

Apatristic Commentary



The Gospel
According to
St. Mark

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO
SAINT MARK

FR. TADROS YACOUB MALATY
COPTIC ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CENTER
Orange - California

Translated by:
DR. GEORGE BOTROS
2001



Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, King of Kings and
Lord of lords



*H.H. Pope Shenouda III, 117th Pope of
Alexandria and the See of St. Mark*

PREFACE

In our study of the Gospel according to St. Matthew we experience the joyful tidings of our Lord Jesus Christ. A gospel which God has prepared through His saintly prophets, so as that we may receive it as an entrance to His eternal kingdom. And now, in the Gospel of St. Mark, we enjoy the same good news, but from another aspect, we see our Lord Jesus Christ laboring on our behalf during His ministry, especially His accepting passion and crucifixion much more than through His words and sermons. This is especially apparent in the acceptance of this passion, suffering, and crucifixion.

This gospel was written to the Romans, who were dependent upon the human strength and contemporary authority, with its violent tendencies. Consequently, this gospel introduces the Lord Christ as the One true authority, through His humility and love, proved in this passion and crucifixion. It is as though the Spirit of God compels us to live by the Spirit of our King, carrying on the Spirit of strength, of labor, by love and passion.

Moreover, I would like to draw attention to the interpretation of this book. Since we encounter incidents dealing with the life and works of the Lord Christ which were previously mentioned in our interpretation of “ The Gospel according to St. Matthew”, quoting several saintly fathers, I suggest that the reader for the sake of avoiding repetition refers to the previous interpretation, together with the introduction of new concepts.

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

INTRODUCTION

A BIOGRAPHY OF SAINT MARK

His Upbringing:

- ✠ St. Mark was born in 'Cyrene', one of the cities of Pentapolis in Libya, in a town called 'Ebryatolis', from Jewish parents related to the tribe of Levi. His father's name is 'Aristopolis,' and his mother 'Mary' was a pious woman, of some stature among the early Christians of Jerusalem.
- ✠ Mark had two names (Act 12:12, 25; 15:37): John, a Hebrew name which means "The kingdom of God" , and Mark a Latin name which means "Hammer".
- ✠ St. Mark was a relative of Barnabas, the Apostle. (nephew or cousin) (Col. 4:10). His father was also a cousin of St. Peter's wife.
- ✠ He learned and mastered both Greek and Latin.
- ✠ After the barbarians attacked their home, they left Cyrene to Palestine, where he and his mother enjoyed the company of the Lord Jesus Christ. Mark's mother; Mary, was one of the women who ministered to the Lord with their resources. She offered her house to the Lord to eat the Passover with His disciples in the upper room. There, He washed their feet and gave them the Sacrament of the Eucharist. By that her house became the first church in the world, consecrated by the Lord Himself through His holy presence and His practicing of the Sacrament of the Eucharist. In that same upper room, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples (Act 2:1-4), and in it the disciples assembled.
- ✠ St. Mark was one of the seventy apostles chosen by the Lord for ministry, as testified by the scholar Origen and by St. Epiphanius.
- ✠ St. Mark attended the wedding of Cana at Galilee; and he was the man carrying the pitcher of water who met the two disciples sent by Lord Jesus to prepare the Passover (Mk.14:13,14; Lk.22:11). He was also the young man who left his linen cloth and fled naked during the incident of the arrest of the Lord (Mk.14:52).

Saint Mark and the Lion:

St. Mark is symbolized by a lion; that is why the people of Venice, who consider him as their intercessor, chose the lion as their symbol, and set a statue of a winged lion at the square of St. Mark in their city.

Some interpretations for the use of this symbol are the following:

(1) It was claimed that St. Mark attracted his father Aristopolis to the Christian faith, while he was on a journey to Jordan. When they were confronted by a lion and a lioness the father asked his son to escape while he tried to distract the attention of the two beasts. The son assured his father, and in response to his prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ, both beasts split in half and died; and the father started to believe in the Lord Christ.

(2) St. Mark opens his Gospel by saying, “*The voice of one crying in the wilderness*” ... as if it was the voice of a lion, the king of animals, roaring high in the wilderness, preparing the way for the coming of the true King, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Additionally, as this Gospel came to declare the authority of the Lord Christ, it was appropriate to symbolize Him by the lion; As it was said of the Lord that He is “the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev.5:5).

(3) St. Ambrose considers, that, as St. Mark started his gospel with the proclamation of the authority of the Deity of the Lord Christ: “*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*” (Mk.1:1), it is appropriate to symbolize it by the lion.

His Missionary Work:

✠ The apostle began his ministry with St. Peter the Apostle in Jerusalem and Judea.

✠ He joined the apostles Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey to Antioch, but, probably because of certain health reasons, he left them in Perga-Pemphilia, and returned to Jerusalem.

✠ When Barnabas asked that Mark accompany them on a second missionary journey, Paul declined. Barnabas and Mark then parted with Paul, and went together to Cyprus, on a missionary tour of their own (Act 13:4-5), while Paul took Silas. Mark went to Cyprus a second time after the synod at Jerusalem (Act 15:39).

✠ There is no more mention of St. Mark in the book of Acts, as he headed to Egypt to establish the Church of Alexandria, after going first to his home of birth in Pentapolis, Libya. From there he set forth to the Oasis region, then to Upper Egypt. Later on he entered Alexandria in the year 61 A. D. by way of its eastern gate.

History tells us the story of how Anianus accepted the Christian Faith, as the first Egyptian to do so... When Mark’s footwear needed repair, he approached Anianus the shoemaker, who, as the needle pierced his finger, he uttered the words “O God the One”.

St. Mark healed him in the name of Lord Christ, and began talking to him of “God the One”. Anianus and his household accepted the faith... As the Christian faith quickly spread in Alexandria, St. Mark ordained Anianos a bishop, and with him three priests and seven deacons. The pagan mob rose in anger, which compelled St. Mark to leave Alexandria to Perga (Lybia), and from there he headed to Rome, where he joined St. Peter and St. Paul, to remain with them until their martyrdom in the year 64 A. D. When St. Mark returned to Alexandria in the year 65 A. D. to find out how the Christian faith had flourished, he decided to visit Pentapolis before getting back to Alexandria to martyrize at the district of ‘Bokalia’.

✠ The people of Lebanon believe that St. Mark preached the new faith in their country; so also in Colosse (Col. 4: 10), in Venice, and Aquila, where he is considered as their intercessor.

✠ We end our talk about his missionary work with the words of the apostle St. Paul, as he was going through his final hours before martyrdom:

“*Get Mark and bring him with you, he is useful to me for ministr* (2 Tim. 4:11).

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK

Time and place of writing:

All scholars agree that the Gospel according to Mark is the oldest of all gospels. Many of them also believe it to be the main source from which the evangelists Matthew and Luke based their gospels.

St. Jerome believes it to be written after the martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul that is after the year 67 A. D. Most scholars agree to the time between the years 65 and 70 A. D.

According to St. John Chrysostom, this gospel was written in Egypt, but other scholars claim it was written in Rome.

The Gospel of St. Mark and St. Peter the apostle:

Certain scholars tried to credit the gospel of St. Mark to the Apostle Peter, considering St. Mark to be just a scribe or an interpreter for his relative St. Peter; and that this gospel is nothing but memoirs of St. Peter or sermons that St. Mark heard him give while they were together in Rome which he recorded after the martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul.

This point of view is totally rejected by the Orthodox Church. His Holiness Pope Shenouda III presented a study on "Saint Mark the Apostle" on the occasion of the 16th century anniversary of his martyrdom. The main points of which I shall enumerate, letting the reader refer to the book by His Holiness: I shall discuss the main points of this book and refer the reader to the book for any other points.

(1) This view was based on St. Papias's claim that St. Mark had never heard or met the Lord but accepted the faith by following St. Peter. This view, adopted by certain scholars, is wrong, as confirmed by several saintly fathers who studied the history of the Church and confirmed the opposite view.

(2) St. Mark was neither a scribe nor an interpreter for St. Peter during his ministry in Rome, as claimed by some; It was not St. Peter, but St. Paul, who ministered in Rome. In his epistle to the Romans, St. Paul clearly expresses his desire to work among them (Rom.1:10-11). and confirms his refusal to build on another man's foundation (Rom.15:20). St. Paul was the preacher for the Gentiles while St. Peter was a preacher for those of circumcision.

(3) If St. Mark was merely a recorder of St. Peter's memoirs or his sermons after his martyrdom, there would be no need to hide it; St. Mark would have certainly mentioned it as a matter of honesty and humility.

(4) Certain scholars base their claim that it was St. Peter's memoirs, on the fact that it includes his weaknesses and ignores his glories, and that he did this out of modesty. This we can dispute by the following argument:

a- The writers of the gospels are above personal level in their task. We find the prophet Moses stating:

"The man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth" (Num.12:3).

Moses' humility did not prevent him from mentioning the miracles that God did through him, how God appeared and spoke to him, accepted his intercessions, and complimented him; At the same time, he mentioned his weaknesses: how he was slow of speech and slow of tongue (Exod.4:10) his trespass that compelled God to forbid him from entering the promised land ... *"...holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"* (2 Pet.1:21). In the New Testament, St. John, the beloved, mentioned how he stood by the cross, how the Lord addressed him and put His mother in his care (Jn.19:25-27), calling himself *"the disciple, whom Jesus loved"* and who *"was leaning on Jesus' bosom"* (Jn.13: 3-25).

b- St. Mark did not abstain from complimenting St. Peter the Apostle. He mentioned the Lord's call for St. Peter as the first of its kind (1:16-20), put his name ahead of all the other apostles (3:16), and placed the story of Christ's entering his house to heal his mother-in-law as the first of the Lord's miracles in his gospel (1:29-31)...He also mentioned St. Peter's words to the Lord: "See, we have left all and followed you" (10:28), and his presence in several occasions together with James and John (5:37; 9:2-8; 14:32).

(5) Certain scholars base their claims that the gospel is a compilation of St. Peter's memoirs on the fact that it mentions incidents that must have been experienced by an eye witness. But, if we consider St. Mark's calling from the Lord to be one of the seventy disciples and his mother's position among the followers of the Lord, we realize that several of these incidents were either witnessed by St. Mark himself, other disciples, or his mother or any one of the Lord's company.

Features:

(1) The early Christians understood the word "gospel" to mean (good news for the world).

We have dealt with the word "gospel" in our study of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. St. Mark was, according to the majority of scholars, the first to use this expression to designate a specific book which presents the life of Jesus Christ as good news for the world. It seems that St. Mark was particularly fond of this word, and included it in the first verse of his Gospel saying:

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mk.1:1)

He, likewise, did the same in several occasions. When he spoke of carrying the cross, he mentioned the Lord's saying,

"Whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's, will save it" (Mk.8:35).

It is worth mentioning that the word 'gospel' was not mentioned by the Evangelists Matthew or Luke in this particular situation (Mt. 16: 25; Lk. 9: 24). The same thing can be said, as St. Mark included what the Lord said about "the leaving":

"There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time ... , and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mk.10:29)

Likewise, St. Matthew the Evangelist did not mention the expression "gospel" in this particular situation. (Mt.19:29).

St. Mark included the word “gospel” in 1:14,15: 14:9... As he preached among the pagan Gentiles and philosophers and especially in Alexandria, this word had a special taste to him. He felt the true joy, which was revealed to the Gentiles from the advent of the Lord Jesus Christ and His presentation of the sacrifice on the cross, as a symbol of reconciliation between God and His people.

(2) As St. Mark was writing his gospel to the Romans, we find him doing the following:

a- He translated the Aramic expressions unknown to the Romans for example: “Boanerges” (3:17); “Talitha” (5:41); “Corban” (7:11); “Ephphatha” (7:34); “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani” (15:34); “Golgotha” (15:21) If he had been addressing the Jews, there would have been no need to translate the meaning of these words, which were well known to them.

b- He explained the Jewish customs, locations and sects and other things that were known to the Jews but unknown to the Romans. He explained the concept of defilement of the Pharisees, and how they were keen on washing things outside (7:2-4); the custom of killing the Passover lamb on the first day of Unleavened Bread (14:12); the meaning of the expression “the preparation day” (15:42); the denial of the Sadducees about the Resurrection (12:18),etc. He mentioned the Jordan followed by the word “river” (1:5); and explained that the Mount of Olives is opposite the temple (13:3), and that Bethphage and Bethany are close to Jerusalem (1:11).

c- Since St. Matthew was writing to the Jews, he quoted much from the Old Testament; however, St. Mark did not because he was addressing the Gentiles.

d- St. Mark was not writing to the Jews (as religious people), nor to the Greeks (as people of Philosophy and thought), but since he was addressing the Romans, who were people of action, he presented a book, small in size, and with no introduction.

He was keen on presenting the Lord Christ in His continuous deeds rather than in His sermons or speeches.

e- The Romans were people who believed in power and authority, having been masters of the world at that time. That is why St. Mark talked to them of the Lord Christ, as a man of real authority; a theme that is obvious throughout the entire book from its beginning to its end.. Christ’s authority was evident upon the unclean spirits (3); upon ailments (1); upon nature (4); upon plants (11); within temple (11); and upon the Sabbath, as “the Lord of the Sabbath” (2). By His true authority, He was aware of secret thoughts (2); and revealed the secrets of the future (13). By His authority, He could feed the multitude (6) and (8).

The Romans believed in authority through violence, pride and oppression, but St. Mark the Evangelist proclaimed the authority of the Lord through humility and ministry to others (9:33; 10:35,45). The concepts of the passion and the cross prevailed his whole book -- almost 1/3 of it -- although the book, as a whole, is a preparation for the soul to receive Christ, the King, through passion!

f- St. Mark the Evangelist presented Herod as an example of their kings, characterized by violence and murder, and around whom gathered those who seek fun and dance.

At the same time, he presents the Lord Christ, who reigns by the gospel of the Kingdom, attracting and fulfilling the soul. The Evangelist often proclaims how

multitudes gathered together around the Lord (1:28,33,45; 2:1,2; 3:7-9; 4:1-2; 6:32-34; 7:24; 9:15; 5:24). All ran after Him, even when He tried to retreat to a deserted place (6: 32 -34), or to a certain house (7: 24). Many times, the Evangelist proclaims how the multitudes were astonished at His teaching (1:22,27; 4:41; 6:51; 10:24,26). He never imposed Himself on others, but through His love and humility He attracted the hearts of many.

g- The Evangelist probably concentrated on demonstrating the conflict between the Lord and the Jews to encourage the Romans to accept Him, who had been rejected by the Jews. In particular, the Lord Christ did not show weakness in His stand before His adversaries, but was always able to expose their hypocrisy. They did not crucify Him through weakness on His part, because he foretold three times to His disciples that He would be crucified (8:31; 10:33,34) to rise from the dead and come again in the glory of His Father, accompanied by the holy angels (8: 38) on the clouds of heaven (14:62).

In addition, St. Mark particularly emphasized the Lord's approach toward the Gentiles (7:24-30; 11:17; 13:10; 16:15) His last commandment was "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*" (16:15).

h- As the Evangelist addressed his gospel to the Romans, he stressed its catholic nature, to encompass the Gentiles as well. That is why he often used the expressions "whole" and "all" (1:5,28,33,39; 2:13; 4:1; 6:33,39,41,55; 13:10).

Finally, we should like to mention the view of a certain scholar: "It is evident that, St. Mark used to live among a Christian community of a Gentile origin, yet it was not completely isolated from Judaism, although it had its own blossoming culture."

(3) If the word "gospel" had been very favorite to St. Mark, the evangelist, faith was the way to enjoy its worldly and spiritual blessings. This book strongly stressed that fact, and showed that lack of faith kept people from recognizing the work of the Lord Christ (6:1-6) Certain scholars see that the Lord Christ is presented in this book as someone who dedicated His life to awaken the faith of man.

(4) The book in our hands prepares the soul to receive the gospel of the suffering Christ. That is why the sayings of the Lord Christ focus on suffering. He spoke most of His suffering clearly and frankly on three occasions:

a- in 'Caesarea Philippi' (8: 31).

b- passing through Galilee (9:30, 31).

c- on His way to the holy city (10: 33, 34).

The Lord Christ was faced on all these occasions either by rebuke, as was done by Simon Peter, or by fear and misunderstanding on the part of the disciples. The mystery of the Cross was not yet recognized, although the Lord had prepared them for it previously on more than one occasion (see 2:20; 3:6; 6:1-6; 6:14-29). Notice that the proclamations of the Lord concerning His sufferings covered three points:

a- His reference to Himself as "*the Son of Man*" (8:31; 9:31; 10:45). If the Evangelist started his book by proclaiming that the Lord Christ is "*the Son of God*" (1:1), because the "Son of God" became "the Son of Man" in order to put Himself in the hands of men, to fulfill in Himself the will of His Father.

b- His confirmation that He would be killed (8: 31; 9: 31; 10: 34) He came into the world, incarnated, for this purpose; to give Himself as a sacrifice; since that was the only way of proclaiming His saving love.

c- His confirmation that He is to rise from the dead after three days. His death was not out of weakness, but was done in order to raise us also with Him.

In our study of this book, the theme of suffering is obviously prevalent throughout it. When He spoke of the parable of the ‘vineyard and the vinedressers’, He demonstrated how the vinedressers planned to kill the heir (12:7). He spoke of Himself as the cornerstone which the builders rejected (12:10). When a woman presented a flask of costly oil to pour it on His head He said:

“She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial” (14:8), etc.

Certain scholars see this book as focusing mainly on the sufferings of the Lord Christ and His tasting of the bitterness of death. One of them commented, saying: “This book, as a whole is a description of how the Lord Jesus has suffered”. Another saw in it, “a parade of the sufferings of Christ, either through direct temptations by Satan, or through human sources.”

This feature led some to believe that St. Mark addressed his book to a particular suffering Christian community, who was facing the burden of persecution, drawing their attention to their duty of sharing the fellowship of suffering with Christ, who invites His disciples to accept it. Some scholars this book ‘the gospel of the martyr’, of the gospel presented to support and encourage Christians who face martyrdom. It may have not presented the philosophy of suffering in the life of the Lord Christ, nor in that of His disciples, as in the epistles of St. Paul the Apostle but it has, nevertheless, confirmed the commitment to the acceptance of suffering, according to the will of God.

(5) Our teacher St. Mark reveals to us the person of our Lord Jesus as the One who works incessantly for our sake. He presents 16 stories demonstrating the miracles He performed, and confirming that He healed many and cast out several unclean spirits (1:34,39; 3:10,11...). Yet the book in its entirety enunciates the Lord’s words;

“Why does this generation seek a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation” (8:12).

Some distinguish between performing miracles (either through healing or casting out unclean spirits) and giving signs from heaven. Miracles were performed by the Lord as acts of love and compassion, when He saw His people in need of support. St. Mark the Evangelist presented the feelings of the Lord Christ towards His people, often writing; *“He had compassion on them”* and *“He took the children in His arms”* etc.

But the sign that the Pharisees, as well as Herod when Christ stood before him, asked for was to realize an extraordinary action, for the sake of showing off; something that Lord Christ utterly refused to do. In this regard we should notice that:

a- His refusal to give a sign from heaven was followed by the admonishing of His disciples to:

“take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod” (8:15)

They then reasoned among themselves, saying, *“It is because we have no bread,”* though the Evangelist mentioned that *“they had one loaf with them in the boat”* (8:14) The sign was actually in their hands, and they did not recognize it; as the Lord Christ was *“the One Loaf”* broken for their sake, and they did not know This was why the Lord rebuked them for not perceiving or understanding (8:17-21). The real unseen sign is the “Eucharistic act”, or *“the broken loaf that He gave them* (18).

b- Certain scholars believe that the Lord refused to give a sign of heaven because He wanted them to concentrate their cues on Him. One of them says: “Jesus Himself, is the sole sign of the gospel... we should not seek a miracle or sign, separate from Jesus Himself.” That was based on the saying of the prophet:

“The Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14)

That sign which the prophets desired to enjoy was beholding the incarnated Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ.

c- He refused to give them a physical sign, as He came seeking “faith”. We see the Gospel of St. Mark revealing around faith, based upon trust in Christ, who is able to fulfill our needs; not the faith based upon signs and visible miracles. The multitude who were astonished (6: 2) quickly, commented,

“Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, such mighty works are performed by His hands! Is not this the carpenter, the Son of Mary....?” (6: 2,3)

Faith, therefore, is not to be based upon the astonishment of a sign or a miracle, but upon leaning on Jesus’ bosom, that satisfies the soul.

d- The High Priests and the scribes asked for a sign at the time of crucifixion, saying,

“Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe” (15:32)

They sought a visible sign, namely, descending from the cross, in order to believe in Him; not knowing that if He had done, they would have been indeed amazed, as by a ‘superman’; on the contrary that would have not fulfilled His mission as the spiritual King of the Jews! The Lord, in refusing to give a visible sign by descending from the cross, was able to attract, through the glory of the cross, the heart of the right thief as well as that of the centurion, and to tear the veil of the temple from top to bottom. The glory of the cross gave light, not to amaze the onlookers, but to attract millions to believe.

The cross became the true proclamation, and the sign and miracle that was performed, not through His descending from it, but through announcing His love and humility, and giving Himself up till death, to raise us with Him.

What the High Priests and the scribes did was nothing but an extension of the devil’s conversation with the Lord Christ, asking Him to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple to astonish the people to believe in Him. But the way of the Lord Christ is that of the cross, not by astonishing people with incredible signs!

e- Indeed, before His crucifixion, He presented to His disciples the sign of His Transfiguration on the mount, right before their eyes. Yet even then, He did not intend it to be an astonishing act: If He had done it, it would have been only done in front of His three disciples, nor even before all of them, but in the presence of a great multitude to demonstrate His glory. In other words, what He presented through His Transfiguration, was not a sign to astonish onlookers, but rather a gift and a divine proclamation. It was a revelation to those whom He shares hidden inner life, that they may experience the exalted heavenly life. In other words, He did not present the Transfiguration to attain the astonishment and admiration of others, but rather to draw their hearts towards a life of fellowship with the Father in His Son, by the Holy Spirit, as a practical life and a genuine experience.

When the bleeding woman encountered the Lord, she was blessed by a power that has gone out of Him (5: 30); not through a visible sign or miracle, but through her faith in His ability to heal her.

f- Finally, while the Lord refused to give a sign from heaven in order to confirm His identity, the antichrists and the false prophets, on the contrary,

“show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (13:21-23).

