

On the Priesthood - Part 7

by St. John Chrysostom

The Priest's role requires a unique combination of purity, discretion, and boldness, making it a challenging and demanding position.

Scripture: Ezekiel 33:6, Matthew 5:13, Matthew 18:6, Matthew 22:13, 1 Corinthians 8:12, 2 Corinthians 8:20, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 2:1, Hebrews 13:17

Topics: "Priestly Ministry", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

John Chrysostom delivers a sermon emphasizing the weight of responsibility and accountability that comes with being entrusted with the care of souls. He warns about the severe penalties awaiting those who fail in their duty, using biblical references to highlight the consequences of causing others to stumble and the importance of purity and discretion in the Priesthood. Chrysostom reflects on the challenges and temptations faced by Priests, urging them to maintain spiritual purity and vigilance amidst the dangers of vainglory, pride, envy, and worldly influences. He acknowledges the intense spiritual warfare faced by Priests, comparing it to a fierce battle against the devil's deceit and attacks on the soul. Despite the struggles and fears, Chrysostom encourages perseverance, reliance on God's grace, and mutual support among Priests to fulfill their sacred calling.

Transcript

1. Our condition here, indeed, is such as you have heard. But our condition hereafter how shall we endure, when we are compelled to give our account for each of those who have been entrusted to us? For our penalty is not limited to shame, but everlasting chastisement awaits us as well. As for the passage, Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit to them, for they watch in behalf of your souls as they that shall give account; Hebrews 13:17 though I have mentioned it once already, yet I will break silence about it now, for the fear of its warning is continually agitating my soul. For if for him who causes one only, and that the least, to stumble, it is profitable that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea; Matthew 18:6 and if they who wound the consciences of the brethren, sin against Christ Himself, 1 Corinthians 8:12 what then will they one day suffer, what kind of penalty will they pay, who destroy not one only, or two, or three, but so many multitudes? For it is not possible for inexperience to be urged as an excuse, nor to take refuge in ignorance, nor for the plea of necessity or force to be put forward. Yea, if it were possible, one of those under their charge could more easily make use of this refuge for his own sins than bishops in the case of the sins of others. Do you ask why? Because he who has been appointed to rectify the ignorance of others, and to warn them

beforehand of the conflict with the devil which is coming upon them, will not be able to put forward ignorance as his excuse, or to say, I have never heard the trumpet sound, I did not foresee the conflict. For he is set for that very purpose, says Ezekiel, that he may sound the trumpet for others, and warn them of the dangers at hand. And therefore his chastisement is inevitable, though he that perishes happen to be but one. For if when the sword comes, the watchman does not sound the trumpet to the people, nor give them a sign, and the sword come and take any man away, he indeed is taken away on account of his iniquity, but his blood will I require at the watchman's hands. Ezekiel 33:6

2. Cease then to urge us on to a penalty so inevitable; for our discourse is not about an army, or a kingdom; but about an office which needs the virtues of an angel. For the soul of the Priest ought to be purer than the very sunbeams, in order that the Holy Spirit may not leave him desolate, in order that he may be able to say, Now I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ lives in me. Galatians 2:20 For if they who dwell in the desert, and are removed far from the city and the market-place, and the tumult therein, and who enjoy all their time a haven of rest, and of peacefulness, are not willing to rely on the security of that manner of life, but add to it numberless other safeguards, hedging themselves round on every side, and studying both to speak and to act with great circumspection, so that to the utmost extent of human power they may draw near to God with assurance, and with unstained purity, what power and strength, do you think, does the ordained Priest need so as to be able to tear his soul away from every defilement, and to keep its spiritual beauty unsullied? For he has need of far greater purity than they; and whoever has need of greater purity, he too is subject to more pressing temptations than they, which are able to defile him, unless by using constant self-denial and much labor, he renders his soul inaccessible to them. For beauty of face, elegance of movement, an affected gait and lisping voice, pencilled eyebrows and enamelled cheeks, elaborate braiding and dyeing of hair, costliness of dress, variety of golden ornaments, and the glory of precious stones, the scent of perfumes, and all those other matters to which womankind devote themselves, are enough to disorder the mind, unless it happen to be hardened against them, through much austerity of self restraint. Now to be disturbed indeed by such things is nothing wonderful. But on the other hand, that the devil should be able to hit and shoot down the souls of men by the opposite of these -- this is a matter which fills us with astonishment and perplexity.

