

# Homily 1 on the Acts of the Apostles

by St. John Chrysostom

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*St. John Chrysostom's homily emphasizes the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in the early Church as documented in the Acts of the Apostles.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 10:18, John 13:35, John 14:12, Acts 1:1, Acts 2:1, Galatians 5:22, Hebrews 10:28

**Topics:** "Baptism", "Holy Spirit"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the significance of Baptism and the need for believers to approach it with earnestness and preparation. He emphasizes the importance of not delaying or hesitating to receive the grace of Baptism, as it signifies a commitment to a virtuous life and the reception of the Holy Spirit. Chrysostom warns against the dangers of sinning after Baptism and highlights the severe consequences of neglecting the gift of grace. He urges believers to approach Baptism with joy, celebration, and a readiness to bear the fruits of the Spirit in their lives.

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## Transcript

Acts 1:1-2

The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, concerning all things which Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day on which, having given charge to the Apostles, whom He had chosen, by the Holy Spirit, He was taken up.

To many persons this Book is so little known, both it and its author, that they are not even aware that there is such a book in existence. For this reason especially I have taken this narrative for my subject, that I may draw to it such as do not know it, and not let such a treasure as this remain hidden out of sight. For indeed it may profit us no less than even the Gospels; so replete is it with Christian wisdom and sound doctrine, especially in what is said concerning the Holy Ghost. Then let us not hastily pass by it, but examine it closely. Thus, the predictions which in the Gospels Christ utters, here we may see these actually come to pass; and note in the very facts the bright evidence of Truth which shines in them, and the mighty change which is taking place in the disciples now that the Spirit has come upon them. For example, they heard Christ say, Whoever believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do John 14:12: and again, when He foretold to the disciples, that they should be brought before rulers and kings, and in their synagogues they should scourge them, and that they should suffer grievous things, and overcome all Matthew 10:18: and that the Gospel should be preached in all the world Matthew 24:14: now all this, how it came to pass exactly as it was said, may be seen in this Book, and more

besides, which He told them while yet with them. Here again you will see the Apostles themselves, speeding their way as on wings over land and sea; and those same men, once so timorous and void of understanding, on the sudden become quite other than they were; men despising wealth, and raised above glory and passion and concupiscence, and in short all such affections: moreover, what unanimity there is among them now; nowhere any envying as there was before, nor any of the old hankering after the preeminence, but all virtue brought in them to its last finish, and shining through all, with surpassing lustre, that charity, concerning which the Lord had given so many charges saying, In this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you love one another. John 13:35 And then, besides, there are doctrines to be found here, which we could not have known so surely as we now do, if this Book had not existed, but the very crowning point of our salvation would be hidden, alike for practice of life and for doctrine.

The greater part, however, of this work is occupied with the acts of Paul, who laboured more abundantly than they all. 1 Corinthians 15:10 And the reason is, that the author of this Book, that is, the blessed Luke, was his companion: a man, whose high qualities, sufficiently visible in many other instances, are especially shown in his firm adherence to his Teacher, whom he constantly followed. Thus at a time when all had forsaken him, one gone into Galatia, another into Dalmatia, hear what he says of this disciple: Only Luke is with me. 2 Timothy 4:10 And giving the Corinthians a charge concerning him, he says, Whose praise is in the Gospel throughout all the Churches. 2 Corinthians 8:18 Again, when he says, He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve, and, according to the Gospel which you received (1 Corinthians 15:5, 1), he means the Gospel of this Luke. So that there can be no mistake in attributing this work to him: and when I say, to him, I mean, to Christ. And why then did he not relate every thing, seeing he was with Paul to the end? We may answer, that what is here written, was sufficient for those who would attend, and that the sacred writers ever addressed themselves to the matter of immediate importance, whatever it might be at the time: it was no object with them to be writers of books: in fact, there are many things which they have delivered by unwritten tradition. Now while all that is contained in this Book is worthy of admiration, so is especially the way the Apostles have of coming down to the wants of their hearers: a condescension suggested by the Spirit who has so ordered it, that the subject on which they chiefly dwell is that which pertains to Christ as man. For so it is, that while they discourse so much about Christ, they have spoken but little concerning His Godhead; it was mostly of the Manhood that they discoursed, and of the Passion, and the Resurrection, and the Ascension. For the thing required in the first instance was this, that it should be believed that He was risen, and ascended into heaven. As then the point on which Christ himself most insisted was, to have it known that He had come from the Father, so is it this writer's principal object to declare, that Christ was risen from the dead, and was received up into Heaven, and that He went to God, and came from God. For, if the fact of His coming from God were not first believed, much more, with the Resurrection and Ascension added thereto, would the Jews have found the entire doctrine incredible. Wherefore gently and by degrees he leads them on to higher truths. Nay, at Athens Paul even calls Him man simply, without saying more Acts 17:31. For if, when Christ Himself spoke of His equality with the Father, they often attempted to stone Him, and called Him a blasphemer for this reason, it was little to be expected that they would receive this doctrine from the fishermen, and that too, with the Cross coming before it.

