off your hair and throw it away; raise a lamentation on the bare heights, for the Lord has rejected and forsaken the generation that provoked His wrath." The fruit of their getting lost, is the disasters befalling them, and their endurance of all misery as a result of their grumbling against the Lord.

Their fall into this misery is not according to the good will of God, for He wants them to obtain the beatitudes in faith and obedience. When it is said that He looked upon the city and wept over it, this is to teach us how much He grieved over it, if this is appropriate to say about God who is above everything else. If He had not manifested His grief in a human way, we would not have realised how deep it was. He also wept over Lazarus, so we understand His grief for man's fall under the power of death, for He has created everything as incorruptible, and due to Satan's envy, death has entered the world. Likewise He wept over Jerusalem for He wanted to bless it, as I said, by her accepting the faith in Him and her appreciation of peace with God. This is what He called for by Isaiah, saying, (Is27: 5) "Let us make peace with Him", that is to say, let us make peace with God by faith, as St. Paul the wise one said (Rom.5: 1) "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ". But, as I have said, they hastened towards rebellion and uncontrolled scorn, thinking lightly of Christ's salvation and rejecting Him. This is why Christ blames them, telling them, "Do you not know what is for your own peace? Do you not know what is profitable and essential for your own peace with God?"

Even before the incarnation, the Israelites proved themselves to be unworthy of Christ's salvation, for they have scorned the partnership with God, and have established for themselves false gods, and have killed the prophets even though they kept warning the Jews of deserting the living God, and commanded them to be committed to God's holy commandments. Despite this, they did not respond, and they grieved God in many ways, even when they were called for salvation.

This is what the Savior Himself informs us with, when He said (Matt.23: 37, 38) "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate!"

You can see Him here, how He truly indeed wished to give them His mercy, yet they rejected His help. For this reason, they fell under the judgment of God's holy law. They have become deprived of being members in His spiritual fold. One of the saintly prophets said to the Jewish nation (Hos.4: 5) "and I will destroy your mother. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to Me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children."

He compares Jerusalem to night; because the darkness of ignorance has obstructed the hearts of the Jews, and has blinded their vision; therefore they were given to destruction and killing. In this way Jerusalem, the sanctified famous city, fell under the destruction catastrophe, as mentioned in history. Isaiah the prophet confirmed this prior to anyone; for he cried out loudly amongst the Jewish crowds, saying, (Is.1: 7) "Your country lies desolate, your cities are burned with fire; in your very presence aliens devour your land, it is desolate, as overthrown by foreigners." This is the price for the vain and false glory that belongs to the Jews.

This is the punishment for their disobedience, and this is the suffering that justly befell them due to their arrogance. But as for us, we have the hope of the saints, and every blessing, because we honor Christ in faith.

St. Cyril the great

+ The merciful Savior wept over the fall of the deceiving city which did not know what would befall her; “If you only knew, you too, you would have wept as well.” You are happy now, because you do not know what is about to befall you.”

He says (Luke19: 42) “if you had only recognized on this day...” because when the city had yielded to the physical passions, it obtained on this day what is for her temporal peace. The Lord made clear what these things offer her, saying (Luke19: 42) “But now they are hidden from your eyes”. If it had not been hidden from her heart’s eyes what future evil would befall her, she would not have been happy with the present affluence. For this reason He added on the spot the punishment that would befall her “The days will come upon you” (Luke19: 43) Here He refers to what happened by means of the two Caesars of Rome: Vespasian and Titus when they destroyed Jerusalem.

Our Savior has not ceased to weep up till now through His elict when He sees a person leaving his good and righteous life and going the malicious way!

Indeed, the evil soul has a certain day; for if it is joyful for a transient time, when it finds its peace in the temporal matters, thinking it is obtaining its pleasure in what is earthly, yet it avoids the future look that confuses its present pleasure.

Pope Gregory the great

5- The Purification of the Temple:

The Lord Jesus has come to establish His fellowship with mankind. When Jerusalem rejected His fellowship, it exposed itself to absolute destruction, in great stupidity of hers. But the Lord did not stand in folded arms, but He rather offered two jobs: that of purifying the temple of the buyers and sellers (Luke19: 45, 46), as well as teaching in it everyday (Luke19: 47, 48). If the first act is passive in which He expelled evil, yet the second one is positive in which the Lord declared His fellowship to His listeners.

The evangelist says (Luke19: 45, 46) “Then He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; and He said it is written, “My house shall be a house of prayer; but you have made it a den of robbers.””

We have already spoken elaborately about the purification of the temple in our interpretation of St. Matthew’s gospel (Matt.21: 12; 13; St. Mark11: 15-17).

+When He mentioned the evils that would befall the city on the spot He entered the temple to cast out those who bought and sold in it. He showed the destruction of the people falls in a major way due to the iniquity of the priests.

Those sitting in the temple who accepted the money, no doubt, practiced pressure that would harm those who offered nothing.

Pope Gregory the great

+God does not want to have His temple a place of gathering for the sellers, but a place of sanctification. He wants to assure us that priesthood is not fulfilled through trading in religion, but rather by voluntary and free giving.

St. Ambrosios

St. Cyril the great thinks in his remarks on St. Luke’s gospel, that the casting out of the sellers is a symbolic act; Christ has come as our Passover to yield Himself up. Thus the sacrifice off blood had to be obsolete; for there is no more any need of animals or birds to be slaughtered.

The scholar Oreganus thinks the buying and the selling here refer to the change in the spiritual service to a work of trade, particularly the selling of the pigeons, for it refers to the selling of the Holy Spirit gifts.

Why did the Lord say about the temple “You have made it a den of thieves”? This is because the thief does not mind who is around him; he rather robs and kills. In this same way the Jewish leaders changed their mission; for instead of offering the word of the Truth, the one that grants life, they began to exploit their positions in trading. They killed their brethren spiritually by being an obstruction to them, and by killing the faith by their behaviour. If the faith concerning the temple stands for the soul concerning the body, then the leaders’ actions cast out the faith, so that the temple stays as a dead corpse. This is the thieving process, in the spiritual concept.

6- His Teaching in the Temple:

(Luke19: 47, 48) “Everyday He was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill Him; but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spell bound by what they heard.”

+ Our Savior did not cease to preach the word, even to the unworthy ones, and those who denied Him.

Pope Gregory the great

The people, in all their simplicity, clung to the Lord Jesus, whereas the knowledgeable ones were deprived of Him, such as the chief priests, the scribes and the prestigious ones. They have deprived themselves of the Lord Jesus’ grace and His heavenly gifts. The meek and simple ones entered His divine fellowship, whereas the wise ones lost this divine gift. As St. Cyril the great says, “Does not this increase their punishment? For, those who were fit to preach hindered the work of preaching.”

+ + +

In the previous chapter, the Lord of glory Jesus came forth to Jerusalem to offer His life a price for our fellowship to Him. This fellowship cost Him all this price, only to be accepted by the simple ones, who responded to it. But as for the leaders who were reportedly wise these have rejected the Lord in every possible way. At times they resisted Him when He taught and doubted His authority. At other times, they accused Him as provoking the people against the authorities, and motivating them not to pay the taxes...etc. This resistance, in fact, was to hide their shepherding of themselves instead of shepherding the people, and taking care of their personal good instead of the general good. The prophet Ezekiel has previously declared as the mouthpiece of the Lord (Ez.34) "Mortal, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel... Ah, you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the sheep. You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and scattered, they became food for all the wild animals.... I will demand My sheep at their hand, and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. I Myself will search for My sheep, and will seek them out.... I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness... I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice."

In this way the Lord reveals to the shepherds their absolute failure in shepherding His good sheep, so He takes over shepherding His people. He thus declared His practical love that was shed on the cross.

This line is clearly manifested in the four gospels in the period between the Lord's entry into Jerusalem until His crucifixion, and in the readings of the Passion Week, where God's spirit reveals the failure of the Jewish denying shepherding and its failure; so that the Lord Himself takes over the shepherding of His people by means of the cross.

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1- The Resistance of His Teaching by Denying His Authority:

We have said that the Lord Jesus came to offer His friendship to humanity not through the mere emotions, but by means of uplifting man to His image, and being blessed by his life in Him. This is why He cast out the sellers and purified the temple, then He stood up to teach. He started to attract people to Him in true love, in a sanctified life.

Before all of this, stood those who resisted Him, such as the chief priests, the scribes and the elders, in great amazement. He has attracted the multitudes in authority even though

He was not of Aaron's lineage, and He had no official role in the temple. Then they began to question Him about the mystery behind His authority, not as an interrogation, but rather because of their envy and their fear for their positions. The evangelist said the following:

(Luke 20: 1-8) "One day, as He was teaching the people in the temple, and telling the good news, the chief priests and the scribes came with the elders and said to Him, 'Tell us by what authority are You doing these things? Who is it who gave You this authority?' He answered them, 'I will also ask you a question, and you tell Me; Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?' They discussed it with one another, saying if we say 'from heaven' He will say, 'Why then, did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'of human origin' all the people will stone us, for they are convinced that John was a prophet. So they answered that they did not know where it came from, then Jesus said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things'."

We have previously spoken of this discussion between the Jewish leaders and the Lord Jesus in the interpretations of St. Matthew's gospel (21: 23-27) and St. Mark's gospel (11: 27-33).

I find it enough at this point to mention the following:

Firstly: St. Augustine says the evangelist St. Luke did not mention the going of Christ to Bethany after His purifying the temple and His return, and also His dealing with the barren fig tree, and His words to His disciples who were amazed on seeing the fig tree wither. The evangelist speaks of the discussion between the Lord Jesus and those leaders.

Secondly: The chief priests and the scribes with the elders posed two questions, not for the sake of information, but rather for provocation so they have their wish in wrecking Him. They said 'Tell us by what authority You do these things?' By saying so they meant He was not of the Levi lineage, nor any other leadership that had the right of teaching; then, how could He dare teach in this way in the temple? The Lord could have answered them from the exact books of the covenant that they assumed He was breaking them by His teachings, and that He was of the lineage of Judah and not that of Levi, and also from the books of the prophets. In the five books of the law and the covenant, He made clear that Levi, of the lineage of his father Abraham, knelt down to Melchizadec, who is only a symbol of the Lord Jesus, and offered Melchizadec the tithes. Is it not appropriate by these sepulchres that refer to Him, to teach Abraham's children? The Lord could have mentioned to them countless prophecies about the truth of His mission, and could have assured them He is the Messiah.

If those leaders had come to inquire about the truth, the Lord would not have hesitated to reveal Himself according to their books. But the Lord knew they had come for stupid useless arguments, so they divert Him away from the essential ministry. This is why He did not answer their questions unless by another question that frustrated them.

The servant who embodies his Lord's Spirit does not begin silly arguments that corrupt his mind, and takes up his time away from the main serious job for the salvation of his brothers. This servant should behave as Nehemiah did when the enemies came up to him asking him for discussion, and so he answered them that day was a day for work (Neh. 6: 3,7).

The second question is, "Who gave You this authority?" They had previously accused Him He was casting out devils by Beelzebub. They wished to make the people doubt Him, that in His teaching He does not have this authority from God, but rather from Satan. At this point, too, He confused them by asking them about John's baptism; because John had declared by baptizing Him the mystery of the Lord's authority, when the Father openly witnessed the Messiah at the baptism moments in the Jordan.

2- The Resistance of the Vine dresser (The parable of the wicked tenants).

In their argument they wished to accuse the Lord Jesus of His teaching, that it was not

based on the lawful covenant, since He was neither a priest nor an official teacher, and that the source of His authority was to be doubted. Therefore the Lord asked them about John's baptism so as to defeat their cunningness. Now that He recounted to them the parable of the wicked tenants who wished to steal the vineyard from its owner, He put those teachers to shame in a symbolic way. Thus they wanted to kill Him, had it not been for their fear of the multitudes. He showed them it was not He who trespassed on the divine authority, but that He was the Son, the Heir who was resisted by those tenants that the Lord appointed in His vineyard to work, and how they wished to usurp the vineyard for their own personal account.

We have previously studied this parable in our interpretation of St. Matthew's gospel (21: 33... etc.) St. Mark's gospel (12: 1...etc.) I therefore find it enough at this point to speak of the following:

Firstly: The Lord Jesus showed His honoring man in two major aspects: the first one is that He compared God, the owner of the vineyard, to man, thereby honoring us by this comparison. As for the other aspect, it is His words about giving the vineyard to tenants, and traveling to a distant country. God did not leave His vineyard and went to a distant place geographically, because He is present in every place; so how much more so in His own vineyard? Neither does He quit His shepherding, for His care is there continuously. But His words saying that He left to a distant country, this is an expression of His sanctifying human freedom. He has given the vineyard to the tenants, giving them the absolute freedom to act, as if He has left them and went far away, not that He would not support them, but so as to oblige them to act in a certain way in their shepherding. He does not pressure the shepherds to conduct themselves involuntarily in their shepherding job.

Secondly: What is the first the owner of the vineyard ask for from His tenants? Father Theophlactius answers, "What will God gain from us except it be His knowledge, which is for our own good?"

Thirdly: Who are those three slaves who went ahead of the Heir, whom the tenants persecuted instead of offering them the fruits for the owner of the vineyard's account?

The first slave the Lord sent to collect for His account is the natural law that God has granted to humanity, even before the law of Moses. Man broke this natural law, a matter made very clear in the killing of Abel. Cain presented the scent of envy stained by innocent blood instead of the brotherly love. The men of faith, before the law, lived through many hardships due to malicious people.

The second slave the Lord sent is the Mosaic law at the hands of Moses. Despite this, Moses suffered a great deal from the Jews, due to their constant grumbling. Moreover, the law of Moses remained scorned at by all the Jewish leaders, by transforming it from the spiritual to the fatal literacy. The Jewish leaders appeared as zealous for the law and keeping it protected, whereas in the brilliant outer appearance of their life and conduct, they have killed the law, and ruined its purpose and its message by their literal teaching of the law of Moses.

The third slave offered by the owner of the vineyard is the prophecy; for there has been sent a group of prophets, urging the people to repent, and they also proclaimed the Messiaiah, the Savior's coming. But these prophets were faced with ordeals, persecution and killing.

We can say that the Lord Jesus, when speaking particularly to the Jewish rulers, these listeners who were present were responsible for the killing of those three slaves. The present leaders in the time of the Lord Jesus, they themselves were working against the natural law, as well as against the law of Moses and also against the prophecy. Concerning their life and their conduct, they did not even regard the natural law itself. Concerning their education, they have killed the law of Moses by applying it literally and in a hard way; for they held on the shadow and the symbol without any concern for the Truth and who those symbols referred to.

Regarding the prophecies, they wrecked them because even though they referred to the Lord Jesus yet they rejected the Savior, the aim of the law and the subject of the prophecies.

Fourthly: Some may find it hard to call the Lord Jesus Himself the Heir; for has the Father died so the Son inherits Him? God forbid! He has offered Himself the Heir not to take the money from His Father; for what is the Father's is the Son's. but He called Himself the Heir for He has left His glory voluntarily, and He denied Himself so He may represent us and be our delegate, so that when the Lord Jesus died in the body, He rose and obtained in our name what He has as our inheritance by our partnership with Him in glory.

The Lord Jesus has carried this title 'Heir' for the sake of His being the head of the church, so the church may inherit in the name of its Head, and with Him and in Him, what is actually His. This is why St. Ambrosios says "Christ is the Heir and at the same time the Sponsor."

Fifthly: We can understand from the following words (luke20: 14) "But when the tenants saw him, they discussed it among themselves and said, 'This is the heir; let us kill him so that the inheritance may be ours'". The Lord Jesus wished to show them clearly that what they were doing against Him, is not because they do not know, but rather out of envy. They know, through the law and the prophets that He is the Messaiah, but He was not according to their fancy, and this is why they killed Him purposefully on the cross.

Sixthly: It is understood from the words (Luke20: 15) "So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him", from the literal aspect that He was crucified in Golgotha, out of Jerusalem. It could also mean that the Jews, who are the tenants of the vineyard, have handed over the Heir to Pilate and the Roman soldiers so they kill Him. They gave Him to be killed out of the vineyard! We can also understand that His going out of the vineyard to be killed, could only mean His rejection. The ungrateful wicked ones cast Him out of their hearts, the Lord's inward vineyard, and they offered Him the suffering instead of love!

In this way we are able to understand the words of St. Paul the apostle (Heb.13: 13) "Let us then go to Him outside the camp and bear the abuse He endured." This means that if we have become the followers of the Crucified, we too, are rejected by the world. Thus we will have no place in the hearts, and are expelled out of their hearts, and we are handed to their hatred, enduring all of their scorn and humiliation towards us. In other words, the believer does not expect, even though he offers all the love to the world, that the world rewards him with love for love. Rather, the world repays his love by casting him outside, so he carries the cross with his Redeemer and accepts His shame.

Seventhly: The Lord Jesus asked them (Luke20: 15) "What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?" The Lord did not wait for the answer to justify what destruction would befall them. And the shepherding work would be taken away from them. The answer was absolutely clear, with no need for any discussion (Luke20: 16) "He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." St. Basilios the great said He wanted to rebuke them so they reconsider their deeds, and thus repent. It is as if the Lord Jesus till the last moments before His crucifixion, wished the Jewish authorities to reconsider their spiritual accounts. The Lord was eager for everyone's repentance, and their return to the Truth.

His words "He will come" refer here all the more to the coming of the Holy Spirit on the church; when He comes on the church, He forms it anew under the leadership of the Lord's disciples and His apostles instead of the old vine dressers.

It is as if this parable offers a brief symbolism for God's work of salvation, His provision and incessant care for man. he therefore spoke of the natural law gift, the law of Moses, and the prophets, who are the three slaves the owner of the vineyard has sent, He also spoke of the divine incarnation which is the Heir's coming, and His crucifixion out of the city, as well as His casting out the old vinedressers, and appointing new vinedressers in whom the Holy

Spirit works.

Eighthly: When the Lord spoke of the Heir's rejection, and their killing Him out of the city, He declared He is the rejected stone even though He is the corner stone. He therefore says (Luke 20: 17, 18) "The stone that the builders rejected has become the corner stone. Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone on whom it falls."

We notice the following in this analogy:

(a) This is taken from the Old Testament (Ps. 118: 22) and it has been fulfilled now; what these wicked leaders do, who were supposed to establish the spiritual structure on the Messiah, the cornerstone, was only seen by the psalmist and was proclaimed. It is as if the Lord Jesus is telling them "What you are doing now, has been previously declared by your prophets in all grief and bitterness.

(b) The Lord Jesus was called 'the cornerstone' as a sign of His divine incarnation, and His self-denial, for He has accepted our nature of dust. He did not come as a great King, but He rather came as a man, denying Himself, and thus He has become a rejected stone by the builders. This stone has been previously proclaimed by Daniel the prophet (Dan. 2: 34) that this stone is not hewn by hands, it is a small stone that becomes a mountain that fills the entire universe.

(c) This rejected stone, thrown away out of the city, has come to be the cornerstone on which the church is founded, that embraces Jewish members as well as Gentile ones. They assemble together, and unite as if on a cornerstone.

Ninthly: St. Augustine thinks those who fall on it and are shattered are the ones who rejected Him when He came down, denying Himself as if He were the last of all; thus those denying Him will fall on this modest stone as if on the ground. But those the cornerstone will fall on, these will be crushed, and they refer to those who died in their sins, with no repentance. Thus the Lord of glory will come, as on the clouds from above and fall on them, for he says, "They themselves fall on Him, for He has come down in modesty, but because He is the One above He will fall on them and crush them when He comes in His glory. Those are the ones He has shattered before in His lowliness.

3- Questioning Him Concerning the Taxes:

The Leaders attempted to make the multitudes doubt the authority of the Lord Jesus. The Lord therefore asked them about John the Baptist's baptism, if it were from heaven or from the earth. Thus they became bewildered, lest they appear before the people they did not know the truth. There also came the parable of the vine-dressers, urging them to repent so the vineyard would not be taken away from them. But instead of repentance, they wished to lay their hands on Him at this hour, but they feared the people (Luke 20: 19).