3. For ere now some men who have escaped these snares, have been caught by others widely differing from these. For even a neglected appearance, unkempt hair, squalid dress, and an unpainted face, simple behavior, and homely language, unstudied gait, and unaffected voice, a life of poverty, a despised, unpatronized and lonely condition, have first drawn on the beholder to pity, and next to utter ruin; and many who have escaped the former nets, in the way of gold ornaments and perfumes, and apparel, and all the rest, of which I have spoken as connected with them, have easily fallen into these so widely differing from them, and have perished. When then both by poverty and by riches, both by the adornment and the neglect of the personal appearance, both by studied and unaffected manners, in short by all those means which I have enumerated, war is kindled in the soul of the beholder, and its artifices surround him on every side, how will he be able to breathe freely while so many snares encompass him? And what hiding-place will he be able to find -- I do not say so as to avoid being forcibly seized by them (for this is not altogether difficult)-- but so as to keep his own soul undisturbed by polluting thoughts?

And I pass by honors, which are the cause of countless evils. For those which come from the hands of women are ruinous to the vigor of self-restraint, and often overthrow it when a man does not know how to watch constantly against such designs; while those which come from the hands of men, unless a man receive them with much nobleness of mind, he is seized with two contrary emotions, servile flattery and

senseless pride. To those who patronize him, he is obliged to cringe; and towards his inferiors he is puffed up, on account of the honors which the others confer, and is driven into the gulf of arrogance. We have mentioned these matters indeed, but how harmful they actually are, no one could well learn without experience. For not only these snares, but greater and more delusive than these, he must needs encounter, who has his conversation in the world. But he who is content with solitude, has freedom from all this, and if at any time a strange thought creates a representation of this kind, the image is weak, and capable of being speedily subdued, because there is no fuel added to the flame from without, arising from actual sight. For the recluse has but himself to fear for; or should he be forced to have the care of others they are easily counted: and if they be many, yet they are less than those in our Churches, and they give him who is set over them much lighter anxiety about them, not only on account of their fewness, but because they are all free from worldly concerns, and have neither wife nor children, nor any such thing to care about; and this makes them very deferential to their rulers, and allows them to share the same abode with them, so that they are able to take in their failings accurately at a glance and correct them, seeing that the constant supervision of a teacher is no little help towards advance in virtue.

4. But of those who are subject to the Priest, the greater number are hampered with the cares of this life, and this makes them the slower in the performance of spiritual duties. Whence it is necessary for the teacher to sow every day (so to speak), in order that by its frequency at least, the word of doctrine may be able to be grasped by those who hear. For excessive wealth, and an abundance of power, and sloth the offspring of luxury, and many other things beside these, choke the seeds which have been let fall. Often too the thick growth of thorns does not suffer the seed to drop even upon the surface of the soil. Again, excess of trouble, stress of poverty, constant insults, and other such things, the reverse of the foregoing, take the mind away from anxiety about things divine; and of their people's sins, not even the smallest part can become apparent; for how should it, in the case of those the majority of whom they do not know even by sight?

The Priest's relations with his people involve thus much difficulty. But if any inquire about his relations with God, he will find the others to be as nothing, since these require a greater and more thorough earnestness. For he who acts as an ambassador on behalf of the whole city -- but why do I say the city? On behalf of the whole world indeed -- prays that God would be merciful to the sins of all, not only of the living, but also of the departed. What manner of man ought he to be? For my part I think that the boldness of speech of Moses and Elias, is insufficient for such supplication. For as though he were entrusted with the whole world and were himself the father of all men, he draws near to God, beseeching that wars may be extinguished everywhere, that tumults may be quelled; asking for peace and plenty, and a swift deliverance from all the ills that beset each one, publicly and privately; and he ought as much to excel in every respect all those on whose behalf he prays, as rulers should excel their subjects.

And whenever he invokes the Holy Spirit, and offers the most dread sacrifice, and constantly handles the common Lord of all, tell me what rank shall we give him? What great purity and what real piety must we demand of him? For consider what manner of hands they ought to be which minister in these things, and of what kind his tongue which utters such words, and ought not the soul which receives so great a spirit to be purer and holier than anything in the world? At such a time angels stand by the Priest; and the whole sanctuary, and the space round about the altar, is filled with the powers of heaven, in honor of Him who lies thereon.

For this, indeed, is capable of being proved from the very rites which are being then celebrated. I myself, moreover, have heard some one once relate, that a certain aged, venerable man, accustomed to see

revelations, used to tell him, that he being thought worthy of a vision of this kind, at such a time, saw, on a sudden, so far as was possible for him, a multitude of angels, clothed in shining robes, and encircling the altar, and bending down, as one might see soldiers in the presence of their King, and for my part I believe it.