(6) The attention of some scholars was drawn to the fact that St. Mark the Evangelist, expressed his opinion that the Lord Christ wished His identity as the Son of God to remain a secret that was not to be revealed until His Resurrection. The analysis, by W. Wrede, of the Gospel of St. Mark, was based on four main points: The Lord abstained from revealing His secret as the Christ. During His ministry on earth; that He revealed that secret to His disciples, who were not able to apprehend it; that the demons recognized Him, but He rebuked them and did not let them testify to Him; and that, as the miracles of healing which He performed, were revealing His secrets, He often ordered those He healed, to refrain from proclaiming them.

Another scholar convinced that St. Mark reveals secrecy of the identity of the nature of the Lord Christ, and how He was keen on hiding it, because of following signs:

a- When the demons recognized Him, He forbade them from revealing His identity (1:25,34; 3:12).

b- The Lord Christ avoided the proclamation of His miracles and healings (1:44; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26), except if the one healed was either Gentile or lived among the Gentiles (5:19,20).

c- The tendency of the Lord to withdraw from people (1:35; 3:7; 4:35; 6:31; 7:24; 8:27; 9:30).

d- His refusal of giving a sign to that generation (8:21).

e- More than once, He presented special teaching to His disciples when they were alone (4:33-34; 7:17-23; 9:28-31), but the parables He gave to the multitude seemed mysterious and incomprehensible to them (4:10-13).

f- The multitudes did not apprehend His parables because of hard-heartedness of heart of the Jewish people, or at least, of their leaders (3:5; 7:6,7).

g- The Lord Christ refused to reveal His nature until the Son of God was raised from the dead (8:30; 9:9).

Hiding His nature seems to have been based on the spiritual basis that the Lord Christ, with His true authority, did not seek worldly glory, but acted in humility, so that when He rose from the dead, He would reveal His nature, not to glorify himself, but rather to glorify those who believe in Him so they could enjoy the power of His Resurrection (His life done working in them). From another aspect, hiding His nature, might have been done in order to fulfill His divine purpose of His crucifixion; the Apostle St. Paul says that,

“had they (the Jews) known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1Cor.2:8).

(7) This gospel has presented the Person of the Lord Christ as a minister to humanity, not only through sermons and commandments, but also by practical love and Divine compassion that drew souls to Him. The word “teach”, (in Greek), is mentioned 15 times in this book, far more than in any other book in the New Testament; The Lord Christ was called “Teacher” 17 times, not only by the Master Himself (14: 14), but by

His disciples, the multitude, and even His adversaries the Pharisees, the scribes, the Sadducees, and the Herudeans.

This book presented Him to us as a Teacher, moving in every direction, either teaching in the synagogue and the temple (1:21; 6:2; 11:7; 12:35; 14:49), or to the multitude (2:13, 14; 6:34; 10:1) or His disciples (6:30).

In His teaching, He did not follow the system of the ‘rabbis’, surrounded by their disciples, own disciples who accompanied and lived with him in true fellowship.

The main theme of His teaching was not merely a list of commandments and precepts, but the presentation of Himself as a sacrifice to them, although they did not acknowledge Him before His Resurrection. He presented Himself as a “sufferer”, exhorting them to have fellowship with Him in His sufferings (8:34; 9:31; 10:32).

That was the theme of His teaching to them, as well as their reward: to receive Him in their lives, with His cross and His sufferings.

Finally, He, as a teacher, has been unique in His authority. So if the Jews, as well as the Gentiles, believed in a bitter contest between the Creator and the unseen evil powers, then the Lord came to cleanse the creation and drive away, by His authority the unclean spirits used by the evil one as agents for his work. He defeated the unseen powers of evil and cast them away from His creation He prevailed over the opposing Jewish leaderships because they were agencies working for these evil powers.

Therefore this book, in its essence, is not a parade of the life of the Lord, but rather a gospel of victory over the powers of evil, and ridding the creation of their authority, through enjoying the Person of the Teacher as the conqueror and victorious!

(8) If this gospel is characterized by being very concise, it is at the same time characterized by detail and clarity. It mentions Matthew, the tax-collector, as the son of ‘Alphaeus’ (2:14); the blind Bartimaeus as the son of ‘Timaheus’ (10:46);

Simon, the Cyrenian, as the father of ‘Alexander’ and ‘Rufus’ (15:21). And in his narration of the miracle of feeding the multitude, he was particular in saying that they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties (6:39,40). He was also particular in proclaiming the feelings of the Lord Christ, as someone who witnessed His actions, acknowledging Him as a Lover of mankind. He reveals how He partook of our emotions and feelings, as someone very close to us; saying, that He was “*moved with compassion*” (1:41); “*...looked (at the young man and loved him)*” (10:21); “*took the children in His arms*” (9:36; 1:16) ...etc.

(9) He was fond of using the expression, “immediately”, in order to give the reader the same feeling he himself had; and he used the present tense to narrate certain incidents, turning them into continuous actions.

(10) He was the only Evangelist to mention the miracles of healing the deaf mute (7:31-37), and the healing of the blind paralytic of Bethsaida (8:22-27); and the parable of scattered seed (4:26-29).

Contents:

- 1. The beginning of the ministry of Lord Christ (1:1-13)**
- 2. His Galilean ministry (1:14 ; 6:30)**
- 3. His departure from Galilee (6:31; 9:50)**

- 4. His ministry in Pirea (10)**
- 5. His ministry in Jerusalem (11-13)**
- 6. The Lord's passion and resurrection. (14-16)**

FIRST SECTION

HIS MINISTRY IN GALILEE

CHAPTER 1

THE BEGINNING OF HIS MINISTRY

St. Mark, did not start his gospel with the events of the Nativity, or by the genealogy of Jesus Christ, However since he was writing to the Romans, those of authority, he expounded the Lord Christ “the Son of God”, who has the real authority over the soul (the inner life) and the body (the outer life). He is the Son of God who floods us with the waters of His perfect love, not the love of authority or domination.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| 1- Introduction to the book | 1 |
| 2- Ministry of John the Baptist | 2-8 |
| 3- Baptism of the Lord Jesus Christ | 9-11 |
| 4- His Temptation | 12-13 |
| 5- Preaching the new Kingdom | 14-15 |
| 6- Calling of the disciples | 16-20 |
| 7- His supreme acts of love | |
| a- Casting out an unclean spirit | 21-28 |
| b- Healing Peter’s mother-in-law | 29-34 |
| c- Casting out demons | 35-39 |
| d- Cleansing a leper | 40-45 |



1- Introduction to the book:

“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (!:1)

The Evangelist begins his gospel by announcing its theme. “The gospel of Jesus Christ”, that is the good news to the world. About the salvation presented by Jesus Christ...

St. Mark was the only evangelist who entitled his book a “gospel”, referring to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is as though what he presents in this book is not merely a parade of past incidents, but rather good news for every soul that encounters Jesus as being the “Savior” He is Christ, anointed by the Father, through His Holy Spirit, to consummate the act of redemption, and proclaim the practical love of the Holy Trinity, through the cross. He is the Son of God, the living One, who rose from the dead and who is present inside His Church to grant it His resurrection within it. He is the Son of God,

who is the only One able, by His unique sacrifice, to raise us to His Father's bosom and reconciled as children of God.

It is worth mentioning that this book starts with the sonship of the Lord Christ to the Father, and ends with the invitation of the Lord to His disciples to preach among the Gentiles and to baptize them. While He was speaking to them, He ascended to heaven to the bosom of the Father. In other words, the book opens with the proclamation of the sonship of the Lord to the Father, and ends by inviting us to sonship to the Father through faith in Him and the water of baptism, to ascend with the Lord to the bosom of His Father, and to enjoy His heaven.. That is the whole purpose of the gospel and its good news: to be counted truly as children of God, through our union with the Father in His Only-Begotten Son. St. Hilary, the Bishop of Poitier clarified the distinction between the sonship of the Lord and that of ours, saying, "The Evangelist proclaims that Christ is the Son of God, according to His fitting nature, and not just by the name. We are the children of God, yet not like Him; for He is Son by nature, and not by adoption. He is the Son in truth and not just by name; by birth and not by creation."

2- The ministry of John the Baptist:

Historically, it has been the custom for kings and emperors, to send someone to prepare their ways for them. Similarly, the Lord Jesus Christ aforetime proclaimed through His prophets about His forerunner, 'John the Baptist', being the (angel of the Lord), and (the voice crying in the wilderness). The Evangelist says:

"As it is written in the prophets: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You. The voice of one crying in the wilderness; Prepare the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight'" (1:2,3).

In certain versions, this verse is written as, "As it is written in the prophet Isaiah" St. Mark quoted two prophecies concerning the Forerunner of the Lord: one of which according to the prophet 'Malachi' (3:1), and the other, is according to Isaiah (40:3). The two prophecies reveal the identity of the "Forerunner of the Lord", who prepares His way:

(1) 'Malachi' called him, "the messenger of the Lord"... The Church used to picture St. John the Baptist, with two wings like an angel. Here we should reject the 'Origenic' view that he is a real angel, who adopted the human nature to minister for us. He was called an angel because of his angelic life and his exalted dignity, as told by Father Theophlactius the Patriarch of Bulgaria (765-840 AD). He was probably called so because of the importance of his mission. The word "angel" in Greek and Latin means "messenger". He was sent as a messenger before the Lord to prepare the way for Him through repentance. He also could have been so called because, in his first encounter with the Lord, he did not behold Him in flesh, but through faith. While he was still in his mother Elisabeth's womb, he "*leaped for joy*", as the Virgin Mary approached her pregnant cousin Elizabeth (Lk.1:44).

The scholar Tertullian said, "John, was not only called a messenger for Christ, but also 'a lamp' to illuminate the way before Him, according to the prophecy of David:

"I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed" (Ps.132:17) That is on account of the fact that, he not only prepared His ways in the wilderness, but he also referred to the "Lamb

of God”, edifying the minds of humanity by proclaiming that he is ‘the Lamb’ who is to suffer, whom Moses used to talk about.”

(2) Isaiah called him “*The voice of one crying in the wilderness*”. So, if he came as an angel of mercy to reveal “the Savior” to us, and to illuminate our minds in acknowledging “the Lamb of God”, he is likewise the ‘lion’, roaring with his fearsome voice in the wilderness of our barren hearts, eliminating any excuse we might have about not hearing his message. He is also preparing our hearts to accommodate the crucified Lamb of God and a crying voice reaching into our barren depths, and eagerly looking forward to the redeeming work of God.

St. Cyril the Great discerns between the Lord Christ, the ‘Word’, and His forerunner, John, the ‘voice’: He sees the First, as a shining ‘Sun’, that is preceded by the ‘morning star’, saying, “Isaiah was aware of the missionary job of John. So, while he calls Christ “God” and “Prince”, he refers to John as a “ ministering messenger” and a “lamp” which illuminates before the rising of the true light. He is the “morning star” that proclaims the rise of the “Sun” behind the horizon, scattering the darkness. John has been a “voice”, and not a “Word”.

That voice roared in the wilderness because of its barrenness and lack of the ‘Tree of Life”, that was in the first paradise of Eden. Its purpose was to proclaim the Lord Christ who would be planted in the wilderness of our nature, transforming by his presence, into an exalted paradise. With that, St. Ambrosius comments on the Divine expression: “*The Word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias in the wilderness*” (Lk.3:2).

“Before God could establish His Church, He started His work through His minister John. That is why St. Luke announced the coming of the Word of God to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. This has been fulfilled in the ‘barren’ wilderness, “*For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman*’, says the Lord” (Isaiah 54:1); That was told, “*Sing, O barren , you who have not borne*” (Isaiah 54:1), as, He who proclaimed: “*I am like a green olive tree in the house of God*” (Psalm 52: 8), had not, so far, come; and the heavenly Vinedresser has not yet granted fruits to the branches (Jn.15:1). Thus, the voice roared to make the wilderness bear fruits.]

What did that voice say?

“*Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight*” (Mk.1:3).

St. Theophlactius believes that the way of the Lord is His gospel, or the New Testament; while His paths are the prophecies that lead us to it. Thus, the goal of St. John was to help us receive the gospel of the Lord through the sound understanding of the prophecies and symbols of the Old Testament.

That voice, leading to the Lord Christ and the enjoyment of His gospel, is that of repentance, proclaimed, not only by the words of John the Baptist, but also by His food and his attire. His entire life was a crying voice leading souls to Christ. Because of this, the evangelist says:

“*John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him, and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins...And he preached, saying, ‘There comes one after me, who is mightier than I, whose sandal straps, I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit’*” (Mk.1:4-8).

In that text, it should be noticed that:

a- The theme of his preaching was “the baptism of repentance”, to enjoy the remission of sins ... His baptism had its power, not in itself, but in its symbolism of the baptism of the Lord Christ. In the same way, the brass serpent, in Moses time, had the power of healing, symbolizing the cross. Thus, St. John the Baptist prepared them, by his baptism, to enjoy the baptism of the Lord Christ; not only for the remission of sins, but also for the fellowship in the burial and resurrection with the Lord, so that we may attain *the likeness of His resurrection*” (Rom.6:4,5). As St. Jerome said “As he was a forerunner of Christ, his baptism was a preparation to that of the Lord.”

St. Ambrose believed that St. John the Baptist, represents the end of the Law, in his persuading man to enjoy Christ and leading him to Christ (as repentance leads to the Lord’s grace for the remission of sins) saying:

“The word came to John to proclaim repentance. For that, John has been for many, a symbol of the Law that reveals sins, but is unable to remit them. He who walks in the way of sin, is measured by the Law and is directed towards repentance for the remission of his sin; as, *“The law and the prophets were until John”* (Lk.16:16).

Thus, John prepared the way of Jesus Christ, preaching the law. In the same manner the Church proclaims grace through repentance.

b- St. Jerome sees in John the Baptist a living image of the ascetic life. Although his mother was pious and his father a priest, he was not moved by the emotion of his mother nor by the position of his father to go into the wilderness seeking Christ with the vision of faith, dreaming everything else. The more St. John has forsaken the world, the more he drew the people’s hearts to the wilderness, away from the world. He drew all the people of Judea and Jerusalem, to the supreme fragrance of Christ that emerged from him.

St. John turned his back to the joyful and pleasant life of the city, and headed to the wilderness, to feed on wild honey and locusts ; Similarly, he brought to the Lord Christ, the peoples of nations (spiritually dry as wild honey) bringing a sweet taste in the Lord’s mouth; and turned the Jews (who became like fallen locusts because of their slothfulness to follow the commandments) into delicious food for Him! In other words, as we reject the joyous food of the world with John , we gain the souls of others, which become delicious food for the Lord!

St. Ambrose saw a prophetic preaching about the work of the Lord Christ in St John’s food and clothing, saying: “He prophesied by his attire, the coming of Christ, Who carried the defilement of our corrupt deeds (as a leather belt of dead animal skin), and the sins of the lowly nations (as camel’s hair); casting away that clothing off of our bodies on the cross. The leather belt refers to the skin that was a burden on the souls, but changed through the coming of Christ who granted us spiritual strength to girdle ourselves with the commandments of God with a watchful spirit, and a free and ready body.

As to the food of John, it likewise carries a sign of his work, and embraces a secret... Hunting for locusts is vain labor, with no benefit, because locusts are not edible. Like locusts in their movement from location to another and then disturbing noise, the peoples of nations (devoid of profitable work or fruitful activity; murmuring voices with no meaning or significance, and ignorant of life) turned into food for the prophet...! The wild honey describes the sweetness of the Church that emerged from the wilderness, not

confining its labor to the cells of the law of the Jews, but rather extending itself to the fields and woods. As it is written,

'We heard of it in Ephrathah; We found it in the fields of the woods' (Ps.132:6)

John fed on wild honey, referring to the peoples who were satisfied with the honey of the rock. As it is written,

"And with honey from the rock, I would have satisfied you" (Ps.81:16).]

So, the nations became satisfied with the Lord Christ (the rock) from the honey of His sweet words which He uttered with love on the cross, and with strength of His joyful Resurrection.

c- Frankly, St. John the Baptist proclaimed that he was not Christ, that his baptism was different from that of Christ; and he was far from ever being compared to the Lord. Concerning the baptism, he says,

"I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (Mk,1:8)."

The baptism of John was a mere symbol, cleansing the body, but that of the Lord Christ sanctifies both the body and the spirit. As St. Ambrosius says: "The water and the Spirit are inseparable; the baptism of repentance differs from that of grace, which embraces the two together; while the former concerns only one. If the body and the soul take part in sin, so sanctification is required for both.

As to the Lord, he says: *"There comes One after me, who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap, I am not worthy to stoop down and loose"* MK. (1:7).

St. Ambrose says; "John did not mean, by that comparison, to prove that Christ is greater than him; because there is no point in concerning the Son of God to any human being. There are many strong people; even the devil is described as strong:

"No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house" (Mk.3:27).

But there is no one stronger than Christ. "John refrained from comparing himself to Christ, in saying:

"His sandal strap, I am not worthy to stoop down and loose"

d- By St. John's proclamation that he was unworthy to stoop down and loose His sandal strap, he referred to his inability to apprehend the secret of Christ's Incarnation: How could the Word of God become man?

Nevertheless, the Lord Christ bowed His head beneath his humble hand to *"fulfill all righteousness"* (Mt. 3: 15); St. John Chrysostom says;

"The hand that he confirmed to be unworthy of loosing His sandal strap, Christ allowed it to be put on His head."

3- Baptism of the Lord Christ :

Our teacher, the Evangelist St. Matthew, demonstrated for us the baptism of the Lord (Mt. 3: 13 - 17), in the form of a festival to honor and crown a King, to inaugurate His royal endeavor to draw every soul from the kingdom of darkness to that of light, through the enjoyment of sonship to God. In his presentation of Christ-- the minister for humanity—he drew us by His practical love, to enjoy His salvation. Our teacher St. Mark presents to us the Baptism of the Lord, preceding His public ministry, to proclaim the ultimate goal of His ministry and salvation work...

The Evangelist clarifies five points:

(1) Coming up from the water:

“It came to pass in these days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heaven parting...” (Mk.1:9,10).

Coming up from the water confirms that the Lord Christ based baptism on plunging into water, to emphasize our communion with Him through His burial in the grave and also our resurrection with Him. According to the saying of the Apostle Paul:

“We were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom.6:4).

It is a coming up with the Lord from the grave, to experience practical life in the spirit and power of the resurrection.

Baptism is “coming up from water”, as though it is “coming out of the Red Sea.” It is also “a Passover life” through which we do not proceed under Moses’ leadership from the Red Sea into the wilderness, towards Jerusalem; but rather it is a coming up from the grave, hidden inside Christ, the Head, being alone the Conqueror of death, and the Destroyer of the gates of Hades. By that we realize what Isaiah the prophet yearned for when he said:

“Then he remembered the days of old, Moses and his people, saying: ‘Where is he who brought them up out of the sea, with the shepherd of His flock ? Where is He who put His Holy Spirit within them ? Who led them by the right hand of Moses, with His glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make for Himself an everlasting name” (Isaiah 63:11,12).

According to a certain scholar baptism, in the heavenly concept is the birth of the new people of God into a new exodus through Christ.

The Lord has come out from the water to proclaim and grant to His new people, who are in Him, “the sonship of the heavenly Father”! Jesus Christ is the new Joshua, carrying us across the Jordan towards the promised land.

In our study of the books of the Old Testament, water was connected to the Messianic time, as one of its main features. In the New Testament, was connected with the life of the Lord Christ. In the River Jordan, the Church finds for it a place in Christ Jesus, granting her the sonship. After His Ascension, He sets forth as the rock of Moses, that followed the people, to flow with the living water of the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost in the wilderness of this world. In the beginning of His public ministry, He turned water into wine to comfort the hearts of the hosts and guests of the wedding (Jn.2:1-11). He proclaimed His engagement to the Gentiles through the Samaritan woman also near Jacob’s well (Jn.4). Even when He preached about the works of love, He spoke of the importance of giving cold water to a little one (Mt.10:42). At the moments of His death, blood and water flowed from His side.

Christ also used the pitcher of water as a sign for the disciples to locate the place of the Passover meals (Mk.14:13).

Finally, before His Ascension, He commended His disciples to baptize all nations. As the scholar says: “What a power the grace of water has, in the sight of God and His Messiah, to confirm baptism! One can never encounter Christ without water!”

What we wish to confirm is that what the Lord did here was neither out of need nor for his benefit. He was baptized in the name of the whole Church, on our behalf, to raise us up from our sins, bringing us to the glory of His inheritance, being the Only-Begotten Son. He experienced the coming out of the water on our behalf, as expressed by St. Cyril, the Great:

“Was Christ in need of the Holy Baptism? What benefit would He gain by going through that office? The Lord Christ is the Word of God. He is “Holy, Holy”, as praised by Isaiah, and as described by the law on all occasions, and confirmed by the crowd of prophets! What do we benefit from the Holy Baptism? Undoubtedly, the remission of our sins. Yet, nothing of that sort can be said of Christ,

“Who committed no sin, Nor was guile found in His mouth” (1 Pet.2:22).

“Who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens” (Heb.7:26).

Christ was baptized only to teach us that the man, from David’s seed, in union with God the Father, was baptized and received the Holy Spirit. Christ never separated from His Holy Spirit before Baptism... But, He, -- as Christ, the Word, the Only-begotten Son of God, who partakes of the Father in glory and authority, because by nature, he is the true Son. God, the father sends the Holy Spirit to the creation, and grants It to everyone worthy of It, as He truly said:

“All things that the Father has are Mine” (Jn.16:15).

St. Ambrose says in his interpretation of the Gospel of Luke: “The Lord was baptized, not to get purified, but to purify the water. As Christ, Who knew no sin, descended into the water, it gained the power to purify everyone who is buried therein, casting away his sins in it.”

(2) The parted heavens:

As Isaiah, looking ahead with the Spirit of prophecy, yearned for the exodus of the new people into the joy of the resurrected life (Isaiah 63:11,12), he perceived that there was no more need for Moses, who crossed the Red Sea, nor for Joshua, who crossed the Jordan, but only for Him, Who parts the heavens to descend to us and shakes our solid mountains to raise us with Him to where He is, saying:

“Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! That the mountains might shake at Your presence” (Isaiah 64:1).

Thus, the parting of the heavens, as when Christ was baptized, happened for our sake; Its gates were opened before us; Its keys being in the hands of our Groom and Head. Even our inner life itself became opened heavens, inhabited by the God of the heavens. We are sure that, by the water of baptism, we now have the Kingdom of heaven wide open, receiving us through the heavenly Head! As St. Cyril, the Great said: “The heaven became open so that man is now close to the holy angels.”