But why speak of the Jews, seeing that even the disciples often upon hearing the more sublime doctrines were troubled and offended? Therefore also He told them, I have many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. John 16:12 If those could not, who had been so long time with Him, and had been admitted to so many secrets, and had seen so many wonders, how was it to be expected that men, but newly dragged away from altars, and idols, and sacrifices, and cats, and crocodiles (for such did the

Gentiles worship), and from the rest of their evil ways, should all at once receive the more sublime matters of doctrine? And how in particular should Jews, hearing as they did every day of their lives, and having it ever sounded in their ears, The Lord your God is one Lord, and beside Him is none other Deuteronomy 6:4: who also had seen Him hanging nailed on the Cross, nay, had themselves crucified and buried Him, and not seen Him even risen: when they were told that this same person was God and equal with the Father, how should they, of all men, be otherwise than shocked and revolted? Therefore it is that gently and little by little they carry them on, with much consideration and forbearance letting themselves down to their low attainments, themselves the while enjoying in more plentiful measure the grace of the Spirit, and doing greater works in Christ's name than Christ Himself did, that they may at once raise them up from their grovelling apprehensions, and confirm the saying, that Christ was raised from the dead. For this, in fact, is just what this Book is: a Demonstration of the Resurrection: this being once believed, the rest would come in due course. The subject then and entire scope of this Book, in the main, is just what I have said. And now let us hear the Preface itself.

The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach. Acts 1:1 Why does he put him in mind of the Gospel? To intimate how strictly he may be depended upon. For at the outset of the former work he says, It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto you in order. Luke 1:3 Neither is he content with his own testimony, but refers the whole matter to the Apostles, saying, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word. Luke 1:2 Having then accredited his account in the former instance, he has no need to put forth his credentials afresh for this treatise, seeing his disciple has been once for all satisfied, and by the mention of that former work he has reminded him of the strict reliance to be placed in him for the truth. For if a person has shown himself competent and trustworthy to write of things which he has heard, and moreover has obtained our confidence, much more will he have a right to our confidence when he has composed an account, not of things which he has received from others, but of things which he has seen and heard. For you received what relates to Christ; much more will you receive what concerns the Apostles.

What then, (it may be asked), is it a question only of history, with which the Holy Spirit has nothing to do? Not so. For, if those delivered it unto us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word; then, what he says, is theirs. And why did he not say, 'As they who were counted worthy of the Holy Spirit delivered them unto us;' but Those who were eyewitnesses? Because, in matter of belief, the very thing that gives one a right to be believed, is the having learned from eyewitnesses: whereas the other appears to foolish persons mere parade and pretension. And therefore John also speaks thus: I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God. John 1:34 And Christ expresses Himself in the same way to Nicodemus, while he was dull of apprehension, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and no one receives our witness. John 3:11 Accordingly, He gave them leave to rest their testimony in many particulars on the fact of their having seen them, when He said, And do ye bear witness concerning Me, because you have been with Me from the beginning. John 15:27 The Apostles themselves also often speak in a similar manner; We are witnesses, and the Holy Spirit which God has given to those that obey Him. Acts 2:32; and on a subsequent occasion, Peter, still giving assurance of the Resurrection, said, Seeing we ate and drank with Him. Acts 10:41 For they more readily received the testimony of persons who had been His companions, because the notion of the Spirit was as yet very much beyond them. Therefore John also at that time, in his Gospel, speaking of the blood and water, said, he himself saw it, making the fact of his having seen it equivalent, for them, to the highest testimony, although the witness of the Spirit is more certain than the evidence of sight, but not so with unbelievers. Now that Luke was a

