

Letters to Olympias - Part 2

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom encourages Olympias to persevere in the face of adversity, citing his own experiences and her bravery as examples of the power of faith and virtue.

Scripture: Matthew 26:41, Romans 5:3, 2 Corinthians 4:17, Philippians 4:11, Hebrews 10:36, James 1:2, James 1:12, 1 Peter 1:6, 1 Peter 4:12

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Persevering Faith"

Description

John Chrysostom encourages Olympias to find joy and strength in the midst of trials and afflictions, highlighting the purification and fortification of the soul through challenges. He reassures her of his own well-being despite past sufferings and emphasizes the importance of enduring afflictions with courage and faith. Chrysostom urges Olympias to focus on spiritual growth and not be dismayed by external threats or hardships, reminding her of the eternal rewards awaiting those who persevere. He commends her resilience and unwavering faith, encouraging her to continue in her steadfastness and trust in God's providence.

Transcript

4. Do not then now desire death, nor neglect the means of cure; for indeed this would not be safe. On this account Paul also exhorts Timothy to take the greatest care of himself. As regards infirmity then enough has now been said. But if it is separation from me which causes your despondency expect release from this. And I have not said this now merely to encourage you, but I am sure that it really will be the case. For if it were not destined to happen, I should long ago, so at least I think, have departed from this world, considering the trials which have been inflicted on me.

For to pass over all that occurred in Constantinople, after my departure thence, you may understand what sufferings I endured on that long and cruel journey, most of which were sufficient to produce death; what I endured after my arrival here, after my removal from Cucusus, and after my sojourn in Arabissus. Yet I have survived all these things, and now I am in sound health, and great security, so that all Armenians are astonished that with such a feeble and flimsy frame as mine I can support such an intolerable amount of cold, or that I can breathe at all, when those who are habituated to the winter are suffering from it in no common degree.

Nevertheless I have remained uninjured up to the present day, having escaped the hands of robbers who have repeatedly attacked us, and yet in daily want of the necessaries of life, and deprived of the use of a

bath; and although since my sojourn here I have been constantly without this luxury I am now so established in the habit that I do not even long for the comfort to be derived from it, but am in sounder health than before. And neither the inclemency of the climate, nor the desolation of the region, nor the scarcity of provisions, nor the lack of attendants, nor the unskillfulness of physicians, nor the deprivation of the bath, nor perpetual confinement in one chamber as in a prison, and the impossibility of moving about which I always used continually to need, nor perpetual contact with fire and smoke, nor fear of robbers, nor a constant state of siege, nor anything else of this kind has got the better of me; on the contrary I am in a sounder condition of health than I was elsewhere, although I then received great care and attention.

Taking all these things then into consideration pray shake off the despondency which now oppresses you, and do not exact inordinate and cruel penances from yourself. I sent you the treatise which I have lately written, that no one can harm the man who does not injure himself, and the letter which I now send your honour contends for the same position. I beg you therefore to go over it constantly, and if your health permits you, recite it aloud. For if you will, it may prove an effectual remedy for you.

But if you are contentious with me, and do not try to cure yourself, and will not rouse yourself from these dismal swamps of despondency in spite of the unlimited amount of advice and exhortation which you enjoy I shall not on my part readily consent to send you frequent and long letters, if you are not to derive any benefit in the way of cheerfulness from them. How then shall I know this? Not by your merely saying so, but by a practical proof, inasmuch as you lately affirmed that it was nothing but despondency which caused this sickness of yours.

Since then you have yourself made this confession I shall not believe that you have got rid of your despondency unless you have got rid of your bodily infirmity. For if it is the former which causes your disorder, as you say in your letter, it is obvious that when that has been dispersed the other will be removed at the same time, and when the root has been plucked up, the branches perish with it -- and if the branches continue flowering and flourishing, and producing an unnatural amount of fruit I cannot believe that you have been set free from the root of your distress.