Moreover another told me, without learning it from some one else, but as being himself thought worthy to be both an ear and eye witness of it, that, in the case of those who are about to depart hence, if they happen to be partakers of the mysteries, with a pure conscience, when they are about to breathe their last, angels keep guard over them for the sake of what they have received, and bear them hence. And do you not yet tremble to introduce a soul into so sacred a mystery of this kind, and to advance to the dignity of the Priesthood, one robed in filthy raiment, whom Christ has shut out from the rest of the band of guests?

Matthew 22:13 The soul of the Priest should shine like a light beaming over the whole world. But mine has so great darkness overhanging it, because of my evil conscience, as to be always cast down and never able to look up with confidence to its Lord. Priests are the salt of the earth. Matthew 5:13 But who would easily put up with my lack of understanding, and my inexperience in all things, but thou, who hast been wont to love me beyond measure. For the Priest ought not only to be thus pure as one who has been dignified with so high a ministry, but very discreet, and skilled in many matters, and to be as well versed in the affairs of this life as they who are engaged in the world, and yet to be free from them all more than the recluses who occupy the mountains.

For since he must mix with men who have wives, and who bring up children, who possess servants, and are surrounded with wealth, and fill public positions, and are persons of influence, he too should be a many-sided man -- I say many-sided, not unreal, nor yet fawning and hypocritical, but full of much freedom and assurance, and knowing how to adapt himself profitably, where the circumstances of the case require it, and to be both kind and severe, for it is not possible to treat all those under one's charge on one plan, since neither is it well for physicians to apply one course of treatment to all their sick, nor for a pilot to know but one way of contending with the winds.

For, indeed, continual storms beset this ship of ours, and these storms do not assail from without only, but take their rise from within, and there is need of much condescension, and circumspection, and all these different matters have one end in view, the glory of God, and the edifying of the Church.

5. Great is the conflict which recluses undergo, and much their toil. But if any one compare their exertions with those which the right exercise of the Priesthood involves, he will find the difference as great as the distance between a king and a commoner. For there, if the labor is great indeed, yet the conflict is common to body and soul, or rather the greater part of it is accomplished by the condition of the body, and if this be not strong, the inclination remains undeveloped, and is unable to come out into action. For the habit of intense fasting, and sleeping on the ground, and keeping vigil, and refraining from the bath, and great toil, and all other means which they use for the affliction of the body are given up, when the body to be thus disciplined is not strong. But in this case purity of soul is the business in hand, and no bodily vigor is required to show its excellence. For what does strength of body contribute towards our being not self-willed, or proud, or headstrong, but sober and prudent, and orderly, and all else, wherein St. Paul filled up the picture of the perfect Priest? But no one could say this of the virtues of the recluse.

6. But as in the case of wonder-workers, a large apparatus is required, both wheels and ropes and daggers; while the philosopher has the whole of his art stored up in his mind, not requiring any external

appliances: So accordingly in the case before us. The recluse requires both a good condition of body, and a place suitable for his course of life, in order that such may not be settled too far from intercourse with their fellow men, and may have the tranquillity which belongs to desert places, and yet further, may not fail to enjoy the most favorable climate. For nothing is so unbearable to a body worn with fastings as a climate which is not equable. And what trouble they are compelled to take in the preparation of their clothing and daily food, as they are themselves ambitious of doing all with their own hands, I need not speak of now. But the Priest will require none of these things to supply his wants, but is unconcerned about them, and participates in all things which are harmless, while he has all his skill stored up in the treasure-house of his mind. But if any one admire a solitary life, and retirement from the society of the multitude, I should say myself that such a life was a token of patience, but not a sufficient proof of entire fortitude of soul. For the man who sits at the helm in harbor, does not yet give any certain proof of his art. But if one is able to guide his ship safely in the midst of the sea, no one would deny him to be an excellent steersman.

7. It would be, therefore, in no wise excessively surprising to us, that the recluse, living as he does by himself, is undisturbed and does not commit many and great sins. For he does not meet with things which irritate and excite his mind. But if any one who has devoted himself to whole multitudes, and has been compelled to bear the sins of many, has remained steadfast and firm, guiding his soul in the midst of the storm as if he were in a calm, he is the man to be justly applauded and admired of all, for he has shown sufficient proof of personal manliness.