Now they began to observe Him so they catch Him for one word. In deceit they asked Him concerning paying the taxes, not to know His opinion, but that if He says to pay the taxes, He would be regarded in the eyes of the people as paying favours to the occupying Roman authorities, and as a result the people would lose their trust in Him as a Savior to save them from the Roman rule. And if He says not to pay the taxes, they would report Him to the Roman authorities for provoking the people to rebel.

The evangelist says (Luke 20: 23-26) "But He perceived their craftiness and said to them, 'Show Me a denarius. Whose head and whose title does it bear?' They said, 'The emperor's'. He said to them, 'Then give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's! And they were not able in the presence of the people to trap Him by what He said; and being amazed by His answer, they, became silent."

When speaking of the fathers' comments about this excerpt in the gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark, we said that the Lord Jesus here offers man an important civilian

principle: to make God glorified in Him, it is important to give to Caesar what is Caesar's. He has to give to the country what her dues are, and he also has to give all whom he deals with, their monetary, emotional or social rights. Our worship to the Lord should not be on others' account, rather, our love and submission, and giving to others is part and parcel of our spiritual life, made perfect with our worship to God. We give others not because we fear them or pay favour to them, but as a true witness we inwardly bear for our honesty and our love to the Lord Himself.

Let us also give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's. This means to give the body what we should towards ourselves, and to the spirit what is the Spirit's. Our spiritual life is not a destruction of our body, that is, Caesar, it is rather a sanctification to the body.

Some fathers, such as the scholar Oreganus, think Caesar here means the world, or the adversary. If we leave in the heart the love of this world, then the world will find its right to pull us to its side. Likewise if Satan has a place in us, he will invade us. It is therefore appropriate for us that Caesar of the world finds nothing that is his in us, and so does not pull our hearts to him. Let us remember the example of our Lord Jesus who said the ruler of this world is coming, and has nothing of him in it! Let the ruler of this world come, and let the evil adversary work with all his might against us, for he will find nothing inside us for his account, and so will run away in defeat, being overcome by us.

The great day of the Lord will come, and God will come to take those that are His own, and the adversary will also come to take those that are his own. Let us be to God, and not to Satan, and God will possess us as children for His kingdom. As many fathers put it, we are 'God's coin' or 'His denarius' on which His image is engraved. If His picture has been lost in us, we have to be washed with the baptismal water so His image would appear all anew. Let us keep this divine image in us by means of constant repentance, so that whenever the Lord comes, we find His denarius with His image on.

Here are some of the father's words concerning this issue:

In every condition, we are more ready than other people in paying the taxes imposed on us, whether they be the regular annual taxes or the exceptional urgent ones.

We pay back the worship to God. As for the other matters, we offer them gladly. We serve you and come to know you as kings and rulers over the people. We also pray for your royal authority so your judgment will be just.

St. Justin the martyr

+ Therefore return Caesar's image that is on the coin to Caesar, and God's image that is on man, (Gen.1: 26, 27; 9: 6; 1Cor. 11: 7) has to be returned to God.

In this rightful way, the money is given back to Caesar, but as for your souls, they are God's.

The scholar Trifilian

+ Let us follow the Savior's words, not as literary meaning in its grammar and synthesis 'Give what is Caesar's to Caesar, and what is God's to God', that is, pay the taxes you are supposed to pay. But who of us opposes to pay the taxes that concern Caesar? Thus, this statement implies a hidden secretive meaning.

Man has two pictures; the one he has received from God at the creation time as mentioned in the book of Genesis (Gen.1: 27) "So God created humankind in His image". The second picture is man's image of earthly dust (1Cor.15: 49) which man took by means of his disobedience. And his sin when he was expelled out of paradise, when he was tempted by the ruler of this world (John12: 31).

Just as the coin bears the image of the ruler of this world likewise is the one who fulfils the deeds of the king of darkness (Eph.6: 12) he, also, bears his image on it.

Jesus commands us to give back this picture and to pull it off, so we may bear the

original one that God has created us in, and so we be similar to God. In this way, we give back what is Caesar's to Caesar, and what is God's to God.

In the very same meaning St. Paul says (1Cor.15: 49) "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven." The words therefore 'Give to Caesar what, belongs to Caesar' only means 'Leave the earthly image of man'. throw away the earthly image so you obtain the heavenly image, and thus you give to God what is God's.

The scholar Oreganus

Moreover, St. Sveris the Antiochian offered us an elaborate article, wonderful indeed, having the title 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's? the deacon Youssef Habib translated and published it; I wish you to refer to it. The saint pointed out the group that came up to the Lord Jesus had tw

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δB CÀ ... < γ ζ □ the second was represented by the Herodians (Matt.22: 16). They came to ask Him if they were to pay the taxes to the Roman governor or not to pay.

St. Sveris the Antiochian says the Pharisees used to urge the people not to pay the taxes, believing they had no other king except God alone, and that he who paid the taxes would be resisting the old law, and exchanging God for Caesar who is an alien. They relied on the literal interpretation of some of the written phrases, such as: (Deut.32: 9) “the Lord’s own portion was His people, Jacob His allotted share.”

(Deut.17: 15) “You may indeed set over you a king whom the Lord your God will choose. One of your own community you may set as king over you; you are not permitted to put a foreigner over you, who is not of your own community.” (Is.33: 22) “For the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Ruler, the Lord is our King; He will save us.” The book of Acts also mentions (Acts.5: 37) That ‘Judas the Galilean’ gathered a lot of people who followed him, and he led them to revolt against Caesar, and they refused to pay Caesar the taxes... and this Judas was a Pharisee.

On the other hand the Herodians advised their Jewish brethren to stay in submission to the Romans, and to pay their due taxes so they enjoy peace and serenity.

4- Questioning Him Concerning the Resurrection:

In the parable of the vinedressers, the Lord Jesus spoke of them (Luke20: 14) “They discussed it among themselves.” Even though those vinedressers are evil and are divided among themselves, yet they unite together in the resistance spirit against the Lord Jesus, and conspire against Him. Now, the chief priests and the scribes failed in their conspiracy against the Lord, when they tried to disfigure His authority in His teaching (Luke20: 1-8). Also some of the Pharisees, and probably some Herodians as well (Matt.22: 15, 16) asked Him about the taxes, and yet they failed. Some Sadducees wanted to test the Lord concerning the resurrection from the dead.

These ones did not believe in the physical resurrection, and they assumed the soul dies with the physical and so it does not rise.

They told Him the story of a woman who got married, but she was childless. After the death of her husband, she married a second one, and a third one till the seventh one. They all died and she was still childless (Luke20: 33) “In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her.” (Luke 20: 34- 38) “Jesus said to them, ‘Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed, they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to Him all of them are alive.’”

We have previously given an interpretation of the fathers to these phrases in the interpretation of (St. Matt.22: 23-33; St. Mark12: 18-27) I think it enough to mention the following remarks:

Firstly: The Sadducees misunderstood the concept of eternal life, for they assumed it was something materialistic: each one had his wife, his children, his physical and material life. Thus the Lord corrected their concepts, declaring that in eternity we live on the level of angels. Our bodies do not need material satisfaction in any way, for they have a new nature appropriate for heaven. They do not eat or drink or have and matrimonial relations.

The Lord of glory revealed, too, one of the aspects for the purpose of matrimony, which is that of bearing children. In this world, there is the need for marriage for the sake of maintaining the human race. But in heaven, because there is no death, there is no need of having any issue.

Secondly: St. Ambrosios thinks the woman who has married seven men, and was childless till her death- she stands for the Jewish assembly that has blended with the covenant, the prophecies, and has been offered every possibility for bearing fruits, and yet they bore none, due to their literal understanding of God's Word. Thus they obtained the divine gifts, but they made no use of them, and they rather fell under the power of death.

We can also understand the woman who married the seven men and was still childless until her death, that she refers to the person who clings to temporal things, or to the love of the world, which is symbolized by the number 7, pointing to the seven days of the week. For the husband's offspring could not be fruitful and live unless he overpasses the seven men, and accepts the eighth that refers to 'eternity', or what is above the time, by baptism we accept the spiritual circumcision which was practiced physically on the eighth day. Then, we are buried with Christ, and rise with Him in real life (Rom.6: 4).

This is the eighth man: to be bonded to the Messaiah, the Resurrected from the dead, at the beginning of the week, or on the eighth day of the previous week. By means of His life we are blessed with the risen life, and bear the fruits of His Holy Spirit in us. Thus death does not destroy us, and neither does the tomb grasp us, rather, we praise vehemently with St. Paul the apostle (1Cor.15: 54, 55) "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where O death, is your victory? Where O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin."

Thirdly: The Lord of glory compares the children of this age, and the life of the age to come. He declares that in this age we are tied to temporary physical deeds such as matrimony. But in the age to come, these physical deeds are non-existent, for we practice a life of an angelic level. This comparison kindled the hearts of many so they train themselves as a first step to eternal life through the Holy Spirit, when they are still in the body, such as chastity, and the monastic life in correct spiritual thinking. When rejecting marriage, for instance, or their frugal life in eating, they do not regard these things as defiled or as being forbidden, but they look upon them as temporal matters that will end, and thus it is appropriate for us that we keep them under control as much as we can.

+I wish unbelievers would not be surprised that God will take away the deeds of our physical members in the age to come. They are absolute and non-functional even at this age.

The martyr JustinX+ In his words to the chaste virgins:

You have actually begun what you will be in!

You have actually come to possess in this world the glory of the resurrection! You have crossed this world... continue to be chaste and virgins, for you have become on equal level with God's angels.

The martyr Kaprianos + Believe that even though you die, if you do not believe on Him, even if you are alive, yet you are dead.

St. Augustine **Fourthly:** When we think of the resurrection, we have to hope in the splendid heavenly life, in which we shall be blessed with the company of the heavenlies, and be blessed with seeing God face to face as they do.

+When we become equal to God's angels, we shall see Him face to face as they do. We shall have wonderful peace towards them, as they have towards us. We shall love them just as they love us.

+ We Look forward hopefully to what He has promised us. We shall become equal to God's angels, and assemble with them, and be blessed with seeing the Holy Trinity. But as for now, we live in the faith.

St. Augustine + When comforting Ostochium for her mother Paula's death:

Do not grieve over our losing her. Rather, we thank God she was ours, and she still is. Because everyone is alive to God, and those who return to the Lord, are still counted members of His family.

We have lost her, this is true, but the heavenly dwelling has won her. (2Cor.5: 6) When she was in the body, she was far away from her Lord. She complained in tears (Ps120: 5, 6) “Woe is me, that I am an alien in Meshech, that I must live among the tents in Kedar, too long have I had my dwelling.”

St. Jerome The scholar Trithemius thinks the Lord’s words here about the no-matrimony in the age to come that it does not mean man loses his being as a man, or his losing his body. Just as the angels are allowed to appear as humans, without their losing their nature as angels, we too become as God’s angels without losing our human bodies. But these bodies will have no temporal requirements, and they will rather bear a new nature befitting the heavenly life.

This is also what St. Augustine confirmed when he said, “All believers who are appointed to rule with Christ, will rise in the same body in a way in which they are counted worthy to be changed to the incorruptible and the angelic. For they will become equal to God’s angels as the Lord Himself has promised, and so they could praise Him without any slothfulness or worry. They will live in the Lord and with Him eternally, and will be blessed with joy and blessings which no man could possibly express or realise.”

5- David’s Son and his Lord:

The different sects of the Jewish leaders resisted squarely the Lord of glory’s fellowship in some way or other. The Lord answered them, not to argue with them, or to defend Himself, but because He was eager to correct their concepts. He hoped to find some of them who would accept His fellowship and respond to His love. Now, that He has entered Jerusalem, and the time of passion and crucifixion was drawing close, their confusion about understanding the Messiah the Savior was even greater. They have been hindered in understanding Him when He was making wonderful miracles, and endless ones, so how will feel about Him when they see Him undergoing the pain and the suffering, being hung on the cross? All of this urged Him to declare His divinity through the words of the Psalmist, for they might realise the situation, and understand His mystery.

(Luke 20: 41-44) “And He said to them, ‘How can they say that the Christ is the Son of David? Now David himself said in the book of Psalms; ‘the Lord said to my Lord’ Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’. Therefore David calls Him ‘Lord’; how is He then His Son?’”

+ He humbly declared His godliness, in no pride or arrogance. He posed the question to them, and when they were confused, He left them to find the answer.

He has shown clearly He does not oppose the Father, but that He rather agrees with Him, for the Father resists the Son’s enemies.

Father Theophlactius +Indeed, David was the father and the slave concerning Christ, for he is His father according to the body, and His slave in the Spirit.

St. John Chrysostom + The sitting here does not mean in a certain position of physical members, as if the Father is sitting on the left, and the Son on the right. The ‘right’ is explained in the sense that the authority He has by the Father, and so He comes to judge after He has come to be judged.

St. Augustine+ The Lord commands us to have faith in Him, for He is Christ the Lord our God who sits on the Father’s right side. This should not be understood physically, for He is present everywhere, and He is in the Father. He is one with Him in power and ability.

Chapter XXI
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Our Heavenly Friend, and His last Coming
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When the Lord Jesus entered Jerusalem so that He gives His life a price for His fellowship to us, the disciples noticed the uprising of all the Jewish rulers against Him; the entire atmosphere looked ominous. Therefore the Lord Jesus raised His disciples eyes to His last coming, and mentioned to them the signs for His coming, and how bitter and difficult this would be. He wished them to know that all of the dark forces and the adversary's resistance will never be able to stop the divine fellowship of God with mankind. It is as if the Lord of glory's words in this chapter, pacify every soul that feels itself belittled due to all the hardships that befall the world, particularly to the believers. For the Lord knows all the historical events which He controls as signs for His coming.

Therefore, let us hear from the Lord's mouth about the wrestling of darkness against the light, and the false prophets and the antichrist against His kingdom. All of this gives us hope, that God has made us know ahead of time of it all, and that He will surely fulfil His divine plan, so He gathers His friends to His kingdom to share Him His eternal glory. We have previously spoken elaborately these signs in our interpretation of St. Matthew 24, St. Mark 13; therefore I shall be brief at this point, for no repetition.

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1- The Widow's Two Copper Coins:

Some may be amazed at the evangelist when he mentions to us the story of the Lord of glory, Jesus, when He accepted the two small copper coins of the widow more than all what the rich had to offer as oblations, before mentioning a most important and serious topic which is that of the Lord's words about His final coming. In other words, how could the story of this widow be as an introduction to this godly and strategic discussion about the signs of the end times? What link is there between the two?

Before we answer this, let us read what the evangelist St. Luke said (Luke 21: 14) "And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. And He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two small copper coins. So He said, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all. For all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she, out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had'."

I think this story the most appropriate introduction for the Lord of glory's discussion about the signs of His coming. He has told us of the signs not that we may know the times and prophecy about them, and be calculating them, but rather that our hearts be kindled amidst this hard life we live in, and be concerned about His coming. Let our constant chanting in all of our worship, conduct and feelings, and our day dreaming be live with the words "O come, Lord Jesus." We are awaiting His coning in us before His coming on the clouds in the last day. As for the widow's story, we find the Lord awaiting also our acceptance of Him, for He says, 'And He looked up and saw the rich... and He saw also a certain poor widow! He constantly looks upon us, whether we are rich or poor, men or women, shepherds or sheep. He looks upon us not to judge us or criticize us, but He is rather looking to see if there is anyone poor amongst us who could find rest in Him. Is there any heart that has responded to His love? We may say He initiates His love and His eagerness to us, before asking us of awaiting His coming. It is He who looks and awaits one single simple heart that accepts Him to sleep there the night.

He did not look for the donations whatever value they were of; He rather looked at the rich, and also at the poor widow. He was concerned about the heart not about the donation, asking for the sp9iritual inward fruit, not the materialistic donation that is visible!

We have previously mentioned many of the fathers' s sayings about this widow when interpreting (St. Mark.12: 41-44). Therefore I think enough be said regarding the following remarks:

Firstly: As the Lord was warning His disciples of following the scribes' example, because they were eating up the widows' homes (Luke20: 47), He began to praise the widow for her heart's generosity in this way, some of the religious leaders could be deprived of the heavenly kingdom due to their greed, whereas the star of the poor and the widows would shine in the kingdom because of their hearts' being opened in love and generosity when being charitable. It is not a matter of how much they have offered, but rather concerning their inward spiritual fruitfulness. For this reason St. Paul writes to the Philippians (Phil.4: 17) "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account."

+ It is the intention that makes the charity valuable or valueless.

St. Ambrosios

+ The concern is not about how much she has given, but in how much she left for herself. For He has not given anyone more than her, for she has not left anything for herself.

St. Ambrosios

+ This widow was rich; for she has put the two coins in the treasury; Christ said about her this poor widow has put more than anyone else in the treasury; for God asks for the faith and not for the money.

St. Ambrosios

+ The widow was found to be in need of the means, but she was rich in her deed. What was offered was distributed to the widows and the orphans, and what befitted her was to take only, but she rather gave instead.

The martyr Kaprianos

Secondly: Who are those rich people who put their charity in the treasury other than the Jews who were puffed up regarding their self-righteousness as the law-keepers. But as for the poor widow, she is the church of the New Testament, whose members mostly came form the Gentiles who lived as though they were widows who had no knowledge of God that He was as a Groom to them. These were poor, and have not been handed the law nor did they know the promises and the covenant, neither were there any saintly prophets among them. They have offered the two coins, which are the faith that works in love. Their faith spring from the Lord Jesus and blended with the practical love. They were like two coins acceptable unto the Lord as pleasing fragrance.

We have mentioned previously that the number 2 refers to love; for the two coins are nothing other than the gift of love that our Lord Jesus accepts joyfully, love for God and for the close ones.

2- A Question Concerning the Temple Building Structure:

The Lord of glory was going towards a cross offering us a deeper concept of the divine fellowship with God. It is the encounter of man's inward being with God within himself. This is why the Lord asked His disciples to flee from the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, and asking for the prestigious front seats, and pretending to be devoted to prayers, despite the fact that they had a heart that devours the widows' homes (Luke20: 45-47). He asks for the heart to be a dwelling place for Him; thus He finds this widow putting the two coins much better than many rich people who throw their charity in the treasury. But the disciples did not understand till this point what the Lord of glory meant, and so some of them spoke with Him about the splendor of the temple building structure (Matt.24: 1; Mark13: 1).

In our study of St. Mark's gospel (Mark13: 1) we mentioned that the temple was being renewed, and that they began this work about twenty years before Christ's coming. This great remodeling, in the eyes of many Jews, was a major sign of God's pleasure concerning them. Even some of the disciples were stunned at the beauty of this structure. They assumed that the Lord Jesus, because He rules that He would establish His authority center in this temple.

The evangelist says, (Luke21: 5-7) "Then, as some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations, He said 'These things which you see- the days will come in which, not one stone shall be left upon another that shall not be thrown down'. So they asked Him saying, 'Teacher, but when will these things be? And what signs will there be when these things are about to take place?'"

At this point, we notice the following:

Firstly: The huge structures and the masterpieces attracted all the people's attention; but as for the Lord of glory, He asks worshipers to worship Him by the Spirit and the Truth. He rather asks for those living in the temple, those ones who in the Lord's eyes, represent the greatness and beauty of the temple, if they only become a dwelling place for Him with their hearts, and their lives be changed to a kindled throne of love.

Secondly: Because the Savior was approaching the cross, it was necessary for Him to declare the destruction of the temple so that the blood sacrifice may cease, since its mission has been fulfilled and perfected through Christ's sacrifice that is so incomparable and unique.

Thirdly: St. Cyril the great thinks His disciples were unable to comprehend His words. they thought He was speaking of the end of the world; this is why they asked Him (Matt.24: 3) "Tell us when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" It was as though they linked the destruction of the temple with the Lord's final coming and the end of ages. This might have been because no Jew ever imagined that the Jerusalem temple would ever be destroyed. They rather thought it was increasing in special power and adornment particularly by the expected coming of the Messaiah to reign though it, and that the temple would stay till the end of times.

3- The False christs:

When the Lord Jesus wanted to proclaim the destruction of the temple, and more so about His last coming, He first presented a warning of the false christs, saying (Luke21: 8) "Take heed, that you may not be deceived. For many will come in My name, saying 'I am He' and 'the time has drawn near'. Therefore do not go after them."