partaker of the Spirit, is abundantly clear, both from the miracles which even now take place; and from the fact that in those times even ordinary persons were gifted with the Holy Ghost; and again from the testimony of Paul, in these words, Whose praise is in the Gospel 2 Corinthians 8:18; and from the appointment to which he was chosen: for having said this, the Apostle adds, But also appointed of the Churches to travel with us with this grace which is administered by us.

Now mark how unassuming he is. He does not say, The former Gospel which I preached, but, The former treatise have I made; accounting the title of Gospel to be too great for him; although it is on the score of this that the Apostle dignifies him: Whose praise, he says, is in the Gospel. But he himself modestly says, The former treatise have I made -- O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach: not simply of all, but from the beginning to the end; until the day, he says, in which He was taken up. And yet John says, that it was not possible to write all: for were they written, I suppose, says he, that even the world itself could not contain the books written. John 21:25 How then does the Evangelist here say, Of all? He does not say all, but of all, as much as to say, in a summary way, and in the gross; and of all that is mainly and pressingly important. Then he tells us in what sense he says all, when he adds, Which Jesus began both to do and to teach; meaning His miracles and teaching; and not only so, but implying that His doing was also a teaching.

But now consider the benevolent and Apostolic feelings of the writer: that for the sake of a single individual he took such pains as to write for him an entire Gospel. That you might have, he says, the certainty of those things, wherein you have been instructed. Luke 1:4 In truth, he had heard Christ say, It is not the will of My Father that one of these little ones should perish. Matthew 18:14 And why did he not make one book of it, to send to one man Theophilus, but has divided it into two subjects? For clearness, and to give the brother a pause for rest. Besides, the two treatises are distinct in their subject-matter.

But consider how Christ accredited his words by His deeds. Thus He says, Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart. Matthew 11:29 He taught men to be poor, and exhibited this by His actions: For the Son of Man, He says, has not where to lay His head. Matthew 8:20 Again, He charged men to love their enemies; and He taught the same lesson on the Cross, when He prayed for those who were crucifying Him. He said, If any man will sue you at the law, and take away your coat, let him have your cloak also Matthew 5:40: now He not only gave His garments, but even His blood. In this way He bade others teach. Wherefore Paul also said, So as you have us for an example. Philippians 3:17 For nothing is more frigid than a teacher who shows his philosophy only in words: this is to act the part not of a teacher, but of a hypocrite. Therefore the Apostles first taught by their conduct, and then by their words; nay rather they had no need of words, when their deeds spoke so loud. Nor is it wrong to speak of Christ's Passion as action, for in suffering all He performed that great and wonderful act, by which He destroyed death, and effected all else that He did for us.

Until the day in which He was taken up, after that He, through the Holy Spirit, had given commandments unto the Apostles whom He had chosen. After He had given commandments through the Spirit Acts 1:2; i.e. they were spiritual words that He spoke unto them, nothing human; either this is the meaning, or, that it was by the Spirit that He gave them commandments. Do you observe in what low terms he still speaks of Christ, as in fact Christ had spoken of Himself? But if I by the Spirit of God cast out devils Matthew 12:28; for indeed the Holy Ghost wrought in that Temple. Well, what did He command? Go therefore, He says, make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. (Ib. 28:19-20.) A high encomium this for the Apostles; to have such a charge entrusted to them, I mean, the salvation of the