Do not thou, therefore, for your part wonder if I, who avoid the market-place and the haunts of the multitude, have not many to accuse me. For I ought not to wonder, if I sinned not when asleep, nor fell when I did not wrestle, nor was hit if I did not fight. For who, tell me, who will be able to speak against me, and reveal my depravity? Can this roof or cell? Nay, they would not be able to give tongue? Would my mother, who best of all knows my affairs? Well, certainly with her I am neither in communication, nor have we ever come to a quarrel, and if this had happened, no mother is so heartless and wanting in affection for her child as to revile and accuse before all him whom she travailed with, and brought forth, and reared, if there were no reason to constrain her, nor any person to urge her to such an act.

Nevertheless, if any one desires to make a careful inspection of my mind, he will discover much which is corrupt there. Nor are you unaware of this who art specially wont to extol me with praises before all. Now that I do not say these things out of mere modesty, recollect how often I said to you, when this subject was being discussed between us, If any one were to give me my choice whether I would rather gain distinction in the oversight of the Church, or in the life of the recluse, I would vote a thousand times over for accepting the former.

For I have never failed to congratulate those who have been able to discharge this office well, and no one will gainsay that what I counted blessed I would not have shunned were I able to take part in it fitly. But what am I to do? There is nothing so prejudicial to the oversight of the Church as this inactivity and negligence of mine, which others think to be a sort of self-discipline, but which I hold to be a veil as it were of my personal infirmity, covering the greater number of my defects and not suffering them to appear.

For he who is accustomed to enjoy such great freedom from business, and to pass his time in much repose, even if he be of a noble nature, is confused by his inexperience, and is disturbed, and his inactivity deprives him of no small part of his natural ability. But when, besides, he is of slow intellect, and ignorant also of these severe trials, which I take it is my case, he will carry on this ministry which he has received no better than a statue. Wherefore of those who have come to such great trial, out of that school, few

shine; and the greater part betray themselves, and fall, and undergo much hardship and sufferings; and no wonder.

For the trials and the discipline are not concerned with the same things. The man who is contending in no wise differs from those who are untrained. He who thus enters this list should despise glory, be superior to anger, full of great discretion. But for the exercise of these qualities there is no scope in his case who affects a secluded life. For he does not have many to provoke him in order that he may practise chastising, the force of his anger: nor admirers and applauders in order that he may be trained to despise the praises of the multitudes.

And of the discretion which is required in the Church, there is no taking account in their case. Whenever, therefore, they come to the trials of which they have never had practical experience, they get bewildered, their heads are turned, they fall into a state of helplessness, and besides adding nothing to their excellence, may have often lost that which they brought with them.

8. Basil: What then? Shall we set over the administration of the Church those who move in society, and who are careful about the concerns of this world, who are adepts at wrangling and vituperation, are full of countless artifices, and versed in luxurious ways?

Chrysostom: Hush, dear friend that you are! You should never entertain in your thoughts such men as these, when the Priesthood is under discussion, but only such as are able after mixing and associating with all, to keep their purity undefiled, and their unworldliness, their holiness, constancy and sobriety unshaken, and to possess all other virtues which belong to recluses, in a greater degree than they. He who has many defects, but is able to hide them, by means of his seclusion, and to make them ineffectual, because he does not associate with any one, when he comes into society will gain nothing, but the position of a laughing-stock, and will run greater risks still, which I was very nearly experiencing myself, had not the providence of God quickly warded off such fire from my head.

For it is not possible for one in such a position to escape notice when he is so conspicuously placed, but everything then is detected, and as the fire tests the material of metals, so too the trial of the clerical office searches the souls of mortal men; and if any one be passionate or mean, or ambitious of fame, if he be boastful, or anything else of the kind, it unveils all; and speedily lays bare his defects, and not only lays them bare, but increases their painfulness and strength.

For the wounds of the body, if they are galled, become harder to heal, and the emotions of the mind when chafed and irritated, are naturally more exasperated, and those who possess them are driven to commit greater sins. For they excite him who does not restrain them, to love of glory, and to boastfulness, and to desire for this world's goods, and draw him downwards, both to luxury and laxity of life, and to laziness, and, little by little, to evils worse than these which result from them.

For many are the circumstances in society which have the power to upset the balance of the mind, and to hinder its straightforward course; and first of all is his social intercourse with women. For it is not possible for the Bishop, and one who is concerned with the whole flock, to have a care for the male portion of it, but to pass over the female, which needs more particular forethought, because of its propensity to sins. But the man who is appointed to the administration of a Bishopric must have a care for the moral health of these, if not in a greater, at least in no less a degree than the others.

For it is necessary to visit them when they are sick, to comfort them when they are sorrowful, and to reprove them when they are idle, and to help them when they are distressed; and in such cases the evil one would find many opportunities of approach, if a man did not fortify himself with a very strict guard. For the eye, not only of the unchaste, but of the modest woman pierces and disturbs the mind. Flatteries enervate it, and favors enslave it, and fervent love-- the spring one may say of all good -- becomes the cause of countless evils to those who do not make a right use of it.