It is as though the Lord Jesus is warning His believers across the generations not to be worried about the times, but rather to be concerned about the watchful spiritual thinking, because the adversary is very eager to mislead you. As Pope Athanasius the apostolic says “Satan is deceiving, and he acquires for himself a name that is loved by everyone. He is like someone who steals, children that are not his own. He seizes the chance of their parents’ absence, and so he attracts the children’s attention and draws them to himself by offering them things they long for. This happens in every heresy spoken of by the deceiving adversary ‘I am the Christ and I am the right one’.”

There appeared false christs even in the apostles’ days and before their time as well, such as Simon the magician who (Acts8: 9, 10) “previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, ‘This man is the great power of God.’” Also Taurus, who spoke of himself as being important, and many people followed him, around four hundred (Acts5: 36). There was also Judas of Galilee in the days of the census, when he drew many people after him (Acts5: 37).

4- The News of War:

(Luke21: 9,10) “But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified, for those things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately. Then He said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom’.”

Prior to the end of the world, there will be a chain of wars, till nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and the world will be changed to an incessant bulk of wars. God has allowed this to happen so that man will be aware that the material world is not immortal; rather, that the world is going in the way of destruction day by day. But the end will not come immediately, for there are occurrences and signs that have to be fulfilled before His coming.

The Lord has informed us of these things ahead of time, so that their impact would be less severe, and so that the believers would not lose their inward peace, since they are in expectation of these occurrences.

The Lord’s declaration of these wars may have been for the believers’ sake lest they doubt; the angels have proclaimed the day of the Lord’s coming ‘Peace on earth’, whereas the wars are increasing day by day. He has come for the peace of our inward earth, that He comes in us and makes our hearts, or our earth, a heavenly kingdom filled with overwhelming peace amidst the commotions of the outer world.

5- Earthquake, Famines and Pestilences:

(Luke21: 11) “And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.”

Because humanity will be divided against itself, and one nation will rise against another, and one kingdom against the other, thus earth and heaven will declare their wrath on mankind. The earth will cry out against humanity through the great earthquakes, just as in the day the Lord of glory was crucified (Matt.27: 51). The earth will also stop giving forth its harvest, and so there will be famines and nature will be disturbed, thus fatal pestilences will increase. Heaven, too, will declare its wrath by means of the awesome fears.

God has created the world for man’s sake so he be blessed with peace and joy in the Lord. When man rises against his own race, and loses his goal, the visible world is provoked against him also. This is not only to declare the earth’s wrath against man, but also to restrain him as much as possible. In other words, the earthquakes, the famines and the pestilences and

great fears that fall from heaven, even though they are drastically fearful, yet this is the language that threatens humanity from being too violent against itself.

This divine declaration, or this warning from the Lord applies to three categories: in the first one, this concerns the end of the entire world, for this will occur literally. The second category is on the level of the destruction of the Jewish temple, and the devastation of Jerusalem. Yousefios, the Jewish historian described what befell Jerusalem before its destruction, particularly the famine that hit the people. They eventually had to eat the seeds in the animal remains. This also applies to a personal level: for with man, a nation will rise against another one, and one kingdom against the other. This means that when man loses his inward peace and his unity with the Holy Spirit, his thoughts and his hearts, and even his own body gets disturbed. It is as though earthquakes have befallen him so his whole being is pulled down. In him there will be famines; for he will find no satisfaction from the world or its honors and pleasures. He will be deprived of God's Word, the Bread that falls from heaven as the mystery for the believers' satisfaction. Pestilences of all kinds will befall him and fatal spiritual diseases will inflict his soul. There will be overwhelming fears from heaven, and his soul will be changed to a bulk of fears which should have been an appropriate heaven for him.

This means man's worries and confusion will not be from the outside, but rather from within his soul.

In this way, when man loses his partnership with the Father, in His Son by means of the Holy Spirit, then man loses all peace for the body, the soul and the spirit. He becomes himself a pretext for his own personal destruction.

6- The Persecution of the Believers:

(Luke21: 12-19) "But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake. But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer. For I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My names sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost. By your patience possess your souls."

The Lord Jesus may have wished to discern between what befalls humanity as far as natural troubles and hardships, or due to its diversion, and between the hardship that would befall believers for no other reason than their faith in the Lord Jesus. The adversary does not stop resisting in every possible way, using those who have religious qualities, such as the Jewish assemblies, and also the earthly authorities; even the relatives according to the body such as the parents, the brothers and the close ones. In all of this, God sees this resistance as against Himself. It is He who gives the word and the wisdom to His believers. He is responsible for every hair on their head. But the believers should not be passive, for He says (Luke21: 19) "By your patience possess your souls."

Briefly speaking, we notice the following in the excerpt above:

Firstly: The broad line in this divine promise of God, is that God Himself is the subject of resisting the adversary. This is why it is He who makes the resistance, in His godly and befitting way. Pope Gregory the great says, "It is as if the Lord is telling His disciples 'Do not fear, go to the battle, it is I who will fight; you will utter and it is I who will speak'." St. Kaprianos also says, "His Job is that we overcome. At this point we can see the great confidence the believers have, and the terrible mistake the unbelievers commit when they do

not trust in Him who has promised the triumph for those who believe in Him, and are not afraid of His threats of eternal punishment to those who deny Him.”

Secondly: If the adversary uses every means, particularly the violent physical means against the believers, then the believers accept from their Christ a mouth and wisdom so the resistant ones feel the weakness before the persecuted.

Thirdly: God allows the believers to go through hardships. But as a Father He declares His concern about them; and not one hair will be destroyed. As St. Augustine says, “Be sure, my brethren, the enemies have no power over the believers, unless as much as is useful to them in their being tested and tempted.” He also adds, “When the Lord Jesus urged His martyrs to be patient, He promised them to make their bodies obtain absolute perfection in the future without any loss at all. I do not say losing a member of his body, but not losing one single hair.”

Fourthly: Pope Gregory the great remarks on the Lord’s words, ‘By your patience possess your souls’ in this way, “To possess the soul is by the virtue of patience; because patience is the basis of every righteousness, and its protector. Patience means to endure peacefully all evil that befalls us from others, without having any ill feeling towards those who drop it on us.”

7- The Besieging of Jerusalem:

(Luke21: 20-24) “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written be fulfilled. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

The Lord Jesus speaks very clearly of what would befall Jerusalem around forty years after, on the hands of Titus the Roman. The Lord’s words were like a warning to the believers who were in Jerusalem so they remember the Lord’s words, and thus they would flee from Jerusalem, and would not fall under the siege. As I said, the Jewish historian Youssefios offered an elaborate description of what happened in this siege.

We notice the following in this excerpt:

Firstly: St. Augustine says these words of the Lord as narrated by the evangelist St. Luke shows that the abomination of destruction that Daniel prophesied about, has been fulfilled by the siege of Jerusalem.

Secondly: (Luke21: 22) “For these are the days of vengeance” The Lord has allowed them to crucify Him without any resistance on His part. But His blood that has been offered as a redemption to the world, and as salvation to the believers, has become the cause of their judgment. What happened in the siege of Jerusalem was a warning to the Jews, so they be aware of what their sinful hands have committed. This may make them return to God in repentance, and accept the Messaiah the Savior.

Thirdly: (Luke21: 23) “But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!” Some think these words are a prophecy to what the historian Youssefios narrated, that the chaste women cooked their children due to their severe hunger.

Fourthly: What does the Lord mean by saying (Luke21: 24) “And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”

If Jerusalem is the head quarters of the Jews, then Israel will remain trampled by ingratitude and disbelief until the Gentile church is complete. In the end of ages, Israel will

decline its Zionist fanaticism, and will accept the faith in Jesus Christ whom they had crucified. As St. Paul the apostle says (Rom.11: 25, 26) “that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. and so all Israel will be saved.”

Fifthly: What does the spiritual siege of Jerusalem mean? There is no doubt that Jerusalem is the headquarters for the Jewish worship. It contains the temple and its branches, and what it comprises as the constant rituals particularly the blood sacrifices. The city used to stand for the Jewish existence in its national traditions, its worship, its culture... etc. Thus we can say that we cannot be blessed with Jerusalem above, proclaimed in our hearts, unless our old Jerusalem in us is besieged. There is no way by which we could be blessed with the constructive grace of the Spirit, and yet be enclosed around the fatal Jewish literacy. There is no encounter between the heavenly church existence, together with the existence of a narrow Jewish concept.

Therefore let us flee from Judea to the mountains, that is, from the Jewish literacy to the high mountains of the gospel, well founded in the Spirit.

“Those in the midst let them flee outside: “If the literacy takes hold of us and prisons us, we ask to flee from it, so as to live freely in the Spirit, and go outside.

“Those in the cities let them not enter” which means, if the Spirit has delivered us, and let us go to the cities of the gospel so as to live in His Spirit, then let us not be eager to go back to literacy.

Woe to those who are pregnant and those who nurse babies”, for they will not be able to those ones who have no mature spiritual fruits as their children, to be released from the narrow and tight literacy. Woe to those who are of weak souls, that have not been fruitful yet, for they are as though they are pregnant, or their fruits are weak, similar to the nursing women; for it is for them to be blessed with the true freedom in the Lord.

8- Signs in the Sun:

(Luke21: 25, 26) “And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring. Men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”

There is no doubt this will literally take place before the last coming of the Lord Jesus; for there will be signs in the sun, the moon and the stars. These things are expected by the astronomers themselves.

What is meant by the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth and the sea?

Firstly: By the signs that will be manifested before Christ’s coming, the Lord may have meant the manifestation of the anti-Christ; it is he who will play a serious role in the world at the end of times. If the sun stands for the Lord Jesus, then there will be a sign to show the choking of the faith in Christ, as if the sun is hidden in people’s lives. The Lord has declared this in bitterness; that if he could, he would mislead even the elect. He also asked “Will the Son of Man find the faith when He comes?”

The moon refers to the church that takes its light from the Lord Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness. It will also carry a sign that specifically pertains to it; for it will go through severe hardship and will become a fugitive in the wilderness, chased by the anti-Christ wherever it is found.

The stars refer to the believers with all their spiritual gifts and positions. It is unfortunate that many will fall, even those who possess gifts and positions. They will deny their Christ, and there will be a bitter move of deserting the Lord.

The earth that is full of catastrophies, refers to the corruption of the body, that is, the earth. Corruption will prevail, and defilement will be common, and people will change to beastly and physical attitudes, quite damaging to the spiritual work.

The sea and its waves refer to the nations and the kingdoms. Hardships will prevail not on an individual level only, but also on the scale of nations.

Secondly: We can also say that because man rejects the Lord's work in him, these signs will thus appear in him. Man will lose his enlightenment by the Sun of Righteousness, that is, by the faith in the Lord Jesus. His moon will be darkened, that is, man will not practice his true membership in the church, as the body of Christ that enlightens man. His stars will fall, since his talents are damaged, and his potentials are weakened, and his gifts are transformed to destroying him instead of building him up and glorifying him. His earth will become, in all its kingdoms, in confusion and tragedies. This means, man will ruin his body instead of sanctifying it. His sensations will be bewildered and will be the mystery behind his disturbance. His sea will be rough with the high waves, that is, man will lose his peace, and he will live in worry, that is continuously tempestuous as the waves of the sea that know no serenity.

Thirdly: The last coming of the Son of Man will take us to a new heavenly life, that has been described by John the beloved, saying (Rev.21: 1) "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea."

Let the present material heaven, and also the earth, be destroyed. Let the seas end, and let the stars fall with no return, for we are awaiting the new heaven that has its sun as the Lord of glory, Jesus. Its moon is the Jerusalem church above, our mother, and its stars are the saints. Let us be blessed with an earth that is not of material contents, that sprouts up thistles and thorns. Rather, it is a new life where (Rev.21: 4) "There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Let the sea be wiped out, for there will be no more any disturbance!

Fourthly: (Luke15: 7) "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." For who could express the sorrow of heaven when it finds the souls collapsing because of the anti-Christ? This is why the Lord of glory says (Luke21: 26) "for the powers of the heavens will be shaken."

St. John Chrysostom says "The powers of the heavens will be shaken, when they will see numberless people fall under condemnation."

Fifthly: St. Augustine says, "The powers of the heavens will be shaken because when the wicked ones provoke persecution, some of the strong believers are terrified."

9- The Coming of the Son of Man:

(Luke21: 27,28) "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near."

+ The believers and the non-believers will see Him. He and His cross will be more brilliant than the sun, and will be noticed by everyone.

Father Theophlactius

+ The words 'coming in a cloud' is understood in two ways: that He is coming in His church as if in a cloud (Heb.12: 1), for He does not cease to come in it up till now. But afterwards, His coming will be fulfilled in greater power and splendor, for He will be manifested to His saints in power, to grant them a greater virtue, so they overcome by Him the terribly fearful persecution. He will also come in His body, that by which He ascended.

St. Augustine

Though the entire events are sorrowful indeed, yet the manifestation of the Son of Man will bring back to the church its joy, its splendor, and its glory on the level of partnership with her Groom in His joy and His glory. Our encounter with the Son of Man will make us forget all the bitter events that have gone before. Rather, this will become the cause of our reward and our glory by the Lord. This is why He says 'Be cautious, which means 'be firm'. Stand up as spiritual man with no slothfulness or negligence. 'Lift up your heads', that is, lift up your minds towards the heavenlies, and await His coming, because your salvation of the eternal level is drawing near.

The Lord of glory will come to save us not only on the level of the soul's salvation, but also for the resurrection of the body, and thus man will be absolutely glorified!

10- The Parable of the Fig-tree and summertime:

(Luke21: 29-33) "Then He spoke to them a parable, 'Look at the fig-tree, and all the trees. When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near. Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."

The Lord assured us by a wise comparison that we have to trample over the love of the world and scorn it, saying 'Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they are already budding (brought forth fruit) you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near.'" It is as if He is saying "Just as with the fruit of the tree it is realised that summer is drawing near, likewise is it with the collapse of the world, it is known that God's kingdom has drawn near. "Here it is clear that our fruit is the fall of the world from our hearts."

It is good that He compares God's kingdom to the summer when the cloud of our grief passes away, and the days of life are brightened up by the Sun's light, so eternal and shining.

Pope Gregory the great

The Lord of glory has assured us (Luke21: 31) "Know that the kingdom of God is near." The hardships come, but they are for a short time. As for the kingdom this is eternal.

+ The kingdom of heaven, dear brethren, is drawing near. It is the reward of life and the joy of the eternal salvation, and the constantly blessed, and possessing the lost paradise. These matters are coming with the crossing over of the world.

The heavens are coming to replace the earth, the big matters are replacing the world, and the eternal issues are replacing the temporal ones.

The martyr Kaprianos

What does He mean by the words "Assuredly I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away. Till all things take place."

What the Lord has said, has been fulfilled in the disciples' generation concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple- a thing that was unthought of. This is why the Lord confirmed it by saying "Assuredly I say to you." Also, all what the Lord said has been fulfilled in the generation of His church, for we know that history, regarding the salvation, is divided into several generations:

- (One) The first generation is from Adam to Noah where there is the renewal and the flood.
- (Two) The second generation is from Noah to Moses where he received the written covenant.
- (Three) The third generation is from Moses to David where there begun the age of the kings and the prophets.
- (Four) The fourth generation is from Moses to the Babylonian bondage.

- (Five) The fifth generation is from Moses to the coming of the Lord Jesus.
- (Six) The last generation is the sixth one; from the coming of Christ in the flesh till His second and last coming. This is the church generation, the new covenant that is current with all what the Lord Jesus has spoken of in this chapter.

11- A Call to Being Watchful:

(Luke 21: 34-36) “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day Come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all those things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

With these concluding words, the Lord Jesus reveals to us the purpose of showing the signs for His coming. He does not wish us to know the times, and be busy counting them; rather, to be watchful with our hearts, expecting in the serious life we lead, His coming to reign eternally.

+Each animal is given motives granted to it from God so as to keep its race. This is why the Lord Jesus gave us this warning so that what the animal practices by nature, we practice it with our minds and our wisdom. Then we will escape sin, just as the animals run away from the food, and ask for righteousness as useful weeds.

The Lord asks us to be watchful, that is, to discern what is fatal and what is healthy and wholesome.

There are two ways to be careful of ourselves: the first one is by means of our physical eyes, and the other is by means of the soul functions. Since the physical eye cannot achieve the goal, therefore He is speaking here of the soul functions.

Be watchful and cautions, that is, look around you from all sides, with a watchful eye to guard yourselves.

Around you there is wealth, arts, and all life pleasures. You have to be careful about yourselves in a special way.

St. Basilious the great

+ The soul leaves the base and materialistic matters and is released towards the invisible and heavenly ones.

Father Isaac

What is the purpose of this spiritual watchfulness and awareness in the Lord’s coming encounter?

This wakefulness changes the ‘day of the Lord’ from an ambush in which falls all those sitting on the face of the earth, to a day of salvation and standing before the Son of Man. In other words, the day of the Lord, to those who are unwatchful, who are just sitting on the face of all the earth, that is, as physical ones of dust, this day will be an ambush to them. But to those who are wakeful, those who are not tied to the love of the earth, but are rather released as if with the Spirit’s wings in the heavens, the day of the Lord will not entrap them for their perdition but they will be blessed by the salvation, on the level of both the body and the soul together. They will be blessed by standing before the Son of Man as God’s angels. Father Theophlactius says, “This is the glory of the angels, to stand before the Son of Man, our God, and constantly see His face.”

12- He Sleeps the Night in the Mount of Olives:

(Luke 21: 37, 38) “And in the daytime He was teaching in the temple, but at night 鑽□□□礮□□□□□*†孫□□嚙□□□□□□鈇斫□□□□□夫□□□□椰□□

Chapter XXII
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The Suffering Friend

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In the previous chapter we have seen how the incarnate Word of God has come to us, offering us His divine fellowship. He reveals to us the features to the way of His fellowship; He caution us of the obstacles on the way. Now He is offering Himself a price to this friendship. We can thus see Him as the greatest priest who is shedding His life a Passover, so He takes us from the state of enmity to the partnership with the Father. He is the priest and the sacrifice at the same time. He offers His own blood a redemption for our sins.

We can most assuredly say in confidence, that our teacher the evangelist St. Luke, when he describes the passion events of the Lord and His crucifixion, he is only presenting to us our Friend who is carrying us to the holiest of His holies. He walks us in His heavenly holy places, with no obstruction or any covering.

For our sake, He impoverished Himself: He did not own a ‘loft’ where He could eat the Passover with His disciples, even though He is offering His life a unique Passover, able to save mankind. For our sake He crossed the valley of tears and pain, all alone, even though He is one with the Father, embracing us in love to Him. He accepted to be betrayed by one of His disciples, and be the subject of judgment before His creation, judged religiously and civilly.

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1- The Passover Draws Near:

(Luke22: 1,2) “Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called Passover. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might kill Him, for they feared the people.”

The Jews used to celebrate the Passover feast on the fourteenth of March (Nissan) when they commemorated the passing or crossing of the angel of death over the homes of their forefathers in Egypt, without harming their prime firstborns, once the angel sees the , blood sign on the board and tablets. Moreover, the word ‘Passover’ or ‘pascha’ means ‘to cross’. The feast

of the bread-cake was on the following day, the fifteenth of March; this feast was for a period of seven days in which the Jews ate no leavened bread, but rather cake. Both feasts were blended together, and at the time of Jesus they became one feast called 'the feast of cakes' or the 'Passover'.

I do not wish to go into details concerning the Passover and the cake feast, since we have spoken of them earlier on more than one occasion, particularly in the interpretation of the book of Exodus (ch.12), also in the interpretation of the book of Leviticus (Ch.23). what we wish to say at this point, is that our Friend has come to offer Himself a Passover in our place, so that with His blood, the angel of death would pass over, and not kill the primes of our life. In other words, by Him we cross to the heavenly life, and we are transferred from the thoughts of dust to the angelic thoughts.