world! Words full of the Spirit! And this the writer hints at in the expression, through the Holy Ghost (and, the words which I spoke unto you, says the Lord, are Spirit) John 6:63; thus leading the hearer on to a desire of learning what the commands were, and establishing the authority of the Apostles, seeing it is the words of the Spirit they are about to speak, and the commandments of Christ. After He had given commandments, he says, He was taken up. He does not say, 'ascended;' he still speaks as concerning a man. It appears then that He also taught the Disciples after His resurrection, but of this space of time no one has related to us the whole in detail. St. John indeed, as also does the present writer, dwells at greater length on this subject than the others; but none has clearly related every thing (for they hastened to something else); however, we have learned these things through the Apostles, for what they heard, that did they tell. To whom also He showed Himself alive. Having first spoken of the Ascension, he adverts to the Resurrection; for since you have been told that He was taken up, therefore, lest you should suppose Him to have been taken up by others, he adds, To whom He showed Himself alive. For if He showed Himself in the greater, surely He did in the minor circumstance. Do you see, how casually and unperceived he drops by the way the seeds of these great doctrines?

Being seen of them during forty days. He was not always with them now, as He was before the Resurrection. For the writer does not say forty days, but, during forty days. He came, and again disappeared; by this leading them on to higher conceptions, and no longer permitting them to stand affected towards Him in the same way as before, but taking effectual measures to secure both these objects, that the fact of His Resurrection should be believed, and that He Himself should be ever after apprehended to be greater than man. At the same time, these were two opposite things; for in order to the belief in His Resurrection, much was to be done of a human character, and for the other object, just the reverse. Nevertheless, both results have been effected, each when the fitting time arrived.

But why did He appear not to all, but to the Apostles only? Because to the many it would have seemed a mere apparition, inasmuch as they understood not the secret of the mystery. For if the disciples themselves were at first incredulous and were troubled, and needed the evidence of actual touch with the hand, and of His eating with them, how would it have fared in all likelihood with the multitude? For this reason therefore by the miracles [wrought by the Apostles] He renders the evidence of His Resurrection unequivocal, so that not only the men of those times -- this is what would come of the ocular proof-- but also all men thereafter, should be certain of the fact, that He was risen. Upon this ground also we argue with unbelievers. For if He did not rise again, but remains dead, how did the Apostles perform miracles in His name? But they did not, say you, perform miracles? How then was our religion (■ θνος) instituted? For this certainly they will not controvert nor impugn what we see with our eyes: so that when they say that no miracles took place, they inflict a worse stab upon themselves. For this would be the greatest of miracles, that without any miracles, the whole world should have eagerly come to be taken in the nets of twelve poor and illiterate men. For not by wealth of money, not by wisdom of words, not by any thing else of this kind, did the fishermen prevail; so that objectors must even against their will acknowledge that there was in these men a Divine power, for no human strength could ever possibly effect such great results. For this He then remained forty days on earth, furnishing in this length of time the sure evidence of their seeing Him in His own proper Person, that they might not suppose that what they saw was a phantom. And not content with this, He added also the evidence of eating with them at their board: as to signify this, the writer adds, And being at table with them, He commanded. Acts 1:4 And this circumstance the Apostles themselves always put forth as an fallible token of the Resurrection; as where they say, Who ate and drank with Him. Acts 10:41

And what did He, when appearing unto them those forty days? Why, He conversed with them, says the writer, concerning the kingdom of God. Acts 1:3 For, since the disciples both had been distressed and troubled at the things which already had taken place, and were about to go forth to encounter great difficulties, He recovered them by His discourses concerning the future. He commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father. Acts 1:4 First, He led them out to Galilee, afraid and trembling, in order that they might listen to His words in security. Afterwards, when they had heard, and had passed forty days with Him, He commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem. Wherefore? Just as when soldiers are to charge a multitude, no one thinks of letting them issue forth until they have armed themselves, or as horses are not suffered to start from the barriers until they have got their charioteer; so Christ did not suffer these to appear in the field before the descent of the Spirit, that they might not be in a condition to be easily defeated and taken captive by the many. Nor was this the only reason, but also there were many in Jerusalem who should believe. And then again that it might not be said, that leaving their own acquaintance, they had gone to make a parade among strangers, therefore among those very men who had put Christ to death do they exhibit the proofs of His Resurrection, among those who had crucified and buried Him, in the very town in which the iniquitous deed had been perpetrated; thereby stopping the mouths of all foreign objectors. For when those even who had crucified Him appear as believers, clearly this proved both the fact of the crucifixion and the iniquity of the deed, and afforded a mighty evidence of the Resurrection. Furthermore, lest the Apostles should say, How shall it be possible for us to live among wicked and bloody men, they so many in number, we so few and contemptible, observe how He does away their fear and distress, by these words, But wait for the promise of the Father, which you have heard of Me. Acts 1:4 You will say, When had they heard this? When He said, It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you. John 16:7 And again, I will pray the Father, and He shall send you another Comforter, that He may abide with you. John 14:16