Constant cares too have ere now blunted the edge of the understanding, and have made that which was buoyant heavier than lead, while anger has burst in like smoke, and taken possession of all the inner man.

9. Why should any one speak of the injuries that result from grief, the insults, the abuse, the censure from superiors, from inferiors, from the wise, and from fools; for the class who are wanting in right judgment are particularly fond of censuring, and will never readily allow any excuse. But the truly excellent Bishop ought neither to think lightly of these, but to clear himself with all men of the charges which they bring against him, with great forbearance and meekness, pardoning their unreasonable fault-finding, rather than being indignant and angry about it. For if St. Paul feared lest he should incur a suspicion of theft, among his disciples, and therefore procured others for the management of the money, that no one he says, should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us, 2 Corinthians 8:20 how ought we not to do all so as to remove evil suspicions, even if they happen to be false, and most unreasonable, and very foreign to our thought? For we are not so utterly removed from any sin as St. Paul from theft; notwithstanding, though so far from this evil practice, he did not, therefore, slight the suspicion of the world, although it was very absurd, and even insane. For it was madness to have any such suspicion about that blessed and admirable character. But none the less does he remove far off the causes of this suspicion, unreasonable though it was, and such as no one who was in his senses would entertain, and he neither disdained the folly of the multitudes, nor did he say, To whose mind did it ever occur to suspect such things of us, after the signs which I have wrought, and the forbearance which has marked my life, and when you all revered and admired us? Quite the contrary: he foresaw and expected this base suspicion, and pulled it up by the roots, or rather did not suffer it to grow at all. Why? Because, says he, we provide things honest not only before the Lord, but before all men. So great, yea and far greater zeal must we use, to uproot and prevent floating reports which are not good, but to see beforehand from afar whence they come, and to remove beforehand the causes from which they are produced, not to wait till they are established and are the common topics in every one's mouth. For then it is not easy in the future to destroy them, but very difficult, perhaps impossible, and not without mischief, because this is done after many have been injured. But how far shall I continue pursuing the unattainable? For to enumerate all the difficulties in this direction, is nothing more nor less than measuring the ocean. Even when any one should clear himself from every passion (which is a thing impossible) in order to correct the failings of others, he is forced to undergo countless trials, and when his own infirmities are added, behold, an abyss of toil and care, and all that he must suffer, who wishes to subdue the evils in himself and in those around him.

10. Basil: And now, art thou free from toils? Have you no cares while you live by yourself?

Chrysostom: I have indeed even now. For how is it possible for one who is a man, and who is living this toilsome life of ours, to be free from cares and conflict? But it is not quite the same thing for man to plunge into a boundless ocean and to cross a river, so great is the difference between these cares and those. For now, indeed, if I were able to become serviceable to others, I should wish it myself, and this would be a matter of prayer with me. But if it is not possible to help another, yet if it be practicable to save and rescue myself from the waves, I shall be contented.

Basil: Do you then think this to be a great thing? And do you fancy that you will be saved when you are not profitable to any other?

Chrysostom: You have spoken well and nobly, for I am not myself able to believe that it is possible for one who has not labored for the salvation of his fellow to be saved, nor did it at all profit the wretched man in the Gospel that he had not diminished his talent; but he perished through not increasing it and bringing it doubled to his master. Matthew 25:24 Nevertheless, I think that my punishment will be milder when I am called to account, because I have not saved others, than it would be if I should destroy myself and others too by becoming far worse after so great an honor. For now I trust that my chastisement will be proportioned to the amount of my sins, but after receiving this office, I fear it would be not double, or threefold, but manifold, because I should have caused very many to stumble, and after additional honor should have offended the God who honored me.

