

Adult Education – St. Luke’s Church – Sedona, AZ – Class 22
Introduction to the Doctors of the Church – St. John Chrysostom
December 1, 2019

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Icon of Saint John Chrysostom (artist unknown)
(http://schgoc.hi.goarch.org/assets/images/John_Chrysostom.jpg)

I. Opening Prayer

Grant, we beseech thee, O Lord, that we remembering with gladness the righteousness of thy Saints, may at all times and in all places feel the effectual succor of their intercession. Through Jesus Christ thy Son our Lord. Who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. **Amen.** (*Secret, Common of a Confessor Bishop, Anglican Missal, p. F23.*)

II. John Chrysostom – Overview

- John Chrysostom was born to wealthy parents c.349 in Antioch – where people of The Way were first called Christians. His father, Secundus, was a high-ranking military officer, and his mother, Anthusa, was a devout Christian
- Secundus died shortly after John’s birth, and Anthusa became responsible for raising Chrysostom and his older sister as a single mother. She never remarried
- Somehow, Anthusa managed to ensure that John was educated in Antioch’s best schools
- In particular, he studied under Libanius, known as the greatest orator of his time but also a committed pagan

- A major turning point in Chrysostom's life occurred in 367 when he met Bishop Melitius, whose winning character turned Chrysostom towards religious life and studies
- Three years later, Chrysostom was baptized at age 21, and he was also ordained a Lector
- It is said that just before Libanius died, those around him asked who should be his successor. Libanius reportedly replied, "John, but the Christians have stolen him"
- Chrysostom strongly desired to become an ascetic in the mountains outside Antioch, where many hermits lived in caves
- Anthusa was deeply distraught, and she begged him not to make her a widow a second time. Chrysostom promised he would not enter the ascetic life until after she died – which she did three years later
- He promptly sold all his belongings, gave the proceeds to the poor, and retreated to the mountains outside Antioch
- For two or three years, he devoted himself to prayer and the study of scripture, and he reputedly memorized most or all of the Bible. (Notably, he later expressed the opinion that ignorance of scripture among the laity was the supreme cause of weaknesses in the church – a comment particularly relevant to our times)
- His self-imposed fasts and deprivations were so extreme that he ruined his health, and he was forced to return to Antioch, where he resumed his role as Lector
- At age 31, he was ordained a Deacon by Bishop Melitius, who died soon afterward. Melitius was succeeded by Bishop Flavian, where Chrysostom assisted the bishop, cared for the poor and probably instructed catechumens.
- Although Deacons were commonly allowed to preach with the bishop's permission, Chrysostom refused to do so, considering preaching to be exclusively the priest's domain. He considered it "spiritual surgery." He did write extensively, however
- Against his wishes, he was ordained a priest at age 37, and Bishop Flavian appointed him to be the cathedral's preacher – a huge responsibility
- He served in that capacity for 12 years, during which time his sermons became hugely popular (see Section III)
- However, in 397, following the death of the Archbishop in Constantinople, he was essentially kidnapped and transported to Constantinople, where he was consecrated Archbishop
- At the time, Constantinople was an ecclesiastical mess. Bishops were known to live lavish lifestyles; clergy had enriched themselves unjustly and many openly lived with "virgin" housekeepers
- Chrysostom imposed numerous reforms, and he preached vigorously against neglect of the poor and sick. He built a great hospital in his first year
- Chrysostom's preaching against lavish lifestyles and neglect of the poor particularly annoyed Eudoxia, wife of Emperor Theodosius
- With assistance from Theophilus, Archbishop of Alexandria, Eudoxia engineered an illicit synod in which Chrysostom was brought up on 29 trumped-up charges
- Chrysostom refused to appear before the synod to defend himself, so the Emperor was persuaded to exile him
- However, shortly after Chrysostom's exile, an earthquake convinced Eudoxia that Chrysostom should be restored to his bishopric, fearing divine punishment. However, Chrysostom refused to re-enter the city until the illicit synod was denounced
- Chrysostom returned to great acclaim from the people, but the detent between Chrysostom and Eudoxia was short-lived when he sharply criticized her for depriving a widow of her vineyard