+ The works of the Jews were a shadow of ours. This is why if you ask a Jew about the Passover or the cake feast, he would tell you nothing of real value, and he rather refers to the salvation from Egypt; whereas if someone asks this of me, he would not hear of Egypt or the Pharaohs, he would rather hear of the freedom from iniquity and the darkness of Satan, not by means of Moses but by the means of the Son of God.

St. John Chrysostom

The Jewish multitudes were heading towards Jerusalem to offer the Passover sacrifice, in its beautiful rituals that portrayed Christ's work of salvation. The chief priests and the scribes were two crowded parties in the Synod assembly; these assembled together mostly in the house of Caiphas the chief priest 'the house of conspiracy'. They discussed how to get rid of Jesus in a covered way, for they feared the people's uproar against them.

St. John Chrysostom says that according to the law of Moses there is only one chief priest. No other is appointed unless at his death. But because the Jews were spiritually lacking, there has come to be more than one chief priest. Actually, the Jews used to appoint every year a chief priest who practiced his job for one year. The Roman authorities had to be pleased with this particular person, and they even chose him with the Jewish leaders. At any rate, it was appropriate for them to have one chief priest, who stood for the bishop of our souls, our Lord Jesus. He accepts the advice from God, and according to His commandment; and He fears God and not man. but as for these ones they were many chief-priests who behaved according to a humane advice, and they feared the people and not God.

St. Cyril the great says, "Let us look at the role played by Satan through his envy, and what his cunning plot against Jesus resulted in. he planted in the leaders of the Jewish assembly envy against Christ, that produced killing. This disease of envy mostly motivates to homicide. This is the normal way to this vice, as happened with Cain and Abel. It was also clear in the case of Joseph and his brothers. For this reason St. Paul the apostle clearly makes these two iniquities next to each other, as if they are related to each other, for he speaks of people who are filled with 'envy and murder' (Rom.1: 29).

In this way those people asked to kill Jesus through Satan's inspiration that implanted evil in them, and he was their leader in their wicked plans.

2- Judas' Betrayal:

The Lord Jesus passed through agony of every kind, in which the Jews took part with all their various categories. One of His disciples also participated with them, as well as the Gentiles.

The evangelist St. Luke speaks of the betrayal of Judas, saying, (Luke22: 3-6) “Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve. So he went his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he promised and sought opportunity to betray Him to them in the absence of the multitude.”

Satan entered Judas not by force, but because he found the door open to him. Greed opened the door for betrayal, despite his being one of the twelve disciples.

We hear in St. John’s gospel (John13: 27) “Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered Him.” Did Satan therefore, enter him before or during the Passover? There is no doubt, Judas gave himself as a vessel to the devil with every opportunity in which the door opened, particularly to respond to Satan as a master to Judas who rules over his heart, and directs his thoughts and actions. In other words, we may say that Judas, in his submission to the evil enemy, he grew every day in responding to him, and practicing his devilish deeds. Just as God is eager to dwell in His children’s hearts continuously so as to fill them with His divine work, likewise does the adversary wish to enter the hearts of those responding to him continuously. He wishes to take them to the end of his malice, for they are his tools and his personal sheep and kingdom.

+ You can see that Satan has actually entered Judas. He first entered when he planted in Judas’ heart the idea of betraying Christ. Then he came to supper embodying this spirit in him. When he took the body, Satan also entered him, not to tempt someone estranged to him, tied to someone else, but rather to rule over someone of his own, who belongs to him.

St. Augustine

+ Due to greed, Judas has reached this point.

Greed begets evil desires, and makes people blasphemous; greed urges people to lose their understanding of God, even though they receive thousands of gifts from Him.

St. John Chrysostom

The adversary trapped Judas who responded to him due to his love of money, and so Judas was motivated to steal (John12: 6). Then he pushed him to betray the Lord; Judas thus became Satan’s tool that he used just as he wished to, since Judas yielded himself to Satan. This is why St. Paul the apostle warns us, saying, (2Cor.2: 11) “Lest Satan should take advantage of us.”

In the same spirit St. Mark the hermit offers to us his advice not to open the door to Satan, even if very little. Once he enters he overrules and it is hard to get rid of him. Let us fight Satan by the Lord when he is away from us, attempting to deceive us. Let us not allow him in and overrule!

St. Cyril the great says Satan has gone into Judas’ heart, but not into Peter’s, James’ or John’s, because their hearts were well founded, and their love to Christ was firm. But Satan found a place for himself in him who betrayed due to the bitter disease of covetousness, about which the devout St. Paul said (1Tim.6: 10) “Money is the source of all evil.” The evangelist, moreover, confirmed that Judas was ‘one of the twelve’ to show clearly the iniquity of betrayal. The one who has honored him, making him one with the rest, and adorned him with the apostolic dignity, and made him beloved, and embraced him to the holy table—this same person has become a way and a means to kill Christ.

For what did Judas sell his Lord?

He sold Him for silver; as St. Didimoas the Alexandrian says, there are two kinds of silver: the genuine silver filtered seven times, which is the Word of God; and the fake silver which is Satan’s word. The Lord Jesus is the incarnate Word of God, the true silver, but Judas

sold Him for the fake one. This betrayal has been practiced by the heretics across the ages, when they misinterpret the Word of God. They use the Holy Book to refer to their corrupt teachings. It is as if they are exchanging the pure and genuinely divine silver for their false one.

The evangelist's words (Luke22: 5) "And they agreed to give him money" means that they give him money in the general sense. The price was the definite sin of thirty pieces of silver, as Amos the prophet has previously prophesied (St. Ambrosios.2: 6) as a price for selling the Righteous One. This is a cheap price, paid as a ransom for a slave if hit by an ox and killed (Ex.21: 32). It is said that this silver piece, on one of its faces had the olive branch picture, a symbol of peace, and on the other face it had the picture of a censer, the symbol of worshiping, and at the bottom the words 'the holy Jerusalem' were engraved.

3- The Preparation for the Passover:

The Passover time drew near; it was therefore appropriate for Him who has come 'a Passover to the World' to offer His body and shed His blood a sacrifice of thanks to God the Father, and the mystery for the life of His disciples... to be a real sacrifice able to reconcile the Father with humanity across the entire ages.

The scholars disagreed in defining the Jewish Passover time: Was it on Thursday when the Lord Jesus offered Himself the Passover directly after the Jewish symbol to declare its absolute fulfillment? Or did the Lord wish to offer His Passover one day earlier so He would be crucified on Friday, at the moments of the Jewish Passover? Each party has its own endeavour to confirm its point of view. What concerns us is that the Jewish Passover was fulfilled and perfected by Passover of Christ, whether the Jews practiced their rituals of their Passover on the Covenant Thursday or during the crucifixion moments.

The Evangelist says (Luke22: 7-13) "Then came the day of unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed. And He sent Peter and John saying 'Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat'. So they said to Him, 'where do you want us to prepare?' And He said to them, 'Behold', when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water, follow him into the house which he enters. Then you shall say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you 'Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?' Then he will show you a large furnished upper room, there make ready.' So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover."

We notice in the above words:

Firstly: Some think the words 'Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed.' These words confirm the last supper was made on the Passover day, and that the Lord Jesus offered His body and His blood after the symbolic lamb has been killed. But some others think that according to the Jewish ritual, they were preparing for the feast on the day before, when the Jews' cleaned the house and searched more than once in their rooms lest there be any leaven found, and thus be counted as breakers of the law, and their Passover would not be accepted. It is as if the Lord has assembled with His disciples on the day before the killing of the lamb, as a preparation for the Passover. But instead of searching in the loft-corners, He offered the spiritual Passover that was not of any material. In addition to this, if the Lord had assembled with His disciples to perform the Jewish Passover ritual, then where are the owners of the house themselves?

In the interpretation of the gospel according to St. Matthew, I mentioned the preparation the Lord made for the last supper after the Lord Jesus and His disciples performed the Passover

rituals of the law. But I repeat, what concerns our thoughts is the godly thinking itself and not the details of the time.

Secondly: The Lord Jesus did not specify the name of the loft owner; but it is mentioned in the church tradition that it was St. Mark the apostle. St. Mark was also the youth who was carrying the pitcher, and he knew the Lord well enough. But the Lord did not mention his name; As St. Ambrosios says this may be to show He was not preparing His Passover in a loft of an unknown person. The Lord does not ask for famous people or prestigious ones. As Father Theophlactius says, it may be that Judas might not know the place and so inform the chief priests and the scribes, and thus arrest the Lord before offering His divine Passover.

Thirdly: In our interpretation of the gospel according to the St. Mark (13: 12-16) we have seen the two saints: St. Cyril the great, and St. Ambrosios looking upon the pitcher of water as a sign to the baptism. We are not allowed to be blessed with the mystery of the Eucharist unless we first encounter the mystery of the baptism, and be blessed with the rebirth that is inwardly so perfect.

Though the pitcher is of clay and pottery yet it carries water inside; likewise, even though we are of dust yet we receive the divine water of grace, and the work of the Holy Spirit within us, so we may be able to be uplifted by the Spirit with our Savior. We shall receive from His hands the mystery of our salvation, that is, His body and His blood that are shed for us.

Fourthly: The Lord with His disciples were uplifted to the furnished loft, in which there is no leaven, and big enough for the Lord and His disciples to take. In this way the Lord wishes to carry us as if to the highest in a furnished loft, where we live in the hidden divine glories; we are exalted above the sins and defiled passions of this world. There, we shall meet Him, where we have no leaven of any evil or cunningness. We will rather have the beauty of the righteous Spirit, big enough with the divine love of God, so we carry within us the Lord and His disciples.

+ Let ascend with the Lord, united with Him, up to the loft. May our house-loft be big enough to receive in it Jesus the Word of God, who is not realised except it be by means of those who have great wisdom.

Let this loft be prepared by means of the good house-owner, so the Son of God comes in it, and finds it washed and pure of every malice.

+ We have to be aware that no one is exalted to the loft who indulges in banquets and temporal concerns. He will have no share with Jesus in keeping the Passover.

The scholar Oreganus

4- The New Passover:

Firstly: The evangelist St. Luke says (Luke22: 14) “When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him.” The hour that the Lord of glory has specified has come for Him to put the basis for the Eucharist mystery, by whose means He offered the world the mystery of salvation, life and inward satisfaction.

The Jews, according to the law of Moses, were used to eating the Passover while they were standing (Ex.12: 17) since this reminded them of being released from the bondage that their fathers experienced in Egypt; for the slave had no right to sit down in the presence of his masters; he rather had to stand to serve them. But when the Lord offered us His new Passover, He sat and the apostles with Him to declare our transfer to the state of ‘glory’. His Passover is the crossing to the heavenly life, so we sit with Him in his Father’s embrace, and be blessed in sharing His glories.

Secondly: When the hour has come to fulfil our salvation by shedding His life for us, He declares He is doing this work in absolute willingness, in true and passionate eagerness, for He is asking for what has been perished. This is why He told them (Luke22: 15) “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”

+ Why so? Because He appreciated His cross, for this would fulfil the salvation of the world, and the mysteries would be given over, and the sorrowful matters would be wiped away.

+ This means “I am handing you the new rituals, and I am granting you the Passover that I am offering it to you spiritually.”

St. John Chrysostom

+ He said this because the cross was drawing near soon after this Passover. We always find Him prophesying His Passion and suffering, eager to have them fulfilled.

St. John Chrysostom

+ It is as if He is saying, “This is My last supper; it is precious indeed and I appreciate it.” It is similar to those who depart to a far-off place, when they offer to their dear ones their loving farewell words.

Father Theophlactius

But as for His words (Luke22: 16, 18) “For I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God... I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” We have previously interpreted this in our study of the book of Leviticus (10: 9) where we have seen the Lord drinking of the fruit of the spiritual vine, that is, when He rejoices at the completion of the elect in God’s kingdom.

Thirdly: We notice here that there are two cups: the first one the Lord took and He gave thanks, saying (Luke22: 17) “Take this and divide it among yourselves.” The second one He took was after supper, and said (Luke22: 20) “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.” It was the Jewish custom, in the Passover ritual for three cups to be used. This is why some think the first cup here is one of the cups in the Jewish rituals. As for the second one, it is the cup of the new covenant that has come, not as a cup of general blessing, but it has been sanctified to become the blood of the Lord Jesus that has been shed. The first one refers to the Old covenant and the second one is offered to us as the mystery of the new covenant.

Fourthly: The Lord Jesus offered His true sacrifice, saying (Luke22: 19, 20) “This is My body which is given for you” and “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.” But as for His words “do this in remembrance of Me”, as we have seen in the book “Christ, the Mystery of the Eucharist” that ‘the remembrance’ here in the Greek ‘Anamnasis’ does not merely mean the recalling of a certain matter that you regard, but that is away from you; it rather implies the repetition of His invitation or His representation in an active way. The Anamnasis here means the remembrance of the Crucified and Risen Jesus from the dead. Or, that we remember His sacrifice not as a thing of the past, but rather to offer a real sacrifice that is present and active, that is, an existing and active remembrance.

+ The Eucharist is the body of our Lord Jesus Christ who suffered for our sins, and who was raised by God the Father.

St. Ignatius the enlightened one

+ The chalice that is mixed, and the bread made, these accept and receive the Word of God. They become the Eucharist of Christ’s body and His blood.

St. Irianus

+ The bread before the sanctified liturgy, is common bread. But when it is sanctified by the mystery, it is called Christ’s body.

St. Gregory, bishop of Nicus

+ When we partake of the holy body of Christ, the Savior of us all and drink of His precious blood, we have life in us; for we become as one with Him. We dwell in Him and we possess Him in us.

+ Do not doubt that this is true; for He said clearly “This is My body.” Receive the words of Your Savior in faith, for He is the Truth who does not lie.

St. Cyril the great

Christ did this so He brings us to the knot of sincere fellowship, and to declare His love to us, offering Himself to His loved ones. This is not only that they may see Him and touch Him, but also to eat of Him, and embrace Him absolutely in their hearts.

St. John Chrysostom

+ Learn, then, how it is appropriate for you to eat of Christ’s body; that is, to remember His obedience till death, so that those alive may not live any more for themselves, but rather for Him who has died for their sakes, and rose from the dead.

St. Basilios the great

Fifthly: St. John Chrysostom thinks that the Lord Jesus spoke of His betrayer after offering the cup, and the betrayer shared in taking of it. The Lord showed that He has offered the betrayer every possibility for repentance, but that he did not wish to repent. God opens the doors of hope to everyone, but He obliges no one to repent against his will.

When the Lord Jesus said that one of them would betray Him, they all began to ask Him. Though they knew how much they loved Him, yet they were more confident of His words than they had confidence in themselves. This is why each one of the feared lest he be the one meant, for they all knew how weak they were, and how subjected they were to fall. I wish we could copy the eleven disciples, and thus know our infirmities, and not rely on ourselves, but rather rely on God’s grace that keeps us from falling.

5- A Discussion about who is the Greatest:

The Lord Jesus, being the incarnate Word of God, declared His heart’s eagerness and His strong desire to offer His life a Passover for mankind, and asked for their fellowship on an eternal level.

At the same time, the Jewish leaders were plotting to kill the Messaiah and get rid of Him. As for the disciples, in their human weakness, they were mentally arguing about the first and prominent positions in the new kingdom. They assumed it to be a temporal kingdom. The evangelist St. Luke says, (Luke22: 24-30) “Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. And He said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors’. But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the youngest, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves. But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me. That you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel’.”

Firstly: St. John Chrysostom says that the Lord Jesus attributes those who ask for the foremost positions are the Gentiles. It is as if the first landmark attributed for the Gentiles was their ‘arrogance’ and their desire for temporal glory. As a contrast, the landmark to be attributed to

Christ's body is 'modesty', and the desire to occupy the last position among all. With lowliness that is full of love, we are able to embrace everyone. In other words, the Word of God, due to His love for mankind, has denied Himself. He took the position of a slave, so He carries in His body the slaves, and He exalts them to the Father's sonship. In the same Spirit, St. Paul the apostle was eager to enslave himself so as to win many (1Cor. 9: 19). St. Paul wished to follow His Master's example, and thus he would have this honor, to consider himself a slave to everyone. This is not out of despair or self destruction, but it is out of real love so as to win many.

+ I wish he who is in power, not to be puffed up due to his job, lest he falls from the blessing of modesty. It befits him to know the true lowliness in serving many.

I wish the greatest to be the youngest.

I wish those who have the prominent jobs to be ready to offer even the physical service, following the Lord's example when He washed His disciples' feet. This is why He said 'let the foremost one be as a servant.'

St. Basilios the great

+Keep the faith and modesty within yourself, because with them, you will find mercy and help. You will also hear the divine words of God in your heart. You will be escorted outwardly and inwardly with your guardian angel.

+Modesty is a medal from God; because the incarnate Word was clothed with it, and He spoke of modesty by means of our bodies. He who is clothed with modesty, copies indeed Him who has come down from His high heavens'. He has covered the greatness of His righteousness with modesty. He has covered His glory with it, so that the creation would not be inflamed with His appearance.

+The Modest person is not hated or blamed or scorned by anyone, because his Lord loves him. He loves everyone, and everyone loves him, and desire him everywhere. Wherever he may be, they look upon him as an enlightened angel, and they offer him reverence.

+Modesty is a hidden power which is achieved by the perfect saints after their life has been fulfilled. Grace does not give this power except it be to those who are absolutely righteous.

Mar Isaac the Syrian

+ The disciples opened a way to the human infirmities: they argued among themselves who is the greatest of them all. This weakness was provoked in them and has been recorded for our own good; since it has happened among the apostles, then it could be an example for us to be blessed with humility. Thus the Lord Jesus rebuked them for this disease, and as a successful physician He amputated it with a deep commandment full of zeal.

+ Let us stop this haughtiness that makes you lose your emotions and is absolutely vain. It springs from the love of vain glory, the source of arrogance. The desire to dominate others, and the conflict to reach this aim, makes man truly to be blamed, even though he cannot be totally void of any praise.

To be exalted in righteousness is worthy of all honor and appreciation; but to reach this we have to be modest in our thoughts and attitude. We have to have humble feelings, not desiring to be the foremost ones, and this is due to our love for our brothers. This what the righteous St. Paul wants to be in us, for he wrote, (Rom.12: 10) "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another." These feelings arm or the saints and are glorified by them, for our righteousness towards God becomes honorable. This modesty tears Satan's cunning network and breaks down his various traps, and we are saved from the pit of corruption, and makes us perfect in being similar to Christ, the Savior of us all. Listen to how He puts Himself before us an example of the humble thinking, and the will-power

that does not ask for any vain glory, for He says, (Matt.11: 29) “Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

In the words just read, He says, “For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as One who serves.”

When we hear Christ uttering these words, who is he who will not take away the love of vain glory? And who will not cast out of his mind the love of hollow honor, and remain in his stubbornness? The co-essential with God the Father in His throne and His kingdom has taken the position of a slave, and has washed the apostles’ feet. In other words, He took the place of a bondsman through His body incarnation. He who is served, has become a servant, the Lord of glory has become poor, and gave us the example as is written (2Pet.2: 21).

Therefore let us avoid the love of vain glory, and get rid of the desire for leadership. If we do so, we become like him, for He has denied Himself for our sake.

St. Cyril the great

Secondly: The desire for temporal greatness causes a crack among brothers, whatever positions they may have, even if they are Christ’s disciples. It is as if this current is the destroyer for the sanctified people.

+If the disciples have argued, this is not a pretext for you; it is just a warning. Let us be cautious lest our arguments for the foremost positions, be the cause of our own perdition.

St. Ambrosios

Thirdly: The call of the Lord Jesus to His disciples not to ask for vain glory and the love of leadership, this is not a deprivation, but it is rather a guidance towards the eternal glory that we achieve by means of the cross. This is why He assures them of the greatest positions the apostles will attain by their being firm with Him in His trials, that is, their carrying the cross with Him every day due to their faith in Him and their preaching His gospel. The Lord Says, “But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me.”

In other words, He does not only call upon them to leave their vain glory, but also to carry the cross, and sharing the Lord His suffering so they share Him His glories. As St. Paul the apostle says (Rom.6: 5) “For we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.”