Therefore do not show me words but facts, and, if you get well, you will see letters sent to you again exceeding the limits of former communications. Deem it then no small consolation that I am alive, and in good health, and that in the midst of such circumstances I have been set free from sickness and infirmity, which, as I know, is a great annoyance and vexation to my enemies. It follows therefore that you should deem this the greatest encouragement, and the crown of your consolation.

Do not call your household desolate, which has now a higher place assigned to it in Heaven by reason of the sufferings which it endures. I was grievously distressed on account of Pelagius the monk. Consider therefore what great rewards they deserve who bravely hold their ground, when men who pass their time in such a habit of discipline and endurance are found susceptible of degradation.

To Olympias

Having risen from the very gates of death I address this letter to the discreet lady; and I am very glad that your servants have met me just as I am anchoring at last in harbour. For had they met me when I was still tossing on the open sea, and experiencing the cruel waves of bodily sickness, it would not have been easy for me to deceive your cautious spirit, by sending good tidings instead of sorrowful. For the winter, which has become more than commonly severe, brought on a storm of internal disorder even more distressing, and during the last two months I have been no better than one dead, nay worse. For I had just enough life

to be sensible of the horrors which encircled me, and day and dawn and noon were all one night to me as I spent all my time closely confined to my bed, and in spite of endless contrivances I could not shake off the pernicious effects of the cold; but although I kept a fire burning, and endured a most unpleasant amount of smoke, and remained cooped up in one chamber, covered with any quantity of wraps, and not daring to set a foot outside the threshold I underwent extreme sufferings, perpetual vomiting supervening on headache, loss of appetite, and constant sleeplessness. Thus restlessly did I pass through my long dark sea of troubles. But not to distress your mind by dwelling upon my miseries, from all of them I am now relieved. For as soon as spring approached, and a little change in the temperature took place, all my troubles spontaneously vanished. Nevertheless I still require great care as regards diet; therefore I put only a light load on my stomach, so that it may be able to digest it easily. But it has occasioned me no little concern to learn that my discreet mistress was brought to the verge of death. Nevertheless in consideration of my great affection, and anxiety, and solicitude for your welfare I was relieved from this care, even before the arrival of your letters, many persons having come from thence who brought me tidings of your restoration to health.

And now I am exceedingly glad and delighted to hear, not only that you have been released from your infirmity, but above all that you bear the things which befall you so bravely, calling them all but an idle tale; and, which is indeed a greater matter, that you have applied this name even to your bodily infirmity, which is an evidence of a robust spirit, rich in the fruit of courage. For not only to bear misfortunes bravely but to be actually insensible to them, to overlook them, and with such little exertion to wreath your brows with the garland prize of patience, neither labouring, nor toiling, neither feeling distress nor causing it to others, but as it were leaping and dancing for joy all the while, this is indeed a proof of the most finished philosophy.

Therefore I rejoice, and leap for joy; I am in a flutter of delight, I am insensible to my present loneliness, and the other troubles which surround me, being cheered, and brightened, and not a little proud on account of your greatness of soul, and the repeated victories which you have won, and this, not only for your own sake, but also for the sake of that large and populous city, where you are like a tower, a haven, and a wall of defense, speaking in the eloquent voice of example, and through your sufferings instructing either sex to strip readily for these contests, and descend into the lists with all courage, and cheerfully bear the toils which such contests involve.

And the wonder is that without thrusting yourself into the forum, or occupying the public centres of the city, but sitting all the while in a small house and confined chamber you serve and anoint the combatants for the contest, and while the sea is thus raging round you, and the billows are rising to a crest, and crags and reefs, and rocky ledges and fierce monsters appear on every side, and everything is shrouded in the most profound darkness you, setting the sails of patience, float on with great serenity, as if it was noonday, and calm weather, and a favourable breeze wafting you on, and so far from being overwhelmed by this grievous tempest are not even sprinkled by the spray; and very naturally so; such is the force of virtue as a rudder.