(3) The Spirit descending upon Him:

The prophet Isaiah saw in that symbolic exodus, on the hands of Moses, the hidden Spirit of God leading the procession; as he says:

“The Spirit of God causes him to rest, So You lead Your people, to make Yourself a glorious name” (Isaiah 63:14).

And God always confirmed to Moses, saying:

“I will be with your mouth” (Exod.4:12).

But, in the new Exodus, there would be no more need for confirmations, as the Leader is the living Son of God, the One with His Father and the Holy Spirit. The descent of the Spirit upon Him proclaims the role of the Holy Spirit, Who used to hover over the face of the waters to turn the void earth, which was without form, into a beautiful world.

Here He is hovering over the waters of the Jordan to make of our dead selves a living holy body for the Holy Head which descends into the waters of the Jordan. It is the Divine Spirit, that molds the new people through the new exodus!

St. Cyril, the Great, confirmed in his exegesis of the Gospel of Luke that the Lord Christ, in the moments of His baptism, is Himself the incarnated Word of God; Who has never been separate from His Holy Spirit, but it is God who sends His Holy Spirit on His Church. What took place during His baptism has been for our sake, saying:

“It descended, at first, over Christ, Who received the Holy Spirit, not for His own sake but for ours, the human kind, as we, by Him and in Him, we are granted grace over grace... And now, we took Christ as our role model; so let us approach the grace of holy baptism... that God would open for us the gates of heaven, and would send to us the Holy Spirit, who receives us as His children; As God, the Father, addressed Christ, at the time of His holy baptism, as though, by Him and in Him, He received man who is inhabiting the earth, proclaiming in the sweet voice, the sonship of human kind, saying:

“You are My beloved Son; In You I am well pleased” (Lk.3:22).

(4) Appearance of the Spirit like a dove:

If the dove refers to Israel, or the Church of God in the Old and New Testaments (Mk.11:11; Ps. 68:13; 74:19; Songs 1:15; 2:14; 4:1; 5:2,12), their appearance of the Holy Spirit like a dove only confirms that the Church is hidden in Christ our God. It is a spiritual Church that carries His features, through the Holy Spirit abiding in it, and working incessantly in it. It is as if the Holy Spirit appears as the finger of God, pointing us towards our salvation in Him who is standing there in the Jordan!

(5) Hearing a voice from heaven:

In the Old testament, we heard the Divine voice through the prophecy:

“Behold ! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights ! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles” (Isaiah 42:1).

Now the same voice from heaven confirms that He is the Word of God, the Only-Begotten Son, who became a Servant to accomplish the mission of salvation and the institution of the Church in the waters of baptism.

That voice came so that we would perceive that in it, we may enjoy the delight of the heavenly Father, and be counted as His children, through the water of baptism and the work of His Holy Spirit. St. Cyril the Great, said concerning this:

“Christ, as I have already said, is truly the Only-Begotten Son of God; and as He took our likeness. His Sonship was proclaimed; not for His own sake, as He has been still is and will always be the Son: But the sonship is proclaimed for our own sake. We, have become the children of God, with Christ, being the Firstborn and our Master. He is the second Adam, as is said:

“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation ; Old things have passed away; Behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor.5:17).

We cast away the oldness of the first Adam, and replaced him with the newness of the second Adam, Who by him and with Him, is the glory and dominion, with God the father, and the Holy Spirit, now and to the age of ages, Amen.

Thus in the baptism of the Lord Christ, the Holy Trinity appeared distinct but not separate bullet. The incarnate Son rose from the water to grant us the resurrection from our sins, to enter through Him into the fellowship of His glories. The Holy Spirit also descended like a dove to institute the Church of Christ; the dove which carries the feature of its Master. The voice of the Father coming from heaven, proclaims our sonship to Him, in His Son, and transforms us into living spiritual stores that rise up through the open heavens to establish the eternal Church.

So the Holy Trinity appeared to build us up; that is why the baptism of the Lord is called the feast of “Theophany”. We should confirm what Augustine said:

“That is what we are bound by truly and zealously: that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are a Trinity that is inseparable; One God and not three.”

4- His Temptation:

The temptation occupied a principal role in our salvation. The King entered into an open battle with the evil one, after having been crowned on account of His people. St. Mark referred to it very concisely, compared to the account in Matthew 4:1-11 and in Lk.4:1-13. We have already dealt with several of the sayings of the saintly fathers concerning this issue.

St Mark presented the temptation in a lively way, saying:

“And immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts, and the angels ministered to Him” (Mk.1:12,13).

Several scholars saw the Gospel of St. Mark as the ‘Book of Passion’, describing the continuous temptation of Christ and His battle against Satan and the evil spirits, either directly or through his servants who fell under his authority and worked for him. What occurred during the forty days in the wilderness, was nothing but the beginning of a battle which had its climax on the Cross, where the enemy yearned to get rid of Him. Yet, as the Master was crucified, the enemy found himself crucified and devoid of any authority. And as the Apostle Paul says;

“Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” (Col.2:15).

The Evangelist St. Mark concentrated on the following points:

(1) The Spirit drove Him out into the wilderness. If the Holy Spirit, who is one with Christ, drove Him out to battle, we are setting forth with Christ, by the Holy Spirit, to he same battle, carrying with us divine capabilities for strife and contest. It is undoubtedly, winning battle for him who is led by the Spirit of the Lord ! It is the battle of God ! We

do not partake in it, but rather are only tools in the hands of God: That is why St. John Saba says:

“The courageous believer is confronted by all the creation, fighting him with noise and clouds, he would not be overcome; because all what that man utters, he does in the way God does: All creatures obey him, or rather, God dwelling inside of him.”

We conquer, if we are driven out by the Holy Spirit, into the spiritual battle, not alone but in the head, Christ For St. Cyril the Great says:

“Now, we have become in Christ, glorified by His victory; while before, we were defeated in the first Adam. Let us praise God and sing the songs of joy to God, our Savior. Let us tread over Satan beneath our feet, and rejoice for his fall into disgrace.

Let us address him by the words of the prophet Jeremiah;

“How the hammer of the whole earth, has been cut apart and broken!... You have been found and also caught, because you have contended against the Lord” (Jerem. 50:23,24).

Since the early ages, and before the coming of Christ, the Savior of the whole world, Satan, our great adversary, has been thinking evil and priding over the weakness of humanity, saying;

“My hand has found like a nest the riches of the people; and as one gathers eggs that are left, I have gathered all the earth; and there was no one who moved his wing, nor opened his mouth with even a peep” (Isaiah 10:14).

Plainly speaking, no one has dared to confront Satan except the Son, who fought strongly against him, while having our likeness. For that, nature has conquered in Jesus Christ, and gained the crown of victory and conquest. From ancient times, the Son has spoken to us on the tongues of His prophets about Satan, our bitter enemy saying:

“Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain, Who destroys all the earth” (Jerem. 51:25).

St. Ambrose says; “If Satan did not tempt Him, God would not have secretly set Adam free of captivity for my sake.”

(2) His strife against Satan for 40 days refers to the ancient people who despite the exodus from the land of bondage, spent 40 years in the wilderness, striving in numerous temptations, and ultimately failed to enter the promised land. However, we are led by a new Leader in Whom we are hidden, who fights for us, grants us victory and conquest, and enters with us into not a land that flows of milk and honey, but the everlasting Divine bosom.

(3) Probably he wanted to confirm by that biblical text, that the only enemy of the Lord Christ is Satan, who strived against Him. Regarding the creation, it is the subject of His love. If mankind has transformed into beasts because of sin, dwell among us, “and was with the wild beasts” to transform, by His presence, the wild beasts into heavenly creatures.

Probably, by saying:

“He was with the wild beasts, and the angels ministered to Him” (Mk.1:13).

He is referring to the ‘messianic time’, prophesied by several prophets, when the beastly nature would be abolished. This is when,

“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb; the leopard shall lie down with the young goat; the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox” (Isaiah 11:6-9; Hosea 2:18).

Thus the beasts would come together with the angels; themselves turning into angels; and the angels rejoice in His work in the beasts.

St. Mark most likely uses the beasts to describe evil. He, probably means, by the beasts, the evil (Ps.22:13-22; Isaiah 13:21,22; Ezek.34:5,8,25); As the Lord has come to the wilderness, to fight evil in its own domain.

5- Preaching the gospel of the new kingdom:

“Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the new kingdom of God, and saying: ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.. Repent, and believe in the gospel’” (Mk.1:14,15).

a- Since John represents the law that bears witness to the joyful gospel of Christ, it is possible for the preaching of the gospel to engulf the soul with joy unless the killing letter of the law is first put away to set forth the constructive Spirit. The law came to lead us to the Lord Christ. Yet, as man bound himself with the letter of the law, the letter had to be put away, to open the gate of the Spirit before us, as we were told by St. Ambrose and St. Hilary, the Bishop of Poitiers.

b- The withdrawal of the Lord to Galilee after John’s arrest reveals to us His wish not to confront evil; and as St. Theophlactius says:

“This is to teach us to withdraw before persecutions, and not to wait for them; Yet, in case we are already fallen under them, we should stand firm.”

The Lord withdrew, not out of fear of pain or affliction, but in order to consummate His mission of healing and preaching, until it was the time to set off to death, even for the sake of His adversaries and executors themselves.

c- The theme of the Lord’s missionary work was the fulfillment of time and the nearness of the kingdom, through His coming, to grant the believers in Him and in His gospel, enjoyment through repentance. The Lord Christ expounds Himself as a theme for preaching; for by Him, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God came into us, so as to enjoy His salvation. By the fulfillment of time, He probably means the ending of the law by His coming, to realize what the law led them to and of the prophecies in Him.

St. John Saba speaks to us about that kingdom, saying:

“Lord ! Grant us to enter, by You, into the temple of our souls; and in it, we behold You, O the treasure of hidden life... Blessed is he, who always beholds You inside him, for his heart would be illuminated to recognize sins.”

d- From God’s side, prophecies have been fulfilled, and His kingdom became imminent and very near to every soul. From man’s side, repentance and acceptance of the word of the gospel, would be expected;

“Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mk.1:15).

St. John Saba speaks to us of the activity of repentance, saying:

“Who would not love you, O repentance, who carries all blessings ?, except for the evil one, whose riches and possessions you have acquired.”

e- From the expression “ John was put in prison”, we understand that his arrest was through the betrayal of the Jews. Yet, in spite of that, shackles and imprisonment did not lead to a hindrance in his missionary work, but rather to its strengthening stronger.

6- Calling of disciples:

The Lord Christ came, not only to minister personally to humanity, but to ordain disciples who would carry His same Spirit, to work by them and minister through them. St. Mark narrates to us about how the Lord called four of these disciples among illiterate fishermen: Simon, Andrew, James and John; the two sons of Zebedee. He chose them illiterate, as stated by the scholar Origen and by St. Jerome, in order not to refer their achievements to their own eloquence and philosophy, but to the Divine work in them.

The Lord called them up in two groups along the shore of the Sea of Galilee -- a fresh-water lake, 13 miles long, bordered by Galilee on the west side; Also known as the Lake of Genissart, and the Lake of Tabaria, according to the names of the surrounding provinces; this is the body of water into which the river Jordan flows from the North.

Fr. Theophlactius believed that Simon and Andrew, disciples of John the Baptist (Jn.1:35-40), followed the Lord Christ when they heard their teacher bearing witness to Him, but come back periodically to help their aged father. Thus what was mentioned in the Gospel according to St. Mark was not their first encounter with the Lord; However, His call took them away from their worldly jobs to be completely dedicated to discipleship and missionary work.

St. Jerome, says that these four disciples were like the horses of fire, carrying the chariot that took up Elijah, in a whirlwind, to heaven. We can even say that they resemble four living bricks used by the Lord to build His living Church. These four also refer to, by their names, the four virtues that are required for the Christian life, or for discipleship to the Lord: The first, 'Simon' (meaning 'listening' or 'obedience' to the Lord and His commandments).The second was named 'Peter', or 'the rock', as obedience to the Lord is based on the rock of faith. 'Andrew' means 'manhood' or 'seriousness'; as faith can not be received mentally, without work and seriousness in life. 'James', means persistent spiritual pursuit and strife. Lastly, 'John', means 'God is compassionate' or 'grantor'; as there is no receiving of God's call and enjoyment of discipleship unless it is granted to us by God, the compassionate.

Fr. Theophlactius, believes that these four started with 'Peter', well known for his preoccupation in work, and consummated by 'John', well known for his life of contemplation. The first, according to him, refers to life of work, and the second to life of contemplation. There is no way to enjoy contemplation in godliness, unless it is preceded by a life of work and strife! As a matter of fact, it is difficult to isolate or separate the two of them, as they are one and the same. Finally, He called them from the Sea of Galilee, referring to the sea of this world, so as to soar them up above its waves, in order to be able to rescue every soul drawn down by its whirlpools.

7- His amazing works of love:

St. Mark, in writing about John the Baptist, quickly paraded through the Lord's Baptism. Temptation, missionary work, and call to four disciples; while expounding the essence of his gospel: "Christ, The Minister of Mankind", who serves with humility and love, yet also with authority and power.

In this chapter, he presents us with some samples of Christ's works, not in chronological order, but took care to expound a biblical thought touching our relation with the Lord, who works for and in us.

A- Casting out an unclean spirit:

The evangelist presented to us, the first work of the Lord, in a Sabbath, in a synagogue, in Capernaum, where,

"He taught as One having authority, and not as the scribes" (Mk.1:22).

There He casts out an unclean spirit, after rebuking it and rejecting its testimonial to Him. For that,

"They were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, 'What is this? What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him'" (Mk.1:27).

Why did St. Mark start with that miracle, in his presentation of the works of the Lord?

(1) He intended to proclaim that the Lord Christ is a unique teacher, to whom His listeners themselves, amazed by His teaching, bear witness, saying; "What new doctrine is this?" The scribes explained the law in the synagogue every Sabbath, used human words. Even when they uttered Divine words, they did it out of a dry and an empty soul. On the contrary, the Lord Christ, being the Word of God, attracts the soul, "*piercing even to the division of soul and Spirit* (Heb.4:12). St. Cyril the Great said: "They saw before them, a teacher who addresses them, not like a mere prophet, but as a supreme God to whom , the Spirit before the body prostrates -- The Lord of the law."

(2) Concerning the location, it was called 'Capernaum', that is to say, 'place of repose' or 'comfort'. And as to the action, the Lord cast away the unclean spirit, the destroyer of man, spirit and body. It is as if wherever the Lord goes, He turns the place into that of real repose and comfort. He turns our days into a permanent Sabbath, casting away from us every evil spirit that destroys our life. The goal of the Lord Christ is real repose in Him. And as St. John Saba said,

"You who labor and are heavy laden, place your head on the Lord's knee and have rest. Lean on His chest and smell the fragrance of life. Lean on Him, for He is your dining table, out of which you feed. Cleanse your mirror, to discern the light of the Trinity... Have this in your heart, to feel that God is living within you, for you, O man, are the image and likeness of God."

(3) Satan, or the unclean spirit recognized the Lord Christ, as the Holy One who was humbly incarnated, and apprehended that the humility of the Lord overshadowed His pride. He assumed that it was the proper time to condemn Him, so he cried out:

"Let us alone ! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us ? I know who you are -- the Holy One of God" (Mk.1:24).

The Lord rejected his testimonial, and rebuked him, saying,

"Be quiet, and come out of him" (Mk.1:25).

The following are comments of some of the saintly fathers concerning that episode:

+ Even the demons utter the name of God; yet they are demons... He used to rebuke them and cast them away. That is why I ask you to rid yourselves of that evil, namely, the utterance of the name of God in vain.

St. John Chrysostom

+ What St. Peter said (Mt. 8: 29), was said also by the demons; the words are the same, but the mind is different.... The faith of a Christian is based on love, while that of demons is devoid of love... Peter said that in order to embrace Christ, while the demons uttered it to make Christ leave them alone.

St. Augustine

+ “*The demons believe and tremble*” (James 2: 19). Faith has its power, but without love it is of no avail. The demons acknowledged Christ, and their acknowledgment was based on belief without love ... We should not boast about our faith, if it is on the level of that of demons.

St. Augustine

+ How great is the power of God’s humility, that was demonstrated in His taking of the likeness of a slave; that conquered the pride of demons. Recognizing this, they expressed it by saying to the Lord, clothed in the weakness of the flesh,

“*What have we to do with you (What should we do to you), Jesus of Nazareth?!*”.

These words show that they are knowledgeable, but without love; the reason for that this is they were horrified of what He could do to them, and they disliked of His righteousness.

St. Augustine

+ The demons saw, in their being cast away from that man, destruction on their part. They have no mercy, they reckon that they would suffer if they do not cause harm to mankind.

Fr. Theophlactius

+ The demons’ knowledge of Him, was as far as God allowed them to have; but they did not know Him in the way the holy angels do, who enjoy an eternal fellowship with Him, being the Word of God.

St. Augustine

+ The truth is in no need of a testimony by the unclean spirits. We should not believe demons, even if they proclaim the truth.

St. John Chrysostom

+ Christ did not let demons acknowledge Him, as it is not fit for them to take over the apostolic office. They also do not have the right to speak, with their unclean tongues, of the secret of Christ’s redemption. Yes! We should not believe the evil spirits, even if they speak the truth; because the light is not revealed by the darkness; as expressed by the apostle Paul:

“*What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness ? And what communion has light with darkness?*” (2Cor.6:14,15).

B- Healing Simon's mother-in-law:

"Now as soon as they had come out of the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. But Simon's wife's mother lay sick with a fever, and they told Him about her at once. So He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her. And she served them" (Mk. 1:29-31).

We have already dealt with the healing of Simon's mother-in-law in our study of the Gospel according to St. Matthew (8:14,15). We mentioned St. Ambrose's view that Simon's mother-in-law refers to our body, attacked by the various fevers of sins, turning it into a captive of pain, cast down without work; in need of a physician to release it from the bonds of sickness. The following could be noticed in what the Lord did:

(1) St. John Chrysostom notices that the Lord Christ was coming out of the synagogue in Capernaum, heading to Simon's house to eat; proving that by the words of the evangelist:

"... the fever left her , and she served them" (verse 31). That house was open to serve the Master, so the Master came to serve it. It is as though whenever we serve the Lord Christ we are, in fact, getting His service, and enjoying His exalted work in us.

St. John Chrysostom believes that Simon did not invite the Lord to heal his mother-in-law, but waited for Him until He consummated His preaching in the synagogue, and healing of many. When He finally came to his house, he told Him about her. "Thus, from the beginning, he learned to put others' interests ahead of his."

(2) St. John Chrysostom says that the Lord Christ " did not hesitate to enter the huts of the poor fishermen; teaching us in every way, to trample upon human pride beneath our feet." And in explaining His coming out of the synagogue, and heading to a simple hut to heal its sick, he says: "While training us on humility; He meant to alleviate the envy of the Jews towards Him, instructing us to keep away of doing anything out of desire for showing off."

That was also confirmed by St. Augustine in his saying: "He wanted them to understand that His deeds were not for the sake of showing off, but out of desire to heal humanity."

In His casting away of the demon or the unclean spirit, the Lord spoke with authority, ordering it to come out; but when He encountered a sick person, to escape the praise of men He took her by the hand and the fever left her. The compassionate One has a true authority over us, by His words as well as by the touch of His hand.

St. Cyril the Great, gave a beautiful expression on the use of the touch of His hand to heal, saying: "I wish you to notice the power of His body. When it touches someone, it wipes away every sickness and infirmity, defeats the devil and his collaborators, and heals crowds of people in a glimpse of time. Although Christ could have conducted miracles with only a word, He *"took her by the hand"* to teach us that the holy body He took as His temple had the power of the Divine Word. May God, the Word bind us to Him; and may we bind to Him by the mysterious communion of His body, so that the soul could be healed of its infirmities and prevail over the attacks and hostilities of the devils.

(3) The Evangelist presents to us the Lord Christ as a Minister to all, working incessantly among the multitudes in Capernaum until, *"His fame spread throughout all the region around Galilee"* (Mk.1:29).

He withdrew afterwards to a small hut to heal a woman with a fever, then found many people crowding the door. He went out to heal many of them and to cast away many unclean spirits. Wherever He is, He draws all to His Divine bosom through his practical love.

(4) Probably, the synagogue in Capernaum, refers to the community of the Jews, among whom were some with unclean spirits, because of lack of faith. The Lord came to them to rebuke those evil spirits in order to gain them as members of His Body. His visit to Simon's house to encounter his sick mother-in-law may refer to His work among the Gentiles to rid them of the fever of idolatry and evil practices, and to turn their focus on His service. Therefore the Lord came to this world to save everyone.

He came to heal the feverish mother-in-law of Simon, after rebuking and casting out the unclean spirit; rescuing the people by binding the evil enemy, destroying his authority and driving him out of their hearts.

(5) In his narratives, St. Mark used the words "lifted her up" (verse 31). The Greek expression 'egeiro' was often used in the Resurrection of the Lord Christ Himself (Mk.14:28; 16:6; 1Cor.15:4; Act.3:15; 13:37). She was not in need of being healed of her physical infirmity, but of being raised from the dead. She needed the source of resurrection Himself, to raise her with Him.

(6) The evangelist says, "*He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and immediately the fever left her. And she served them*" (Mk.1:31).

Getting in touch with the Lord of Glory Jesus Christ, takes away from us the fever of sickness, or the burning flame of evil. We do not live in the coolness of spirit, but in a new flame, which is the flame of the active spirit, ministering to all, if not through the ministry of preaching, through the good example and silence.

Our lives are then turned into flames fueled by the Holy Spirit, kindling others and being kindled with them by the Spirit. As expressed by the spiritual Elder:

"In the same way, fire does not decrease in intensity, through lighting several flames out of it. Also, the grace of one with the holy Spirit dwelling inside will not decrease if he gives grace to others."

(7) The healing of Simon's mother-in-law drew the entire city to enjoy healing as well.

"Now at evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick, and those who were demon-possessed' And the whole city was gathered together at the door. Then He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He did not allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him" (Mk.1:32-34).