Fourthly: When He speaks here of being blessed with the eternal kingdom, this does not mean it is by means of eating, drinking and sitting on seats in the literal meaning. The kingdom of God is not food and drink (Rom.14: 17), it rather means a state of ever lasting satisfaction, and the dominance in the Lord. As St. Cyril the great says, He describes the spiritual matters by means of the analogy in the present current life; for this is counted a great privilege for people to sit, with kings at their table, and share them their food!

St. Ambrosios says that the apostles judge the tribes of Israel, not by their sitting in seats to judge in a literal sense, but rather that they would be the cause of their pricking conscience by means of their faith and their virtue. At this point the Israelite and iniquity will be put to scandal.

6- His Warning to St. Peter:

Our Friend proclaimed His acceptance of the passion and suffering, and enduring the crucifixion to offer His life for the sake of our salvation. The Jewish rulers faced this love with hatred and the attempt of getting rid of Him. Moreover, Judas His disciple, faced this fellowship by betraying Him most atrociously. Now, the Lord says to His disciples (Luke22: 28) “But you

are those who have continued with Me in My trials”, and He confirms that this firmness in Him is actually a divine gift and a free blessing, without which their faith could perish. In other words, if the downfall of Judas to the abyss is the outcome of his personal wickedness, despite being offered every opportunity for repentance, then the firmness of the eleven apostles is a gift from God, but they rather accept this gift out of their free self will. This is what the Lord has declared in His warning to St. Peter the apostle.

(Luke22: 31-35) “And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not, fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.’ But he said to Him, ‘Lord, I am ready to go with you, both to prison and to death.’ Then He said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me.””

In the above conversation we notice the following:

Firstly: He may have chosen Simon Peter in particular, because he was known for his impulsiveness and forwardness. He could have been one of those arguing about ‘who is the greatest’, or, on hearing the Lord’s words ‘You are those who will be firm in My trials’, he thus counted himself the first of those who are firm. Thus the Lord wished to reveal in St. Peter the weakness of human nature in general. Hence, each of us would see in himself his personal weakness.

Judas stands for ‘the betrayal’, but St. Peter stands for ‘the weakness’ that needs help from God, and so he rises to become firm. He moreover makes others firm with him by means of the overflowing grace that he obtains.

+This was said to St. Peter because he was more bold than the rest. He also might feel proud due to the promises Christ has said to him and the others, that they would rule and judge the twelve tribes of Israel.

Secondly: In this conversation, the Lord Jesus depicted clearly the reality of the spiritual struggle for the sake of God’s kingdom. Though man’s heart is the battlefield, yet the conflict in its reality is between God and the devil. Here we can see Satan overruling Judas’ heart, and taking absolute control over his greed. Satan wishes to overrule the hearts of others as well. But he cannot invade our life and tempt us without any permission, for the lord Jesus says, (Luke22: 31) “Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat.” Though his temptation is similar to the sifting that separates the weeds for his account, yet it cannot touch the wheat, and this sifting does not take place without asking the Lords permission.

At this point, important spiritual facts are brought to attention: the adversary exerts his utmost to sift humanity by means of his trials. Though he obtains the permission from God to sift, yet God’s care over His wheat prevails, and the wheat is untouched by the trials. Rather, the wheat is separated from the weeds and is discerned so it be crowned. We are God’s wheat, and we are His concern. The evil adversary will not touch us however much he sifts us, unless e allow ourselves to be transformed from being God’s wheat to Satan’s weeds.

Dear one, even if you are a weed, know for sure that the Lord has come to change our weeds to wheat. He therefore pulls us away from Satan’s kingdom to His own.

The adversary’s war is diversified and unrelentant. As St. Ogris says to the monks, the enemy fights them by day by means of the people around them. But at nighttime, Satan himself fights them directly, for he says, “At night, the devils ask that they sift the spiritual leader himself. As for the daytime, the people are used so they surround him by different controversies, slanders and hazards.”

Thirdly: St. Augustine used the words of the Lord Jesus to St. Peter the apostle “But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail,” so as to answer Pelagius’ followers who in their extreme defense for mankind’s freedom, they almost denied the word of God’s grace. They believed that man is able to save himself by means of his personal struggle. St. Augustine assures us at this point, that even the faith, this is a gift from God, for the only begotten Son asks for His apostle’s sake that his faith does not perish.

St. Peter the apostle thought within himself he is able to share the Lord Jesus all of His suffering even unto death. In human zeal, yet with a sincere heart he said (Luke 22: 33) “Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death.” St. Peter did not realize that in fact, he was unable to pray or keep watch with the Lord in the garden. Neither could he face a maid in the house of the chief priest. St. Peter relied on himself and he was unaware of his actual weakness; a fact that his Master knew well about him more than St. Peter knew about himself.
+What has the Lord asked for St. Peter other than he remains persistent till the end?

For sure, if man were able to do so all by himself, this would not be asked of God for St. Peter’s sake. This is why the apostle said (2Cor. 13: 7) “Now I pray to God that you do no evil.” Surely He prays to God for their sakes so they be persistent.

St. Augustine

+ Therefore, we should never assume that our faith depends on our free self-will, without the need of God’s support.

St. Augustine

+ He taught us modesty in every way, affirming that the human nature alone is like nothing at all.

St. John Chrysostom

+The Lord Jesus knew St. Peter at all times; He knew him when St. Peter did not know himself. This is as what always happens with the patients: the patient does not know what is happening inside him, whereas the doctor knows this; even though the former suffers from the sickness whereas the physician does not.

The physician can inform us of what occurs in others’ lives; whereas the patient himself is unable to say what is happening inside him.

+ Man does not know what is inside him; but man’s Creator knows what is within man.

St. Augustine

+ He teaches us to be committed to thinking in modesty concerning ourselves, for we are as nothing. According to our human nature and our mental readiness we fall into sin. It is only through Him and in Him alone, we are strengthened, and we become in the state we are in at the present time. If we borrow from Him our salvation, then we are counted righteous and devout; then what situation is there for puffed-up thoughts? All what we have is from Him, and nothing is of our own. (1Cor.4: 7) “And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”

This is what the wise St. Paul said; as the righteous David the prophet said (Ps.59: 12) “O Lord, our shield.” Also (Ps. 45: 1) “God is our shelter and our strength.” Jeremiah the prophet says (Jer.16: 19) “O Lord, my strength and my stronghold, my refuge in the day of trouble.” Furthermore, the devout St. Paul when being truly advanced, says (Phil.4: 13) “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Indeed, even Christ Himself says (John15: 5) “Without Me you can do nothing.”

+ Christ shows clearly that even him who seems great, he is nothing and is weak indeed. Satan is used to attacking sublime people, of great prestige; he also creates a unique and fierce struggle, a barbaric conflict against those who have a good reputation in the righteous life.

St. Cyril the great

Fourthly: The Lord Jesus has asked of the Father for the sake of St. Peter. As St. Cyril the great says “He demeaned Himself for our sakes, so the Lord speaks here within the limitations of man. he is God in His nature, even if He has become incarnate. He is the Father’s power, by whom everything is kept, and from Him we obtain the ability for the good deeds; but because He has become man, He is asking of the Father.” It was necessary; yes, it was appropriate for Him who for the sake of providing Himself to become man like us, that He practices our work as well, when it is necessary to do so.”

Fifthly: St. Augustine thinks Christ’s request for the sake of St. Peter, did not limit the free will of St. Peter. He does not oblige him not to fall. He gives the divine support, and it is St. Peter’s right to accept or refuse this help.

On another occasion the same saint confirms that God is concerned about men’s freedom, otherwise His commandments would have been of no use. But man needs the divine grace of God to support him in carrying out these commandments.

Sixthly: St. Basilios the great discerns between the fall of the spontaneous ones such as St. Peter and the fall of others. He says that God allows the zealously spontaneous ones to fall sometimes as a cure for them lest they rely on themselves. This is usually hiddenly done, and is out of man’s weakness, and not out of ingratitude and insistence. As for the others, they fall due to their ingratitude and stubbornness. This is why the former ones need God’s support together with gentleness in raising them. As for the others, they usually need severe rebuke and discipline so they realise that God is the Judge, and thus they are terrified and so repent.

Seventhly: The Lord Jesus links repentance or coming back to Him with the positive work in serving the souls; for the Lord Jesus asks Simon Peter to make firm his brethren whenever he returns. This godly commandment has been experienced by king David the prophet in his repentant moments, for he cried out in the Psalm of Repentance saying (Ps.51: 13) “Then I will teach transgressors Your ways and sinners shall be converted to You.”

St. Cyril the great says that the Lord Jesus, even though He warned us of the trials, yet He offered us a comforting word. In other words, Christ is our true Friend, and He is warning us of our drawbacks, but He does not stand on the negative side; He rather supports us and encourages us to practice strongly the positive performance. Therefore we should not fear the devilish war or the authority of iniquity; rather, we have to believe in Him who dwells in us, and who works in us in authority for the spiritual construction.

The system the Lord Jesus uses when dealing with us, urges us to the ‘active hope’. With warning, He adds strength, and He urges us to work fearlessly and persistently.

Eighthly: When St. Peter still believed, after this discussion, that he could keep following Christ through his human zeal, the Lord assured him that he would deny Him three times. We have prior to this, spoken of this issue in the interpretation of St. Matthew 26: 34; St. Mark 14: 30.

7- A General Warning:

The Lord Jesus warned St. Peter the apostle and assured him he would deny Him three times before the cock crows. He also told him that he would depart from this weakness by means of God’s work and His grace. Now the Lord is asking all of His disciples to be armored by the swords of faith and spiritual struggle, that is, by the faith that works in love.

The evangelist says (Luke22: 35-38) “And He said to them, ‘When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?’ So they said ‘Nothing’. Then He said

to them 'But now, He who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one. For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: 'And He was number with the transgressors'. For the things concerning Me have an end.' So they said 'Lord, look, here are two swords'. And He said to them, 'It is enough.'"

Firstly: When sending them, He asked them for nothing other than to leave everything, even the necessities, so He be the secret of their satisfaction, and the Provider for their personal lives and their preaching mission. But now that the time of the crucifixion has come, He directed their attention to struggling. This is not to carry a sword and fight with it, as the disciples assumed; rather, to carry the sword of live faith that functions with love. This is why when they told Him there were two swords, He said to them 'It is enough.' They thus assumed He meant the two actual swords.

St. John Chrysostom compares Christ's words to a swimming instructor who puts his hands under the body of those he trains when in the water, and thus they feel confident and comfortable. The trainer then bit by bit takes his hands off, and so they struggle and learn. Likewise at the beginning, the Lord did not urge them for the spiritual struggle, He just sent them to preach, being carried on His hands, and not in need of anything. Now He is asking them for the spiritual struggle by the sword of the truthful Spirit, so they may face tribulations, and endure the crucifixion with Him Joyfully, and do not get hindered.

The Lord Jesus did not leave them to be in need of anything; rather, in overflowing satisfaction He filled all their needs when He was with them physically. Now, due to His love, He wished to leave them so He carries the cross, and they become as if they were in need, so they be blessed with new experience amidst the need and the pain. The love through which they lived for a time, in relief and in no need, is the same one that allowed them to practice the partnership with Him in His passion. For this same reason as saint Anba Anthony the great says in his letters, that God probably gives those who repent, at the beginning of their repentance, a lot of solace so as to uplift them and support them. But He allows it that He takes away their solace for a while so they struggle amidst the suffering, and thus they become exalted and obtain greater solace than at first.

Secondly: St. Ambrosios thinks the sword the Lord asked His disciples to have is 'the Word of God' that is counted as a double-edged sword.

+ (Luke22: 36) "and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one."

Why, Lord, are you commanding me to buy it, and yet You forbid me to strike (Matt.26: 52)?

Why do You command me to possess that which You forbid me to get out of its sheath, even if it is to defend myself?

The Lord was able to take revenge, yet He preferred to be slaughtered! There is also found the spiritual sword that makes you sell your inheritance to buy the Word that you deep spirit is clothed with.

There is also found the sword of suffering by which you uproot the body, so that you buy with the remains of your slaughtered body the crown of holy martyrdom. He may have meant the Old and the

with a kiss?’ When those around Him saw what was going to happen, they said to Him, ‘Lord, shall we strike with the sword?’ And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus answered and said, ‘Permit even this.’ And He touched his ear and healed him.”

Firstly: The crowd came that included the chief priests and the officers of the temple, and also some of the Roman soldiers and elders (John 18: 12) under the leadership of Judas. The Jewish leaders carried the weapons of hatred and loathsomeness in their hearts, and the soldiers carried the swords and cudgels. As for Judas, he came forward with a kiss from his lips that was more bitter than all the other weapons. It was a false kiss from a student to his Teacher! Judas was terrible in his iniquity: on one hand, he offered the kiss, the sign of love and loyalty, and the sign of giving Him to them. He offered this on the feast of the Passover, when it was appropriate that he would be righteous and devout, in honor of the reverence of the greatest Jewish feast. He offered it at the garden, at a time in which he knew it was a place of prayer for his Teacher. The student abused all what is holy; he abused the reverence of being a student, and the reverence of the feast, the reverence of prayer, and at no cost, for he asked of them the price of a slave!

King David the prophet says on behalf of the Lord Jesus who was betrayed by His student (Ps. 55: 12-14) “For it is not an enemy who reproaches me, then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me, who has exalted himself against me, then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion, and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in the throng.”

+ Judas did not cease his betrayal, even though Jesus warned him of it in every way; for at the last moment He told him “Judas, is it with a kiss you betray the Son of Man?”

St. John Chrysostom

+ He did not tell him ‘You scoundrel’, even though Judas was indeed a betraying scoundrel. Is this what you offer Judas, to reward such a great and gentle Lord? But the Lord simply said ‘Judas’, using the appropriate name and the gentle title, for He did not speak angrily; He just wanted Judas to reconsider himself.

He did not tell Judas “You are betraying Your Master or your Lord, or He who has authority over you, but He merely said ‘Are you betraying the Son of Man’, that is, you are handing over this gentle and meek one. It is as if Jesus is telling him “Even if I am not your Master or your Lord, or Him you are indebted to, do you betray an innocent and gentle person with you? Do you kiss Him at this moment of betrayal, and make of the kiss a sign of betrayal?”

Blessed are You, O Lord! You are an awesome example in enduring evil. You have manifested this in Your personality! What great meekness this is! The Lord gave us the example showing us not to cease offering the good advice to our brethren, even if our words seem to be of no avail at all.

St. John Chrysostom

+ It is appropriate for us not to stop advising our brothers even when our pieces of advice seem to be fruitless; for the springs of water keep overflowing even if no one drinks of it, and he who does not listen today may listen tomorrow. The fisherman could have empty net all day long, and at the last moment he might catch a fish. Likewise, even though our Lord knew that Judas would not stop, yet He did not cease to offer him the advice.

St. John Chrysostom

Secondly: ‘The kiss’ is the sign of love, friendship and longing for. But Judas used it to betray his Master, and thus it has become to him a sign of treachery and ingratitude.

This is why our fathers advise us not to conduct ourselves in sweet and gentle signs, but they cover up a cruel and violent heart. Let the outer appearance be a true reflection of the inner depths. An example of this is apparent silence as a sign of forgiveness or endurance, whereas the depths are boiling with hatred, or the outer silence is not a desire for gentleness, but is actually a kind of spite.

+ It is in vain to bridle your tongue, if your silence plays the same role that screaming does.

Father Joseph

Thirdly: when the disciples saw this general uproar against their innocent Lord, they said in human yet wrongful zeal (Luke 22: 48) “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” This was said by St. Peter the answer came clear and open (Matt. 26: 53, 54) “Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?” (John 18: 11) “Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?”

Fourthly: St. Peter did not wait for the Lord’s answer when he said ‘Shall we strike, Lord, with the sword?’ He might not even have heard the Lord’s answer, for the sight was very provoking and threatening, or he might have not quite woken up from sleep. He therefore struck Melchus, the slave of the chief priest and cut off his right ear.

Fifthly: The Lord Jesus is naturally good and gentle, and He does not cease to do good even at the difficult moments. While the persecutors showed every hatred and malice, the Lord Jesus was concerned about healing the injury of this slave who came in rebellion so as to kill Him.

St. Augustine comments on the healing of Melchus the slave’s ear, saying “Melchus means ‘he who helps so as to rule?’ Therefore what does the ear that has been cut for the Lord’s sake, and that the Lord has healed mean, other than the renewal of the hearing that the old times have been cut off from him, so that he becomes in the Lord’s fold, and not in the old literacy? Who can doubt that he who is blessed with this matter in Christ, has become impotent so he reigns with Him?”

Why has the right ear been cut off, and the Lord healed it?

The slave refers to the Jewish nation that was in the bondage state, and has not yet been blessed with the sonship to God. This nation was given the right ear so they hear the spiritual and divine voice through the old law. The left ear means the actual listening, and the right means the spiritual one. They had to listen to the law spiritually through the circumcision of the heart and the ear. But due to their cruel hearts, their ears were corrupted, since they were spiritually uncircumcised. The Lord allowed the cutting off of the uncircumcised so the actual hearing would die, and the inner ear be circumcised and thus hears the Lord’s voice.

Sixthly: Just as the Lord Jesus has paid attention that in love He reproached Judas at the last moments before His betrayal, for Judas might repent and return, without Jesus hurting his feelings by any cruel or harsh word, likewise did Jesus pay attention to His disciple St. Peter and asked him not to strike with an actual sword. Jesus was also concerned about Melchus the chief priest slave, and He healed his right ear so he might hear the divine voice. At this point Jesus is also concerned about those rebelling against Him, and reproached them for the sake of their salvation, for the evangelist says, (Luke 22: 52, 53) “Then Jesus said to the chief priests, captains of the temple, and the elders who had come to Him “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not try to seize Me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.””

The Lord reproaches them because they came to him at night, so they perform the deeds of darkness and malice. It was Satan who was leading them ‘the power of darkness. It was more befitting for them to be the sons of Light and the sons of Day, meeting Him in the temple and enjoy the shine of His righteousness and the beams of His love.

This work was called ‘the hour’ because the deeds of darkness however long they may be, they are only of a short duration and end. They were allowed to practice the deeds of darkness but for a short while.

(Revise the fathers’ sayings, particularly those of Sts. Cyril the great and Ambrosios in our interpretation (Matt. 26: 47; Mark14: 43)

10- Being Judged Religiously in the chief priest’s house:

(We have previously mentioned the fathers’ sayings in the religious Judgment of the Lord Jesus when interpreting (Matt.26: 57, Mark 14: 66)

The Lord was led first to Ananias Caiaphas’ father in law, and Caiaphas was the chief priest. Then He was led to Caiaphas, and this chief priest tore his clothes, and he thus prophesied without being aware of it that the tearing of the levites’ priest clothes means canceling it (Math.26: 65). There, He was accused of two things: that the Lord has said He would destroy the temple and in three days He would build another not made with manual hands; and the second accusation was that the Lord has blasphemed.

The Lord had to be judged before His own, so He be rejected, and thus the door of salvation would be opened to the Gentiles.

11- St. Peter Denying Him:

We have previously spoken of St. Peter’s denial (Matt.26: 57; Mark14 :48) where we saw St. Peter following the Lord from afar (Luke22: 54) By so doing, Peter denied the Lord, and when he drew near to Him, he did not deny Him. Peter sat, warming himself among the slaves and the servants, when he lost the warmth of the inner spirit. Finally he repented and regretted, for (luke22: 61) “and the Lord turned and looked at Peter.” In other words, it is appropriate for us, so we do not deny the Lord, to draw closer to Him and not to follow Him from afar. We also have to ask for the warmth of the inner spirit, and not the warmth of the false word, and that the Lord looks upon us with His merciful eye, and thus kindles our hearts with repentance, and grants our eyes the true tears acceptable unto God.

We add the following excerpts to what has gone prior to them in the interpretations of St. Matthew and St. Mark:

+ This tribulation was truly and lesson for our salvation, so we learn that if we take lightly the infirmities of our bodies, we are then tempted. If St. Peter has been tempted, then who of us is able to be puffed up?

He mentioned to us St. Peter who was tempted so that we learn of him how to resist temptation; and that even if we are tempted, yet we are able to overcome the thorn of tribulation with the tears of patience.

St. St. Ambrosios

+ What do the words “And the Lord turned and looked at Peter” mean other than that He gave him back the face that Peter had turned away from the Lord a short while ago?