But why did the Holy Ghost come to them, not while Christ was present, nor even immediately after his departure, but, whereas Christ ascended on the fortieth day, the Spirit descended when the day of Pentecost, that is, the fiftieth, was fully come? Acts 2:1 And how was it, if the Spirit had not yet come, that He said, Receive the Holy Ghost? John 20:22 In order to render them capable and meet for the reception of Him. For if Daniel fainted at the sight of an Angel Daniel 8:17, much more would these when about to receive so great a grace. Either this then is to be said, or else that Christ spoke of what was to come, as if come already; as when He said, Tread ye upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the devil. Luke 10:19 But why had the Holy Ghost not yet come? It was fit that they should first be brought to have a longing desire for that event, and so receive the grace. For this reason Christ Himself departed, and then the Spirit descended. For had He Himself been there, they would not have expected the Spirit so earnestly as they did. On this account neither did He come immediately after Christ's Ascension, but after eight or nine days. It is the same with us also; for our desires towards God are then most raised, when we stand in need. Accordingly, John chose that time to send his disciples to Christ when they were likely to feel their need of Jesus, during his own imprisonment. Besides, it was fit that our nature should be seen in heaven, and that the reconciliation should be perfected, and then the Spirit should come, and the joy should be unalloyed. For, if the Spirit being already come, Christ had then departed, and the Spirit remained; the consolation would not have been so great as it was. For in fact they clung to Him, and could not bear to part with Him; wherefore also to comfort them He said, It is expedient for you that I go away. John 16:7 On this account He also waits during those intermediate days, that they might first despond for awhile, and be made, as I said, to feel their need of Him. and then reap a full and unalloyed delight. But if the Spirit were inferior to the Son, the consolation would not have been adequate; and how could He have

said, It is expedient for you? For this reason the greater matters of teaching were reserved for the Spirit, that the disciples might not imagine Him inferior.

Consider also how necessary He made it for them to abide in Jerusalem, by promising that the Spirit should be granted them. For lest they should again flee away after His Ascension, by this expectation, as by a bond, He keeps them to that spot. But having said, Wait for the promise of the Father, which you have heard of Me, He then adds, For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. (v. 4-5.) For now indeed He gives them to see the difference there was between Him and John, plainly, and not as heretofore in obscure hints; for in fact He had spoken very obscurely, when He said, Notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he: but now He says plainly, John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Matthew 11:11 And he no longer uses the testimony, but merely adverts to the person of John, reminding the disciples of what he had said, and shows them that they are now become greater than John; seeing they too are to baptize with the Spirit. Again, He did not say, I baptize you with the Holy Ghost, but, You shall be baptized: teaching us humility. For this was plain enough from the testimony of John, that it was Christ Himself Who should baptize: He it is that shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire Luke 3:16; wherefore also He made mention of John.

The Gospels, then, are a history of what Christ did and said; but the Acts, of what that other Comforter said and did. Not but that the Spirit did many things in the Gospels also; even as Christ here in the Acts still works in men as He did in the Gospels: only then the Spirit wrought through the Temple, now through the Apostles: then, He came into the Virgin's womb, and fashioned the Temple; now, into Apostolic souls: then in the likeness of a dove; now, in the likeness of fire. And wherefore? Showing there the gentleness of the Lord, but here His taking vengeance also, He now puts them in mind of the judgment likewise. For, when need was to forgive, need was there of much gentleness; but now we have obtained the gift, it is henceforth a time for judgment and examination.