11. For this very cause God accuses the Israelites more vehemently, and shows that they were worthy of greater chastisement, because they sinned after so many honors had come to them from Him, saying in one place: But you only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore will I punish you for your iniquities, Amos 3:2 and again, and I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites; Amos 2:11 and before the times of the prophets, wishing to show that sins receive sorer punishment by far when they occur in the case of the Priest than in the case of the laity, He enjoins as great a sacrifice to be offered for the Priest as for the whole people, and this amounts to a proof on his part, that the wounds of the Priesthood need more assistance -- that is, as great as those of all the people together, and they would not have needed a greater, except they were worse; and they are not worse in their nature, but are aggravated through the dignity of the Priest, who dares to commit them. And why do I speak of the men who follow this ministration. For the daughters of the Priests, Leviticus 21:9 who have no part in the Priestly office, yet on account of their father's dignity undergo a far bitterer punishment for the same sins as others, and the offense is the same in their case and in the daughters of the laity; namely, fornication in both; yet the penalty is far severer for the former. Do you see with what abundant proof God shows you that he demands much greater punishment for the ruler than for the ruled? For no doubt he who punishes to a greater degree than others the daughter of a certain man for that man's sake, will not exact the same penalty from the man who is the cause of her additional chastisement as from others, but a much heavier one; and very reasonably; for the mischief does not merely involve himself, but it destroys the souls of the weaker brethren and of them who look up to him, and Ezekiel, writing to show this, distinguishes from one another the judgment of the rams and of the sheep. Ezekiel 34:17

12. Do we then seem to you to entertain a reasonable fear? For in addition to what has been said, although much toil is needful on my part, so that I should not be completely overwhelmed by the passions of my soul, yet I endure the toil, and I do not shun the conflict. For even now I am taken captive by vainglory, but I often recover myself, and I see at a glance that I have been taken, and there are times when I rebuke my soul, which has been enslaved; outrageous desires even now come over me, but they kindle only a languid flame, since my bodily eyes cannot fasten upon any fuel to feed the fire. From speaking ill of any, or from hearing any one evil spoken of, I am utterly removed, since I have no one to talk with; for surely these walls would never give tongue; yet it is not altogether in like manner possible to avoid anger, although there be none to provoke it. For often when the recollection of outrageous men has come over me, and of the deeds done by them, it makes my heart swell. But not permanently, for I quickly subdue its kindling, and persuade it to be quiet, saying that it is very inexpedient and extremely despicable to leave one's own fault alone, and to busy one's self about the faults of one's neighbors. But were I to

come among the multitude, and to be involved in countless excitements, I should not be able to have the benefit of this warning, nor to experience reflections which take me thus to task. But just as they who are driven over precipices by a torrent, or in some other way, are able to foresee the destruction to which they are finally going, and are unable to think of any means of help, so I, when I have fallen into the great tumult of my passions, shall be able to see at a glance my chastisement daily increasing. But to be master of myself as I am now, and to rebuke diseases of this sort raging on every side, would not be equally easy for me as it was before. For my soul is weak and puny, and easily mastered, not only by these passions, but by envy, which is bitterer than all of them. Neither does it know how to bear insults or honors temperately. But these do exceedingly elate it, while those depress it. As, then, savage wild beasts, when they are in good condition, and in full vigor, overcome those that fight with them, particularly, too, if they be feeble and unskillful; but if any one were to weaken them by starvation, he will put their rage to sleep, and will extinguish most of their strength; so that one, not over valiant, might take up the conflict and battle with them: so also with the passions of the soul. He who makes them weak, places them in subjection to right reason; but he who nourishes them carefully, makes his battle with them harder, and renders them so formidable that he passes all his time in bondage and fear.

What then is the food of these wild beasts? Of vainglory, indeed, it is honors and applause; of pride, abundance of authority and power; of envy, the reputation of one's neighbors; of avarice, the munificence of the generous; of incontinence, luxury and the constant society of women; and other passions have their proper nutriment? And all these things will sorely attack me if I come forth into the world, and will tear my soul to pieces, will be the more formidable and will make my battle with them the harder. Whereas, while I am established here they will be subdued; and then, indeed, only with great exertion; yet at the same time, by the Grace of God, they will be subdued, and there will not be anything worse than their bark. For these reasons I keep to this cell, and am inaccessible, self-contained, and unsociable, and I put up with hearing countless complaints of this kind, although I would gladly efface them, and have been vexed and grieved because I cannot; for it is not easy for me to become sociable, and at the same time to remain in my present security. Therefore I beseech you, too, to pity rather than to censure one beset with such great difficulty.

But we cannot yet persuade you. Accordingly the time is now come that I should utter to you the only thing which I have left unspoken. Perhaps it may seem to many to be incredible, but even so I shall not be ashamed to bring it before the world, for though what is said is proof of an evil conscience and of many sins, yet, since God, who is about to judge us, knows all accurately, what gain will result to us from the ignorance of men? What then is this, which is yet unspoken? From that day on which you imparted to me the suspicion of the bishopric, my whole system has often been in danger of being completely unhinged, such was the fear, such the despondency which seized my soul; for on considering the glory of the Bride of Christ, the holiness, the spiritual beauty and wisdom, and comeliness, and then reckoning up my own faults, I used not to cease bewailing both her and myself, and amidst continual distress and perplexity, I kept saying -- who then made such a suggestion as this? Why has the Church of God made so great a mistake? Why has she so provoked her Master, as to be delivered over to me, the unworthiest of all men, and to undergo such great disgrace? Considering these things often by myself, and being unable to bear the thought of so monstrous a thing, I used to be like thunderstruck people, speechless, and unable either to see or hear. And when this condition of great helplessness left me, for there were times when it passed off, tears and despondency succeeded to it, and after the flood of tears, then fear again, entered in their stead, disturbing, confusing and agitating my mind. In such a tempest I used to pass the time that is gone; but you were ignorant of it, and thought that I was spending my time in a perfect tranquillity, but I will now