He became confused, but he learnt not to trust himself; this was useful to him.

+ It cannot be said that the Lord turned to him and looked at him with His physical eyes; rather, this has come to happen inwardly. It has been fulfilled in the mind, in the deed of the will-power.

Christ's mercies have drawn close to him, silently and in secret. It touched his heart and reminded him of the past. The Lord remembered St. Peter with His inner grace, and it urged in him the tears of man's inward feeling that is activated in him.

Look by what means God is present with His help to work in our will power and our actions. Look how the Lord works in us so that we 'want to' and that 'we work'

St. Augustine

+ St. Peter was in need of the Lord reminding him, His look to him was replacing the voice, and thus St. Peter was

CHAPTER XXIII

The Crucified Friend

For the sake of the fellowship the Lord Jesus was asking for, He endured the agony. He accepted the judgment, and the carrying of the cross, and He underwent death, and was buried in the grave so that He carries us as friends to Him for eternity.

1. His judgment before Pilate
2. His judgment before Herod
3. The Jews' Persistence to Crucify Him
4. The cross and Simon the Cyrene
5. The cross and the lamenting women
6. His crucifixion between two thieves
7. Giving up the Christ
8. His burial

1. His judgment before Pilate:

The Lord Jesus came to reconcile man to the Father, and cover man's sins by His blood. But man accused Him of provoking the people and was the source of rebellion; for the evangelist says, "*Then the whole multitude of them arose and led Him to Pilate, and they began to accuse Him saying, 'We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying He himself is Christ, a king'*" (**Luke 23:1, 2**)

The evangelist St. Luke mentions the civil accusation clearly. In the religious council He was accused of blasphemy. Here, before Pilate, the accusation was that He was perverting the people so they do not pay taxes to Caesar, and that He appointed Himself a king, even though He was previously asked and answered, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's". Also, when they wished to take Him by force and appoint Him king, He disappeared from among them!

St. Cyril the great says, "They led Jesus to Pilate. They, too, were given up to the Roman soldiers who have occupied their minds, their land and have invaded their city, where the holy and revered places were, and the inhabitants were killed by the sword and by fire. In them, the prophecies of the saintly apostles were fulfilled, for one of them says, "*Woe to the guilty! How unfortunate they are, for what their hands have done shall be done to them*" (**Is. 3:11**). Another prophecy says, "*As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head*" (**Obadiah 1: 15**)

There is no doubt, Pilate has heard that the Lord has called to give Caesar what is Caesar's. When he saw that the Lord Jesus was a poor man, and that He could not appoint Himself king, he asked Him maybe mockingly, or just for appearance, "*Then Pilate asked Him saying, 'Are You the King of the Jews?'*, He answered him and said, '*It is as you say*'. So Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, '*I find no fault in this Man*'" (**Luke 23:3, 4**).

As St. Cyril the great says, “They led Jesus to Pilate, and they devised several accusations, and they brought them up against Christ. They were false accusations that had no proof whatsoever. By this, they were more malicious than the atheists, for Pilate had justified Him from any accusation saying, “I find no fault in this man”. Pilate said this three times.

When the leaders could not provoke the governor against Him by rational means, *“But they were more fierce, saying, ‘He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place’ (Luke 23:5).*

They might have wished to threaten the governor by this, because the situation is not limited in his area only, but that it extends to other places as well. This means that if Pilate does not pass a verdict over Him, another ruler will do so; thus the governor would be looked upon as careless in the eyes of Caesar, leaving those who cause chaos without any judgment. It also maybe for this reason that Pilate sent Him to Herod and to Galilee, so that if He is pronounced innocent or guilty, there would be another governor’s verdict supporting him before Caesar. According to the Roman law, moreover, every person stands before his district governor to be judged. Therefore Pilate did not wish to trespass over Herod’s concerns, despite the enmity existing between them. It is as if Pilate paid consideration to the earthly law, quite contently, and handed Him over to another governor, whereas the Jewish leaders did not pay any regard to the divine law of God, and gave up the Lord Jesus to be crucified unto the death sentence wrongfully.

We also notice that the Lord Jesus did not defend himself with a single word. He counted the truth in which He is, well testified about by this silence, and that He does not need any words to testify of Him. This is what the evangelist proclaims in the encounter between the Lord Jesus and Herod, as we shall see. He came to draw our hearts by His love, and not to defend Himself.

2. His judgment before Herod:

“Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad, for he had desired for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him. Then he questioned Him with many words, but He answered Him nothing. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. Then Herod with His men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each others.” (Luke 23: 8-12)

We notice in the encounter between the Lord Jesus and Herod the following points:

First: Herod wished to be assured of what he had heard about the Lord Jesus, and this is why he was so happy to see Him. It was not to be blessed by Him, or to know the truth, but it was to see miracles and wonders. But the Lord did not come to parade miracles, but rather to save the souls. This is why He kept silent and did not even answer the accusations alleged against Him, therefore Herod scorned Him and his men ill-treated Him.

Second: In his judgment, whether it be with the chief priest or Pilate or Herod, the Lord kept silent, so the words be fulfilled, “*like a lamb to the slaughter and like a sheep that is before its shearers is silent*” (Isa. 53:7). The Lord was likened to being a lamb in being silent so He would be counted righteous and not guilty.

St. Augustine

This is an awesome example calling on the human hearts to endure the humiliation in a firm spirit. The Lord was accused and yet He kept silent! In His silence He was just, because He was in no need of some one to defend Him.

St. Ambrosios

Third: St. Ambrosios commented on the gorgeous robe that Herod dressed the Lord in saying, “Herod dressed the Lord in a white robe to point out that the agony He endured was because of no blame in Him; for He is the lamb of God that is unblemished carrying gloriously the sins of the world.

Fourth: Father Theophlactiss thinks the friendship that ensued between Pilate and Herod due to the killing of the Lord Jesus after the enmity that had existed between them, that His is a reproach to us. Satan has united the two enemies to carry out his evil purpose. As for us, we are divided against ourselves instead of being united for the sake of the salvation of our souls.

As for St. Ambrosios, he thinks the friendship between the two enemies, a reference to the unity that has come to be between the people of Israel and the Gentile nations through Christ’s death, by the acceptance of everyone as members in the New testament church, the new covenant church.

3. The Jews Insist on Crucifying the Lord:

First: We are not surprised that the Lord Jesus, though He was falsely accused, has been silent, whereas the enemies stood in defense of Him, among whom were Pilate and Herod. Pilate testified, “*and indeed, having experienced Him in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning all the things of which you accuse Him. No neither did Herod*” (Luke 23:14, 15).

When they insisted on killing Him once and twice, He assured them, “*why what evil has He done? I have found no reason for death in Him*” (Luke 23: 22), but they cried out insistently that He be crucified!

Pilate rebuked them and offered some justification for himself, saying, “I have found no fault in this man...” here are those who know the divine law and have sublime qualities, and say they are Moses’ disciples, here they are asking that He be put to death. It is He who is

blameless, He is the head and the teacher of every righteousness. It is He who grants the believers every righteousness in great skill.

They have become all the more, deserving of every severe punishment, because Pilate whose job was to condemn Him, had pronounced Him innocent.

St. Cyril the Great

Secondly: The Lord has exerted every effort even His own life, for the sake of offering His fellowship to mankind, yet, His own rejected Him and preferred Barabas to Him, “*and they all cried out at once saying, ‘away with this man, and release to us Barabas’ who had been thrown into prison for a certain rebellion made in the city and for murder*” (**Luke 23:18, 19**). They wanted to kill the righteous one and release the rebellious and the killer. As St. Ambrosios says, “the word ‘barabas’ means the son of the father. It is as if these are the ones to whom it has been said, “*you are of your father, the devil*” (**John 8:44**). Now they are preferring their fathers son, that is the Anti-Christ, rather than the son of God.

Third: *For the third time they cried out vehemently, and begged Pilate to crucify Him, “But they were insistent, demanding with loud voices that He be crucified. And the voices of these men and of the chief priests prevailed. So Pilate gave the sentence that it should be as they requested. And he released to them the one they requested, who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison, but he delivered Jesus to their will” (Luke 23:23-25).*

These cruel and unlawful shouts have been rebuked by the Lord in Isaiah the prophet, “*For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people pf Judah, are His pleasant planting, He expected justice, but saw bloodshed, righteousness but heard a cry*” (**Is. 5:7**).

At another place he spoke of them, “*woe to them, for they have strayed from Me! Destruction to them, for they have rebelled against Me! I would redeem them, but they spoke lies against Me*” (**Hos. 7:13**). Also, “*their officials shall fall by the sword because of the rage of their tongue*” (**Hos. 7:16**).

It is said that Pilate gave the word that their desire be done, for this was good in their eyes, because Pilate’s will was defeated, and the verdict has been pronounced. They resisted and vehemently opposed Pilate, and they overcame him. Thus this was a trap to them and was the cause of their perdition. It is this that pushed them to disastrous and incessant perdition and devastation.

St. Cyril the Great

4. The Cross and Simon the Cyrene:

“Now as they led Him away, they laid hold of a certain man, Simon Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and on Him they laid the cross that He might bear it after Jesus.” (Luke 23:26).

We have said that the word ‘simon’ means to ‘to hear’ or ‘to obey’, ‘cyrene’ means ‘the inheritance’, which is a Gentile city in Libya. Therefore ‘Simon the Cyrene’ refers to the church of the new covenant that has become higher by means of the obedience in the faith. She has come from the Gentiles to share her Christ His cross, and be blessed with Him by this honorable reverence.

St. John the evangelist mentions that the Lord Jesus has carried the cross (**John 19:17**), for this is the sign of His kingdom. As Isaiah the prophet has said, *“authority rests on His shoulders” (Isa. 9:6)*. On the way because He wanted to make of the church a queen that shares Him His glories it was allowed that Simon, the church representative, carry the cross.

St. Ambrosios says, “the time has come so that the conqueror raises his banner and so the cross was put on His shoulders. The Lord carried His banner, then He handed it over to the martyrs, for them to raise as well, *“take up your cross and follow Me” (Luke 9:23)*.

I wish we would go out with Simon in obedience that springs out of faith, going from the field of this world so as to carry the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus we share Him His inheritance and His glories.

5. The Crucifixion and the Lamenting Women:

“And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him. But Jesus, turning to them said, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children, for indeed, the days are coming in which they will say, ‘blessed are the barren wombs that never bore and breasts which never nursed!’ then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘fall on us’ and to the hills ‘cover us’! for if they do their things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry” (Luke 23: 27-31)

Because the evangelist St. Luke wrote to the Gentiles, he wished to focus on a womens’ position and her esteem in the eyes of a Christian. The men have rebelled against the truth and the multitudes revolted asking for the crucifixion of the righteous and the release of the killer, whereas a crowd of women were lamenting what happened and following the Lord in those bitter moments.

Our Christ, the real friend, turned to these women, to direct their human tears that were full of pity on Him to the sincere repentance and ask for the salvation of their souls and their childrens’ saying, “do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children”.

The Lord himself wept over Jerusalem, since it did not want to weep over itself, the Lord wants us to weep so as to escape from the perdition.

He who weeps a lot in the world, is saved in the future; because, ‘the heart of the wise is in the house of lamentation, whereas the heart of the ignorant is in the house of laughter”.

The Lord Himself said, “*Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh*” (**Luke 6:21**). Let us weep, then for a time, and then be joyful forever. Let us fear the Lord and wait for Him, in confession of our sins. Let us revert from our wickedness, so we are not told, “*woe is me!the faithful have disappeared from the land and there is no one left who is upright*” (**Micah 7:12**)

St. Ambrosios

Furthermore, many of the fathers think the words here are addressed to the Jewish nation, for He called them, ‘daughters of Jerusalem’ He declared to the Jews that it is appropriate for them that they rather weep over what would befall Jerusalem. If the Roman verdict has been pronounced of crucifying the ‘green branch’, that is the Lord Jesus, then Jews will hand over the ‘dry branch’, to the Roman swords where Jerusalem will be besieged, and the temple will be absolutely destroyed.

He called Himself ‘the green tree’ or ‘the green branch’ that bears leaves and fruits and blossoms. As for its fruits these are His teachings, His advice and the testimony of the power of His godliness in His divine miracles that are indescribable: the dead He has raised to life, and He healed the lepers, and healed the blind, and many other wonders He did that urge us to give absolute gratitude to the perfection. Despite the marvels that He performed, the Romans and particularly Pilate condemned Him. It was Pilate who unjustly passed judgment over Him and inflicted on Him cruel scorn. This is why He says if the Roman rulers have poured on Me these matters, even though they witnessed Me adorned in tremendous glory such as this, then what would they do to Israel, now that they have realized it is a dry and fruitless branch? For they do not find in the Israelites an unusual thing worthy of honor or mercy. Therefore they will burn them with fire unmercifully and would exercise against them fierce cruelty.

St. Cyril the Great

He called Himself ‘the green wood’, and us ‘the dry branch’ because He himself in Him is life and the strength of the divine nature. But as for us humans, we are called the dry branch.

Pope Gregory the Great

If Christ the Lord, ‘the tree of life’ did not depart from this world except after He had endured the agony for our sakes and due to our iniquity, then don’t we expect ourselves to suffer, we the dry branch that is fruitless?

As for the days in which the barren women are blessed, the days of besieging Jerusalem have come, when the honest women have eaten their children due to their excessive hunger, as the Jewish historian, Youssofios, described.

6. His Crucifixion Between Two Thieves:

The evangelist St. Luke offered us a description of the Lord's crucifixion, in which was mentioned.

First: For more humiliation they crucified Him between two thieves, one on the right, the other on the left, and thus the words of Isaiah the prophet have been fulfilled, "*He was numbered with the transgressors, yet He bore the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors*" (**Isa. 53:12**). The evangelist also describes the position of the two thieves, saying, "*Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, 'If You are Christ save Yourself and us' But the other answering, rebuked him saying, 'Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this Man has done nothing wrong' Then he said to Jesus, 'Lord remember me when You come into Your kingdom' and Jesus said to him, 'assuredly I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise'*" (**Luke 23:39-43**)

If you have been crucified with Him as a thief, then come to know God since you are a repentant thief.

Kneel down to Him who was hung for your sake, even if you yourself are hung. Make use of your malice, and press your salvation by means of your death. Enter with Jesus into paradise, so you learn from where you have fallen, (Rev. 2:5).

St. Gregory El Naznizi

The thief believed at a time when He learned themselves absolutely failed. The thief did not believe in their words, and yet his faith was such that he confessed Him who he saw nailed to the cross, and did not see Him risen or king.

St. Augustine

Christ Himself took the thief from the cross to Paradise, to show that repentance will not be delayed in its mission. He transformed the killer's death to a martyr.

St. Jerome

Do not be ashamed to consider this thief a teacher for us. It is him who the Lord was not ashamed of, but rather He made him enter into paradise before anyone else!

I do not only see Him as worthy of admiration but I bless him as well, because he did not think about his pain, but he rather forgot about himself and was concerned about his friend, trying to save Him from perdition. In this way he became a teacher when on the cross. Meditate on how he fulfilled the apostles law. He was not only concerned about himself, but he did every means as much as he could to save the other from perdition and guide him to the truth.

The thief confessed, and so he found the doors of paradise open! He confessed, and so he was told enough to ask for the kingdom, even though he was a thief!

Tell me, you thief, how did you remember the kingdom of heaven? What happened now and before your eyes are the nails, the cross, the accusation, the humiliation, and the swearing.

He would say, yes, I can see all of these, but the cross itself is the symbol of the kingdom. Thus I call the One crucified on it, the king because the king has to die for the sheep.

St. John Chrysostome

Despite this, the cross itself, when we meditate well, is the judgment seat. The judge has sat in the middle: one thief believed and so he was saved, and the other blasphemed and so he was condemned. By this He meant He is the judge of the living and the dead; yes, someone on the right and the other are on His left.

St. Augustine

He was hung on the precious cross, and two thieves were hung with Him as well. What does this signify?

To the Jews, this was out of real humility, but it was a remembrance of the prophecy, for it is written, "*He was numbered with the transgressors*" (**Is. 52:12**). For our sakes He became a curse, that is, under the curse, for it was also written, "*for anyone hung on a tree, is under God's curse*" (**Deut. 21:23**).

"But to Him, this deed wiped out the curse for us. In Him and with Him, we became blessed. Because the righteous king David knew this, he said, "we are blessed from the Lord, the creator of heaven and earth" for by His agony, the blessing came upon us. He has paid the debt on our behalf and carried our sins away, "*but He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, upon Him was the punishment that made us whole, and by His stripes we are healed*" (**Isa. 53: 5, 6**).

As I said the two thieves were hung to mock Him even in the agony that has brought salvation to the world in its totality. But one of the thieves remained in the Jewish wickedness, and uttered the words of blasphemy like they did. But the other one took a praiseworthy road for he believed in the Lord at a most bitter moment of torture for himself. He rebuked the violent cries of the Jews and the words of the one being crucified with him. He confessed his sins so he could be justified. He testified of Christ blamelessly, and reproached the Jews for their impotence in loving God. He also condemned the verdict of Pilate. He became a confessor of the savior's glory and condemned the pride of those who crucified Him.

St. Cyril the Great

On the cross, the thief's hands and feet were nailed. He had nothing free to act except His heart and His tongue. By an inspiration from God, the thief offered all that was free in

himself, for it is written, “*For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*” (**Romans 10:10**). The thief became all of a sudden filled with grace, and he received all of these three virtues the apostle mentioned and held unto them on the cross. He therefore obtained the salvation since He came to believe in God, that the rules and reigns, when though he saw the Lord saw as he was dying as well. He yet had the hope by which he asked to enter the Lord’s kingdom. He also kept the love as well, in great zeal at the moment of his death, since he rebuked his brother thief, his colleague.

Pope Gregory the Great

The Lord forgave him quickly because the thief repented quickly. Grace is of more value than the request. The thief asked the Lord to remember him, as for the Lord He answered him in an overflow, “assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise”. Life means to be with Christ, and where Christ is, the kingdom is also.

St. Ambrosios

Second: The evangelist St. Luke related the name where Christ was crucified to the crucifixion between two guilty men. He said, “*and when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left*” (**Luke 23:33**). In the tradition, it is mentioned that the place was called Calvary, where Adam, the head of mankind was buried. It is as if the cross was raised on Adam’s grave, where his skull was changed to dust due to his corruption. The Lord has been crucified between criminals who stand for the present corruption. In other words, the savior was hung on the cross to save us from Adam's sin as well as from the actual iniquity.

Because humanity was corrupted, the Lord declared His body so that wherever corruption is manifested there is found the incorruption. This is why He was crucified in Calvary, where the Jewish scholars say Adam was buried.

Pope Athanasius the apostolic

The cross was raised in the middle, as assumed untop of Adam's grave.

St. Ambrosios

Some think the word 'Calvary' is translated from the Aramaic, 'golgotha'. It has been called as such due to its circular shape that is similar to mans skull or because it was the crucifixion site where there was a lot of crucified skulls.

Furthermore, some scholars believe that the Lord Jesus was crucified between two thieves instead of Barabas who was supposed to be crucified as their leader, their colleague and their motivator for crimes. Thus, the Word replaced this killer.

Thirdly: The four gospels have recorded seven words the Lord Jesus uttered on the cross, three of which have been mentioned in the gospel according to our teacher St. Luke. These seven words are: three words before darkness fell:

- a. - "Father forgive them for they know not what they do" (**Luke 23:34**)
 - "Assuredly I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise" (**Luke 23:43**)
 - "Woman, behold your son!...behold your mother!" (**John 19: 26, 27**)
- b. A word during a darkness:
 - "My God! My God! Why have You forsaken me" (**Matt 27:46, Mark 15:34**)
- c. Three words after the darkness:
 - "I am thirsty" (**John 19:28**)
 - "It is finished" (**John 19:30**)
 - "Father into Your hands, I commit my Spirit" (**Luke 23:46**)

These seven words, that the evangelist St. Luke mentioned the first, the second and the seventh have all been offered for our sake, so we be blessed with His through His work of salvation on the cross.