They brought Him all who were sick and demon-possessed after sunset, as it was the Sabbath. The Jews were still unable to understand the spiritual concept of the Sabbath as a day of repose, during which wearied souls could find healing. So they waited until the Sabbath came to an end by the sunset. As to saying "He healed many" and not "He healed all, this could probably be because of lack of faith, that deprived some of His Divine grace. When demons realized His identity, He rebuked them and rejected their testimonial, casting out many of them!

As the Word of God incarnated and dwelt among the Jews, He turned their night into day, and healed many souls, amongst whom was Simon's mother-in-law, the disciples, apostles and the Marys. As His Body ascended, it was as though the evening had come, and the sun set had people of all nations gathered together at the door to ask

for the Messiah to work in them. The Lord healed many and cast out many demons, transforming the faith of many from idolatry to Christianity. In other words, through His Ascension (or by sunset), the door was opened to the Gentiles to enjoy faith with true repentance, leading to the Kingdom of God in them, in place of the destructive kingdom of Satan.

C- Casting out demons:

“Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed. And Simon and those who were with Him searched for Him. When they found Him, they said to Him, ‘Everyone is looking for You’. But He said to them, ‘Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth’. And He was preaching in their synagogue throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons” (Mk.1:35-39).

The Lord Christ spent the whole Sabbath preaching, healing and casting out unclean spirits. By sunset, the whole town came to Him to have their needs fulfilled. In the early morning, He went out and departed to a solitary place to pray. He, the Receiver of prayers, prayed to teach us to resort to praying all the time.

The town He encountered the day before was seeking Him; but He wanted to go to the neighboring towns to preach and to minister. He refused to confine His work to a single town in order to shine the rays of His love everywhere, to cast away from them the evil spirits and adversaries.

Some scholars agree with St. Theophlactius’s view, that this text also carries a symbolic meaning. In the very early morning Christ went out, through His disciples, to the Gentiles, as though to a solitary place. Truly, He was followed by Simon and those who were with him, representing the faithful Jews who believed in Him, and were longing for the salvation of their nation. But the order was given: ‘Let us go into the next towns’, that is to say, ‘Let us go to work among the Gentiles ! There the apostle stated that “He was preaching ... and casting out demons”, introducing His Kingdom and destroying that of the darkness.

D- Cleansing a leper:

The Master shone His rays of love to draw many, among whom was a leper, who was rejected by all, in fear of getting defiled. He approached Him believing that He is above the law, capable of curing him if He was willing, saying:

“If You are willing, You can make me clean” (Mk.1:40).

As though he was saying, ‘The law is defaming me, exposing my weakness, and declaring my uncleanness, to chase people away from me. But, You alone, if You are willing, You can make me clean’. He did not ask Him to entreat God for him; He knew that He is the One who wills and can!

St. John Chrysostom says: “He did not say ‘Make me clean’, but left every thing in His hands, and left his cure according to His will; in testimony of His authority.”

The leper knelt down to Him, proclaiming his submission, physically and spiritually: The Lord was impressed by his contrition, “...moved with compassion, put out His hand and touched him, and said to him: ‘I am willing; be cleansed’” (Kk.1:41).

He gave him His love and compassion, before granting him healing and cleansing.

He could have said just a word to cleanse him. But, in compassion, He put out His hand, to proclaim that He is the Creator Who discerns between the sickness and the sick; between the sin and the sinner ... He puts out His hand, lovingly touching everyone, whatever his uncleanness, to cure him. He wanted to proclaim that He, as the Maker, and Lord of the law, does not get defiled through touching a leper: Leprosy instead, escapes by His touch. By His compassionate touch, and His words "*I am willing; be cleansed*", He was proclaiming that the world is in need of a practical touch of love, amalgamated with the commandment, and even preceding it.

Putting out His hand here refers to the incarnation of the Word. So if the leper refers to Adam who was infected by the leprosy of sin and love of the world, as did Gehazi, Elisha's servant he would be in need of the incarnation of the Word to cleanse him of his leprosy.

In our study of the gospel, according to St. Matthew (8:1-4), we explained how the Lord commanded the cured leper to show himself to the priest, to offer for his cleansing. We showed how even when the Lord ordered him to say nothing to anyone, he went out and began to proclaim it freely, spreading the matter.

CHAPTER 2

OPPOSITION TO HIS MINISTRY

Christ had come to minister to the whole world, expounding His work in Godly love and without limit. But His loving acts faced opposition, as to His authority, His behavior, His religious practice, and His obedience to the law of the Sabbath.

1- Opposing His authority: Healing a paralytic	1 - 12
2- Opposing His behavior: His love of sinners	13 - 17
3- Opposing His rites of worshipping: not fasting	18 - 22
4- Accusing Him of not keeping the Sabbath (the law)	23 - 28

+++

1- Opposing His authority: Healing of a paralytic:

This chapter includes four negative questions, intended to raise doubts about the Lord's authority, His behavior, His religious practice, His rites of worshipping, and thus obedience of the law: These questions are:

A- *"Why does this man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"* (verse 7).

B- *"How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?"* (verse 16).

C- *"Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"* (verse 18).

D- *"Why do they (Your disciples) do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"* (verse 24).

These questions were presented, yet the questioners did not wait for answers. Their intention was just to attack the Lord Christ. His supreme acts of love were not rewarded

with thanks and love, but with insults and false accusations. Despite that, the Master did not forsake His love or refrain from laying down His life, even for the sake of His adversaries.

The first of these questions was raised by certain scribes when a paralytic was brought to Him. We have already discussed the episode of healing that paralytic, in our previous study of the Gospel according to St. Matthew (Mt. 9: 1 - 8). St. Mark began his narration of that episode, saying:

“And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house.” (Mk.2:1).

When St. Matthew speaks of healing the paralytic, he mentions that a miracle took place in “The Lord’s own city”; but here, St. Mark specifically mentions that it was in ‘Capernaum’ (meaning, “Place of comfort and repose”). St. Augustine sees Capernaum as a sort of a capital of the province of Galilee. The Lord considered that province as a whole, as His own city or home....St. John Chrysostom, on the other hand, considers ‘Bethlehem.’ His place of birth, ‘Nazareth’, the city that received Him after His return from Egypt; and Capernaum, “His home of residence. He considers each as ‘the city of the Lord’.

Nevertheless, when we meet with the Lord Christ -- wherever we might be -- we enter with Him into His city, “The spiritual Capernaum,” to enjoy the real repose and inner comfort.

His presence grants repose, even if we are put, with the three young men into the furnace of fire, with Daniel into the lion’s den, or with Jona into the depth of the sea.

Our encounter with the Lord, makes of our souls a Capernaum, and our deprivation of Him, turns them into a Caper – (or place of affliction). As St. John Saba says, “If the Kingdom of God is within us, as said by the Lord, hell is, likewise, within those attached lusts. Everyone has his inheritance, and his abode is within him.”

“Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door, and He preached the word to them. Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. And they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. And when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic: ‘Son, your sins are forgiven you’ ” (Mk.2:2-5).

Although we have already dealt with the episode of the paralytic in our study of the Gospel, according to St. Matthew (Chapter 9), we notice here, the following:

A- The Evangelist St. Mark presents to us. The Lord Christ, the Authority. When He is in a house, it fills with people until there is no longer room to receive more, not even near the door. This crowd came, not to flatter Him, or to get social or material gain, but to receive the word, that proceeded from His mouth. The word which satisfied their depths, and to healed their inner wounds. That is the Messiah, the Minister of humanity with His word of love and unfailing services.

The house may also refer to the heart, into which the Lord enter to reign over its inner throne and establish His Kingdom, according to His promise:

“The Kingdom of God is within you” (Lk.17:21).

As the Lord enters into the heart, the depths of man’s soul and the strength of his body gather together around Him as an uncountable multitude. The heart would no longer live in a void, nor in distraction. But it would concentrate around its Savior with all its capacities. Then, the four Evangelists would raise the mind towards heaven, as if to the roof, to be purified and tempered in the Lord, to be confined in Him and before Him. It is amazing, that the mind is lowered from the roof through humility, to where the Lord Christ is. He humbled Himself for our sake; so that our spiritual growth would not become an excuse for pride, self esteem or self justification. Rather it would be for an encounter

with the Lord Christ, the humble. In this concern, St. John Saba says, “Brother! You should always clothe yourself with humility; so that your soul would get clothed with Christ, its grantor.”

B- Some scholars believe, if the sick man was healed because of the faith of the four men who brought him, that the paralytic demonstrated his faith, by his consent to be carried and lowered from the roof. Although it was a rather weak and negative faith.

Anyhow, these four men refer to the Church as a whole: Three are the orders of the clergy (orders: bishops, priests and deacons) and congregation. All are bound to work together with one spirit, in order to bring forward every paralytic soul to the Lord Christ.

St. Ambrose speaks about these four men, saying:

“Every sick man, should have intercessors, to pray for him. For by their intercession, the soft bones of our life would get stronger, and the twisting of our actions would be straightened, by the remedy of the word of life. Let us then, have guides for our souls, who have compassion on our spirits, bound by the weaknesses of the bodies. The priests, molders of the spirit, know how to lift or humble it in order to stand before Jesus Christ,

“Who regarded the lowly state of His servant” (Lk.1:48).

Fr. Theophlactius sees in these four men a symbol of the four evangelists, saying:

“When my mind gets confused, I become too weak to carry out any good work, as it I am paralyzed. Then I am in need of the four evangelists to lift me up, bring me to the Lord Christ, to hear Him say that I am a son of God, and my sins are forgiven.”

C- St. John Chrysostom complimented these men, saying: “They placed the sick man before the Lord, without uttering a word, leaving every thing to Him.” With the same spirit, Miriam and Martha sent a message to the Lord, saying:

“Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick” (Jn.11:3).

How wonderful to surrender our prayers before the Lord, with a true faith that *“His will be done,”* believing that He cares for us, and will grant us much more than we ask for!

D- What is that open roof through which the four men lowered the sick man, but the open spiritual insight and discernment. As the mud and material roof is lifted, the heart is opened to God to enjoy His love. For that, Fr. Theophlactius says, *“How could I be lifted to Christ, as long as the roof is not yet opened? The roof is the discernment, the most exalted thing we possess! Here, there is much dust, namely the worldly concerns which, when removed, our virtue of discernment would be set free.*

Then, we ail lowered, that is to say, humbled; thus discernment does not teach us pride, but rather humility.

E- How amazing it is to hear the Lord Christ say: *“Son”!* The priests would hesitate to touch a paralytic, while the Creator calls him His son ! This is the God’s fatherhood to humanity; yearning to regain every fallen soul of His children, to the glorious fellowship of its heavenly Father.

F- The Scribes should have rejoiced, to see the paralytic enjoy the grace of one remission of his sins and the healing of his soul; Yet, having been shelled within their selves, saw in what the Lord said, a blasphemy and an escape from healing the body. So they said:

“Why does this man speak blasphemies like this ? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mk.2:7).

The Lord did not adopt an adversary position towards them. But with His unlimited love, He desired to heal their souls with that of the paralytic: So He clarified two things:

First, that He knew their thoughts. He said to them;

“Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? (verse 8), assuming that they might comprehend that He, who *“fashions their hearts individually, and considers all their works” (Ps.33:15),* is capable of forgiving sins.

Secondly, to correct their belief that healing the body is more difficult than healing the soul. That is why, by healing the visible body, He proved that He is capable of healing the soul and forgiving sins, which are much more difficult.

St. John Chrysostom says, “He confused them with their very words; as though He was saying to them: ‘You proclaimed that forgiveness of sins is for God alone; Therefore, you can no longer question my identity.

“But that you may Know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins He said to the paralytic: ‘I say to you, arise, take up your bed and go your way to your house.” (verses 10,11).

g- He instructed him to take up his bed to proclaim that the healing was a tangible fact. It confirmed that, God forgives sins, by making us rise and live with Him by the power of His Resurrection. We keep His commandments and consummate His will through positive work.: by taking up our beds to our homes that we deserted, namely our Church, the lost paradise.

St. Augustine sees in that bed a symbol of the weaknesses of the body. In our sins, we were taken over by the lusts of the body and its weaknesses, with our souls bound and banned from movement. But, as we gain the strength of the new life, the soul sustains the body with all its sensations and energies, to guide it by the spirit, and take it home, that is to the holy life. Thus, the body is not longer a burden that destroys the soul, but helper that responds to it, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

And as St. John Saba says; It would turn into a holy Church for God.

“Whoever slay his self every day by the toils of will for the sake of Christ, his body would become a tangible Church, and the congregation inside it, a multitude of virtues.

The mind that was found worthy of beholding the Holy Trinity would be a Church whose congregation is a host of angels.”

St. Ambrosius says: “What is that bed that the Lord instruct to take up ? It is the bed, that David had “*drenched all night with his tears*” (Psalm 6: 6). It is the bed of passion, where our souls lie, a victim of the bitterness and suffering of the conscience; Yet, when we walk according to the precepts of Christ, our bed would be that of repose, not of pain. The mercies of God have changed the place of death into that of His resurrection, and turned the sleep of death into something we look forward to enjoy. He did not only instruct him to take up his bed, but to “*go his way to his house,*” that is to say, to go back to paradise, the true home that received the first man, who lost it by the deceit of the devil. Therefore, it is imperative to go back home. As the Lord came to destroy the traps of beds and to give us back what we have lost].

h- The Evangelist says:

“*And immediately he rose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We never saw anything like this’*” (Mk.2:12).

The healing of the paralytic became personal a blessing to him, through the enjoyment of the forgiveness of his sins, and the well being of his body. It was an opportunity for the Lord to speak with the scribes, to proclaim that He is the Messiah: The multitude also were amazed, saying: “*We never saw anything like this*”. St. Theophlactius believes that the multitude refers to our thoughts, when enjoy enjoying a sound and pure spiritual vision when our sins are forgiven, Then we stand amazed before the Lord Christ, or healer.

Truly, the soul that was inflicted with paralysis, as it hears the voice of its heavenly healer and enjoys His work in it, would never bear to live without Him. And as St. John Saba says: “Who has seen Him, and can not bear to be without him, then bears not to ?!; Who has heard His voice, and bears to live without ? ! Who has smelled His fragrance, and did not hasten to come to enjoy Him?!”

2- Criticizing His conduct: His love for sinners:

The Jewish leaders encountered with the Lord Christ -- not to enjoy His company, and to hear the words of truth, but to selfishly maintain their positions. For then every thing that was shining in the Lord Christ, turned into darkness. They considered His forgiveness of sins a blasphemy: The scribes and Pharisees interpreted His interest and love for sinners, and as an offense; In this manner, they addressed His disciples:

“How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?” (verse 16).

They were unable to spot anything wrong in His personal life and in His daily conduct, so they targeted His love for the tax collectors and sinners.

The Lord encountered many tax collectors and sinners in the house of Matthew the Evangelist, who was a tax collector. At the time He called him to draw his heart away from the love of money to the ministry of the Kingdom of God. His heart, as well as his house, became open to his colleagues to let them meet the One he had met.

The Evangelist says:

“Then He went out again by the sea; and all the multitude came to Him, and He taught them. And as He passed by, He saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax office, and said to him, ‘Follow Me’, and he rose and followed him. Now it happened, as He was dining in Levi’s house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many, and they followed Him” (verse 13-15).

Fr. Theophlactius sees that the Lord Christ went out by the sea, forsaking glory. Yet, wherever He went the multitude gathered around Him and He was glorified in them.

We can say that the Lord Christ did not seek glory from the world, but poured His love over all souls that had drawn the multitude, either in a Jewish Synagogue, in a house

within in town, in an entire at the beach; or even in a solitary place) that the departed to (1:35). The light of His everlasting love cannot be hidden or bound within one place.

Fr. Theophlactius says, commenting on the going of the Lord by the sea, escaping from the worldly glory:

“He meant to teach you that whenever you get away from glory, it will chase you; and whenever you chase it, it will evade you.”

He seems to quote that concept, and may be these same words, from St. Isaac, the Syrian, who said: “Whoever escapes prestige is chased by it, and whoever chases it, it would evade him.”

The Lord went out by the sea to be surrounded by the multitude to hear His words.

Yet, in the mid of His occupation with them, He did not forget someone by the name of ‘Levi, the son of Alphaeus’, who was sitting at the tax office, with his heart weighed down by the love of money, and his soul soiled by greed. He had no interest but to increase his wealth on his brother’s expense. He was in need of a word from the Master’s mouth to set him free of his inner bonds to kindle his depths, too compelling leave everything and follow Christ, his Savior; and even to convince him to call others to join him in enjoying that encounter.

Our Lord selected His disciples and apostles among the sinners so that, tasting the sweetness of fellowship with Him, they would draw other sinners.

As mentioned in the Epistle of Barnabas: “He chose His apostles to preach His gospel, from among those who were sinners ..., in order to proclaim that:

“He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance”

(Mt.9:13; 2:17; Lk.5:32).

St. Cyril, the Great, comments on the call of Levi, by saying:

As a tax collector Levi had no limit to his repulsive greed; He despised the law of justice and fairness; He was fond of possessing what was not his. Tax collectors were well known

for these hateful faculties. Yet, Christ snatched one of them who was drowning in the muck of transgression. He called him, rescued him and saved him; And said to him,

“Follow Me’; He left all, rose up, and followed Him” (Lk.5:27,28).

How true was the description of Christ by St. Paul, the apostle, that,

“He came into the world to save sinners” (1Tim.1: 5).

Do not you see, how the Word of God, the Only-begotten Son, took flesh so that he could draw on to Himself, the slaves and possessions of Satan?”

St. Ambrosius comments on that call by saying:

“The Lord instructed him to follow Him, not according to the flesh, but by the spirit. Once the man heard the word, he left all. He who stole what belonged to his neighbors and abused his authority, left the tax office and followed Christ with a kindled heart. Then he held for Him a banquet. He who receives Christ in his heart, becomes full of many good things and is exalted by happiness. The Lord Himself enters and rests in his love as a believer.”

The Pharisees and the Scribes, instead of rapidly receiving Levi and his friends, satisfying their long-starved hearts with “heavenly bread”, the Lord Jesus Christ instead of rejoicing the rekindling of the hard and solid hearts with the eternal flame, they started to accuse the Master because He was eating and drinking with the tax collectors and sinners.

“When Jesus heard it, He said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need for a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners , to repentance” (verse 17).

The scribes and Pharisees protested against His conduct, assuming that it constituted a violation of the law as it was unfit for the clean hands to eat together with the unclean ones. They were not aware that the Lord’s hands are the grantors of sanctification. St. Cyril, the Great says:

“Why did the Pharisees blame the Savior for eating together with the sinners ? They were demanding that Christ should keep the law of Moses. But they did not protest was not honestly for the sake of the law, but was out of envy and malice. They often responded with the intention of luring Christ to fall into a hidden trap. But He evaded them and responded to their evil intention with a good one. Telling them that He did not come to condemn but as a Physician to heal. That is why, as a Physician, He had to approach the sick to heal them.”

That statement by the Lord opened the gates of hope before the Gentiles and the sinners because the Physician came, not to the self-righteous , like the Jews, but rather to those who acknowledge their need for a Savior to rescue them from their sins. He is the Physician of the sick and Savior of the sinners!

St. Justin sees in Christ’s words, an open door for the body. He responded to certain heresies, that claimed that the sinful body was worthy of resurrection with the soul by saying:

“If the body is a sinner, the Savior came for the sinners, proclaiming, *“I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance”*. This shows that the body is highly valued in the eyes of God, that it is glorified and should be saved.”

3- Criticizing His rites of worship: Not fasting:

The Jews tried to oppose the Lord as to the rites of worshipping, as practiced by His disciples, saying to Him,

“Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” (verse 18).

Probably some of John’s disciples nursed a little jealousy when they saw their teacher an example in severe asceticism in his food, drink, and attire, bow before the Lord and persuades his own disciples to follow Him. The Lord Christ was not in their sight, an ascetic, for he did not instruct His disciples to fast the way they did ! As for the disciples

of the Pharisees, they watched how their teachers broke down before the Master; and how the multitude deserted them, in spite of their high spiritual status and their strict rites of fasting

The Lord did not criticize the disciples of John nor those of the Pharisees. Instead, He turned the situation to reveal new spiritual Theological concepts, that touches the life of man as a whole: the most important of which are:

A- The Lord, did not underestimate the value of fasting, but diverted their hearts from the outer vision of the apparent ascetic practices to the real essence of ascetism, which is enjoying the heavenly Bridegroom Himself, saying,

“Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them?”
(verse 19).

The time will come when the disciples and apostles should strictly practice fasting; But He wanted, while He was still with them, to draw their attention, their thoughts and their hearts to enjoy the Bridegroom, to attach themselves to Him. and to desire to be with Him wherever He is... Then, when He ascends from them in the flesh and commissions them to preach the gospel, they would start fasting steadily, for the sake of letting every soul enjoy the Bridegroom.

B- St. Cyril the Great observes that when the Pharisees could not oppose Master directly, they attacked Him through His disciples, who were not fasting. They did not comprehend that their own fasting was only apparent, that their hearts were full of evil, while the Master’s disciples were practicing the inner fasting of the heart until they fast by the flesh in due time. St. Cyril says:

“Do you, O Jews, really comprehend, the significance of fasting ? Isaiah says:

“In fact, in the way of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. Indeed you fast for strife and debate, and to strike with the fist of wickedness ... Is it a fast that I have chosen?” ... The mouth of the Lord has spoken” (Isaiah 58:3,5).

You should reevaluate yourselves, O Jews, because you are ignorant of the real meaning of fast and yet you blame the disciples for not fasting as you do.

But let us look at fast indifferently; Those who were enlightened by the wisdom of Christ fast with their minds, through their humility before the Divine presence. They chaste themselves voluntarily, through asceticism and labor.

Such fasting brings them to the remission of sins, grants them a new spiritual grace, and kills the law that masters their flesh. It is just like you, O Pharisee, to ignore that kind of fast, having rejected the heavenly Bridegroom, the shower and Teacher of virtues, Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer.

I beg you once more to heed the way Christ drew the attention of the Pharisees to the bitter fact that they have no part in the banquet; that they are outsiders (not of the wedding household, as are the disciples), that they will not partake of the joy or in the procession. The coming of our Savior came to the world has been a proclamation of happiness and joy because He united himself with the human nature, taking as his bride. Producing fruit after barrenness, and blessing it with uncountable seed. Those who have been called by Christ through the gospel mission are the Bridegroom's household: But as to the Scribes and the Pharisees who were completely inclined to the shadow of the law, they have no share in the Lord Christ.”