try and unveil to you the storm of my soul, for it may be you will henceforth pardon me, abandoning your accusations. How then shall I unveil this to you? For if you would see this clearly, it is not otherwise possible than by laying bare my own heart; but as this is impossible, I will try and show you as well as I can, by a certain faint illustration, the gloom of my despondency, and from this image please to infer my condition.

Let us suppose that the daughter of the King of all the earth under the sun is the betrothed of a certain man, and that this damsel has matchless beauty, transcending that of human nature, and that in this respect she outstrips by a long distance the whole race of women; also that she has virtues of the soul, so great as to distance by a long way the whole generation of men that have been, or that shall be; and that the grace of her manners transcends all standards of art, and that the loveliness of her person is eclipsed by the beauty of her countenance; and that her betrothed, not only for the sake of these things, is enamored of the maiden, but apart from these things has an affection for her, and by his ardor throws into the shade the most passionate of lovers that ever were. Then let us suppose, while he is burning with love, he hears from some quarter that some mean, abject man, low born, and crippled in body, in fact a thoroughly bad fellow, was about to wed this wondrous, well-beloved maiden. Have we then presented to you some small portion of our grief? And is it enough to stay my illustration at this point? So far as my despondency is concerned, I think it is enough; for this was the only purpose for which I introduced the comparison, but that I may show you the measure of my fear, and my terror, let me proceed to another description.

Let there be an armament composed of infantry, cavalry, and marines, and let a number of triremes cover the sea, and phalanxes of foot and horse cover most of the plains, and the ridges of the mountains, and let the metal of their armor reflect the sunshine, and the glitter of the helmets and shields be reflected by the beams which are emitted from them; let the clashing of spears and the neighing of horses be borne up to the very heavens, and let neither sea nor land appear, but only brass and iron in every direction. Let the enemy be drawn up in battle array opposite to these, fierce and savage men, and let the time of the engagement be now at hand. Then let some one suddenly seize some young lad, one of those brought up in the country, knowing nothing but the use of the shepherd's pipe and crook; let him be clad in brazen armor, and let him be led round the whole camp and be shown the squadrons and their officers, the archers, slingers, captains, generals, the foot and horse, the spearmen, the triremes and their commanders, the dense mass of soldiers in the ships, and the multitude of engines of war lying ready on board. Let him be shown, moreover, the whole array of the enemy, their repulsive aspect, and the varied stores and unusual quantity of their arms; the ravines also and precipices of the mountains, deep and difficult. Let him be shown further on the enemies' side, horses flying by some enchantment and infantry borne through the air, and sorcery of every power and form; and let him consider the calamities of war, the cloud of spears, the hailstorm of arrows, that great mist and obscurity that gloomiest night which the multitude of weapons occasions, eclipsing the sunbeams with their cloud, the dust no less than the darkness baffling the eyesight. The torrents of blood, the groanings of the falling, the shouts of the surviving, the heaps of slain, wheels bathed in blood, horses with their riders thrown headlong down, owing to the number of corpses, the ground a scene of general confusion, blood, and bows, and arrows, hoofs of horses and heads of men lying together, a human arm and a chariot wheel and a helmet, a breast pierced through, brains sticking to swords, the point of a dart broken off with an eye transfixed upon it. Then let him reckon up the sufferings of the naval force, the triremes burning in the midst of the waves, and sinking with their armed crews, the roaring of the sea, the tumult of the sailors, the shout of the soldiers, the foam of the waves mixed with blood, and dashing over into all the ships; the corpses on the

decks, some sinking, some floating, some cast upon the beach, overwhelmed by the waves, and obstructing the passage of the ships. And when he has been carefully instructed in all the tragedy of warfare, let the horrors of captivity and of slavery be added to it, worse than any kind of death; and having told him all this, bid him mount his horse straightway, and take command of all that armament.

Do you really think that this lad would be equal to more than the mere description, and would not, at the very first glance, lose heart?