But why does Christ say, You shall be baptized, when in fact there was no water in the upper room? Because the more essential part of Baptism is the Spirit, through Whom indeed the water has its operation; in the same manner our Lord also is said to be anointed, not that He had ever been anointed with oil, but because He had received the Spirit. Besides, we do in fact find them receiving a baptism with water [and a baptism with the Spirit], and these at different moments. In our case both take place under one act, but then they were divided. For in the beginning they were baptized by John; since, if harlots and publicans went to that baptism, much rather would they who thereafter were to be baptized by the Holy Ghost. Then, that the Apostles might not say, that they were always having it held out to them in promises John 14:15-16, (for indeed Christ had already discoursed much to them concerning the Spirit, that they should not imagine It to be an impersonal Energy or Operation, (■ ν■ργειαν ■νυπ■στατον) that they might not say this, then, He adds, not many days hence. And He did not explain when, that they might always watch: but, that it would soon take place, He told them, that they might not faint; yet the exact time He refrained from adding, that they might always be vigilant. Nor does He assure them by this alone; I mean, by the shortness of the time, but withal by saying, The promise which you have heard of Me. For this is not, says He, the only time I have told you, but already I have promised what I shall certainly perform. What wonder then that He does not signify the day of the final consummation, when this day which was so near He did not choose to reveal? And with good reason; to the end they may be ever wakeful, and in a state of expectation and earnest heed.

For it cannot, it cannot be, that a man should enjoy the benefit of grace except he watch. Do you see not what Elias says to his disciple? If you see me when I am taken up 2 Kings 2:10, this that you ask shall be done for you. Christ also was ever wont to say unto those that came unto Him, Do you believe? For if we be not appropriated and made over to the thing given, neither do we greatly feel the benefit. So it was also in the case of Paul; grace did not come to him immediately, but three days intervened, during which he was blind; purified the while, and prepared by fear. For as those who dye the purple first season with other ingredients the cloth that is to receive the dye, that the bloom may not be fleeting; so in this instance God first takes order that the soul shall be thoroughly in earnest, and then pours forth His grace. On this account also, neither did He immediately send the Spirit, but on the fiftieth day. Now if any one ask, why we also do not baptize at that season of Pentecost? We may answer, that grace is the same now as then; but the mind becomes more elevated now, by being prepared through fasting. And the season too of Pentecost furnishes a not unlikely reason. What may that be? Our fathers held Baptism to be just the proper curb upon evil concupiscence, and a powerful lesson for teaching to be sober-minded even in a time of delights.

As if then we were banquetting with Christ Himself, and partaking of His table, let us do nothing at random, but let us pass our time in fastings, and prayers, and much sobriety of mind. For if a man who is destined to enter upon some temporal government, prepares himself all his life long, and that he may obtain some dignity, lays out his money, spends his time, and submits to endless troubles; what shall we deserve, who draw near to the kingdom of heaven with such negligence, and both show no earnestness before we have received, and after having received are again negligent? Nay, this is the very reason why we are negligent after having received, that we did not watch before we had received. Therefore many, after they have received, immediately have returned to their former vomit, and have become more wicked, and drawn upon themselves a more severe punishment; when having been delivered from their former sins, herein they have more grievously provoked the Judge, that having been delivered from so great a disease, still they did not learn sobriety, but that has happened unto them, which Christ threatened to the paralytic man, saying, Behold you are made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto you John 5:14: and which He also predicted of the Jews, that the last state shall be worse than the first. Matthew 12:45 For if, says He, showing that by their ingratitude they should bring upon them the worst of evils, if I had not come, and spoken unto them, they had not had sin John 15:22; so that the guilt of sins committed after these benefits is doubled and quadrupled, in that, after the honour put upon us, we show ourselves ungrateful and wicked. And the Laver of Baptism helps not a whit to procure for us a milder punishment. And consider: a man has gotten grievous sins by committing murder or adultery, or some other crime: these were remitted through Baptism. For there is no sin, no impiety, which does not yield and give place to this gift; for the Grace is Divine. A man has again committed adultery and murder; the former adultery is indeed done away, the murder forgiven, and not brought up again to his charge, for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance Romans 11:29; but for those committed after Baptism he suffers a punishment as great as he would if both the former sins were brought up again, and many worse than these. For the guilt is no longer simply equal, but doubled and tripled. Look: in proof that the penalty of these sins is greater, hear what St. Paul says: He that despised Moses' law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and has done despite unto the Spirit of grace? Hebrews 10:28-29

Perhaps we have now deterred many from receiving baptism. Not however with this intention have we so spoken, but on purpose that having received it, they may continue in temperance and much moderation.