C- Some interpret the words of Christ, that when a person walks in spirit, with a holy heart in the Lord, he would be, as if in a wedding banquet, full of joy for his Christ; but when he sins, he would feel as if the Bridegroom departed from him. That would push him to practice the labor of repentance with persistent groaning until the Lord renews his joy through His presence in his heart. Fasting, therefore, is not just abstaining from certain kinds of food, but rather practicing repentance with all its labors inside the heart- namely, regret, crying and motions.

D- The Master drew their attention to the complete change as fit for His disciples, saying:

“No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else the new piece pulls away from the old, and the tear is made worse.

And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined.

But new wine must be put into new wineskins.” (verse 21,22).

He had proclaimed that His disciples would fast when the Bridegroom was taken away from them. When they do, so it that would be with a new concept worthy of the New Covenant. Thus, after His Ascension, the Holy Spirit descended upon them and transformed each into a new garment or a new wineskin; that carries the new nature in the image of their Creator and practices worship with a new mind. Thus, the fast of the Old Covenant, a deprivation of the body became in the New Covenant, the liberation of the soul and refreshment of the inner heart.

In other words, the Lord did not want His disciples to practice fasting in its new concept while they were still ‘old garment’ or ‘old wineskin. But, with the renewal of their lives through His Ascension and condescension of His Holy Spirit upon them, they would be able to practice-fasting with a new and fit Christian mind.

What would be the new cloth other than fasting. According to the Lord’s teachings; this should not be sewed on an old garment. The whole garment, must be changed through the complete renewal of the Holy Spirit. Before receiving the new cloth; namely, fasting in its new concept, as an integral part of the whole worship. Thus, we should not have fasting, in its new concept -- as new wine -- in an old wineskin, but have the wineskin of our inner life renewed to receive the new wine. St. Cyril, the Great says: “The hearts of the Jews have been old wineskins that do not accept new wine. But Christ opens widely the gates of the Christian lent to be exalted with spiritual blessings and adored with various virtues.

St. Ambrosius says: “We should not mix the deeds of the old man with those of the new. The first is carnal, carrying out deeds of the body, while The inner man, who is renewed, is bound to discern between the old and new deeds, having carried the seal of

Christ, and found to follow the steps of Him after being newly born to Him through baptism... Let us keep the new garment that Christ has given us in baptism, as it is very easy to have it torn, if our actions are not worthy of its purity.”

4- Accusing Him of not keeping the Sabbath (the law):

After presenting the new depths for the law, and setting our minds beyond the killing letter to enjoy the constructive, life-giving Spirit, the Lord Christ was accused by the Jews as a breaker of the law, especially concerning the sanctification of the Sabbath.

When the Pharisees saw the disciples of the Lord plucking the heads of grain from the grain fields and eating them they said to Him:

“Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath? (verse 24).

The law allowed man to eat from any grainfield, as long as he did not take anything with him. Yet the Pharisees saw in what the disciples did, a practice of harvesting on the Sabbath, which is against the law, a killing of the letter. If they had simple eyes, they would have seen people serious in their life and in their discipleship to the Lord. Hating to lose any of their time in cooking meals, they were satisfied with some simple heads of grain, feeding on them just for natural necessity.

Christ quoted for them an example from the Old Testament: what David and those with him do when he was in need and hungry. He went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, which only the priests were allowed to eat, and also gave some to those who were with him. He also took the sword of Goliath that was presented to the Lord (1Sam.21).

St. Mark mentioned ‘Abiathar’ as the name of the high priest (verse 26), while it was ‘Abimalech’ in the book of Samuel. Some scholars believe that ‘Abiathar’ was the son of ‘Abimalech’, and that they were together as they encountered the prophet David. When the father was killed by Saul, Abiathar fled to David and became his companion during his escape; to become, later on, a high priest, of a far greater fame than his father’s.

In His response Christ did not defend His action and those of His disciples, that they did not break the Sabbath, but strongly proclaimed His authority, saying,

“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath” (verse 27,28).

He confirmed to them that He is the Lord of the Sabbath, and the maker of the law. He made the law not to master man by its killing lettering, but to serve him. If He, the Son of God, became the Son of Man for the sake of man, would He not put the Sabbath at the service of man?!

We can say that the Lord of the Sabbath, or the Lord Jesus , the maker of the law, sent His disciples to the ‘grain-fields’ of the Holy Bible on the Sabbath. When they rested in Him from all iniquities and enjoyed Him as a true Sabbath for their souls. They plucked the grain-heads of prophecies and rubbed them with their hands to remove the outer letter, and present a spiritual food to fulfill our souls!

Let us, instead of harsh criticism, set forth with pure hearts to the disciples of the Lord Jesus and receive from their hands, which were sanctified by His blood, His pure teaching as Holy grains of wheat to support us in this world until we encounter Him face to face on the great day of the Lord.

St. Ambrosius presents us with a symbolic interpretation of the plucking of grain-heads, saying: “The Lord Jesus leads them on the Sabbath through the grain-fields, to train them on the fruitful works. What do the Sabbath, the harvest and the grain-heads mean?

The field is the present world sown by man; the plentiful harvest is that of the Holy Spirit; and the grain-heads of the field are the fruits of the Church that were started by the ministry of the apostles ... The earth received the Word of God and the fields were sown with heavenly love to produce a plentiful harvest. The disciples were hungry for the salvation of man, so they wanted to reap the fruit of Spirit that came from the spring of faith, presented by the disciples, supported by amazing miracles. Yet, the Jews saw that,

that was not lawful on the Sabbath ... In other words, the Lord revealed the inability of the law, and the action of grace].

CHAPTER 3

THE INCESSANT WORK

In the last chapter, we saw how the loving ministry of the Lord Christ, was faced by opposition from all sides. Now, in the present chapter, the evangelist confirms the unlimited love that filled the vastness of the Master's heart, working incessantly, despite the equally incessant opposition.

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1- Healing the man who had a withered hand | 1-6 |
| 2- His ministry through a small boat | 7-11 |
| 3- Appointing disciples to work with Him | 12-19 |
| 4- His relatives and the scribes accusing Him | 20-30 |
| 5- His mother and brothers sending for Him | 31-35 |

1- Healing the man with a withered hand:

The Lord Christ entered the Jewish synagogue on a Sabbath, and there, was a man with a withered hand; said by St. Luke, the evangelist, to be his right hand. They watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. That action refers to the entrance of the Lord to His own 'the Jewish synagogue', to find them with withered hands, unable to do God's work on a Sabbath. They were afflicted with withering of their right hands, that is to say their spiritual work.

If the Lord, has silenced the Jews who rebuked His disciples, because they plucked heads of grain on a Sabbath (2: 23 - 28), presenting to them the prophet David as an example; As He entered the synagogue, He brought them to the truth, healing the man with a withered hand, so as to proclaim that, if the disciples have plucked the heads of grain, to satisfy the necessary need of their bodies, He is healing that man to let him spend the Sabbath, not in idleness, but in work for the kingdom of God.

The withered hand may refer to that of the first man that was extended in rebellion, to eat from the forbidden tree, to get withered of all good deeds... It needed the coming of the Messiah, Himself (the second Adam), to restore it to life, through having His own hand extended and nailed on the cross, in place of the withered hand. And as expressed by St. Ambrose, [The hand that Adam extended to take from the forbidden tree, had been flooded by the Lord with the juice of salvation, rich in good deeds. So, if it were withered through sin, it would be healed through the good deeds.]

St. Mark, the evangelist, narrates the episode of the man with the withered hand, saying, *“He said to the man who had the withered hand, ‘Step forward’. And He said to them, ‘Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill? ‘ But they kept silent”* (verse 3,4)

St. Cyril, the Great, says, [Why did Christ instruct the man to do so? He was probably trying to move the emotions of the Pharisees towards Him, and to soften their hearts; as that man’s condition was painful enough to draw tears, and to quench the ember of vile and malice.]. He wanted to draw them away from the stupid arguments to the practical love.

He presented them with a question that silenced them, as they would be unable to say, that it is lawful to do evil on the Sabbath, but to do good. So, it would be more fitting for Christ to show mercy, and to save a soul, in order to be able to enjoy the grace of life. And as expressed by St. Cyril, the Great, [God ordered man to abstain from working on the Sabbath and He, even instructed him not to force animals to work on that day, saying,

“But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work. You, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger,

who is within your gates’ (Exod. 20:10).

So, if God have compassion on cattle, would He not, on a Sabbath, have it on a man, afflicted by sickness, that withered his strength and will?]

By His talk with them, the Lord probably wished to heal them from the withering of their literally minds concerning the law, before he heals the withering of the man’s hand. ; As they were far sicker than he was, and in much more need for the work of Christ in

them. Yet He opened the door for them to be healed, without compelling them. If our withered hands through the fall of the first Adam, have been completely cured, through the work of the second Adam; and, in the water of Baptism, we gained the new man who carries the newness of life (Rom. 6: 10), and is capable of spiritual work, we should walk in spirit, laboring incessantly, to keep from getting once more the withering of our hands.

St. Paul, the apostle, says:

“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2Cor. 5:17)

And St. Amrose says, [You heard the words of the Lord, “Stretch out your hand”]; this is the key cure! You, who think that your hand is sound, beware not to spoil it by greed, and sin; stretch it more often... stretch it to that poor man who begs you! stretch it to help your neighbor, and to support the widow, stretch it to rescue the oppressed from the oppressor. The hand of king Jeroboam withered, when he stretched it out to burn incense to the idols, and restored it when he prayed to the Lord (1Kings13:4-6).

The evangelist says:

“The Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him” (verse 6).

They considered the word of Christ, that healed on the Sabbath, a great crime that warrants his destruction. As to the Herodians, they did not care a bit about the Sabbath, but they feared for the authority of their Roman master. They assumed that the spiritual authority proclaimed by the Lord Christ, would lead to the fall down of the dynasty of Herod the Great; despite the fact that the Lord has proclaimed in many ways that His Kingdom is not of this world.

Early scholars had different definitions of the ‘Herodians’, but the most probable is that they were not a religious, nor a political group, nor representing official positions, but they were Jewish friends of Herod the Great, working on His behalf, and on that of Rome. And some were even claiming that Herod is Christ. Anyway, the Herodians were, with the Roman Governor, on one side, and the Jews as a whole on the other... Yet common interest has united the Pharisees and the Herodians , despite the great animosity between the two groups.

The word 'Herod' originally came from 'Hero'; but Fr. Theophlactius thinks that it means 'Skin'. So, if the Pharisees refer to hypocrisy, the Herodians refer to the lusts of the body (skin).

2- His ministry from a small boat:

If the Lord entered the synagogue of the Jews to cure them of the withering of their right hands, to give them the ability of spiritual work for the sake of the Kingdom of God, by which they can celebrate the true Sabbath, the majority of them plotted to destroy Him. But, as it was always His custom, He did not confront evil with evil; He meekly withdrew, to preach among the strangers, in the 'sea' of the nations and Gentiles; The evangelist states:

“But Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea. And a great multitude from Galilee followed Him, and from Judea and Jerusalem and Idumia and beyond the Jordan; and those from Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude.

When they heard how many things He was doing, they came to Him. And He told His disciples that a small boat should be kept ready for Him because of the multitude, lest they should crush Him” (verses 7-9).

a- The evangelist says, “Jesus withdrew”; As they intended to destroy Him, He left them, not out of fear, but to consummate His work with others. He withdrew from evil, and did not oppose it, presenting Himself as a role model for the Church, that is not afraid of death, yet does not confront evil with evil, but rather withdraw from it. He did not withdraw from evil to put an end to His missionary work, but headed to the sea, to the pagan nations, roaring like the sea, to rid them of the sweeping currents of corruption, and to grant them His exalted peace!

b- The Lord came to His own, who did not receive Him; So He headed to the Gentiles, preaching them through His disciples and apostles; The evangelist says “When they heard how many things He was doing”.... The Jews got the chance to enjoy the incarnated Lord Christ, a descendant of David, but they rejected Him. But the Gentiles enjoyed Him through listening to His words of preaching. It is as though, what the Lord

did here was an instruction to His disciples to work among the Gentiles after His ascension. He opened and paved the way for the disciples to walk through.

Some people may raise the question, why did the Lord, as far as preaching among the Gentiles is concerned, stop at that level, leaving it to the disciple to consummate? If He had preached, and performed healing miracles among the Gentiles openly, and on a large scale, that would have given the Jews some excuse to crucify Him. So He had that missionary work postponed until after the crucifixion, to deprive the Jews of any excuse for crucifying Him.

c- The Lord told His disciples that a small boat should be ready for Him; in reference to His Church, in which He is residing, that He called by the name of ‘the little flock’:

“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom” (Lk.12:32).

His Church is a little flock or a little boat in the middle of the world; yet, it carries Him, whom the heaven and earth could not accommodate.

As the Lord transfigured in the middle of His little Church, He drew to Him many, who came to touch Him, in loving faith, to get spiritual healing, and to rid themselves of the evil spirits; according to the words of the evangelist:

“For He healed many, so that as many as had afflictions pressed about Him to touch Him. And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, ‘You are the Son of God’.

But He sternly warned them that they should not make Him known” (verses 10,11).

The unclean spirits uttered the same words that St. Peter did (Mt.16:16); But, as expressed by St. Augustine:

[I hear a similar confession, yet, I do not see notice a similar love; they embrace fear without love. Those who have the beloved, are children, but those who tremble with fear, are not. Who have the beloved, He makes them gods, but those who tremble, are confirming that they are not gods.]

3- Choosing disciples to work with Him:

The Lord working incessantly to save every soul, in His love for man, chose his disciples and apostles, to work with His Spirit, granting them the power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out demons (verse 15). He granted them His capabilities, to work, not in their own name, but in His, and for the sake of His Kingdom.

His choice of the disciples came after two things:

a- He forbade the unclean spirits from bearing testimony for Him (verse 11,12), even though they were telling the truth, at the time; so as not to let people trust in them, and fall under their influence. He muted the evil spirits, to grant His word to the mouths of His saintly disciples, to preach His gospel.

b- St. Luke, the evangelist, stated that the Lord, before He started calling His disciples, *“Went out to the mountain to prey, and continued all night in prayer to God”* (Lk.6:12).

As representing us, He wanted to proclaim that His ministers working in truth, are chosen, not according to human mind, but to Divine will. If the Lord Christ Himself - the rock, not cut by hand, who became a great mountain, filling the whole earth -- it is fitting for us, always to seek His Divine counsel, to choose ministers according to His Divine heart. That was what He confirmed to us, by saying,

“The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Lk.10:2).

So also says St. Paul:

“No man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God” (Heb.5:4).

The Lord chose Simon, and gave him the name (Peter), that means (Rock); and James and John, the sons of Zebedee, whom He called (Boanerges), that is (Sons of Thunder).

The reason He changed the names of some of His disciples, was, according to St. John Chrysostom: [To make it clear that He gave the Old Covenant, changing the names of Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, Jacob to Israel; as well as giving others their names, before or since they were born, as Isaac, Samson, and those mentioned in the Book of Isaiah (8: 3), and in the Book of Hosea (1:4,6,9), etc.

He called Simon ‘Safa’ or ‘Peter’, meaning (the Rock), because he was privileged by a revelation by God the Father about the identity of the Son, leading him to proclaim, that He is the “Son of the living God” (Mt. 16: 17); And called James and John ‘the Sons of Thunder, as they, according to St. Ambrose, became like those in heaven, carrying the nature of heavenly thunder; or, according to St. Gregory of Nizenzi, owing to their eloquence.

‘Andrew’, in Greek, means (strong) or (brave), in reference to his mature and brave association with the Lord. ‘Philip’, means (the mouth of the lamp), in reference to the shining light of the words of God coming out of his mouth. ‘Bartholomew’ means (the son of the one attached to the water), probably in reference to his enjoyment of sonship to God through the water of Baptism. ‘Matthew’ means (gift), granted to him by the Lord, not only through forgiving his sins, but also by choosing him as an apostle.

‘Thomas’ means (depths) as he, who has the knowledge by a Divine authority, enters into depths. ‘James’ the son of Alphaeus means (the learned strifer). ‘Thadaeus’ means (watcher of the heart, or with the heart); he, himself, is ‘Judas’, brother of ‘James’, both also known as the brothers of the Lord. ‘Simon’ the Canaanite, and ‘Judas’ Iscariut, the first referring to (listening, or obedience), is related to the village of Cana of Galilee; as Judas is to his village Souchar.

St. Ambrose speaks to us about the Lord’s choice of His disciples, saying, “He chose to send them to sow faith through preaching with the help of God, for the salvation of mankind in the whole world. Behold the wisdom of God; He did not choose the wise, the rich, nor the noble, but chose them from among tax collectors and sinners, so that they would not think, that because of their power, they have drawn hearts and enjoyed salvation. He wanted to save them from getting attracted by the glamour of authority and wealth, by the power of truth.

St. Cyril, the Great, says, [They were simple men, but they were rich in their (spiritual) work The embers of rich Greek Philosophy have been extinguished, by the beauty of speech of St. Paul, and the wave of gospel message soared up, to cover the whole world. It would be enough to read what the Prophet Habakkuk referred to, in his rebuke of the adversaries of the apostles:

“Woe to him who increases what is not his -- How long? And to him who loads himself with many pledges; will not your creditors rise up suddenly? Will they not awaken who oppress you? And you will become their booty” (Hab.2: 6).

Satan has grasped all the inhabitants of the earth who are not his, and led them to prostrate to him and worship him. He boasted his greatness. Yet a few of them rose up and plundered his booties; The apostles cast their net of teaching on the captives and sinners, to get it back to God, loaded with the people of the world.]

4- His relatives and the scribes accusing Him:

“And the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. But when His own people heard about this they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, ‘He is out of His mind’. And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, ‘He has Beelzebub’, and, ‘By the ruler of demons He casts out demons’” (Verse 20-22).

Having called His twelve disciples, He brought them (home), that is to say, to the ‘Church’, to make of them His household, and to enter with them into a relation that surpasses that of flesh and blood. They did not enter alone, but the place got packed with people, “so that they could not so much as eat bread”. He opens the gates of His heavenly house, longing to embrace all in it, as beloved as brothers, and as children.

As to His own people, His own flesh and blood, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, ‘He is out of His mind’. God let us get into Him by love, yet man, in his idiocy, gets himself out of this circle of love, accusing even God of ‘being out of His mind’ ... He tries to embrace man, but man thinks that he should be free of His love!

It was not just His relatives, His own flesh and blood, but even some learned persons, the scribes, came down from Jerusalem, to accuse Him of having Beelzebub, and that by the ruler of demons, He casts demons. They came down from the Higher Jerusalem, and rejected the heavenly life, so their minds got corrupted, and their inner vision darkened through ignorance. Yet, in love, He revealed to them the idiocy of their thoughts, saying:

“How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself, and is

Divided, he cannot stand, but has an end. No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house.

Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation” (verses 23-29).

We have already presented interpretation of these phrases, in our study of the gospel according to St. Matthew, the evangelist (12: 25-32). But I should like here to stress the following points:

a- According to every-day knowledge, it is impossible to accept the claim, which Satan casts out Satan, lest his kingdom would not stand. In ordinary wars, as in home life, dissension would definitely be followed by destruction.

b- Satan has taken over man and considered him his (house), plundering all his energies, capabilities and gifts, to work for the kingdom of evil. That strong enemy would not get out, nor the goods he plundered would be regained, unless we first bind him. The Lord Christ came to proclaim His authority as a destroyer of that strong (man), to regain what he plundered. St. Cyril, the Great, says:

By the (strong man) is meant Satan, and by his (house), his kingdom on earth; as to his (goods), these are people who follow the steps of Satan, their father, in their affairs and their actions. And, as we call the Saints, (sanctified vessels and consecrated garments), so also we can call the evil ones, (the devil's vessel and his garments), as they partake of Him in evil and guile.

Christ, the Word, entered alone the devil's house, this earthly world, and bound Satan, and delivered him “*into chains of darkness*” (2 Pet.2:4). He saved ‘Levi’, not only from being a captive in the kingdom of Satan, but to become, by his repentance, worthy of the Divine blessings. Thus we learn, that repentance is the sound way towards salvation and redemption. It is said:

“Look at Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth” (Isaiah 45:22).

c- The Son of Man is ready to forgive these accusations, despite their bitterness, if these people retract from their evil ways. But if they persist on not repenting, they would be considered as blasphemers against the Holy Spirit, that is to say, as rejecters of His

work, that is repentance. So they would be denied forgiveness, and would be subject. St. Augustine says, “Indeed every sin and blasphemy are forgiven to mankind, not only what is said against the Son of Man. As long as there is no sin of unrepentant, which is addressed to the Holy Spirit, by whom the Church forgives all sins, all sins are otherwise forgiven.”

5- His Mother and brothers send for Him:

Having brought His disciples into a (house), and was surrounded with a huge crowd, He wanted to proclaim, that His relationship with these people, is far more exalted than that of the flesh. He did not underestimate relationships according to the flesh, but rather proclaimed His commitment to a higher and nobler relationship. That is why, when His Mother and brothers stood outside and sent for Him, He responded by saying:”

“Who is My mother, or My brothers” And looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, *“Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and My mother”* (verses 33-35).

+ The Lord instructs us to honor our relatives according to faith, more than we do towards those according to flesh and blood. Indeed, man could be a “mother” to Jesus through preaching Him; for he would be then, as though He is delivering Him in the hearts of his listeners.

St. John Chrysostom

+ He did not say so, to deny His mother, but rather to proclaim her honor, which is not based on her conceiving Christ, but on her enjoying every virtue.

Fr. Theophlactius, Patriarch of Bulgaria

+ He did not say ‘You are not My mother’, but said “Who is My mother?” as though He is presenting a new concept of relating to Him, not through physical relationship by flesh and blood, but rather through doing the will of God, His Father. Don’t you see Him, in every occasion, denying relationship according to the flesh, but adding to it what is through virtue?

St. John Chrysostom

+ Be sure to do the will of God, in order to be a (mother) to Christ (Mk. 3: 35)

St. Ambrose

+ The Church is in a condition of labor, until Christ is transformed and delivered in us; Every Saint who enjoys a fellowship with Christ, is as though Christ is born anew in him.

Fr. Methodosius

+ Whoever preaches the truth, is considered, above every thing a (mother) to the Lord Christ, as he (delivers) our Lord, bringing Him into the hearts of his listeners. He becomes a (mother) to Christ, as he insinuates the love of God, in the spirit of his relative, through his talk to him.