Now merchants and pilots, and sailors and voyagers when they see clouds gathering up, or fierce winds rushing down upon them, or the breakers seething with an abundance of foam keep their vessels moored inside harbour; and if they chance to be tempest-tossed in the open sea they do their best, and devise every means to bring their ship to some anchorage, or island or shore. But you, although such innumerable winds, and fierce waves burst upon you together, and the sea is heaved up from its very depths owing to the severity of the storm, and some are submerged, others floating dead upon the water,

others drifting naked upon planks, you plunging into the mid ocean of calamities call all these things an idle tale, sailing on with a favourable breeze in the midst of the tempest; and naturally so; for pilots, even if they are infinitely wise in that science, nevertheless have not skill sufficient to withstand every kind of storm; consequently they often shrink from doing battle with the waves.

But the science which you have is superior to every kind of storm -- the power of a philosophic soul-- which is stronger than ten thousand armies, more powerful than arms, and more secure than towers and bulwarks. For the arms, and bulwarks, and towers which soldiers have, are serviceable for the security of the body only, and this not always, nor in every way; but there are times when all these resources are baffled, and leave those who fly to them for refuge destitute of protection.

But your powers do not repel the weapons of barbarians, nor the devices of hostile men, nor any assaults and stratagems of that kind, but they have trampled under foot the constraining forces of nature, put down their tyranny and levelled their citadel. And while ceaselessly contending with demons, you have won countless victories, yet have not received a single blow, but stand unwounded in the midst of a storm of darts and turn the spears which are hurled at you back upon those who discharge them.

Such is the wisdom of your art; by the sufferings which you undergo you take vengeance on those who inflict them; by the plots of which you are the subject you put your enemies to pain, possessing in their malice the best foundation for the materials of fame. And you, knowing these things well yourself, and having gained perception by experience, naturally call them all an idle tale. For how, pray, should you not call them by that name, possessing as you do a mortal body, and yet despising death as if you were hastening to quit a foreign country, and return to your own land; a chronic sufferer from the most severe infirmity, and yet more cheerfully disposed than the thriving and robust, not depressed by insults, nor elated by honours and glory, the latter being a cause of infinite mischief to many who after an illustrious career in the priesthood, and after reaching extreme old age, and the most venerable hoar hairs, have fallen into disgrace on this account, and become a common spectacle of derision for those who wish to make merry.

But you on the contrary, woman as you are, clothed with a fragile body, and subject to these severe attacks, have not only avoided falling into such a condition yourself, but have prevented many others from so doing. They indeed before they had advanced far in the contest, even at the very outset and starting point, have been overthrown; whereas you, after having gone countless times round the farther turning post, have won a prize in every course, after playing your part in manifold kinds of wrestling and combats.

And very naturally so; for the wrestlings of virtue do not depend upon age, or bodily strength, but only on the spirit and the disposition. Thus women have been crowned victors, while men have been upset; so also boys have been proclaimed conquerors, while aged men have been put to shame. It is indeed always fitting to admire those who pursue virtue, but especially when some are found to cling to it at a time when many are deserting it. Therefore, my sweet lady, you deserve superlative admiration, inasmuch as after so many men, women, and aged persons who seemed to enjoy the greatest reputation have been turned to flight, all lying prostrate before the eyes of the world, and this not after a severe onslaught, nor any alarming muster of the enemy's force, but overthrown before the encounter and worsted before the struggle, you on the contrary after so many battles and such large muster of the enemy are so far from being unstrung, or dismayed by the number of your adversities, that you are all the more vigorous, and the increase of the contest gives you an increase of strength.

For the recollection of what has been already achieved becomes the ground of cheerfulness, and joy, and greater zeal. Therefore I rejoice, and leap for joy; for I will not cease repeating this, and taking about with me everywhere the material of my joy; so that although my separation from you distresses you, yet you have this very great consolation arising from your successful exploits; for I also who am banished to so great a distance gain no small cheerfulness from this cause -- I mean your courage.