'But I am afraid,' says one. If you were afraid, you would have received and guarded it. 'Nay,' says he, 'but this is the very reason why I do not receive it -- that I am frightened.' And are you not afraid to depart thus? 'God is merciful,' says he. Receive baptism then, because He is merciful and ready to help. But you, where to be in earnest is the thing required, dost not allege this mercifulness; you think of this only where you have a mind to do so. And yet that was the time to resort to God's mercy, and we shall then be surest of obtaining it, when we do our part. For he that has cast the whole matter upon God, and, after his baptism, sins, as being man it is likely, he may, and repents, shall obtain mercy; whereas he that prevaricates with God's mercy, and departs this life with no portion in that grace, shall have his punishment without a word to be said for him. 'But how if he depart,' say you, 'after having had the grace vouchsafed to him?' He will depart empty again of all good works. For it is impossible, yes, it is in my opinion impossible, that the man who upon such hopes dallied with baptism should have effected ought generous and good. And why do you harbor such fear, and presume upon the uncertain chance of the future? Why not convert this fear into labor and earnestness, and you shall be great and admirable? Which is best, to fear or to labor? Suppose some one to have placed you, having nothing to do, in a tottering house, saying, Look for the decaying roof to fall upon your head: for perhaps it will fall, perhaps not; but if you had rather it should not, then work and inhabit the more secure apartment: which would you have rather chosen, that idle condition accompanied with fear, or this labor with confidence? Why then, act now in the same way. For the uncertain future is like a decayed house, ever threatening to fall; but this work, laborious though it be, ensures safety.

Now God forbid that it should happen to us to fall into so great straits as to sin after baptism. However, even if anything such should happen, God is merciful, and has given us many ways of obtaining remission even after this. But just as those who sin after baptism are punished for this reason more severely than the Catechumens, so again, those who know that there are medicines in repentance, and yet will not make use of them, will undergo a more grievous chastisement. For by how much the mercy of God is enlarged, by so much does the punishment increase, if we do not duly profit by that mercy.

What do you say, O man? When you were full of such grievous evils, and given over, suddenly you became a friend, and wast exalted to the highest honor, not by labors of your own, but by the gift of God: you again returned to your former misconduct; and though you deserved to be sorely punished, nevertheless, God did not turn away, but gave unnumbered opportunities of salvation, whereby you may yet become a friend: yet for all this, you have not the will to labor. What forgiveness can you deserve henceforth?

Will not the Gentiles with good reason deride you as a worthless drone? For if there be power in that doctrine of yours, say they, what means this multitude of uninitiated persons? If the mysteries be excellent and desirable, let none receive baptism at his last gasp. For that is not the time for giving of mysteries but for making of wills; the time for mysteries is in health of mind and soundness of soul. For, if a man would not prefer to make his will in such a condition; and if he does so make it, he gives a handle for subsequent litigation (and this is the reason why testators premise these words: Alive, in my senses, and in health, I make this disposal of my property:), how should it be possible for a person who is no longer master of his senses to go through the right course of preparation for the sacred mysteries?

For if in the affairs of this life, the laws of the world would not permit a man who was not perfectly sound in mind to make a will, although it be in his own affairs that he would lay down the law; how, when you are receiving instruction concerning the kingdom of heaven, and the unspeakable riches of that world, shall it be possible for you to learn all clearly, when very likely too you are beside yourself through the violence of

your malady? And when will you say those words to Christ, in the act of being buried with Him when at the point to depart hence?