13. Do not think that I have exaggerated the matter by my account, nor suppose that because we are shut up in this body, as in some prison house, and are unable to see anything of the invisible world, that what has been said is overstated. For you would see a far greater and more formidable conflict than this, could you ever behold, with these eyes of yours, the devil's most gloomy battle array, and his frantic onset. For there is no brass or iron there. No horses, or chariots or wheels, no fire and darts.

These are visible things. But there are other much more fearful engines than these. One does not need against these enemies breastplate or shield, sword and spear, yet the sight only of this accursed array is enough to paralyze the soul, unless it happen to be very noble, and to enjoy in a high degree as a protection to its own courage the providential care of God. And if it were possible by putting off this body, or still keeping it, to see clearly and fearlessly with the naked eye the whole of his battle array, and his warfare against us, you would see no torrents of blood, nor dead bodies, but so many fallen souls, and such disastrous wounds that the whole of that description of warfare which I just now detailed to you you would think to be mere child's sport and pastime rather than war: so many are there smitten every day, and the wounds in the two cases do not bring about the same death, but as great as is the difference between the soul from the body, so great is the difference between that death and this.

For when the soul receives a wound, and falls, it does not lie as a lifeless body, but it is thenceforth tormented, being gnawed by an evil conscience; and after its removal hence, at the time of judgment, it is delivered over to eternal punishment; and if any one be without grief in regard to the wounds given by the devil, his danger becomes the greater for his insensibility. For whoever is not pained by the first wound, will readily receive a second, and after that a third.

For the unclean spirit will not cease assaulting to the last breath, whenever he finds a soul supine and indifferent to his first wounds; and if you would inquire into the method of attack, you would find this much more severe and varied. For no one ever knew so many forms of craft and deceit as that unclean spirit. By this indeed, he has acquired the greater part of his power, nor can any one have so implacable a hatred against his worst enemies as the evil one against the human race.

And if any one inquire into the vehemence with which he fights, here again it would be ludicrous to bring men into comparison with him. But if any one choose out the fiercest and most savage of beasts, and is minded to set their fury against his, he will find that they were meek and quiet in comparison, such rage does he breathe forth when he attacks our souls; and the period of the warfare indeed in the former case is brief, and in this brief space there are respites; for the approach of the night and the fatigue of slaughter, meal-times also, and many other things, afford a respite to the soldier, so that he can doff his armor and breathe a little, and refresh himself with food and drink, and in many other ways recover his former strength.

But in the case of the evil one it is not possible ever to lay aside one's armor, it is not possible even to take sleep, for one who would remain always unscathed. For one of two things must be: either to fall and perish

unarmed, or to stand equipped and ever watchful. For he ever stands with his own battle array, watching for our indolence, and laboring more zealously for our destruction, than we for our salvation.

And that he is not seen by us, and suddenly assails us, which things are a source of countless evils to those who are not always on the watch, proves this kind of war to be harder than the other. Could you wish us, then, in such a case to command the soldiers of Christ? Yea, this were to command them for the devil's service, for whenever he who ought to marshal and order others is the most inexperienced and feeble of all men, by betraying through this inexperience those who have been entrusted to his charge, he commands them in the devil's interests rather than in Christ's.

But why do you sigh? Why weep? For my ease does not now call for wailing, but for joy and gladness.

Basil: But not my case, yea this calls for countless lamentations. For I am hardly able yet to understand to what degree of evil you have brought me. For I came to you wanting to learn what excuse I should make on your behalf to those who find fault with you; but you send me back after putting another case in the place of that I had. For I am no longer concerned about the excuses I shall give them on your behalf, but what excuse I shall make to God for myself and my own faults. But I beseech you, and implore you, if my welfare is at all regarded by you, if there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any bowels, and mercies, Philippians 2:1 for you know that yourself above all hast brought me into this danger, stretch forth your hand, both saying and doing what is able to restore me, do not have the heart to leave me for the briefest moment, but now rather than before let me pass my life with you.

Chrysostom: But I smiled, and said, how shall I be able to help, how to profit you under so great a burden of office? But since this is pleasant to you, take courage, dear soul, for at any time at which it is possible for you to have leisure amid your own cares, I will come and will comfort you, and nothing shall be wanting of what is in my power.

On this, he weeping yet more, rose up. But I, having embraced him and kissed his head, led him forth, exhorting him to bear his lot bravely. For I believe, said I, that through Christ who has called you, and set you over his own sheep, you will obtain such assurance from this ministry as to receive me also, if I am in danger at the last day, into your everlasting tabernacle.

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