To Olympias

Why do you lament? Why do you belabour yourself, and demand of yourself a punishment which your enemies were not able to demand from you, having thus abandoned your soul to the tyranny of dejection? For the letters which you sent to me by the hands of Patricius have discovered to me the wounds which have been inflicted on your mind. Wherefore also I am very sorrowful and much distressed that when you ought to be using every exertion and making it your business to expel dejection from your soul, you go about collecting distressing thoughts, even inventing things (so you say) which do not exist, and tearing yourself to pieces for no purpose, and to your very great injury.

For why are you grieved because you could not remove me from Cucusus? Yet indeed, as far as you were concerned, you did remove me, having made every exertion and endeavour for this purpose. And even if it has not been actually accomplished you ought not to be vexed on that account. For perhaps it seemed good to God that I should be set to run the longer double course, in order that the garland of victory might be rendered more glorious. Why then are you vexed on account of these things, in consequence of which my fame is spread abroad, when you ought to leap and dance for joy and bind wreaths upon your brow, because I have been deemed worthy of so great an honour which far exceeds my merits?

Is it the desolation of this place which grieves you? Yet what can be pleasanter than my sojourn here? I have quietness, and tranquillity, plenty of leisure and good bodily health. For although the town has neither market-place nor market that is nothing to me. For all things are poured abundantly upon me as out of a flowing spring. I find my lord the Bishop here and my lord Dioscorus are constantly employed in providing for my refreshment. And the good Patricius will tell you that as far as my sojourn here is concerned I pass my time cheerfully and gladly, surrounded by attention.

But if you lament the events which occurred in Cæsarea, here again your conduct is unworthy of yourself. For there also bright garlands of victory were woven for me, inasmuch as all were proclaiming and publishing my praises, and expressing wonder and astonishment at the ill-treatment to which I had been subjected followed by expulsion. Meanwhile however do not let any one know these things, although they are the theme of much gossip. For my lord Pœanius has disclosed to me that the presbyters of Pharetrius himself have arrived on the spot, who declare that they were in communion with me and had no communication or intercourse or partnership with my adversaries.

Therefore to avoid upsetting them do not let any one know these things. For certainly the things which befell me were very grievous: and if I had not suffered any other distress the events which happened there would have sufficed to procure innumerable rewards for me: so extreme was the danger which I encountered. Now I beseech you to keep these matters secret, and so I will give you a short account of them, not in order to grieve you but rather to make you glad. For herein consists the material of my gain, herein consists my wealth, herein the means of getting rid of my sins-- that my journey is continually encompassed by trials of this kind, and that they are inflicted upon me by persons from whom they were quite unexpected.

For when I was about to enter the region of Cappadocia, having escaped from that man of Galatia, who nearly threatened me with death, many persons met me on the way saying the lord Pharetrius is awaiting you, and going about in all directions for fear of missing the pleasure of meeting you, and making every possible endeavour to see you, and embrace you, and show you all manner of affectionate regard; and he has set the monasteries of men and women in motion for this purpose.

Now when I heard these things I did not expect that any of them would really take place, but formed an impression in my own mind precisely the reverse: but of this I said nothing to any of those who brought me this message.

2. Now when I arrived late one evening at Cæsarea, in an exhausted and worn-out condition, being in the very height of a burning fever, faint and suffering to the last degree, I lighted upon an inn situated just at the outskirts of the city, and took great pains to find some physicians and allay this fiery fever; for it was now the height of my tertian malady. And in addition to this there was the fatigue of the journey, the toil, the strain, the total absence of attendants, the difficulty of getting supplies, the want of a physician, the wasting effects of toil, and heat and sleeplessness; thus I was well near a dead man when I entered the city.