The first is addressed for the sake of these enemies so He grants them the forgiveness, for He has come to eliminate the enmity and grant reconciliation. The second was offered to the thief in a personal sense to confirm His personal relation with everyone without remembering the past. The third was offered to His mother and to John the beloved to proclaim this care of every soul and His care to all our needs. The fourth implied a kind of reproach so we have the full courage in our speaking to God. The fifth revealed His thirst towards us, and His eagerness to man that is uninterrupted. The sixth He declared the victory of salvation, and the seventh He offered us the absolute relief.

Fourth: "*Then Jesus said, 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do'*" (**Luke 23:34**)

He said this, not because He is unable to forgive them Himself, but rather so as to teach us to pray for the sake of our persecutors, not by words only, but by actual deeds as well. He says, "forgive them" if they repent, for He is merciful to those who repent if they wish to wash with their faith their many sins that they have committed.

St. John Chrysostome

The objective of the cross is to save and forgive, not caring as to what may befall Him. He did care about dying by their means, but rather, only to die for their sake.

St. Augustine

Look how he kept on being gentle even when dealing with those who was crucified him

St. John Chrysostome

Allow them to be cultured by means of your it deeds if there is no other way. Face the wrath with meekness and their haughtiness with humility in their blasphemy with your prayers. Let us prove in real gentleness that we are their brethren. Let us follow the Lord's example who endured the injustice, and thus compete in your endurance of injustice, scorn and degradation. Let Satan have no place in your hearts where he could nestle.

St. Ignatius the Enlightened

Fifth: *"and they divided his garments and cast lots" Luke 23:34*

The lord Jesus has carried our sins he has been hung on the cross naked so He redeems us from the shame of Sin.

We said in the interpretation of St. **Matthew 27:35**, that the cloak divided into four parts refers to the extended church into the four corners of the universe. As for the garment that was woven from the top (**John 19:13**) for which they cast their lots without being cut, this refers to the church that has to bear the qualities of her groom. Thus it is heavenly, for it is woven from the top, without any cutting or division. This has also been spoken of by St. Cyril the great.

St. Ambrosios thinks the four soldiers refer to the four evangelists have recorded who have recorded what we are blessed with. As for the garment they cast their lot for, this refers to the Holy Spirit that is not granted according to man's personal worthiness, but rather it is a free gift of God.

Sixth: When the lord Jesus was hung on the cross, He became an object of scorn by everyone: the multitudes and the rulers, the Jews and the Roman soldiers, for it is said, *"and the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered saying, 'He saved others, let Him save Himself if He is the Christ and the chosen of God' the soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering him some wine and saying, 'if You are the King of the Jews save yourself'" (Luke 23:35-37)*

The rulers wished to mock Him, and thus they confessed in their own are tongues, 'He saved others', and this confession has come to be testimony against themselves. Indeed, He has come not to save Himself for He's not in need of any salvation. As a Physician, He came forth to heal those who are sick. As Pope St. Athanasius the apostolic said, 'Indeed the Lord our savior, wished to be known as the savior, not by saving Himself, but by the salvation of others. The physician is not considered as such by healing Himself, but by showing his skill with patients. Likewise is the Lord, by being the savior, He does not need to save Himself. It is not by His coming down from the cross that he becomes a savior but by his death. Indeed the great salvation of humanity is fulfilled by His death more than by His coming down from the cross'

He has accepted to drink the vinegar, as St. Ambrosios says, for He has taken our corruption to nail it on the cross. As His rejection of the wine blended with bitterness this is not to avoid the sour bitterness, but rather because the bitterness gives a kind of anesthesia, and thus the crucified does not feel the agony he passes through. The Lord wished to endure the agony till the very end. As for the bitterness, St. Ambrosios says, "Surely, He has taken the bitterness of our life in His human body"

Seventh: *"And an inscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. This is the king of the Jews" (Luke 23:38)*

His error was a crown to Him that showed His hidden reality a king. As mentioned in the book of the songs of Solomon, *"Go forth, O daughters of Zion, and see king Solomon with the crown, with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, the day of the gladness of his heart"* (**Song 3:11**).

Notice that Satan's wiles have reverted to him. His guilt has been written in three languages so that no one passing by would fail to know He has been crucified for appointing Himself king. It was written in Greek, in Latin, and in Hebrew. These languages are the ones that have the most significance among the Roman Gentiles, the most knowledgeable among the Greeks and the most worship to God among the Jews. All of these yield to the dominion of Christ.

Father Theophlactus

6. The Giving up of the Spirit:

Though the human authorities have united together in an effort to see the crucified Lord Jesus, yet the thief on the right hand managed to take the kingdom and be blessed with the divine fellowship on a level. Now and just before the Lord Jesus gives up the ghost in the Father's hand, the solid and insensible nature has begun its role in testifying to Him what has been denied by the sensible and earthly creation, till the Roman centurion came to believe in Him and testify of Him.

"Now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. Then the sun was darkened and the veil of the temple was torn in two. And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, 'Father into Your hands I commit My spirit' having said this He breathes His last. So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God saying, 'certainly this was a righteous Man!' And the whole crowd that came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned, but all His acquaintances, and the women who followed Him from Galilee, stood a distance watching these things" (**Luke 23: 44-49**)

We notice the following in the above passage:

First: According to the Jewish calculation, now it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. This is due to the fact that nature wished to express its rejection to what man has done to the incarnate Word of God? Or did wish by this darkness to draw the curtain of nature on this horrific sight? Or did nature wish to declare that the crucified is the Creator?

Prior to this, the prophets have testified this happening, saying, *"on that day there shall not be neither cold nor frost, but there shall be continuous day, not day and not night, for at evening time there shall be light"* (**Zech. 14:6, 7**). *"On that day, says the Lord God, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth in broad daylight. I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into laments"* (**Amos 8:9, 10**). *"I clothe the heavens with blackness, and make sack cloth their covering"* (**Isa. 50:3**).

St. Ambrosios

Yes indeed, the nature laments itself and what it has; the sun has darkened, and the rocks split open and cracked, and the temple seemed like someone clothed in grief, for the veil was torn from top to bottom.

St. Cyril the Great

Second: The temple veil got torn from the middle, for the enmity now was wiped between God and man. Thus the holies of holies was opened to all those who believe, the members of the crucified body. As Father Theophactus says, 'the holies of holies is no longer a place not be approached'

St. Ambrosios says that the old veil was torn so the Jews could, by means of faith, to witness the mystery declared to them. Thus they would accept the Gentiles with them, without any division of the two nations, the Jewish and the Gentile, that is, to manifest the church of the New covenant.

(Revise St. Ambrosios's comments in the gospel book according to St. Mark pages 293 & 294)

Third: *"Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Father into Your hands I commit My spirit'"*
(Luke 23:46)

The Son commits His human Spirit into the Father's hands; and even though He is in the highest, yet He enlightened Hades to save all there in it.

He committed His Spirit into the Father's hands so that the heavens themselves be released from the chains of darkness. Thus there would be peace in heaven, and earth could follow it.

He gave up the Spirit by His own will, and this is why He added "in a loud voice".

St. Ambrosios

This voice tells us that the souls of the saints no longer descends to Hades as before, for the are now with God, since Christ has made this beginning of a change.

St. John Chrisostome

Fourth: When the centurion saw the Lord Jesus giving up the Spirit so strongly, and when he heard the Lord yielding it up and committing it into the Father's hands, he believed saying, *"Certainly this was a righteous Man"* (Luke 23:47), *"Indeed this Man was the Son of God"* (Matt. 27:39).

The centurion had seen many of those crucified, die. But, the death of this crucified One, was unique. He shock the depth of his heart and drew it to believe in Him, particularly when he saw with his own eyes how nature testified to Him. The Lord's words had been fulfilled, *"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw the peoples to Myself"* (**John 12:32**). He has been lifted up on the cross and has attracted the thief on His right hand, the centurion, and many others who were witnessing this, and were watching from afar.

St. John Chrisystome says, 'Great is the dominion of the Crucified; after much scorn, humiliation and scourging, the centurion was moved to regret, and also the multitudes. Some say the centurion was later a believing martyr, when he matured in the faith'

8. His Burial:

Joseph of Aramithea who was *"a council member, a good and just man"* (**Luke 23:50**) was bold enough to ask for the body of the Lord Jesus, for he was waiting for God's kingdom (**Luke 23:51**). When Pilate agreed, *"Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of a rock, where no one had ever lain before. That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near. And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment"* (**Luke 23:53-56**).

Joseph was a secret and hidden disciple to the Lord Jesus. He was eager to listen to the Lord. But due to fear, he could not declare being a follower to Him. When the time of crucifixion came, this fear was wiped out, and he asked boldly for the Lord's body. Hardship could turn many people from being afraid to having courage, and thus they have become worthy in the eyes of God and of people. They become deserving by God's grace to put oils on the body of Christ, that is, the church, by the precious spices that are manifested strongly at the time of ordeal.

If you were Joseph of Aramethea, ask for the body from the one who has crucified the Lord. Make Him a king to you, He who cleanses purifies the world (1 John 1:7)

St. Gregory El Nazinzi

(Revise St. Ambrosios's comments in the gospel book according to St. Mark pages 295 & 296)

Section Five
Our Friend, the Resurrected from the dead.
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Chapter XXIV
Our Friend, the Resurrected from the Dead

The Lord Jesus underwent all this agony for our sakes, so He might make us friend to Himself. Because He has risen, He remained after the resurrection the Friend to mankind. He is eager to grant His life that has been risen, to humanity. We could see Him drawing close to the Amos disciples, walk with them, and gently speaks with them, and kindles their hearts by His love. He then opens their eyes so they know Him. He also appears to the rest of the disciples, and asks them to touch Him and feel His real presence in their midst. He even ate with them, so they be confident of the reality of His presence. Finally, He gets them out to Bethany, and raises His hands and blesses them. He then draws apart from them and ascends to heaven to prepare a place for them. This is why they returned to Jerusalem in great joy.

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1- The Empty Tomb:

(Luke24: 1-8) **“Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb, bringing the spices with they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again’. And they remembered His words.”**

The women rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment, (Luke23: 56). The Lord was laid in the tomb; this was the last of the Sabbaths of the Old Testament, so that with its finality the Old is terminated and fulfilled, whereas the New covenant begins, with the Lord’s resurrection at the beginning of the week, at dawn. This day, in which the Lord rose from the grave was like a new beginning to mankind in their relation to God; for now, humanity has the right of life resurrected in the Lord, so it lives in a unique new Sabbath, which is ‘the rest of the new life in the Lord’, or, ‘The life restful in the resurrection of the Lord’, or you may say, ‘The restful partnership with the risen Christ.’

He left the tomb empty, and the stone sealed. This is just as He was born of the Virgin and her virginity was untouched. He sent His angel to roll the stone, so that the believers might find in the empty tomb the deposit of the resurrection that has no end to it, and also the spring of the new life that has overcome death!

God used to send fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice, as a sign of His acceptance of it and its being exalted to His heavens. But now that the Son has offered His life a sacrifice of love in our place, the tomb has become empty as a sign of the Father's pleasure for the sacrifice, and His acceptance of it. Thus there is no place for the Lord's body in the tomb, for He is risen! This is the church's faith, that has been summarized by St. Paul the apostle in his brief statement (Rom.4: 25) "Who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification." Moreover, scholars think this statement stands for the cornerstone in the creed of the church's faith in the apostle's time, which the apostle carried forth from the tradition.

The evangelist St. Luke mentions the women going to the grave to find it empty. We notice the following in these words:

Firstly: The evangelist begins by saying, "Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb." In the previous chapter he concluded his words saying that the women rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment. Now, with the beginning of the new week, they went with their spices and oil fragrances to the Lord's tomb, and some women went along with them.

It was not possible on the Sabbath, according to the Jewish tradition, for them to prepare the spices or go to the tomb. Thus they had to do nothing till Saturday evening or the eve before Sunday so they prepare the spices, and go with the new day at dawn, when it was still dark, towards the tomb. We may say that these women represent the one church that extends across the age, that has lived at the symbolic time as the truth. By stopping work on the Sabbath, they proclaimed their acceptance of the symbol in the Old Testament, but yet eager it be fulfilled, so they be transferred to the Sunday dawn, in order to find the Truth in essence, by their encounter with Christ the Risen from the dead. In this way, the church-rest is not in stopping work on the symbolic Sabbath, but in going towards Christ the Risen, carrying the holy spices and the fragrances so beautiful, declaring in her life and her preaching the Truth.

They headed on, and some women were with them as well. If those women represent the men of the Old Testament that had their hearts kindled with the awaited-for Messaiah then we can consider those coming along with them to the tomb to stand for those Gentile nations that have accepted the faith in Christ, the Risen from the dead.

Secondly: (Luke 24: 2) **"But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus."** The angel had rolled the stone (Matt.28: 2), and according to the church tradition, it is St. Michael the archangel who did this.

The rolling came after the resurrection, since the Lord was not in need of the stone-rolling to rise. He has risen, as I have said previously, when the seals were still there. Many of the fathers, such as St. Augustine and St. Jerome, believe this work comparable to what had occurred on His birth from the ever-virgin St. Mary.

Therefore, the rolling of the stone was for our sakes, so as to be assured of the Lord's resurrection, for St. John Chrysostom says "The stone was rolled after the resurrection for the women's sake, so they believe the Lord has risen, on witnessing the tomb without the body, and hence witnessing the Truth."

Thirdly: (Luke24: 4) **"And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments."**

The women played a role that has not been made by the other apostle or disciples. They went ahead when it was still dark, and did not mind the obstacles awaiting them, such as the rolling of the stone. When they saw the tomb opened, they did not hesitate to go in. thus they were worthy to see the two angels dressed in bright and gorgeous garments, proclaiming to them the Resurrection.

They did not see the angels in flames of fire, neither did they see them carrying fiery swords as others did in the Old Testament. Rather, they saw them in garments of joy and splendor. It is as if heaven wanted to share the church her joy in the Lord's resurrection. In their bright shining garments, the angels wished to proclaim to the entire church that the heavenly hosts are wearing the kingdom garments, awaiting the blessed bride's coming, that will be wedded to her heavenly Groom in His eternal kingdom.

Fourthly: (Luke24: 5-8) **“Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again’? And they remembered His words.’”**

On seeing the tomb empty, grief and fear filled their hearts. In bitterness, they bowed their faces to the ground. This is why the angels' gently reproached them, how they could expect to see the living in the tomb, for He has overcome death. This was actually declared to the disciples ahead of time, concerning His resurrection. At that moment, they remembered the Savior's words!

We can say that this angelic reproach is still there addressed to every believer who wishes to keep the Lord in the tomb, as if He is unable to rise from the dead. In other words, we assume we are Christian believers, whereas we do not leave the physical needs and passions, the earth links and concerns, and we are like those who ask for the living among the dead, and listens to the words “He is not here, for He is risen!”

He, who remembers the Lord's words about His resurrection, finds himself with his Christ above the boundaries of the grave. He is not afraid of death, neither does he bow down to the physical passion bondage. He is not confused about the world concepts, but rather, he goes with his Christ who dwells in him to a heavenly life, triumphant beyond any time or place.

If we meditate on the life history of the martyrs, we find that the mystery behind their victory lies in their unity with the Lord risen from the dead. They are not besieged in the body, and thus, even if the wicked ones torture their bodies, the Lord sends them His angels, and at times He Himself appears to them, not to take their revenge, but rather to exalt them above the limits of suffering. This made the rulers accuse Christians of magic and sorcery.

Fifthly: When the women were ahead of the apostles in going to the Lord's tomb, they were thus blessed by preaching of the Lord's resurrection among the apostles. The evangelist therefore says, (Luke24: 9) **“Then they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest.”** St. Cyril the great says, “the woman who was once to serve death, now is the first to receive the mystery of the awesome resurrection, and was the first to be informed of it. In this way the woman has obtained salvation from the shame and the curse.

Sixthly: When the disciples heard the news (Luke24: 12) **“Peter arose and ran to the tomb; and stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying by themselves; and he departed marveling to himself at what had happened.”**

The women's talk to the apostles was like fantasy and they could not believe them (Luke24: 11). This situation was so unexpected despite the Lord's assurance to them prior to His agony and passion. The expression 'idle tales' or 'fantasy' is medical, and was used to describe those sick with fever and have lost their mental balance. However, St. Peter was quick as usual to see what has happened, for his heart was burning in zeal. As father Theophlactius says, “When St. Peter heard this, he was quick to run to the tomb, because when fire catches anything, it knows no delay.”

Seventhly: The resurrection events, as mentioned in the gospel of our teacher St. Luke the evangelist, touches the life of every true believer who wishes to encounter the heavenly

Friend. The Marys, and some others with them, ran to the tomb in the midst of darkness, which signifies man, in all his spiritual potentials, his gifts, his capabilities, running as at the beginning of the week, at the first dawn, that is, to rise up early toward God, to be the first in all of his life. He runs as if from the darkness of this world to the Lord's tomb, that is, to the divine altar to find the risen body from the dead, the mystery of His life and His resurrection, renewed perpetually. He runs, carrying the spices, which are the prayers and the worship blended with the righteous life in the Lord, as an incense fragrance that the Father smells in pleasure. There, at the divine altar of God, the entire church assembles to see the stone of the Mosaic literacy rolled, and the sacraments of the resurrection, or, knowing God, have been revealed. The church could see the happy angels wearing brilliant garments, sharing the believers their joy of salvation, and their thrill of the kingdom. They praise all together; let us therefore sing their praises and be counted, all of us, the earthly and the heavenly creation, as one in the kingdom.

Eighthly: The church fathers comment on the presence of the burial cloths in the tomb, for the evangelist says about St. Peter that (Luke24: 12) “**Stooping down, he saw the linen cloths lying by themselves.**” This is proof that the Jews lied when they accused the disciples of stealing the sacred body from the tomb. From the words of the church fathers is the following:

+ If the disciples had stolen the body, they would not have done so, that is, to disrobe the body. They would not have tolerated to take His handkerchief, to fold it and to put it in one place of the tomb, but they would have stolen the body as quickly as possible. For this reason, St. John has mentioned ahead of time that He was preserved by much myrrh that made the cloths stick to His body. So if you hear that the kerchief was laid on one side and the cloths on the other side, this is impossible to have been stolen.

St. John Chrysostom

+Know well that if a robber, other than the disciples, had stolen Him, his intent would have been to steal these valuable clothes, and the many spices and oil fragrances more than stealing Him without the cloths. As for the disciples, it was not appropriate they take Him when naked! Since they did not wish to sham Him but rather to honor Him.

Anba Peter El Sadmenti

2- The Amos Disciples:

The evangelist St. Luke narrates to us the Lord's encounter with His two disciples, on their way to Amos, a village about seven and a half miles far, north-west of Jerusalem. It is probably in the village site of 'Khomasia' or 'El Kobiba'. These two disciples, one of whom was Cleopas (Luke24: 18), an abbreviation of 'Cleopatros' or 'the perfect glory'. As for the second, some scholars think he is the evangelist St. Luke himself. The scholar Oreganus and St. Cyril the great think the second person is called 'Simon', from among the seventy apostles, other than Simon Peter and Simon the Cyrene.

We notice in the story narrated by St. Luke, the following:

Firstly: The two disciples, from among the seventy apostles, were walking on the Amos way that extends for seven miles and a half. The number 8 refers to the eternal life, and the number 7 refers to our present time. Therefore these two disciples have crossed the current life, but they have not reached the power of the resurrection, and its complete number is 8. In other words, their demeanor on this road refers to the man who believes in the resurrection in his thoughts, and is the topic of his conversation, yet he is not blessed with it nor is he practicing it.

Many believe in the resurrection, and they even preach it, but they do not live it. These are still on the Amos road, and they are in need of the Lord's appearance to them, and His talking to them, so as to kindle their hearts in their inward life, by means of the resurrected life; and thus they would live it before their departure from this world.