For indeed both by works and by words must we show our good will towards Him. Romans 6:4 Now what you are doing is all one, as if a man should want to be enlisted as a soldier, when the war is just about to break up; or to strip for the contest in the arena, just when the spectators have risen from their seats. For you have your arms given you, not that you should straightway depart hence, but that being equipped therewith, you may raise a trophy over the enemy. Let no one think that it is out of season to discourse on this subject, because it is not Lent now.

Nay, this it is that vexes me, that you look to a set time in such matters. Whereas that Eunuch, barbarian as he was and on a journey, yea on the very highway, he did not seek for a set time Acts 8:27; no, nor the jailer, though he was in the midst of a set of prisoners, and the teacher he saw before him was a man scourged and in chains, and whom he was still to have in his custody. Acts 16:29 But here, not being inmates of a jail, nor out on a journey, many are putting off their baptism even to their last breath.

Now if you still questionest that Christ is God, stand away from the Church: be not here, even as a hearer of the Divine Word, and as one of the catechumens: but if you are sure of this, and know clearly this truth, why delay? Why shrink back and hesitate? For fear, say you, lest I should sin. But do you not fear what is worse, to depart for the next world with such a heavy burden? For it is not equally excusable, not to have gotten a grace set before you, and to have failed in attempting to live uprightly.

If you be called to account, Why did you not come for it? What will you answer? In the other case you may allege the burden of your passions, and the difficulty of a virtuous life: but nothing of the kind here. For here is grace, freely conveying liberty. But you fear lest you should sin? Let this be your language after Baptism: and then entertain this fear, in order to hold fast the liberty you have received; not now, to prevent your receiving such a gift. Whereas now you are wary before baptism, and negligent after it.

But you are waiting for Lent: and why? Has that season any advantage? Nay, it was not at the Passover that the Apostles received the grace, but at another season; and then three thousand (Luke says,) and five thousand were baptized: (ch. 2:41; 4:4, and ch. x.) and again Cornelius. Let us then not wait for a set time, lest by hesitating and putting off we depart empty, and destitute of so great gifts. What do you suppose is my anguish when I hear that any person has been taken away unbaptized, while I reflect upon the intolerable punishments of that life, the inexorable doom!

Again, how I am grieved to behold others drawing near to their last gasp, and not brought to their right mind even then. Hence too it is that scenes take place quite unworthy of this gift. For whereas there ought to be joy, and dancing, and exultation, and wearing of garlands, when another is christened; the wife of the sick man has no sooner heard that the physician has ordered this, than she is overcome with grief, as if it were some dire calamity; she sets up the greatest lamentation, and nothing is heard all over the house but crying and wailing, just as it is when condemned criminals are led away to their doom.

The sick man again is then more sorely grieved; and if he recovers from his illness, is as vexed as if some great harm had been done to him. For since he had not been prepared for a virtuous life, he has no heart for the conflicts which are to follow, and shrinks at the thought of them. Do you see what devices the devil contrives, what shame, what ridicule? Let us rid ourselves of this disgrace; let us live as Christ has enjoined. He gave us Baptism, not that we should receive and depart, but that we should show the fruits of it in our after life.

How can one say to him who is departing and broken down, Bear fruit? Have you not heard that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace? Galatians 5:22 How comes it then that the very contrary takes place here? For the wife stands there mourning, when she ought to rejoice; the children weeping, when they ought to be glad together; the sick man himself lies there in darkness, and surrounded by noise and tumult, when he ought to be keeping high festival; full of exceeding despondency at the thought of leaving his children orphans, his wife a widow, his house desolate.

Is this a state in which to draw near unto mysteries? Answer me; is this a state in which to approach the sacred table? Are such scenes to be tolerated? Should the Emperor send letters and release the prisoners in the jails, there is joy and gladness: God sends down the Holy Ghost from Heaven to remit not arrears of money, but a whole mass of sins, and do ye all bewail and lament? Why, how grossly unsuitable is this! Not to mention that sometimes it is upon the dead that the water has been poured, and holy mysteries flung upon the ground.

However, not we are to blame for this, but men who are so perverse. I exhort you then to leave all, and turn and draw near to Baptism with all alacrity, that having given proof of great earnestness at this present time, we may obtain confidence for that which is to come; whereunto that we may attain, may it be granted unto us all by the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.

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