Then indeed I was visited by the whole body of the clergy, and the people, monks, nuns, physicians, and I had the benefit of great attention, as all paid me every kind of ministration and assistance. Yet even thus, being oppressed by the lethargy arising from the feverish heat I was in an extremely distressed condition. At length by degrees the malady was coming to an end and abating. Pharetrius however nowhere appeared; but waited for my departure, I know not with what purpose in view.

When then I saw that my disorder had slightly abated I began to form plans for my journey so as to reach Cucusus, and enjoy a little repose after the calamities of the way. And while I was thus situated it was suddenly announced that the Isaurians in countless multitudes were overrunning the district of Cæsarea, and had burnt a large village, and were most violently disposed. The tribune, having heard this, took the soldiers which he had and went out. For they were afraid lest the enemy should make an assault also upon the city, and all were in terror, and in an agony of alarm the very soil of their country being in jeopardy, so that even the old men undertook the defense of the walls.

While affairs were in this condition suddenly towards dawn a rabble of monks (for so I must call them, indicating their frenzy by the expression) rushed up to the house where we were, threatening to set fire to it, and to treat us with the utmost violence unless we turned out of it. And neither the fear of the Isaurians, nor my own infirmity which was so grievously afflicting me, nor anything else made them more reasonable, but they pressed on, animated by such fierce rage that even the proconsular soldiers were terrified.

For they kept threatening them with blows and boasted that they had shamefully beaten many of the proconsular soldiers. The soldiers having heard these things, sought refuge with me, and entreated and beseeched me, saying even if we are to fall into the hands of the Isaurians deliver us from these wild beasts. When the governor heard this he hastened down to the house intending to succour me. But the monks would not pay any heed to his exhortations, and in fact he was powerless.

Perceiving the great strait in which affairs were placed and not daring to advise me either to go out to certain death, or on the other hand to stay indoors, owing to the excessive fury of these men, he sent to Pharetrius beseeching him to grant a few days respite on account of my infirmity and the impending danger. But even then nothing was effected, and on the morrow the monks arrived even fiercer than

before, and none of the presbyters dared to stand by me and help me, but covered with shame and blushes (for they said that these things were done by the instructions of Pharetrius) they concealed themselves and lay hid, not responding even when I called them.

What need to make a long story? Although such great terrors were imminent, and death well near a certainty, and the fever was oppressing me (for I had not yet got relief from the troubles arising from that cause) I flung myself at high noon into the litter, and was carried out thence, all the people shrieking and howling, and imprecating curses on the perpetrator of these deeds, while every one wailed and lamented. But when I got outside the city, some of the clergy also gradually came out and escorted me, mourning as they went.

And having heard some persons say *Where are you leading him away to manifest death?* one of those who was warmly attached to me said to me *Depart I entreat you; fall into the hands of the Isaurians, provided you get clear away from us. For wherever you may fall, you will fall into a place of security, if only you escape our hands.* Having heard and seen these things the good Seleucia, the generous wife of my lord Ruffinus (a most attentive friend she was to me), exhorted and entreated me to lodge at her suburban house which was about five miles from the city and she sent some men to escort me, and so I departed there.

3. But not even there was this plot against me to come to an end. For as soon as Pharetrius knew what she had done, he published, as she said, many threats against her. But when she received me into her suburban villa I knew nothing of these things; for when she came out to meet me she concealed these things from me, but disclosed them to her steward who was there, and ordered him to afford me every possible means of repose, and if any of the monks should make an assault, wishing to insult or maltreat me, he was to collect the labourers from her other farms, and thus marshal a force against them.

Moreover she besought me to take refuge in her house, which had a fortress and was impregnable, that I might escape the hands of the bishop and monks. This however I could not be induced to do, but remained in the villa, knowing nothing of the plans which were devised after these things. For even then they were not content to desist from their fury against me but Pharetrius beset the lady as she says, strictly threatening her, constraining and forcing her to expel me even from the suburbs, so that at midnight, I knowing nothing of these things, the lady being unable to endure his annoyance, announced, without my knowledge, that the barbarians were at hand, for she was ashamed to mention the compulsion which she had undergone.