Secondly: The evangelist specifies the historical time of this encounter, saying (Luke24: 13) **“On this day”**, that is, on the Sunday of the Resurrection day. This was about sunset, when the day was about to end (Luke24: 21). It is as if the two disciples almost stayed the whole day in Jerusalem, listening and discussing together, or with the women and St. Peter and St. John who have gone to the tomb. They were also recalling the memories of the Lord's words concerning His resurrection, before His agony. Despite this, they were not positively sure in their faith, but, (Luke24: 14) **“And they talked together of all these things which had happened.”**

Thirdly: (Luke24: 15) **“So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them.”** Indeed, they were not thoroughly confident of their faith, but they were busy with their thoughts about the Lord, speaking and discussing. In their weakness, they were unable to realise the Truth; thus the Truth came to be in their midst, declaring Himself supporting them. He assured them earlier (Matt.18: 20) **“When two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in their midst.”**

Fourthly: (Luke24: 16) **“But their eyes were restrained, so they did not know Him.”**

They may have been unable to recognize Him because when He had risen, His embodied a kind of glory more than previously, and so they were unable to recognize Him, as happened also with Mary Magdalene (John20: 14), and with the disciples on the seashore (John21: 4). Another reason why they couldn't recognize Him was due to their weak faith, and slow spiritual understanding, or maybe this was a divine purpose so that the Lord reveals to them His divine mysteries and the prophecy fulfillment in Him, for (Luke24: 27) **“And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”**

+ Because He has come to have the spiritual body, the geographical distances are no obstacle to His coming physically wherever He wants. It is the same body that He was born with from the Virgin, and it embodies a new nature appropriate for the heavenly life. His body does not submit to the laws of nature but rather to the unsurpassable law of nature, the spiritual law. Thus, as St. Mark says, He appeared to them (Mark16: 12) **“In another form”**, and He did not allow them to know Him.

It is said that their eyes were restrained from knowing Him, till their concepts would be declared that were so skeptical. Thus their wounds would be revealed and they would receive the healing, and so they know that though this was the same body in which he suffered and rose again, yet He is not visible to everyone, but only to those whom He wishes them to see Him. Moreover, so that they would not wonder He no longer walks among the people, as He did before the resurrection, showing that His transformation does not besit humanity, but what is godly and divine. He offered Himself an example to the forth coming resurrection when we become as angels and God's children.

Father Theophlactius

+ Indeed, He covered up His own manifestation from them by appearing in a form that they did not know. He did so for the physical eyes, for the sake of what they did themselves inwardly concerning the mental eye. Inwardly, though they have loved Him, yet they doubted. Therefore, once they spoke of Him, He appeared to them, but when they doubted, He hid himself from them.

Pope Gregory the great

Though their eyes were restrained from knowing Him, yet He came forward Himself to open the discussion with them. He asked them (Luke24: 17) **“What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?”** Even though the Lord has undergone the agony and was crucified, yet death did not separate Him from His disciple. Even though He has risen, yet His resurrection did not distance Him from them. For our sakes, He was crucified, and died, and rose so He would draw nearer to us and initiate His love to us. He is eager to begin a conversation with us, so He offers Himself to us, and so open our eyes to witness Him, and our hearts so He dwells in us.

Anyway, the story of the Lord’s encounter with the Amos disciples whose eyes were restrained from knowing Him, this is the story of every spiritual person. The Lord escorts him all the way, and leads him Himself, and kindles his heart, revealing His gospel mysteries to him, and declares His resurrection, and opens his vision so that he sees Him and rejoices in Him.

St. Augustine says, “God’s absence is not actual absence. Believe in Him, and He will be with you even though you do not see Him. When the Lord drew near to the two apostles, they had no faith yet. They did not believe He rose from the dead, or that anyone else could. They have lost the faith, and had no more any hope. They were just walking with Him on the road. They were dead with the living, dead ones with life ‘Life’ was walking along with them, but their hearts had no life pulse.

Fifthly: (Luke24: 17) **“And He said to them, ‘What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?’”**

If we are in this world crying over our sins and grieve over them, yet in our encounter with Christ the Risen, we have to walk joyfully in the Lord, and not to walk sadly, because the kingdom of God is (Rom.14: 17) “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

In the confessions of St. Augustine, God used to blend His worshiping with a spiritual thrill that surpasses all the pleasures of the world, so He weans us from the pleasure of sin.

It is said that St. Apollo, whom St. Jerome met in the area of Thebes, that he was constantly hopeful and pleasant. He has attracted many to the monastic life as an inwardly joyful life to live, satisfying to the heart by the presence of the Lord Himself. He often used to say, “Why do we struggle with a frowning face? Are we not heirs of the eternal life? Leave aside any grief and frowning to the unbelievers, and leave lamenting to sinners. As for the righteous and the saints, they should rather rejoice and smile because they are blessed with spiritualities.”

Sixthly: What is the faith of the Amos disciples?

There is no doubt that they were unable as yet to realise His godliness, or to accept the mystery of the cross. Rather, they were expecting Him to liberate Israel or be the Redeemer of the Jews from the Roman dominance. The cross has actually ruined their hopes, since Cleopas said about the Lord Jesus (Luke24: 19-24) **“He was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but Him they did not see.”**

The evangelist St. John analyzes the disciples' lack of faith saying (John20: 9) "for as yet they did not know the scripture, that He must rise again from the dead."

St. Cyril the great adds that the Amos disciples had another excuse: which is that the news the women said were not enough for them to believe in the resurrection, rather, this was amazing and bewildering news, "the women astonished us," for the news bore the empty tomb and the angels testimony. Even St. Peter's news, for he only saw the empty tomb and the linen cloths. Moreover the two disciples said (Luke24: 12) "**As for Him, they did not see Him.**"

Seventhly: When the two disciples declared their weak faith or their disbelief, the Lord offered them the assurance of the law and the prophets, for He said to them (Luke24: 25-27) "**O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself.**"

St. Cyril the great says, "The Lord presented to the two disciples Moses and the prophets. He revealed to them what they could not understand, for the old law is a paving to the road, and the service of the prophets is to prepare the people so they receive the faith. God did not send anything that is of no use, rather, for everything there is usefulness at the right time. The prophets are actually the servants the Lord has sent before Him, so that their prophecies are a preparation for His coming. It is as if these prophecies are a royal and sealed treasure, that has to be opened at the right time to interpret the symbols inside."

Eighthly: (Luke24: 28) "**Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther.**"

He did not tell them He was going to a farther place, but He pretended to, so He would not intrude Himself on them. But if they ask Him to, and insist on asking Him, He would accept. God does not impose Himself on our life, without our own will. He rather asks that we invite Him in, and insist on the invitation, declaring the full freedom of man's self will in accepting or rejecting Him.

This is on one hand, on the other one, as Pope Gregory the great said, because they were still strangers to the faith, 'He pretended to be going to a farther place.'

Ninthly: They insisted saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." The soul that has tasted of what the disciples did, does not cease saying with the bride of the songs of Solomon (Song of Sol.3: 1,4; 2: 6, 3) "Upon my bed at night, I sought him whom my soul loves; Scarcely had I passed them, when I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go until I brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.... O that his left hand were under my head, and that his right hand embraced me! With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste."

St. Augustine says, "If you wish to have life, copy the apostles so that you may come to know the Lord. They insisted on inviting all the more and said to Him to stay with them because it was almost eventide." The saint also says, "Invite warmly the close ones if you want to know your Savior. This warm invitation returned to the disciples what the doubts and lack of faith had taken thus the Lord declared Himself when He broke the bread. Therefore, learn where to ask for the Lord, and you will be lucky enough to have Him at your table."

Tenthly: (Luke24: 30, 31) "**Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.**"

Some think what the Lord Jesus did here is the 'Eucharist Sacrament', and that the Lord manifests Himself through this mystery. He opens the inward eyes of His believers so they witness Him. Others think that this was not the Eucharist Sacrament because we do not hear of Him that He also took the cup and gave them to drink. Moreover, He did not mention, when breaking the bread that this is His body that is shed for them, as He did at the last supper.

St. Augustine says "When did the Lord manifest Himself? When He broke the bread.... This is why when we break the bread, we come to know the Lord; for He did not declare Himself except at the table, to us who were unable to see Him physically, but he gave us His body to eat. Therefore, if you believe this, come, whatever state you may be in. if you are confident, then be restful when the bread is broken."

Father Theophlactius says, "The eyes are opened to those who receive the holy bread so that they know Christ, because the Lord's body bears tremendous strength, quite unutterable.

St. Cyril the great analyzes the disappearance of the Lord Jesus from them, saying, "The Lord has disappeared from them because the Lord's relation with His disciples, after the resurrection was not the same as before. They were in need of a change, and a new life in Christ, so that the new would stick to what is new, the incorruptible to the corruptible. It is for this reason that the Lord did not allow Mary Magdalene to touch Him, as St. John mentioned (John20: 17) until He ascends, and comes back once more."

Eleventhly: He concluded the story, saying (Luke24: 33) "**So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem**", This is the aim of God's work in us, that He grants us the power of the resurrection, for He says 'they rose up'. With this resurrected life we go back to Jerusalem above which we have left, we return to the city of God the great king (Matt.5: 35). We go back to (Gal.4: 26) "the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all." In other words, God changes our direction. After we were heading to Amos, and were giving our backs to Jerusalem, now we are giving our backs to Amos, and heading with our faces, our hearts and our thoughts towards Jerusalem.

3- His Appearance to His Disciples:

When the Lord Jesus rose from the dead, He no longer led the human daily life. He no more preached among the Jews, or performed miracles and wonders. He has risen, bearing His own body but glorified. In other words, His new and natural position has come to be His ascension to the heavens, awaiting His sacred bride to be exalted with Him. But He stayed for forty days after His resurrection until His ascension. He manifested Himself to those eager for Him, so He draws their hearts towards heaven.

Indeed, the Lord Jesus seized every opportunity to declare His resurrection and confirm it in the life of His lovers, those who believe in Him. He heralded the women coming to the tomb in love, asking to offer the spices and fragrances to the holy body. Thus His angels declared to them of His resurrection. He also walked with the two disciples who were discussing together on the Amos way, about His resurrection issue. Now, the disciples have returned to Jerusalem to inform the disciples of what had happened, and how they came to know Him at the breaking of the bread.

(Luke24: 36- 43) "**Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, 'Peace to you'. But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. And He said to them, 'Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold, My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.'**"

When He said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, ‘Have you any food here?’ so they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate in their presence.”

We notice the following in the above meeting:

Firstly: When they were speaking of the resurrection, all of them were kindled to being blessed by Him, as did St. Peter the apostle (Luke24: 34) and the two Amos disciples, and some of the women. The Lord therefore fulfilled their hearts’ desire and He stood there in their midst.

Indeed, by His coming in their midst, the loft has been changed to a sacred church in tremendous brilliance and glory. You may say the loft has become at this moment a live model of what the church has to be. This means the church members becoming enkindled with the resurrected Messaiah, and His coming in their midst, as a live Head, giving the power of the resurrection to the members of His body.

+He, who is truly desired, has come, manifesting Himself to those who ask for Him, and those who await Him. This is not in a doubtful way, but He came in their midst in an explicit manifestation.

St. John Chrysostom

Secondly: In the first meeting of the Lord who is risen from the dead with His assembled disciples, the representatives of His church, He offered them His unsurpassing ‘Peace’. This was not as an outward gift, but a talent that touches the most inward depths, for He had promised them on the night of His passion, saying, (John14: 27) “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.

+Let us give honor to the gift of peace that Christ has left to us on His departure. Peace, in particular, concerns God alone; for He unifies everything together into one entity. To Him is nothing attributed such as the oneness of nature and peace that dwells by Him in man.

St. Gregory, bishop of Nazinaza

+ The Lord also revealed to them clearly His bruises, and He assured them with His voice, for they were worried and anxious. It is said, “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you.” This means they should not be troubled. By saying so He assured them of His words before the crucifixion took place (John16:33) “In this world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

(John20: 20) “Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.” Look how this has been fulfilled. For before His crucifixion He said, (John16: 22) “Therefore you now have sorrow, but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you,” so His words have been fulfilled at this moment. All of this has brought to them firmly assured faith.

These are the Lord’s first words to them after His resurrection. As for the women. He granted them the joy (Matt.28: 9) because the women were sorrowful indeed, and this is why He granted them primarily joy. In discretion, the Lord granted peace to the men, and granted joy to the women due to their grief.

He offers the fruits of the cross first, which is ‘Peace’.

St. John Chrysostom

+ This is the true peace, and the salvation greeting, for the greeting takes its name from salvation.

St. Augustine

Thirdly: The evangelist says, (Luke24: 37) “**But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit.**” The disciples have lived with the Lord Jesus for a long

time, and they realised that He has truly become incarnate, and that He embodies a real human nature. Now, when they heard of His resurrection, they never expected He would come in this way in their midst when the doors are shut. This is why they were terrified and frightened, and thought they have seen a ghost. After the Lord Jesus had granted them His real peace, He assured them he was not a mere spirit, but that in truth He bore a physical body. He proved this by telling them to touch Him, and he asked to eat with them.

+ We cannot assume that St. Peter and St. John doubted, after that they were assured of His resurrection when they had gone into the tomb. Then why does St. Luke say the disciples were terrified?

Firstly: Because the majority declared their doubts, and so they prevailed over the minority.

Secondly: Even though St. Peter believed in the resurrection, yet he was stupefied when he saw Jesus present in their midst, in His physical person, whereas the doors were shut.

St. Ambrosios

Thirdly: The Lord Jesus revealed to them at first who He was, by telling them He knew what was on their minds and in their hearts. He said to them (Luke24: 38) “Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts?” He then assured them He is the crucified Messiah, (Luke24: 39) “**Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.**”

St. Augustine says that the Lord Jesus has left His bruises after His resurrection so that He heals the disciples’ wounds with them for they did not believe His resurrection when He manifested Himself, and they thought Him a spirit. He therefore showed them His hands and His feet, for he says, “Even though His wounds were healed, yet their traces were still there! The Lord saw this is useful to the disciples, to keep the scars of His wounds, so the wounds of their souls be healed, the wounds of their lack of faith. The Lord has appeared before their eyes, and He manifested to them His real body, and despite this, they thought Him a spirit! And what did the Lord tell them? (Luke24: 38)

“**Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts?**” If you have thoughts arise in your hearts that are doubtful, then these come from the earth. It is better for man that doubts do not rise in his heart, but that rather man’s heart rises upwards. This is where the apostle wishes believers to set their hearts there, for he says, (Col.3: 1-4) “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” What kind of glory is this? It is the glory of the Resurrection! What glory? Listen to what the apostle says about this body (1Cor.15: 43) “It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory.”

St. Ambrosios says, “In their fear, the disciples thought they had seen a spirit. To show you the truth of the resurrection, the Lord said to them to touch Him, and to look at Him, for the spirit has no flesh and bones as He has. How could the Lord be, not in the body, and yet there were the scars of the wounds and the piercing that He showed them? The Lord has accepted to ascend to the heavens with the wounds He bore for our sakes. He did not wish to wipe them away, so He shows to God the Father the price of setting us free. In this way He sits on the Father’s right hand, carrying the banner of our salvation.”

As St. Cyril the great says, “The main reason to keep the scars of those wounds is to testify to His disciples that the body that rose is the same exact one that has suffered.” As for Pope Gregory the great, he mentions four justifications to these wounds. These are:

- (a) To build up His disciple in the faith by means of His resurrection.
- (b) These wounds remain so as to declare His intercession for redemption and atonement to the Father instead of us.
- (c) So the believers remember His love to them and His mercy towards them.

(d) These wounds remain to judge the wicked ones on the great day of the Lord.

Fourthly: (Luke24: 41-43) **“But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, ‘Have you any food here?’ So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And He took it and ate in their presence.”**

They were so glad they could not believe themselves, that they could see the Lord. This is why He wanted to assure them He was not a spirit, when He asked them for food from their hands so He eats it before them.

+ He was not hungry, but He asked to eat. He thus ate in His authority, not out of necessity, so that the disciples realise the reality of His body, and that the entire world would know Him by means of their preaching.

St. Augustine

+Even though there is no food or drink after the general resurrection for everyone, nor if anyone is injured, there will be a resurrection with this injury, yet the Lord did so, that we believe all of us that the body that suffered and died is the same one that rose from among the dead.

Anba Paul El Boshy

+ According to the commandment of the old law, the Passover used to be eaten for real with bitter herbs, because the bitterness of the bondage was still there. But after the resurrection, the food is sweet with the bees' honey.

St. Gregory El Nasy

Fifthly: When the Lord Jesus, the Risen from the dead, came in the midst of His disciples, and offered Himself by means of the senses so He might exalt them through faith to what is above the senses, He opened their minds so they be aware of what was written about Him in the Mosaic Law, and the prophets, particularly about His crucifixion and His resurrection.

(Luke24: 44-46) **“Then He said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.’ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the scriptures. Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day’.”**

The Lord went into the loft when the doors were shut so He manifests His resurrection to them. He came into their minds and declared His transfiguration in them, and thus they would be blessed with the glory and power of His resurrection. They would realise the concepts of His gospel, and experience His kingdom from the inside.

4- Sending His Disciples:

The Lord Jesus has declared His resurrection to His disciples, just as if declaring the resurrection of the Head for the sake of the body. He rose to make us rise with Him. In other words, He rose to send His disciples to offer the power of His resurrection to mankind, so they be blessed with the true membership in His risen body. Here, He began His gifts by granting His peace, and He concludes them by asking the disciples to preach through the power of His Holy Spirit, so as to recruit new members in His holy body, the risen from the dead.

His commandment to them came as follows (Luke24: 46-49) **“Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day. And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send**

the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.”

The Lord has offered to them His life that was shed, the risen form the dead, so that it becomes a deposit and a fund for the preaching after they are blessed with, the Holy Spirit, as the mystery of their power from above’. This is for the establishing of the church, the risen body of Christ.

St. Augustine comments on this divine appearance of the Lord, the concluding one, to send His disciples in dispatchment, saying, “He manifested Himself to His disciples for His being the Head of His church. At first, the church could see herself in Him, for the Head was seen, and the body was promised. They saw the Head and they believed in Him, being in touch with the body. As for us, we can see the body and we believe in the Head. Their seeing Christ helped them in their belief of the future church. As for us, our seeing the church helps us in the faith of Christ the Risen One. Their faith has become complete, and our faith has become complete as well. Their faith has been fulfilled by means of their seeing the Head, and our faith has been fulfilled by our seeing the body. They have seen the Head and have believed in the body. As for us, we have seen the body and have come to believe in the Head. No one is lacking in Christ, for He is complete in everyone, despite the fact that His body is not yet complete up till today.”

Furthermore, St. John Chrysostom says “Just as the captain does not allow his soldiers to face many others unless they be armored, likewise did the Lord not allow His disciples to go fighting the battle unless the Holy Spirit comes down first.”

Now that the Lord Jesus has met His disciples more than once, and has assured them of His resurrection, and promised them to send His Holy Spirit on them, He went up to heaven so their hearts ascend with Him, bearing His heavenly qualities.

5- His Ascension to Heaven:

(Luke24: 50-52) **“And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.”**

We said that ‘Bethany’ means ‘the house of suffering’ or ‘the house of obedience’. He wished to ascend up to the heavens in Bethany, at the mount of Olives, so that anyone who wishes to exalt his heart to heaven, has to endure the suffering with Him, and share Him His agony. He also has to have the quality of obedience that is the Son’s towards His Father.

We can say that due to our disobedience, He came down from heaven, and with His obedience He exalted us to the heavens.

He lifted up His hands, that had the scars of the wounds by the blessing of the cross, and offered His blood that was shed as a price for exalting them with Him.

What is surprising is that the disciples did not grieve over the Lord’s ascension, and His being physically separated from them. They rather returned to Jerusalem with great joy. They realised that where the Head is, the members will be. What the Lord Jesus was blessed with is only in the name of the church as a whole, and for her account.

6- Their Relation to the Temple:

(Luke24: 53) **“And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.”**

They were linked to the temple, and did not wish to leave it but rather, they wanted to draw every heart to realise the spiritual and evangelical concepts of the law. Their life was a

constant praise, even when they were cast out of the temple, and underwent the most bitter persecution by the Jews, and later on by the Romans.

This is the end of the gospel book; in it we find the heavenly Friend exalted, so as to exalt His friends, granting them the life of praise so they complete their inward struggle joyfully, and cling to Him eternally.

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