- In retaliation, Eudoxia erected a silver statue of herself in the cathedral courtyard during a multi-day celebration
- Chrysostom was later confined to his chancery, and he survived two assassination attempts
- Eventually, he was banished again under orders of the Emperor, this time on Easter Eve, just as Chrysostom was preparing to baptize numerous catechumens
- Essentially, Chrysostom was ordered to undergo a long death-march under military guard, during which time he was intentionally exposed to extremes of heat and cold, and he suffered incredible deprivations
- On September 14, 407, completely exhausted, he asked permission to rest at the church in Comana (in Asia Minor) but was refused, and the death-march proceeded. However, the guards relented, and he was permitted to return to the church
- He died the same day. His famous, final words were: “Glory be to God for all things.”
- Because September 14 was already devoted to the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, his Feast is celebrated on November 14, the day that some sources say he became Archbishop of Constantinople
- He is also commemorated on January 27, celebrating the translation of his relics from Comana to Constantinople, and on January 30, as one of the Three Holy Hierarchs, along with Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian
- He was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church in 1568, along with St. Athanasius, St. Basil the Great, and St. Gregory of Nazianzus – the four Eastern (or Greek) Doctors
- He is considered the patron saint of Education, Epilepsy, Lecturers, Orators and Preachers

III. John the Golden Mouthed

- Chrysostom was originally known simply as John of Antioch
- However, because of his excellent preaching skills, he became known as John Chrysostom, derived from the Greek word *chrysostomos*, meaning “golden mouthed”
- He preached long sermons without notes. The sermons were so popular and so notable that two or three stenographers were usually present to transcribe them. He later edited those notes and published his sermons. Over 1,400 survive
- His sermons were so popular that he had to preach against applauding them
- He generally avoided dogmatic controversies (such as Arianism) and focused on practical issues involving daily Christian life and duties, especially the importance of charity to the poor
- Despite his unwavering devotion to celibacy, he was particularly well-known for his excellent preaching on marriage and family life
- He is famously said to have advised husbands: Before you criticize your wives, tell them how much you love them
- Without question, his most famous sermon is known as the Paschal Sermon (see Section VI)

IV. The Liturgy of John Chrysostom

- Chrysostom was an accomplished liturgist, and his most significant contribution in this area was to edit various liturgies then in use – especially the Liturgy of Basil the Great – into a form now known as the Liturgy of John Chrysostom
- We have no definitive record of precisely what changes he made or what he contributed to the liturgy, and certainly changes have been made since, but his influence is so heavily stamped on the Liturgy that it retains his name
- His influence is particularly attributed to the Anaphora – what we commonly refer to as the Prayer of Consecration
- It is recited on all but ten Sundays throughout the year in Orthodox churches

V. Notable Writings

- More works of Chrysostom survive than any other of the Greek Fathers
- While in Antioch, he wrote the hugely influential “On the Priesthood,” a six-volume work that stands alongside Athanasius’ equally influential “Pastoral Rule”
- He wrote numerous commentaries on scripture. St. Thomas Aquinas considered Chrysostom’s commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew to be practically inspired – as he said “worth more than the city of Paris”
- His writings are quoted approvingly by both the Eastern church and the Latin Church
- St. Jerome particularly praised Chrysostom’s theological writings

VI. The Paschal Sermon

“In the very early years of its history the Eastern Orthodox Church adopted the custom of using the Paschal sermon of St. John Chrysostom at the Paschal Vigil service held during the Saturday night before Easter morning. Chrysostom first proclaimed this sermon as instructions to catechumens, new Christian converts, who were baptized during that vigil service.

“The service itself is the high point of the year in Orthodox worship, and the Chrysostom sermon, recited (preached) in every Orthodox church each year, is a high point of the service. It is presented enthusiastically and with flourish. In one service I attended, the congregation joined the priest in saying the words, “It was angered” and “Christ is risen!” as those were repeated again and again. The poetic sermon is heard but once a year, but many worshipers know it by heart.”