So in the middle of the night Evethius the presbyter came to me, and having roused me from sleep, exclaimed with a loud voice *Get up, I pray you, the barbarians are upon us, they are close at hand. Imagine my condition on hearing this!* Then, when I said to him *what must we do? We cannot take refuge in the city lest we suffer worse things than what the Isaurians are going to do to us,* he compelled me to go out. It was midnight, a dark, murky night without a moon -- a circumstance which filled up the measure of our perplexity -- we had no companion, no assistant, for all had deserted us.

Nevertheless under the pressure of fear and in the expectation of immediate death, I got up, suffering as I was, having ordered torches to be lit. These however the presbyter ordered to be put out, for fear as he said lest the barbarians should be attracted by the light and attack us; so the torches were extinguished. Then the mule which carried my litter fell on its knees, the road being rugged, and steep and stony, and I who was inside was thrown down and narrowly escaped destruction, after which I dismounted, and was

dragged along on foot, being held fast by Evethius the presbyter (for he also had alighted from his mule), and so I plodded on, led, or rather hauled by the hand, for to walk was impossible through such a difficult country, and among steep mountains in the middle of the night.

Imagine what my sufferings must have been, encompassed as I was by such calamities, and oppressed by the fever, ignorant of the plans which had been made, but in terror of the barbarians and trembling with the expectation of falling into their hands. Do you not think that these sufferings alone, even if nothing else besides had befallen me, would avail to blot out many of my sins, and afford ample material for obtaining praise with God? Now the reason of all this, at least as I suppose, was, that as soon as I arrived in Cæsarea, those who were in official positions, the learned men who were ex-vicars, and ex-governors, the ex-tribunes and indeed the whole people visited me every day, paid me great attention, and treated me as the apple of their eye; I suppose these things irritated Pharetrius and that the envy which drove me from Constantinople did not refrain from pursuing me even here. This at least is what I suppose, for I do not positively declare it but only suspect it to be the fact.

And what is one to say about the other events which happened on the way, the fears and the perils? As I recall them day by day, and continually bear them in mind, I am elated with pleasure, I leap for joy as one who has a great treasure laid up in store for him; for such is my position and feeling about them. Wherefore also I beseech your Honour to rejoice at these things, to be glad, and leap for joy, and to glorify God who has counted me worthy to suffer such things. And I beseech you to keep these matters to yourself, and not to divulge them to any one, although for the most part the proconsular soldiers can fill all the city (with the story) as they themselves have undergone extreme danger.

4. Nevertheless do not let any one know this from your prudence, but rather put down those who talk about it. But if you are distressed lest the consequences of my ill-treatment should remain, know for certain that I have shaken myself entirely free from them, and that I am in better bodily health than when I was sojourning in Cæsarea. And why do you dread the cold? For a suitable dwelling has been prepared for me, and my lord Dioscorus does and arranges everything so as to prevent my having the least sensation of cold. And if I may form a conjecture from the outset of my experience, the climate now seems to me oriental in character, no less than that of Antioch. So great is the warmth, so pleasant is the temperature. But you have grieved me much by saying, perhaps you are annoyed with me as having neglected you, yet I dispatched a letter many days ago to your honour begging you not to move me from this place. Now I have had occasion to consider that you need a strong defense and much toil and labour to be able to make a satisfactory apology for this expression. But perhaps you have made a partial apology, by saying I am generally occupied in thinking how to increase my affliction. But I in my turn reckon it as the greatest accusation that you should say I take a pride in increasing my sorrow by thinking over it: for when you ought to make every possible effort to dispel your affliction you do the devil's will, by increasing your despondency and sorrow. Are you not aware how great an evil despondency is?