Pope Gregory (the Great)

CHAPTER 4

THE SOWER AND THE SEEDS

In this chapter, St. Mark the Evangelist took interest in portraying the Lord Christ as a teacher who teaches incessantly, sowing the words of His practical love wherever there is good soil to receive His work and expecting to produce fruit. There might be some other soil, although, that does not respond and does not produce fruit. He is a persistent Sower, who never stops working, sowing His word, wishing that all would be fruitful. He sows Divine, active seeds, yet not compelling us to respond to it against our will.

1- Encountering the multitude by the sea	1
2- His Divine labor as living seeds	2 - 20
3- His Divine labor will never be hidden	11 - 25
4- The continuous Divine labor	26 - 29
5- The Divine labor and the mustard seed	30 - 34
6- The Divine labor and the opposing wind	35 - 41

1- Encountering the multitude by the sea:

“And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea” (Verse 1)

If the sea, with its waves, refers to the nations and people that lived among the currents of paganism, then the Lord Christ has come to them, entering the boat of His Church, and sitting on the sea as if on a throne.

St. John Chrysostom believes that the Lord did not do that without purpose. He sat on the boat, facing the multitude who sat on land, to have all people in front of Him and none of them behind Him. He came down, to proclaim His care for us, demanding to meet us face to face, so that we may enjoy seeing Him. Here, through faith and hearing the word of His preaching, we behold Him, and have fellowship with His glories.

2- His Divine labor as living seeds:

The Lord Christ told the multitude the parable of the sower who went out to sow. Some of the seeds fell by the wayside, some fell on stony ground, some fell among thorns, and some fell on good ground, where they increased and produced, some thirty fold, some sixty, and some a hundred. St. Matthew the evangelist, mentioned that same parable (13:1-23) and it was also mentioned by the evangelist St. Luke (8: 5 - 15). The following points are to be noticed:

a- The evangelist St. Mark presented the continuous labor of the Lord Christ, as a Minister to humanity, that was faced by persistent opposition, yet, along with that opposition, there had been growing fruit. Indeed, there are souls that are similar to the wayside fallen seeds, where the birds of the air came and devoured the seeds. There are souls that are more like seeds that fell on the stony ground, where, though the seeds grew up fast, yet were scorched by the heat of the sun. There are souls that are choked by the thorns of the world. Yet, there are also souls that are like good ground, receiving the seeds to produce a crop that is pleasing to the heart of God.

b- St. John Chrysostom explains that, when the Lord Christ says, “A sower went out to sow”, he means by saying “went out”, the Divine incarnation. As the Word of God, the true Sower, is omnipresent, He does not go out to a certain place. Through Divine ordinance, He adopted a body, as though to come out to us, we who were rejected, to reconcile us with His Father, and to let us enter anew into the Divine presence. We exited from paradise, as He who inseparable from the father, “went out” to us, the sinners, to bring us back to the bosom of the Father and bring us to union with Him through remission of our sins.

The expression “went out” probably means God’s initiation of love. He is always coming out to man with love, while man, in his weakness, is unable to encounter his God or to enter into His Divine presence.

The Lord Christ is addressing the Jews, His own people, whom He came to. By saying “Went out”, He probably means proclaim his imminent going out to the Gentiles, having been rejected by His own.

c- The Lord Christ, Himself, presented an interpretation of that parable to His disciple; and we have already paraded some of the sayings of the fathers concerning that Divine interpretation. Here, I shall have to limit myself to certain quotations from sayings by St. Cyril, the Great:

[The Savior says that the sower went out to sow; Who is that sower? He is without doubt the Lord Christ, as He is the One who sows the good things. By Him and for Him, spiritual fruits are harvested, according to His saying:

“I am the vine, you are the branches; He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit” (Jn.15:5).

You have to notice, how the sower goes around, sowing seeds all around, some falling by the wayside, some on the stony rocks, some among the thorns, and some on good soil. Those that fell by the wayside, were trampled on; what fell on the rocks, immediately sprang up, then withered away; what fell among the thorns grew up, and were choked; while those that fell on the good soil, increased and produced a rich crop, estimated to be hundredfold...

Why were the seeds on the wayside wasted? Because of the hardness of earth, being solid earth was unsuitable for agriculture. These were trampled on by those coming and going, which caused the scattered seeds to be devoured by the bird of the air. Such is the case with “hard headed” people, characterized by arrogance and stubbornness. When the Divine words of God fall on them, they will go nowhere, and will not give fruits of God’s fear, or of heavenly virtues. Such people make themselves like the wayside seeds, to be trampled on by the unclean spirits, and even by Satan himself, leaving no place in them to proclaim the holy fruits.

I wish the people, whose hearts are barren, would wake up, and open their minds to the holy seed of truth, to produce in them the fruits of pure life ! Be sure to watch over your thoughts, and to close your doors firmly, to keep out thieves and robbers. Chase away flocks of birds of the air, to protect the seeds and to produce a rich and plentiful crop.

Let us now contemplate on the seeds that fell on the stony ground, or rather the people who, when they hear the word, immediately accept it with gladness, but stumble when tribulation or persecution arise. Such people do not enter into the crucible of

temptations, interested only in empty words, but are distance themselves from meditating upon secrets of heaven. Their piety is therefore, mere nonsense, as they lack any deep roots in a fertile soil. They cheat the Church, by showing gladness in what they hear from the preacher, pouring on him a flood of compliment, without any comprehension or discernment, but out of impure will and unsound heart. Once they leave the threshold of the Church, they forget altogether what they heard, and resume their twisted ways; they do not keep anything that may grow or give fruit.

If the Church is safe, in peace, and not passing through any temptation or persecution, they show off their faith to a certain extent, yet, if there is any change of circumstances to the worse, bitter prosecution starts by the fierce enemies of faith, these people refrain from taking part in the strife, as they are devoid of spiritual zeal and Divine love. Rather, they are more inclined to cowardice.

Why do you run away, O feeble ones and cowards, from a fight you are prepared for, and where would your pride and glory be? Stand fast, and lay bare your spiritual swords, as beyond your steadfastness, there would be glory and honor... If we suffer in defending our faith in Christ, we will get honored with the crowns of victory and glory.

Let us know, that, to die with honor, would be far better than a life of shame, as expressed by the Savior to His holy disciples:

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear; Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell” (Lk.12:4).

Did the Master demand from us to suffer, while He was not willing to do the same Himself? No! He gave Himself up for us , and purchased the whole world with His blood; We do not own our souls; we belong to the redeemer who saved us, as expressed by the apostle Paul:

“For to this end Christ died and rose and died again, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living” (Rom.14:9).

Let us be steadfast and daring, so that, if the storms of temptation blow against us, we will be able to overcome difficulties by graceful patience and perseverance. Let us rejoice in confronting afflictions and tribulations, for in them there is the chance of

revealing goodness by our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, let us contemplate on the truth of that parable, as far as the thorns that choke the Divine seeds; The Savior says:

“Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in, choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful” (verse 18,19).

The redeemer sows the seeds, and they fall on hearts that seem to be strong and fruitful; Yet, after a while, they get choked by the cares and deceitfulness of life, which dry up and wither the seeds; or as said by the prophet Hosea:

“They sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind. The stalk has no bud; it shall never produce meal. If it should produce, aliens would swallow it up” (Hos. 8:7).

We should know, that the Divine seeds will not blossom, unless we drive away, from our minds all worldly cares, and all pride in vain riches;

“For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (1 Tim.6:7)

What would be the benefit for us to possess corruptible things; when,

“The Lord will not allow the righteous soul to famish, but He casts away the desire of the wicked” (Prov. 10:3).

Didn't you notice that, in circumstances of evil, we get choked by greed, drunkenness, foul play, pride, as expressed by the apostle John, the beloved:

“For all that is in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 Jn.2:16).

The good ground is that one that produce a hundredfold; People usually compliment their ground when it gives them a rich crop. A saintly prophet described such fertile soil, saying,

“And all the nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land; says the Lord of hosts” (Mal. 3:12).

The word of God, if hearkened by a mind, pure from thorns, will grow and produce a rich crop of fruits. St. Matthew says, concerning this chapter, that the good ground was of three grades: “Some (producing) a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (Mt. 13: 23). Take notice, that as the Lord Christ showed three grades of loss, He showed also three

grades of wins and benefits. The seeds that fell on the wayside were devoured; those that fell on the stony ground dried up: those that fell among the thorns were choked; while those that fell on good ground, produced rich crops of hundred-, sixty-, and thirtyfold. Or, as said by the wise apostle Paul:

“Each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that” (1 Cor.7:7).

Not all the saints have the same success; We are instructed to seek the good work, to choose the best that pleases the Lord Christ, to whom, and to God the Father, the Holy Spirit, be praise and authority, now and forever, Amen.

If it is the same sower, and the same seeds on all grounds, let us not fall by the wayside, open to evil spirits, so that the seeds may not be devoured by the birds of the air, for we would be robbed of the Divine fruit. And let us not be with a stony heart, devoid of love for God, and fellow men, so as to give the seeds the chance to have deep roots in us.

Let us not allow the thorns, the cares of this world and the deceit of riches, choke the word, but let us surrender our lives into His hands, to make of them a good soil that receives His word, producing good crop.

d- Someone may ask, why did the Lord sow the seeds on the wayside, on the stony ground and on the thorny places, and did not sow them all on the good ground?

1- A scholar believes that we cannot understand that parable, unless we know two things: First, in the land of Palestine, they used to begin by sowing the seeds, then plow the ground with a wooden plow. Thus, any ground that receives the seeds would produce fruits, if it got plowed after that, to turn it into good agricultural land.

We can also add, that the seeds are given to all, as the word of God is offered free to all, but he who accepts in his life, the wooden plow, that is the cross, will enjoy the fruit of the word in him. But he, who persists on leading his spoiled life, will have the birds of the air devour the seeds. They are called the birds of the air, because the evil spirits were originally spiritual and heavenly, before getting corrupted through falling into the sin of pride.

The “Stony ground” represents the limestone that is covered by a thin layer of soil, which is common in the region of Galilee. So the sower sows the seeds on an apparently good soil, not knowing that it hides a core of stone.

2 - Acknowledging human freedom, God offers His word to all ... Thus, although there are three kinds of ground, that do not produce fruit, though there is a fourth one that produces an amazingly rich crop: a hundredfold, a sixty-, and a thirtyfold. This refers to the exalted glory to be enjoyed by the believers in inheritance.

About that plentiful fruits, that pleases the heart of God, the prophet Isaiah says:

“Those who come, He shall cause to take root in Jacob; Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit” (Isaiah 27:6).

Therefore, we should not worry about the seeds that are sown all over the various kinds of grounds.

e- He began His parable by saying, “Listen’ (that is *Shema* in Hebrew) and ended it by saying, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (verse 9). It is as though, when the Lord speaks of the Kingdom of God, He is speaking about the secret of God’s work in souls. There is the need for spiritual ears, capable of hearing His voice and responding to it. In the old time, as God presented His law, He started by saying: “Now, O Israel, listen...” (Deut. 4:1; 6:4); But, as Israel did not have circumcised ears, he could not listen to the commandment in the depth of his heart, nor comprehend its secrets and respond to it. He is like Eli, the high priest, representing Israel, who could not hear the Divine voice heard by the child Samuel, representing the Gentiles (1Sam 3). That is why Christ came, not only to present the commandment, but also to change the nature of the ears and to circumcise them by His cross.

The Master said, “Who has ears’, not, “Who has an ear”. This figure of speech, according to St. Augustine, refers to (love). He, who has a single ear, hears only what conforms with his own benefit, while he who has two ears, joyfully hears what glorifies God and edifies people. He is a lover of God and of humanity!

f- In his encounter with the twelve, who asked Him about the parable, the Lord said:

“To you it has been given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that, ‘seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them” (verses 11,12).

This response, raised a lot of questions from many scholars: How could that be? Doesn't the Master wish that all humanity to understand His teaching, to enjoy His salvation, and to have their sins forgiven them?

Did not the evangelist, himself, say in the same chapter,

“And with many parables He spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it” (verse 33)?

Does the Master not desire that all would be able to comprehend the mysteries of His Kingdom? He had said:

“I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight” (Mt. 11:25,26).

-- A scholar says, that we should comprehend the words of the Lord Christ, with the theological mind of the early Church. The words of the Master distinguished between two groups of people: those belonging to Him, together with the twelve, and those who are outside (verse 10, 11). The mystery of the kingdom of God, was not only revealed to the twelve, but also to those who gathered around the Master in His Church. As to those outside, they are the Jews who refused to believe in Him.

The individual who enjoys the Church life, and becomes a follower of the Lord, will enjoy an open heart that can comprehend the mystery of the Kingdom of God. The individual who stays outside will not be able to comprehend the mystery in depth, but would deny himself the living knowledge of faith. Also, he that may see by his physical eyes and hear by his physical ears, will be unable to see nor hear the depths of meaning, thus, he does not turn to the Savior, and his sins will not be forgiven him.

-- The Master offered His teachings to everyone. Yet, there is the need to be able to enjoy the proclamation of the mystery given to every soul that comes from the Master, together with the twelve, to meet Him alone and to enjoy His hidden work in it. If the Kingdom of God is likened to a pearl of high value, God would not deny it from anybody who seriously comes to Him to ask for it. The word of God is given for free; yet it is not proclaimed except to him, who eagerly seeks the knowledge of “the mystery of the Kingdom of God”. This is something that we strongly recognize in the life of our teacher the apostle Paul, who says,

“But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory” (1 Cor 2:7).

And he calls the gospel “the mystery” (Ephes. 6:19)...

With the same thought, we find the Lord Christ presenting His life, laid publicly on the cross; Yet no one can comprehend the mystery of the cross, except the individual, who wishes to meet with Him, in order to acknowledge the power of His resurrection. The episode of the cross took place before the whole world, but the resurrection would be experienced only by those who seek to enjoy its work in them; those who ascend, with the disciples to the upper room of Zion, to wait for His appearance!

-- The Jews used to consider the Gentiles “outsiders”, having not enjoyed what the Jews did of fathers, prophets, holy law, and Divine covenants. Now, in this parable, the Lord reveals to them, that the outsiders, are the Jews, who, having enjoyed these blessings, refused to enter into the mystery of the Kingdom. Thus, as said by St. John Chrysostom:

[When they see the Lord Christ casting out the demons, they say, He is possessed by Satan; and when they behold those raised from the dead (like Lazarus), instead of prostrating to the Lord, they plot to destroy Him.]

3- His Divine labor will never be hidden:

If the Lord Christ has come to the world to minister to it by His practical love, without seeking glory for Himself; yet, His glory would never be hidden. He set for us a plan to labor for inner glory, away from appearances or worldly dignities. While so laboring in His Spirit, He would be glorified in us publicly; thus He says;

“Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but it should come to light” (verses 21,22).

In this Divine saying, the following should be noticed:

a- That saying came directly following His explanation of the parable of the sower and seeds to His disciples. He probably meant to tell them, that His words are “a shining lamp”, that common people hear without spiritual comprehension, thus putting them under

a basket or under a bed. But as for His disciples, He set them, as a lampstand, to carry the Divine Lamp, to give light to the world.

Fr. Theophlactius says, [The Lord exhorts His disciples to become light in their life as well as in their talk; saying to them, that as a lamp emits light, so also is everyone looking up to their life. That is why they ought to practice a good life, and should not sit idle, but should turn into a lamp, that would not emit light if put under a bed, but should be put on a lampstand; that is to say, it has to be set upon good and exalted life. A lamp should never be put under a basket, that is under things that enter into the mouth; nor under the bed, that is idleness. For no one who seeks the desire of his mouth, or leads an idle life, can emit light to others.]

b- So, the word of God is light that should shine upon all, and if we put it under a basket or under a bed, we would deny its effect upon others. What is a basket, but the human worldly measures, that leads man to lose his faith in God, whose actions are far beyond all human boundaries? What is a bed, but the body that leads a life of idleness, not caring for eternity? In other words, let us receive the word of God in us, as a lamp that lifts us above all earthly thought, and all lusts of the body!

c- At the beginning of this book, we noticed how the Lord Christ used to conceal His true mystery by various ways; Yet this concealment was to be just to a certain limit. For the mystery of Christ, or indeed the mystery of His gospel, even His disciples were unable to comprehend, until after His resurrection and ascension

“His Holy Spirit, who would teach them all things, and bring to their remembrance all things that He said to them” (Jn 14:26).

That is why the apostle Paul says, concerning the mystery of God,

“God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:10,11).

St. Dedyms, the Blind says, [It is impossible for anyone to gain the grace of God, unless he has the Holy Spirit, in which are all the gifts of God.]

d- The Lord says,

“For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light.... With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you, and to you who hear, more will be given. For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him” (verse 22-25).

Whatever we sow here, we shall reap. So if we sow the heavenly things, we shall enjoy their glories, with much more added, and if we collect dust, we get double corruption.... Eternity is, an extension of a life, chosen by man for himself, and lived in the depth of his heart. And as the Spiritual Elder says, [Everyone has his inheritance in him, and his inheritance within him.]

“Whoever has, to him more will be given, but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him” (verse 25).

In other words, whoever chose the spiritual riches, more will be given to him; and whoever is negligent in his spiritual life will get poorer. Jews, with their denial of the Lord, what they already had, had been taken away from them; while those who received Him, have been granted grace on top of grace.

In our spiritual life, if we reject the labor of God, even what we have been given by nature, or by natural law, will be taken away from us, leading man to walk on a level fit only for animals, or even less than that. As for he who strives to be faithful, he will be granted exalted blessings, beside what he enjoyed through nature that God has given him.

4- The incessant Divine labor:

The disciples might have found it difficult to comprehend how they would present light to the world. That is, why the Lord confirmed to them that the ministry work is a Divine and a continuous labor, that would have its activity in the life of others, even in moments of weaknesses, through which a minister may pass; saying,

“The Kingdom of God is, as of a man should scatter seeds on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seeds should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how; For the earth yields crops by itself ” (verse 26-28).

a- Who is He, who scatters the seeds on the ground, other than the Son, who surrendered Himself to death saying,

“No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (Jn. 10:18).

He surrendered His body, as though He slept and then woke up; Yet the seeds of ministry sprouted and grew, to become a plant: first a blade, then a head, after that a full grain in the head (verse 28). By His death and resurrection, He granted the Church incessant fruits. As for us, if we are ministering, we are presenting Him, who, with His Divine labor, is never ceasing to set up the souls, until He consummates the elect to enjoy together with Him the communion of His glory.

As to His saying, “...he himself does not know”, this refers to the mysterious nature of His hidden labor in the hearts that He sets with Him, in a way beyond our comprehension.

b- Some scholars call this parable (the Patient Sower); The Lord scattered the seeds, not worrying, but positive that His Kingdom is no doubt coming. The harvest, surely, will be fulfilled, and the ground will carry fruit. Indeed! We, likewise, should not worry, but be sure in faith, of the activity of the seeds He granted us; that they are capable of getting heavenly fruit from ht earthly man, and raising him to sit together with the Lord Jesus Christ in the heavenliest (Ephes 2:6).

c- The Lord is sending the sickle for reaping, and He is raising our hearts to His second coming, to see that the harvest is completely ripe. The angels, as reapers, are coming with their heavenly sickles to reap joyful fruit for the Kingdom of God.

That was what the prophet Joel saw, saying,

“Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe” (Joel 3:13).

And what St John also enjoyed seeing:

“And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, ‘Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe’ So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped” (Rev.14:15,16).

d- Pope Gregory, the Great, says, [Man sows the seed in the ground, as he harbors the good will in his heart; then he sleeps indeed, feeling comfortable in his hope for the good work. Yet, he rises day and night, as he progresses in growth with struggle, even though he does not know how that is realized; and is unable to measure the magnitude of

his growth. Thus, as we harbor the good will, we have sown the seed in the ground; and as we start the good work, the seed indeed becomes a plant; and as we grow to the perfection of good deeds, we would reach the stage of the head; and as we abide in perfection in the same work, the head would be full of grains.]

5- The Divine labor and the mustard seed:

That is the third parable given by the Lord Christ in this chapter: The first is the parable of the sower, that gives us hope; so as not to worry about the seeds that fell on the ground and did not produce fruit; as there are other grounds that produce hundred-, sixty-, and thirtyfold The second is the parable of the sower who does not know how the seed grows; God is the One who labors, eventhough the missionary work seems like a seed in the middle of the ground, surrounded by darkness. The third parable is that of the “mustard seed”; that teaches us not to worry, if we see the missionary work, at its beginning, so tiny like a mustard seed; for it will, eventually, grow to become a big tree where the birds of the air nest under its shade.

In this parable we notice:

a- In the old times, a great kingdom was referred to as a tree in the middle of the earth, under which the beasts of the field find shade, in whose branches dwell the birds of heavens (Dan. 4:10-12; Ezek. 31:6), as would the kingdom, so wide, includes countries and nations, which it protects against any foreign aggression. As to the tree mentioned here by the Lord, it is a spiritual kingdom that drew through the cross, nations and peoples, to find in it a place of comfort. We have already dealt with the mustard seed, and its relation to the passion of Christ and His gospel.

b- The Lord used the “mustard seed” in particular, as a reference to His heavenly Kingdom for two reasons: The first, that the benefit of that seed, is better demonstrated when it is squeezed or pressed; and it becomes a tree if buried in the ground, as if carries a reference to the passion and burial through which the Lord would pass. The second is that, it was well known among the Jews (in Palestine) that it is the littlest of the seed, so the Lord used it to reveal the mystery of His Kingdom.

c- We have already expressed views of certain saintly fathers concerning the relation of the mustard seed to the Kingdom of the Lord Christ. As for examples of the views of

Pope Gregory (the Great), of St. John Chrysostom, of St. Ambrose, of St. Jerome, of St. Augustine, and of St. Hilary the Bishop of Poitier, we shall include here only some words by St. Cyril, the Great, in this concern:

[The analogy is superb; as it is very fitting to present them with what would happen to the Holy Divine missionary work, concerning the gospel, which He calls the Kingdom of heaven; as through it we are granted the right of fellowship in the Kingdom of Christ. That missionary work was, at the beginning, presented to few persons, and on a small scale, to extend later on to cover all nations. It was first preached only in Judea, where the blessed disciples were very limited in number; Then, as the Jews rejected it, the command came to the saintly disciples to,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations ...” (Mt.28:19).

Thus, as the mustard seed is very tiny in its size compared to the seeds of other plants, it grows much higher than other normal herbs, to become a shelter for many birds. So it is with the Kingdom of heaven, whose message started by being presented to few people, to grow rapidly to become a shelter to nations and peoples to nest under its shade, considered as birds, as the human affairs are reckoned small, when compare to God’s.