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<https://www.reformedworship.org/article/december-1999/paschal-sermon-st-john-chrysostom-4th-century-sermon-still-preached-every-east>

If there are devout and God-loving people here,
let them enjoy this beautiful, radiant festival.
If there are prudent servants,
enter joyously into the Lord’s joy.

Whoever may be spent from fasting,
 enjoy now your reward.
 Whoever has toiled from the first hour,
 receive today your just settlement.
 If have come came after the third hour,
 celebrate gratefully.
 If any of you arrived after the sixth,
 have no misgivings, you have lost nothing.
 If some have been as late as the ninth,
 come forward, do not be at a loss.
 If any of you have arrived only at the eleventh hour,
 do not be dismayed for being late.
 The Master is gracious;
 He accepts the last even as the first;
 He gives rest to those of the eleventh as well as to
 those who have labored from the first;
 He is lenient with the last while looking after the first;
 to the one He gives, to the other He gives freely;
 He accepts the labors and welcomes the effort;
 honors the deed, but commends the intent.
 So, all of you, enter into the joy of our Lord:
 first and second, share the bounty.
 Rich and poor alike, celebrate together.
 Sober or heedless, honor the day.
 Those who fasted, and those who did not, rejoice today.
 The table is full, everyone fare sumptuously.
 The calf is fatted; no one go away hungry.
 Everyone, savor the banquet of faith;
 relish the riches of His goodness.
 No one need lament poverty,
 for the kingdom is seen as universal.
 No one need grieve over sins;
 forgiveness has dawned from the tomb.
 No one need fear death;
 the Savior's death has freed us from it.
 While its captive He stifled it.
 He despoiled Hades as He descended into it; it was vexed when it tasted His flesh.
 Foreseeing this, Isaiah proclaimed: "Hades," he
 said, "was angered when he met You below."
It was vexed because it was abolished.
It was vexed because it was mocked.
It was vexed because it was slain.
It was vexed because it was shackled.
 It received a body and encountered God.
 It took earth and came face-to-face with heaven.
 It took what it saw and fell by what it could not see.
 O Death, where is your sting?
 O Hell, where is your victory?
Christ is risen and demons have fallen.
Christ is risen and angels rejoice.

Christ is risen and life rules.

Christ is risen and not one dead remains in the tomb.

For Christ, having risen from the dead,
has become the firstfruit of those that slept.

To Him be the glory and the dominion, forever and ever. Amen.

Audio: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5N5msAPzLk&t=278s> (1:36 to 4:51)

Recited by Fr. Chris Kerhulas, St. Basil Greek Orthodox Church

VI. Closing Prayer

O LORD, who didst vouchsafe to illumine thy Church with the wondrous righteousness and doctrine of thy blessed Confessor and Bishop Saint Chrysostom: grant, we beseech thee; that the bounty of thy heavenly grace may evermore increase and multiply the same. Through Jesus Christ thy Son our Lord. Who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. **Amen.** (*Collect for the Feast of St. Athanasius, Anglican Missal, p. E56.*)

VII. Sources

Catholic Encyclopedia: St. John Chrysostom (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08452b.htm>)

Rengers, C. *The 35 Doctors of the Church (revised ed.) Kindle Edition.* Charlotte, NC: TAN Books 2014.

Schaff, P. (ed.) *The Complete Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Collection of Early Church Fathers: Cross-Linked to the Bible. Kindle Edition.* Amazon Digital Services 2016.

Saint John Chrysostom on YouTube

Early Church Fathers: St. John Chrysostom (EWTN)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6nV400h-nRY>) (4+ minutes)

Coffee with Sr. Vassa – Ep. 39 (St. John Chrysostom) (11 minutes)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aOe3Ww-xIU&t=51s>)

Saint John Chrysostom for the 21st Century – Fr. Josiah Trenham (1:10:16)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4KvatDTZhsk>)

Tchaikovsky: Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom – Audio Recording

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DmM4i7rj_3g) (1:00:05)

The Lives of the Saints: John Chrysostom (provides a Greek Orthodox perspective and contains a recitation of the Paschal Sermon from 1:36 to 4:51)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5N5msAPzLk&t=55s>) (25 minutes)

Next week: Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus

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