As to the Isaurians, dismiss your fears in future concerning them: for they have returned into their own country: and the governor has done everything necessary in this respect; and I am in far greater security here than when I was in Cæsarea. For in future I have no one to fear so much as the bishops, with a few exceptions. On account of the Isaurians then fear nothing: for they have retreated, and when winter has set in they are confined to their own homes, although they may possibly come out after Whitsuntide. And what do you mean by saying that you have not the benefit of letters from me? I have already sent you three long letters, one by the proconsular soldiers, one by Antonius, and the third by Anatolius my servant; two of them were a salutary medicine capable of reviving any one who was desponding or stumbling, and

conducting him into a healthy state of serenity. When you have received these letters then go over them constantly and thoroughly, and you will perceive their force and enjoy experience of their healing power, and benefit, and will inform me that you have derived much advantage therefrom. I have also a third letter ready, similar to these, which I do not choose to send at the present time having been exceedingly vexed at your saying I accumulate sorrowful thoughts, even inventing things which do not exist, an utterance unworthy of yourself, which makes me hide my head for shame. But read those letters which I have sent, and you will no longer say these things, even if you are infinitely bent on being despondent. I at least have not ceased, and will not cease saying that sin is the only thing which is really distressing; and that all other things are but dust and smoke. For what is there grievous in inhabiting a prison and wearing a chain? Or in being ill-treated when it is the occasion of so much gain? Or why should exile be grievous or confiscation of goods? These are mere words, destitute of any terrible reality, words void of sorrow. For if you speak of death you only mention that which is the debt of nature: a thing which must in any case be undergone even if no one hastens it: and if you speak of exile you mention that which only involves a change of country and the sight of many cities: or if you speak of confiscation of goods you mention what is only freedom and emancipation from care.

5. Do not cease to pay attention to Maruthas the Bishop, as far as it concerns you, so as to lift him up out of the pit. For I have special need of him on account of the affairs in Persia. And ascertain from him, if you can, what has been accomplished there through his agency, and for what purpose he has come home, and let me know whether you have delivered the two epistles which I sent to him: and if he is willing to write to me, I will write again to him: but if he should not be willing let him at least signify to your prudence whether any thing more has taken place there, and whether he is likely to accomplish anything by going there again.

For on this account I was anxious to have an interview with him. Nevertheless let all things which depend on you be done, and take care to fulfill your own part, even if all men are rushing headlong to ruin. For your reward will thus be perfected. By all means therefore make friends with him as far as it is possible. I beseech you not to neglect what I am about to say, but to pay diligent heed to it. The Marsian and Gothic monks where the Bishop Serapion has constantly been concealed have informed me that Moduarius the deacon has come bringing word that Unilas, that excellent bishop whom I lately ordained and sent into Gothia, has been laid to rest, after achieving many great exploits: and the deacon was the bearer of a letter from the king of the Goths begging that a bishop might be sent to them.

Since then I see no other means of meeting the threatened catastrophe with a view to its correction save delay and postponement (as it is impossible for them to sail into the Bosphorus or into those parts at the present time), take measures to put them off for a time on account of the winter season: and do not by any means neglect this: for it is a matter of the greatest importance. For there are two things which would specially distress me if they were to happen, which God forbid: one is that a bishop should be appointed by these men who have wrought such great wickedness, and who have no right to appoint, and the other is that any one should be made without consideration.

For you know yourself that they are not anxious to create some worthy man bishop, and if this should take place, which heaven forbid, you are aware what will follow. Use all diligence therefore to prevent either of these things happening: but if it were possible for Moduarius quietly and secretly to hasten out to me it would be of the greatest advantage. But if this is not possible let what is practicable under the circumstances be done. For that which takes place in the case of money, and actually occurred in the case of the widow in the gospel, also holds good in the case of practical affairs.

For as that poor woman when she had cast two mites into the treasury surpassed all those who had cast in more, because she used up her whole substance: even so they who devote themselves to the work in hand with all their might discharge it completely, so far as they are concerned, even if nothing results from it, and they have their reward perfected.