The Mosaic law was given to the Israelites; and as the populations of the earth could not get salvation through the shade of the law and its materialistic ministry, there was the need for the missionary message to set forth through the gospel, the giver of salvation, and to spread every where under heaven.

That was what the Mosaic law proclaimed through a certain sign:

“And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Make two silver trumpets for yourself; you shall make them of hammered work; you shall use them for calling the assembly, and for directing the movement of the camps’ ” (Num.10:1).

That was followed by:

“The sons of Aaron, the priest, shall blow the trumpets, and these shall be to you as an ordinance forever throughout your generations” (Num.10:8).

From that, we can understand the preparatory nature of the law (for the gospel), and the perfection which we get in Christ through the gospel life. The prophet Isaiah also referred to that name by saying,

“So it shall be on that day, that the great trumpet will be blown” (Isaiah 27:13).

Actually, the great trumpets were blown through the voice of the saintly apostles, who did not disregard the first “trumpet”. Rather, they included it, always proving what they said concerning Christ, from the law and prophets, using the testimonies of the ancient times.

Thus, there were two trumpets, of hammered silver; the silver referring to exalted, as the word of God is glorified, free of any of the darkness of the world. Hammering the mineral shows that the Holy Divine trumpet -- that is to say, the old and new preaching -- grows and progresses, because what is hammered extends in length and width. By the resurrection of Christ, for the sake of the people of the earth, the old law progressed through its spiritual interpretation, as we preach it, we, who have got the spiritual enlightenment in Christ. The message of the gospel likewise, progressed and extended to embrace the whole world. The law instructed the priests to use the trumpet to teach their congregation; Lord Christ on the other hand, presented the ministers of the new proclamations, namely, His saintly apostles, to preach of Him and His commandments. They proclaimed His mystery, as though by using two trumpets to preach of Him; being,

... those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word”
(Lk.1:2).

confirming, through their words, the true testimonials of the law and the prophets.

It is not difficult to see, how the message of the gospel was preached at the beginning, limited in its magnitude, to extend later on greatly, as was proclaimed to us by the Lord, through the voice of Isaiah:

For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the water covers the sea”
(Isaiah 11:9).

The message of salvation everywhere, would inundate like the sea, and its work would not be opposed. That was likewise, clearly proclaimed by the Lord, through the voice of His prophet Amos:

Let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream” (Amos 5:24).

He gave the names ‘justice’ and ‘righteousness’ to the message of the gospel; and gave us the confirmation that that message would run, in the world, like water and flood; no one would be able to stand in the face of its mighty currents.

Likewise the analogy of the Kingdom of God to a little yeast, is very fitting; the yeast is little in its quantity, yet, it holds the whole dough, quickly reacting to give it its own characters. In the same way, the word of God works in us; it acts within us to turn us into blameless saints; infiltrating our minds and our hearts, to make spiritual people out of us; as expressed by the apostle Paul:

“May your whole spirit, soul and body, be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Thess. 5:23).

6- The Divine labor and the opposing wind:

The Lord Christ, having likened His Divine labor to extend His heavenly Kingdom, to the seeds sown on the ground, proclaiming the continuity of His imperceptible work. Now, as the evening had come, He intended to reveal to His disciples those capabilities, in practice, through rebuking the opposing wind, proclaiming His authority even upon the sea.

We have already studied the episode of calming the wind and waves by the Lord Christ (Mt.8:23-27), through the writings of the saintly fathers; where the Church appears as a boat in the middle of the waves of this world, suffering the temptations and afflictions; but never wavering, because her Bridegroom is within her. Our message is to awake our Christ within us, as He, alone can order to be obeyed... That, and through our union with Him , and abiding in Him, we acquire authority, to live in the fullness of inner victory.

Beside what we have already said, in our interpretation of the gospel according to St. Matthew, the evangelist, we can add:

a- The Lord Christ used to repose, as our representative, in one of three places: Either in a “solitary place”, referring to our encountering the Father in a retreat, or on the top of a mountain, referring to our rise to the exalted life by Christ Jesus, the true mountain, on whom Zion would be established, or upon a pillow inside a boat, as we see here. If the boat refers to the Church, the Lord Christ reposes in it, through the believing souls, as a comfortable pillow, on which He finds a place for His head. If the boat refers to the Cross, His true comfort is in reposing on His Cross for the sake of our salvation.

b- The Lord allowed for that fearful experience, in order to, to proclaim, that His presence in the boat, would not keep His disciples out of temptations, but would deliver them, if they wake Him up inside them; that is to say, proclaim their faith, and beseech Him by continuous prayers. St. John Saba says:

[The reward of standing fast in wars (temptations), is far greater than that of good deeds consummated in comfort.]

“The waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling” (verse 37).

c- That experience let them enter into a new experience, revealing to them the Person and authority of the Messiah, as,

“They feared exceedingly, and said to one another, ‘Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?’” (verse 41).

With that experience, we were granted to have the Messiah within us, to have His work and His authority, not to rebuke the sea and the wind, but to live above the winds of the world, and overcome hades and all its fears.

St. John Chrysostom says:

[Behold! You could, not only see Him, but also follow His example, that is if you are filled with zeal! I wish we would not delay to gain that; for He is ready to respond to the lips of the meek and the long-suffering, much more than to prophets, saying:

“Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your Name?!... And then I will declare to them, I never knew you” (Mt.7:22,23).

But, the lips of Moses, who was *“very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth”* (Num. 12: 3), were acceptable and beloved to Him. It was said, that He used to talk to him face to face, and mouth to mouth, as one talks to his friend. As for you, if you are not rebuking the demons now, you will eventually rebuke the fire of hades. If you keep your mouth like that of Christ, you can order this fire saying: *“Be still!”* with great confidence. You can step into heaven, and enjoy the Kingdom granted to you by God, with the grace of Lord Jesus Christ, and His love for mankind.]

d- Many scholars see the water, as where the dragon dwells; That is why in Epiphany, the early Church believed that the Lord Christ descended to destroy the dragon in his dwelling place. So, if the Lord set forth with His disciples in the boat, to cross over to the other side (verse 35), that refers to Him, setting forth, through His Church in this

world, to face Satan, the great dragon, to grant the church victory over him. Setting the church forward to eternity, in a true cross-over.

St. Jerome quotes the prophet David, “Your way was in the sea” (Psalm 77:19), to say: Through the waves, through the bitter water, where the dragon dwells..., You are in heaven, and you descend to earth ... The fountain of life came to transform the bitter and dead sea into sweet waters.]

CHAPTER 5

HIS AUTHORITY OVER

UNCLEAN SPIRITS AND OVER DEATH

The Lord, having faced and conquered the visible winds, also proclaimed His authority over the invisible ones, namely, the unclean spirits that corrupt the life of man, and his inner peace. And lastly, He faced death and destroyed its sting.

1- Christ and the dweller among the tombs	1 -- 20
2- His encounter with 'Jairus'	21 -- 24
3- Healing of the woman with the flow of blood	25 -- 34
4- The daughter of 'Jairus' restored to life	35 -- 43

1- Christ and the dweller among the tombs:

In the last chapter, the flesh faced opposing winds, as nature arose against man. The Lord gave him back his peace, and turned nature into a friend to him. Now, souls are facing unclean spirits or "Legion", that destroy and humiliate them altogether, to make out of man a dweller among tombs.

Some scholars see that the episode begins with verse 6. The first five verses being like an introduction put by the evangelist to proclaim the idea behind it, namely, that the Lord has high authority upon these invisible powers which control man. Baring him of his humanity, isolating him from his own, to dwell among tombs, taking away his freedom and destroying his body as well as his soul.

We have already dealt with that Divine act while studying the gospel according to St. Matthew (Mt.8: 28)... It is fitting for us to notice here the following points:

a- The evangelist Matthew mentions that they were two demon-possessed men (Mt.8: 28), while the evangelists Mark and Luke, mention only a single man. St. Augustine interprets this discrepancy, saying that the two evangelists mentioned only the

famed one, for whose sake, the whole region was feeling sorry. St. John Chrysostom believes that they mentioned only the one man who was suffering more, and, whoever heals one of them can also heal the other. The whole idea was not a narration of a historical episode, but a proclamation of the possibility of healing.

b- Some believe that as the Lord Christ set forth to a Gentile province, it was sanctified by His presence, paving the way for embracing the Gentiles, to cast out from them the evil one who, for a long time, had the upper hand upon them. What the Lord Christ did to that poor man was continued through His disciples, to cleanse every part from the control of Satan, and to grant His heavenly Kingdom to every soul.

c- The Psalmist saw humanity, as it was drawn by sin, away from paradise, as though from its own home. To set forth with it to the tombs, making out of man, a dwelling place for unclean spirits. To become completely isolated from the fellowship with God, the source of his life; suffering from bitter loneliness, even though he might be dwelling among his family, friends and relatives. ... He became in need of God, Himself, as a Savior, to rescue him from the “evil spirit”, to get him back anew to his Divine home and inner paradise, saying:

“God sets the solitary in families; He brings out those who are bound into prosperity” (Ps.68: 6).

I say that what the Psalmist hoped in God, His Savior, in the coming Messiah, had been realized in that man possessed by the unclean spirit. Who was deprived of dwelling in his own home, from life of fellowship, even with his relatives; to live in an inner isolation, as well as physical isolation among tombs. He saw the Lord Christ mightily casting away from him the unclean spirit, to bring him back to Him, to share His heavenly Kingdom, and to have his place in the Lord Christ, and through Him to settle in the bosom of God the Father.

The evangelist described that poor man, who was suffering from bitter isolation, as saying:

“He had his dwelling among the tombs, and no one could bind him, not even with chains, ... And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones” (verse 3-5).

Sin had turned him into a fierce beast, untamable by anyone; or like a dragon of the sea, of which is said:

“Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him? And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority ... over every tribe, tongue and nation” (Rev.13: 4,5).

The Lord Christ came with authority to destroy that of the beast; also proclaimed by the Psalmist saying:

“You who still the noise of the seas, the noise of the waves, and the tumult of the peoples” (Ps.65: 7).

St. Ambrose says, [Such souls, seem as though they are dwelling among tombs. The bodies of the non-believers are nothing but a sort of tomb where the dead (the dead souls) are buried. Where the word of God is not dwelling. He rushed to the deserted places, those devoid of virtues of the Spirit, away from the law and separated from the prophets; thus rejected by grace.]

d- It was a common belief among the Jews that demons prefer three locations for their dwelling: the wilderness, which is the deserted places; the depths of water; and the tombs. The first one refers to the lust of the devil to take away from man all vitality, and every spiritual fruit. To turn him into deserted wilderness. The second refers to the wish of the enemy to draw man into the whirlpool of life. To take his mind away from his eternity and become as if he is in the deep waters, with no hope.

The third, namely the tombs, refers to the nature of the devil as a fighter against man, wishing his death. Also to the devil's content in the corruption of the dead works. That is why the Lord proclaimed His Divine authority, and His work in us, through His journey into the wilderness, to wrestle face to face with our adversary. He also did through setting forth to the waters of the Jordan, in order to destroy the authority of the enemy under our feet, granting us the sonship to God, the conqueror of evil and of the evil one. And now, He is heading to encounter the dweller among the tombs, to rid him of the unclean spirit, and to get him back to his home.

e- The unclean spirit could not bear to see Jesus; from afar he ran and cried out with a loud voice, and said,

“What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the most High God? I implore you by God that you do not torment me” (verse 8).

Now, if we compare these words uttered by the unclean spirit dwelling in a man of the Gentiles, with the words uttered by another unclean spirit dwelling in a Jewish man, who said:

“What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are -- the Holy One of God!” (Mk.1: 24).

We would see the confusion that prevailed in the kingdom of the devil, whether the one falling under it is of the Gentiles or of the Jews. The enemy realized that his kingdom is collapsing. His authority is coming to an end, and his condemnation is getting closer through the coming of “Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God”. St. Gregory the Great says: [Behold the authority of Christ, the unconquered, before whom Satan trembled; as the words of Christ to him are like fire and flames; as expressed by the Psalmist:

“The mountains melt like wax at the presence of the Lord” (Ps.97: 5).

The great and arrogant powers have melted. St. John Chrysostom likewise says:

[The demons realizing that their condemnation has drawn very close, they trembled as if it will happen on the spot.]

The demons felt that casting them away from man is punishment. They had comfort in the kingdom. They settled in corrupted hearts, and assumed that the destruction of that kingdom would be followed by the eternal condemnation ... By the coming of the Lord Christ, the devil realized that the end drew near.

f- The Lord Christ intended to demonstrate the fierceness of the devil, so he asked the unclean spirit:

“What is your name? And he answered saying, ‘My name is Legion, for we are many.’ (Verse 9).

Fr. Theophlactius says: [Indeed the Lord asked him not to get information from him, but to let those around realize that the man was possessed by many demons.]

What happened to that poor individual is portraying man, when he becomes the victim of a particular sin, or of a particular devil. One sin would deliver him to another,

and one devil to another, until he becomes enslaved to a legion. And as expressed by St. John Saba: [The sufferings (the sins) are interwoven with one another; if you come under one, you would, through necessity, be enslaved to all.]

Some believe 'legion' to mean, originally, (a soldier). It is as if he claims to be a military troop fighting incessantly. It may also mean a Roman troop of 6000 soldiers. It is to be noticed that the unclean spirit began by speaking in the singular form, to avoid revealing his nature. But once he confessed that they are a 'legion', he used the plural form.

g- The demons begged him to send them to the swine, as they were sure that He would not allow them to enter into another man, having come to honor humanity through His incarnation. They also did not ask to enter into clean animals that could be used as animal sacrifices in the temple of the Lord, but sought permission to enter into unclean swine. The Lord allowed them to do that, to proclaim to those around Him, the value of the human soul, that is worth more than two thousand swine! To reveal clearly, the evils of demons, and their destructive nature, even towards the unreasonable animals. And lastly, to reveal that they are unable to enter any creature without His permission!

St. Ambrose commented on the request of the demons, saying:

[The demons begged Him to let them enter a herd of swine. Here we should notice that the Lord did not tend with His mercy, to condemn anyone, but everyone is working toward his own condemnation. He did not send the demons to the herd of swine. They asked Him for that, because they were unable to stand the splendor of Divine light. As those with an eye ailment, are not able to stand sunlight, preferring darkness, so also the demons, tremble as they escape before the splendor of the Eternal light. What does the herd of swine represent? These are, of whom is said:

“Do not cast your pearls before swine” (Mt.7: 6).

Those resembling the speechless, thoughtless and lowly animals; who defile their lives by unclean deeds, and in their plunge down to the abyss of evil, get trapped in between the waves of this life, and are eventually destroyed through suffocation. In the same way, those who are swayed by wind cannot have life-giving communion with the Spirit. Thus, man, could make himself miserable, if he leads a life of swine, that gets him under the authority of the devil. But if he could avoid that unfortunate destiny, even if the

devil gets authority over him, that would not be for his destruction, but rather as a test for him.]

h- Who are these people who tended the swine, of whom was said:

“Now those who tended the swine fled, and they told it in the city and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that happened. Then they came to Jesus, and saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind and they were afraid ... Then they began to plead with Him to depart from their region” (verses 14-17).

1- These people represent the view of many not fit to care for one member of the congregation if his salvation and edification would cost some others a material loss... These people do not appreciate the value of a human soul, whoever that soul might be. Yet God cares for every soul. It is of value to Him, high enough to lay the life of His beloved Son for her sake.

2- These people represent some workers and ministers who prefer the idle life, even if it is tending the swine. The work of the Lord Christ is manifest, giving inner peace and prudence to the souls, and they become afraid and disturbed, and “begin to plead with Him to depart from their region”.

St. Ambrose believes that they represent teachers of Philosophy and leaders of the Jewish society. Weak souls, that could not stand the word of God or the impact of His wisdom.

I- The Lord did not oppose them, but left and got into the boat. He, who had been demon - possessed begged to stay with Him. However Jesus instructed him to go home, and tell his friends what great things the Lord has done for him, and how He had compassion on him. He departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis, all that Jesus had done for him, and all marveled (verses 18-20).

The tenders of swine represent the society that preferred the idle lifeless life, to preaching the gospel. Jesus, the Lord of glory, left them and got into the boat. He left the Jewish nation, lost, to dwell in the Church of the New Covenant. As to that man, He sent him to preach, to pave the way for the gospel work among the Gentiles.

That he did, setting forth to ‘Decapolis’, that refer to the Gentile and pagan world. ‘Decapolis’, embraced nine cities east of the Jordan: Hyppos, Damascus, Gadara,

Jerasa, Phyladelphia (Rabat Ammon or Amman), Dion, Rafata, Kanata, Byla, and a city west of the Jordan, Skitopolis (Pissan). These cities are considered Greek, populated by Greeks after the attack by Alexander, the Great, on the east. They were commercially flourishing, owing to their natural geographic location in the midst of Syria; though independent from it politically and economically.

2- His encounter with Jairus:

The healing of the demon-possessed man of the country of the Gadarenes refers to the Gentiles receiving the work of the Lord Christ. The attitude of the tenders of swine refers to the position of the Jewish society, rejecting the Savior. The evangelist did not close the curtain at that stage, but presented to us the episode of restoring to life of the daughter of Jairus, one of the rulers of the Synagogue, interwoven with that of healing the woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years. He proclaimed that, after healing the Gentiles (the woman with the flow of blood), the Jews would, at the fulfillment of time, enjoy salvation. When they receive the Lord, whom they have rejected before, they are restored to life like that little girl.

We have already discussed the sayings of St. Hilary, the Bishop of Poitier, and St. Augustine, in this concern. Now, we shall present certain quotations by St. Ambrose:

[We already said that Christ left the synagogue, in the persons of the Gadarenes, as, "*His own did not receive Him*" (Jn.1: 11).

As for us, we have received Him, whom we were waiting for. He did not refuse us; yet, if the others got back to Him, He would not turn them down. The ruler of the synagogue had one daughter. He was seeking the healing of the synagogue, which was facing death, after Christ had left it. Who could the ruler of the synagogue be, but the law! For its sake, the Lord did not forsake the synagogue for good, but kept the healing for those in it, who would eventually come to believe.

While the Word of God hastened to the daughter of that ruler, to save the house of Israel, the Holy Church, assembled from the Gentiles, enjoyed the salvation set for others. The Word of God came to the Jews; yet, He was drawn by the Gentiles. The owners of the law did not believe in Him, but the others did. Like that woman, who had spent all what she had on physicians, and was no better; so the people of the Gentile have likewise, lost

all their natural gifts, and their life inheritance... With faith she approached Him, and with wisdom, knew for sure that she got healed. So did the sanctified nations that believed in the Lord, having been put to shame by their sin, which they left, to progress in faith... clothed themselves with wisdom to achieve healing; then got the courage to admit, that what they seized was not theirs in the first place.

Why did she come behind Him? Because it is written:

“You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments” (Deut.13: 4).

And what does it mean that the twelve-year-old daughter of that ruler was about to die? That would refer to the fact that, as the synagogue became powerless, the Church emerged! The weakness of the one is strength of the other, as,

“Through their fall, ... salvation has come to the Gentiles” (Rom.11: 11).

The end of the one, is the beginning for the other; not a beginning by nature, but through

Salvation; as:

“Hardening in part has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom.11: 25).

The word ‘Jairus’ designates (the enlightened). So if ‘Jairus’ refers to the law, and his daughter refers to the Jewish nation, who fell ill to become near death? It would not be able to get resurrected from that death, unless it comes to enjoy the spirit of enlightenment. Guided by the law and not to the letter that kills, but to Him, who can resurrect from the dead.

3- Healing the woman with the flow of blood:

a- St. John Chrysostom says, that that woman did not dare to approach the Savior openly, or to come to Him from the front; as, the law stated, she is considered Unclean. She came behind Him, and dared only to touch the tassels of His ‘cloak’. He goes on with His narrative saying: [She got healed, not because of the cloak itself, but because of her faith.

St. Augustine sees in the ‘tassels’, a reference to our teacher the apostle Paul, who called himself *‘the last of all’*; as by his preaching, the nations of the Gentiles got to meet

the Lord Christ, and to enjoy the Divine salvation. The nations that did not see the Master in the flesh, came through the faith preached by St. Paul, to get in touch with Him ‘from behind’, and enjoy healing.]

St. Ambrose comments on that touch, saying: [If we apprehend the greatness of the Son of God, we can appreciate that we are not able to touch more than the tassels of His cloak. If we wish to be healed, let us then touch, in faith, the tassels of His cloak ‘from behind’, as God is in no need of eyes to see with. He does not have physical senses, but in Him is Knowledge of every thing. Blessed is he, who touches, just the tassels of the ‘cloak’ of the Word as, Who is able to contain Him!]

Every Hebrew was bound by the Law to make four tassels on the corners of his garment (Num.15: 38), and to put in them a blue thread, to designate his identity, as one of the elected people of God. ... So, if the tail of the garment, which gets in touch with the ground, has a blue (that is to say, heavenly) thread, that indicates that it is only fitting, for that man, to be as a whole, heavenly. That is concerning the Hebrew man in general, but as to the Lord Christ, the Son of the heavenly God, if we get in touch with Him, we are getting in touch with the God of heavens Himself.

b- St. Augustine sees that the physicians on whom the woman spent all what she had, referred to the teachings of philosophers, saying: [The teachings of philosophers have actually kindled the hunger to the truth, without satisfying it. ... But, as to a touch of the tassels of His cloak; it is the scream of the believing heart.]

c- If the Lord healed that woman with the flow of blood, that healing cost Him a flow of love, the evangelist says:

“And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched My clothes?’” (Verse 30).

It was not a mere touch of the tassels of His cloak, but “power had gone out of Him”.... That does not involve any loss on His part, but rather a flow of kindled love to her. It is like when we light a candle from a flame of fire. The flame does not suffer any loss by that. The Lord Christ gives “power”, set forth through His cross, to heal the afflicted souls. He presents a true inner gift, which completely draws the heart of the Church. As the apostle Paul says:

“Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father” (Gal.1: 4).

And the Lord Himself says:

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep” (Jn.10: 11).

d- As the woman admitted to the Lord “the whole truth”, she heard Him say to her, “Daughter!” and as St. John Chrysostom says: [He called her “daughter”, for she was saved through faith, as our faith in Christ makes of us children to Him]. She believed in Him, who is able to grant salvation; and put her faith in practice by getting into the midst of the crowd and touch the tassel of His cloak... She proclaimed her living faith, to enjoy the work of Christ in her...