I am very grateful to Hilarius the bishop: for he wrote to me asking to be allowed to depart to his own country, and to set things in order there, and then to come back again. As his presence therefore is of great service (for he is a devout, inflexible, and zealous man) I have urged him to depart and to return speedily. Take care then that the letter is quickly and safely delivered to him and not cast on one side: for he eagerly and earnestly begged for letters from me, and his presence is a great benefit. By all means therefore have a care of the letters; and if Helladius the presbyter be not on the spot see that they are delivered to my friends by the hands of some discreet man who has a head on his shoulders.

To Olympias

Nothing strange or unnatural has befallen your Piety, but only what is quite natural and consonant to reason, that by a constant succession of trials the sinews of your soul should become more braced, and your zeal and energy for the struggle increased, and that you should therefrom derive much joy. For such is the nature of affliction -- when it lays hold of a brave and noble soul, this is what it is wont to effect. And as the fire makes the piece of gold, when it is applied to it, of better proof: so also affliction when it visits golden characters renders them purer and more proven.

Wherefore also Paul said affliction works patience, and patience probation. Romans 5:3-4 For these reasons I also rejoice and leap for joy, and derive the greatest consolation of this my solitude from a consideration of your fortitude. On this account, even though innumerable wolves encompass you, and many crowds of wicked doers, I fear nothing; but I pray both that existing temptations may be suppressed, and that others may not occur, thus fulfilling the Lord's precept who bids us pray that we may not enter into temptation; but if it should be permitted to happen again I have good confidence concerning your golden soul, which acquires therefrom the greatest riches for itself.

For by what means will they be able to terrify you, who dare everything to their own destruction? Will it be by loss of goods? But I know well that these are counted by you as dust and cheaper than dirt. Or shall it be by expulsion from country and home. But you know how to dwell in great and populous cities as if they were uninhabited, spending the whole of your time in quietness and rest, and treading worldly ambitions under foot. Or do they threaten death? This also you have constantly practiced by anticipation, and if they should drag you to slaughter, they will be dragging a body which is already dead.

What need to speak more at length? No one will be able to do anything to you of this kind which he will not find you have already abundantly made yourself undergo. For by always walking in the narrow and strait path, you have trained yourself in all these things. Wherefore having practised this most beautiful art in the course of your training, you now shine forth the more gloriously in the contest itself, not only being in no wise disturbed by the things which are happening, but rather elated, and leaping and dancing for joy.

For the contests which you have anticipated in your training you now undertake with much ease, although it be in a woman's body, feebler than a cobweb, treading under foot with derisive scorn the fury of lusty men gnashing their teeth upon you; being ready to suffer even worse things than they prepare for you. Happy and thrice happy are you by reason of the crowns of victory to be won, but even more by reason of the contest itself. For such is the nature of these struggles, even before the prizes are given even in the

midst of strife they have their recompense and reward -- the pleasure which you are now enjoying, the cheerfulness, the courage, the endurance, the patience, the power which is proof against capture and conquest and rises superior to all things; the perfect training which renders you insensible to any terror at the hands of any one, the power of standing on a rock in the midst of mighty billows of tribulation, and sailing in a calm with a favourable breeze when the sea is raging around you.

These are the prizes of affliction even in this world before the kingdom of heaven is won. For I know very well that, even at this present time, being elated with joy, thou dost not consider yourself clothed with a body, but if an opportunity should summon you to do it, you would divest yourself of it more readily than others do of the raiment which they wear. Rejoice therefore and be glad both for yourself, and for those who have died a blessed death, not in a bed, nor in a house, but in prison, and chains, and torment; and bewail those only who do these things, and grieve for them.

But since you also wish to be informed concerning my bodily health, let me tell you that I have been relieved for the present from the infirmity which was lately oppressing me, and am now in a more comfortable condition: the only fear is lest the winter on its return should again make havoc of my feeble digestion; and as far as the Isaurians are concerned we now enjoy great security.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-john-chrysostom/letters-to-olympias-part-2/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net