4- Restoring Jairus’ daughter to life:

As Jairus, one of the rulers of the synagogue, went by himself to the Lord Christ -- whom the synagogue considered as a transgressor, with whom any loyal Jew should have nothing to do -- and fell at His feet, and begged earnestly for His help. That man came to enjoy the entering of the Lord into his house, together with three of His disciples. His house has thus turned into a Holy temple, where the Lord of heaven comes to dwell.

The Lord did not go to the little girl accompanied by a great crowd, for He wanted to confirm that it is not for all to enjoy the power of resurrection, but only for those who ask and yearn for it... The restoration of the little girl to life was not a show of an amazing miraculous act, but it was rather a revelation that the Lord Christ is the grantor of resurrection, to those who attach themselves to Him and become His disciples.

The Lord entered into the house, to find the funeral procedure had already begun, from tearing of clothes, to cutting of hair, to wailing loudly. In the midst of that tumult, He said:

“Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping” (verse 39).

According to those people who could not restore her to life, she was dead. But to Him she was just sleeping, to be awakened at any time He wants. He let them laugh at

Him, to scorn, and turn their laughing into a testimonial of truth, that she was actually dead. When He raised her up:

He took the child by hand (verse 41); and as St. Ambrose says:

[I wish the Word would hold my hand, and let me enter His inner room, to keep the spirit of evil away from me, and surround me with the life-giving Spirit. I wish He orders for me to be given the heavenly bread to eat, that is, the Word of God.]

Many of the fathers concentrated on the phrase: “Something should be given to her to eat” (verse 43), considering it a confirmation that her resurrection had been, not a matter of ‘make believe’, but an actual fact. St. Jerome comments:

[When He raised anybody from the dead, He used to instruct those concerned to give him or her something to eat, to confirm that the act of resurrection was not a sort of illusion]. St. Ambrose, also says: [The funeral procedure was completed, to confirm death, then the spirit came back by the word of the Lord, and the body was raised up fresh, and given food to confirm the testimony of life.]

Finally, as we have already noted, St. Augustine sees in the acts of restoration to life, mentioned in the Holy gospels, a reference to the raising of souls up from the death of sin. The little daughter of Jairus, who was on her deathbed, refers to the soul, dead through the sin of inner thoughts, although not personally practiced, yet, had been lying hidden in her home. The son of the widow of Nain (Lk. 7: 14, 15), refers to the soul, dead through the sin that proceeded from thoughts to talk or to action, demonstrated in behavior outside home. And finally, the raising up of Lazarus, after four days (Jn.11), refers to the resurrection of the soul that died through practicing sin, as a continuous life habit.

SECOND SECTION

HIS DEPARTURE FROM GALILEE

CHAPTER 6

IMPRESSIONS AS TO THE PERSON OF CHRIST

Even though the Lord Christ had proclaimed His authority, not only upon the felt wind, but also on the unseen unclean spirits, and on death; yet, man remained ignorant of His identity.

His relatives stumbled in Him; Herod thought of Him as John the Baptist; and even His own disciples asked Him to send the multitude away, that they might buy themselves bread to eat...; He entered with them through the affliction of the fierce wind and sea waves in the middle of the horrifying night; in order to proclaim Himself to them.

1- His relatives stumble in Him	1 - 6
2- Sending out the twelve	7 - 13
3- Herod's attitude towards Him	14 - 29
4- The disciples and the hungry multitude	30 - 40
5- The disciples and the waves of the sea	41 - 53
6- People recognizing Him	54 - 56

1- His relatives stumble in Him:

We have already seen, how His relatives came to lay hold of Him, for they said, "*He is out of His mind*" (Mk. 3: 21); and yet, when He healed the woman with the flow of blood, and restored Jairus' daughter to life, the evangelist says:

"Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him. And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue" (verse 1).

He came to them despite knowing that they despised Him and attacked Him ... As for Him, He opens His heart even to those who reject Him, even though He does not force anyone to receive Him against his will!

They stumbled in Him and did not take Him seriously for two reasons, namely, for His family origin, and His profession as a carpenter or a laborer. The evangelist says:

“Where did this man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us? And they offended at Him. But Jesus said to them: ‘A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house’” (verses 2-4).

In this text, the following is to be noticed:

a- The early Church probably wondered, how could the Jews could fiercely reject that Jewish Messiah, in whom the Jewish religion and the prophesies, in their hands, are fulfilled. Yet, it found in that rejection, one of the signs of the true Messiah; as in Him, the prophesies are fulfilled; The prophet Isaiah says:

“He will be a sanctuary, but a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, to both the houses of Israel; As a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble; they shall fall and be broken; he snared and taken” (Isaiah 8:14,15).

The early Church believed that that Jewish attitude, had been a part of the hidden Divine care which was planned by God for Zion (Isaiah 28:16); that through the stumbling of the Jews in the Cornerstone, the Gentiles would receive salvation, as expressed by the apostle Paul:

“Through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:11). *“For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written: ‘Behold, I lay in zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense; And whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame’”* (Rom. 9:32,33).

Some scholars say that the gospel, according to St. Mark, as a whole, is interested in proclaiming that “ stumbling” or “ offense” in the corner stone.; revealing its secret,

which is the blindness and sins of humanity; as is clear from their evil interpretation of His holy works (Mk. 3:21,22), and their incessant counsels for resisting and destroying Him (Mk. 2,3)... All these were referring to the shadows of the Cross towards which He was setting forth to carry; or in other words, for which sake He came to the world.

And now, as the end of His ministry in Galilee drew near, His own people started to deny Him. Indeed, the people of Nazareth could not deny His mighty works and wisdom; yet, despite their amazement, they stumbled: How could they believe in someone they know of His origin and His family who are living in their midst, when all Jews were expecting the Messiah to come on the clouds from heaven! They were questioning, but not for reaching the truth, but rather for the sake of resisting Him. Another reason for their stumbling was His profession as a carpenter. According to the Greek origin, the word 'Tekton', designates a laborer in stones, wood or minerals; related to the Hebrew word 'charasch', designating a manufacturer of plows and yokes; all, according to them representing humble professions, not prestigious like those of priests, Pharisees or scribes,...!

What stumbled the Jews, is a reason for our admiration; as we, indeed, apprehend the exalted love of God, in that His Word had not come on the clouds, but through humbleness; had dwelt in our midst, and performed our tasks, to partake of our life, so that we partake of His eternal glories. He descended to us to lift us up to Him!

b- Probably, the words said by His relatives here (verse 3, 4), are confirming what St. John Chrysostom said, commenting on the phrase:

“This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him” (Jn.2:11). that, the Lord Christ, as He came, incarnated, did not perform mighty miracles, during His infancy and adolescence, but started His work by turning water into wine, at the wedding of Cana of Galilee, after His baptism. In other words, the Master did not come to impress His relatives during His infancy and adolescence, through some mighty acts, but, He rather came to minister and draw souls to Him, through His Divine acts, exalted in love! If He had demonstrated such mighty acts during His infancy, before His relatives according to the flesh, they would have mentioned them here, as they were expressing their amazement concerning His wisdom and the powers performed by His hands.

C- Their calling Him, “the carpenter, the son of Mary”, proves that His stepfather St. Joseph, must have passed away at that time, or they would have mentioned his name. As to calling James, Joses, Judas, and Simon, “His brothers”, the expression “brother”, had been used, in the Holy Book, for designating brothers according to blood, to

nationality, to close relation, or to friendship. Here, it is used because of close relation; as it was the case, when Abraham called his nephew Lot, “his brother” (Gen. 13: 8); Likewise Laban did the same for his son-in-law Jacob (Gen. 29: 15). The Jews used to call cousins “brothers”, as, in most cases, they probably lived under one roof. According to the Aramic language, the word “brother” designated all these relations. That is why, according to St. Jerome, Jesus’ brothers are the sons of His aunt, St. Mary, the wife of Clopas, sister of St. Mary, the Holy Virgin (Jn, 19:25).

d- The tragedy, these relatives lived through, was that, because of their materialistic view, they lost what the strangers had enjoyed; they lost the chance to enjoy and gain the blessings of the works of the Lord Christ, as it was said:

“He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them” (verses 5,6).

The Master was bitterly amazed, because their lack of faith, deprived them of Him and His works; as the Lord does not grant healing, except to him who wants and believes. And as St. John Chrysostom says: [The Master did not care for revealing Himself, as much as for benefiting them]. St. Gregory the Nizenzian says:

[For healing to take place, two things are needed: faith of the sick, and power of the healer; and if one of them is lacking, it will not be possible]. And Father Sherimon says: [He intends to grant His healing, not according to a certain measure of His mighty power, but rather according to a measure of faith He finds in every one... The limitless gifts of God, stopped, as

”He could do no mighty work there... and He marveled because of their unbelief” (Mk. 6:5,6).

It is thus clear, that the magnitude of God’s giving, is according to that of faith; as it is said:

“According to your faith, let it be to you” (Mt.9:29). “Go your way, and as you have believed, so let it be done to you” (Mt.8:13). “Great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire” (Mt.15:28). “Your faith has saved you” (Lk.18:42).]

Father Theophlactius comments on the saying of the evangelist:

“He went about the villages in a circuit, teaching” (Mk.6:6). by saying: [The Lord did not preach only in cities, but also in villages, teaching us, not to despise the humble things, and not to seek always the assignments of ministry in large cities; but to sow the seeds of the word of God in the poor and humble villages.]

2- Sending out the twelve:

If He was rejected by His own, that did not stop Him from loving them or humanity as a whole; so:

“He called the twelve to Him, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits” (verse 6).

The Lord appointed His disciples (Mk. 3), and let them see His amazing works (Mk.4 and 6), having lived with Him and partaken of His life. And now, as He sends them out, He is giving them power over unclean spirits ... It is not sufficient to let them listen to His words, to behold His works, or to live with Him, but the need is great to grant them power to destroy the kingdom of evil, and to establish that of light.

In this mission, the following points have to be noticed:

a- He sent them two by two, according to the words of Scripture:

“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up” (Eccles 4:9,10).

Probably, sending them that way, is to let one of them get occupied with preaching the word, while the other prays for him; so that, the word would go hand in hand with the prayer, giving more fruit. And as we had already seen, the figure 2, refers to love; that mission being one of love presented from God to mankind. Pope Gregory, the Great says: [The Lord sent out His disciples to preach, two by two, according to two commandments concerning love: Love for God and love for our neighbor; Moreover,

love cannot hold between less than two parties. By that, He proclaimed to us, that whoever has no love for his neighbor should definitely refrain from the task of preaching]

The Church, as the home of love, would not be able to preach in the world, unless it embraces the Spirit of love among its ministers and its entire congregation... Through that love, God is glorified, blessing every work, however small it may seem; without love ministry would lose all its energy and fruits.

b- He gave them authority over unclean spirits (verse 7). Because the evil one has reigned over the heart of man, there is a great need for an authority against that enemy. In other words, the real battle would be located in the heart; and its two parties would be God and Satan. There is no animosity between the disciples and any person, whatever his attitude towards them is; their real animosity is directed towards the evil one himself, who deceives the hearts and transfers them to his side.

c- *“He commanded them to take nothing for the Journey except a staff”* (verse 8).

If the Lord has granted them authority over demons, as a gift, for the sake of their mission; Yet He requested from them, in return, a proclamation of their trust in Him, to be demonstrated, in preaching, not merely by mouth, but through dispensing with all material worldly needs; trusting in God who would sustain and care for them.

St. Ambrose says: [The gospel presents the features of a model preacher for the kingdom of God...’ While not asking for worldly resources, completely surrendering himself to faith, he is confident, when he so does, that every thing would be provided in abundance to him.]

Commandments are not literal, but carry deep spiritual concepts; When He commanded His disciples, not to carry a staff (Mt. 10: 10), to lean on, on their way, or even to use it to defend themselves against dogs, wandering in the fields, He wanted to proclaim to them, that He is their staff, whom to lean on with their hearts for continuous support. Yet here, He allows them to carry a staff, probably as a reference to the Cross; as no preaching can hold, unless the preacher carries the staff of the Cross, partaking of the passions of His Master.

Some believe that, forbidding His disciples to carry anything, even a staff, the Lord intended it for the sake of perfection; but when he allowed it, He did that for the sake of weakness; as for example, in case of sickness or old age.

d- “... *no bags, no bread, no cupper in their money belts*” (verse 8).

So that the Lord Himself would be to them, their food, drink, and wealth. The bag, probably refers to the weight of worldly troubles; the bread to worldly delights; and the cupper in money belts, might refer to their hidden gifts. As if, it is not anymore fitting for a preacher, who cares, as a spiritual physician, for the salvation of others, to trouble himself with worldly affairs, to be drawn to its delights, or to hide the gifts that God granted him.

St. John Saba says: [As fire does not hold in water, so also the knowledge of God does not hold in a heart that is engaged in the lusts of this world], [Whoever rejects the world through perfection, is the one in whom God’s fire is kindled.]

It is to be noticed, that the Lord’s commandments to the disciples were strict: they are not to carry even a bag with some necessities; nor bread, a basic item for food; nor copper in their money belts, as it had the custom of the Jews. He denied them the littlest of the little.

“... *but to wear sandals, and not to put on two tunics*” (verse 9).

A Jew used to wear five items:

- 1- An under-shirt.
- 2- A cloak, to put on by day, and to use as a cover by night.
- 3- A waist band to wear over the shirt and cloak.
- 4- A headwear: a white, blue or black turban.
- 5- A pair of shoes or sandals.

The Master commands them to wear sandals; their continuous travel and incessant preaching activity, necessitate putting on sandals at all times; especially with the missionary path, covered with thorns. Some believe that wearing (inner sandals) in the heart, refers to enlightenment to recognize the way of the Lord, so as not to have our depths defiled by the dirt of this world; as is expressed by the Psalmist,

“*Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light for my path*” (Psalm 119:105).

Thus, it is fitting for a preacher to wear the (inner sandals) of truth, having discarded his old ones, made of the skin of dead animals; to do as the prophet Moses did, when he took his sandals off his feet on the holy ground, to behold the burning bush, and to receive God's invitation for his spiritual new leadership (Exod. 3).

Our Lord Christ forbids us to put on two tunics; for it is not fitting, for whoever wears Christ, to put on the tunic of the world; Whoever is hidden in the Lord, our sanctuary, is not to wear, anymore, the love of worldlies..

f- *“Also He said to them, ‘In whatever place you enter a house, stay there till you depart from that place”* (verse 10).

By this commandment he means, that sentimental emotions and brotherly love, should not distract them from the seriousness of their missionary task. If houses are wide-open for the sake of Him, who is dwelling in them, so it is not fitting to deviate from their spiritual goal, and their original mission, which is to draw every soul to the bosom of the Father.

What is that house, which we enter into, and which we should stay in until the time of our departure, but the biblical Church life; that angelical life, where we live, as though in heaven, we should stay in it, until we depart from this world, to enjoy heaven itself.

g- *“And whoever will not receive you, and hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet, as a testimony against them”* (verse 11).

Shaking the dust, means that the preacher has suffered the trouble of the long way, whose dust is a testimony against those who rejected the word. It could also mean, that they do not look forward for any material benefit; even the dust that clung to their feet on their way to that house, they shake off at the threshold of their door; they leave everything as a testimony against them.

St. John Chrysostom sees in it “ a terrifying act”; giving the disciples more courage to proclaim, that they are shaking off all that is material; forsaking all dust and earthly thought, to live attached to the heavenlies. That view of St. John Chrysostom, is based on what the Jews used to do in the old times: when they returned home, from a sojourn

in a foreign land; they used to shake off the dust under their feet, as a proclamation that they are getting rid of the defilement of the pagan world.

St. Ambrose comments on that action, in his interpretation of the gospel according to St. Luke, saying: [The Lord commands us to avoid entering into, and even to escape from, any house of a heretic; and to shake the dust off our feet, so that its dryness -- having its origin from a barren sandy soil (i. e. False faith) -- would not defile our spiritual path.

Thus, it is the duty of a preacher of the bible, to carry on his shoulders, the physical weaknesses of believers, to cast them away; and to tread upon their sinful deeds under his feet, as though upon dust, according to what is written:

“Who is weak, and I am not weak?” (2Cor.11:29), Yet, He should also keep away from any Church, that rejects the true faith, based on the apostolic one, in order to avoid any source of deceit. That is confirmed by the saying of apostle:

“Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition” (Tit.3:10).

h- The disciples successively accomplished their mission; according to the evangelist:

“So they went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them” (verses 12,13).

Their preaching was centered around “the kingdom of heavens”, and the way that leads to it: A true repentance, springing from belief in the Lord who reigns upon the heart; and its fruits being, the healing of soul and body; the soul is healed through casting out of demons, and the body is healed through the anointing with oil.

From what the evangelist says, it is to be noticed that the act of anointing with oil, has not been an isolated one, carried out by one, but not the other of the disciples; It was rather something done by all of them along their preaching task. There must have been a particular commandment, to which they were bound; That was revealed in the epistle of the apostle James, in which he says:

“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the priests of the Church, and let them pray for him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” (James 5:14).

According to a certain scholar, it is obvious from the text, that the healing effect was not due to the nature of the oil itself; Anointing with oil is done as a mystic sacrament,

the same way as the laying of hands. Some scholars believe, there is nothing against the fact that this sacrament has been carried out by all the disciples, and probably by the Lord Himself, although we do not have anything to back that up.

3- Herod's attitude towards Him:

When Herod Antipas heard about the Lord Christ and His mighty works, he thought of Him as John the Baptist, whom he killed, raised from the dead, as a reward for a girl who danced at his birthday party. That way of thinking had been common among the Jews: that certain saints, particularly those who have been martyred, are occasionally raised from the dead, to return to this world, with special authority granted by God, to perform a particular commission.

From another point of view, those thoughts of Herod, reveal what was going on deep within his conscience: If he had surrendered the voice of truth to the sword, and presented the head of John the Baptist to a dancing girl, yet, that voice would have remained incessantly screaming loud in him.

The evangelist St. Mark presents us with three different views of various people, as far as the identity of the Person of the Lord is concerned:

a- That of those in fear, as for instance Herod, who thought that the one he Killed, was raised from the dead. Despite his fear, he did not repent, and continued his evil path, staying attached to the wife of his still-living brother Philip... He was called a "fox" by the Lord Christ (Lk. 13: 32); and had been one of the judges, before whom Jesus was tried (Lk. 23:7-12).

b- That of the materialists ... The Lord Christ came for salvation; but despite His mighty works bearing witness to Him, they said He is "Elijah" (verse 15). They expected Elijah to come, to prepare the way for the Messiah, who would publicly come over the clouds, to restore the kingdom to Israel -- on a materialistic conventional level -- to subject the whole world, under its rule.

c- That of the despairing ... in whose despair, Israel remained for almost 300 years, with no prophet; Thus, they thought of the Master as a prophet (verse 16).

As these three views did not score the truth, and did not grasp the true identity of the Person of the Messiah, there was a need for the coming of God, Himself, to proclaim and reveal the heavenly truth.

Having paraded these three views, the evangelist presented to us the episode of the martyrdom of St. John the Baptist; at the hands of king Herod (verses 16-29).

That Herod, was 'Herod Antipas', the son of Herod the Great, from his wife 'Malthaki' the Samaritan. St. John the Baptist stood screaming in protest against the public adultery, practiced by the whole family of Herod the Great, who personally married ten wives and had many children, deviating the holy marriage into lowly plots, aimed to grab the authority to reign. As examples of those practices, we mention:

a- His son Philip (from Mary, the Postin), married 'Herodea', the daughter of his brother Aristopolos (from Mary, the Macabian).

b- The other Philip (from Cleopatra of Jerusalem), married 'Salome', the daughter of Philip, his already mentioned brother.

c- Herod Antipas (from Malthaki, the Samaritan), married 'Herodea', the wife of his still-living brother Philip. His wife's daughter, Salome, danced at his birthday party, and asked - as a reward- for the head of John the Baptist; in order to spare her mother from hearing his alarming voice, and to make sure that Herod's nagging conscience would not, later on, make him divorce her because of that voice.

The following is a sketch to show these marriages:

Herod the Great from Cleopatra Malthaki Mary the Postin Mary the Macabe Doris
Philip Archilaus Herod Philip Aristopolos Alexander Antipas (married (married
(married (Killed by (killed by (killed by Salome) Herodea) Herodea) his father) his
father) his father) Salome Herodea

The episode of the martyrdom of St. John the Baptist, at the hands of Herod, was not a secret; It was recorded by the Jewish Historian Josephus, who, nevertheless claimed that the killing was the result of Herod's fear of a public revolution against his reign, encouraged by John the Baptist.

On the occasion of celebrating his birthday, instead of releasing the wrongly imprisoned man of God, he covered his birthday party with the blood of the innocent, as a reward to Salome, the daughter of Herodea, who pleased him with her dance.

Father Theophlactius says: [He was overcome by his lust, to the extent of promising up to half his kingdom as a reward for a dance. Instead of thanking God for having brought him to life on that day (his day of birth), he added to the sin of imprisoning an innocent man, that of murdering him.]

St. Ambrose warns us against exotic parties, saying: [St. John, the forerunner of Christ, was decapitated at the request of a dancing girl; proving that exotic parties, could be far more harmful than the madness of anger, that could defile sanctuaries.]

The Scholar Origen says, that imprisonment and murder of St. John the Baptist, took place within the frame of the of the Jewish nation's tendency to try to suppress the prophecies, through destroying the Messiah.

In the midst of the lusty exotic dancing, Herod swore an oath to give a young girl, up to half his kingdom, as a reward for her dance; thus turning himself into a murderer of St. John the Baptist. That is why, St. John Chrysostom warns us against oath-swearing, saying: [Recall, how much the tribes of Israel have suffered as a result of their oath-swearing, concerning the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 21: 5 - 10); and how much Saul did, as a result of his oath (1 Sam. 14: 24). But Herod did what is far worse than just bringing harm on himself and others; he turned into a murderer. You should also recall what happened with Joshua, when he swore an oath to the Gibeonites (Joshua 9). Oath-swearing is truly a trap of the devil; let us set ourselves free of it.

Anyway, while Herod gave the blood of John the Baptist as a price for raping his brother's wife, and for the sake of relieving her conscience, as to that sinful marriage, the Lord Christ, on the other hand, gave His own blood, as a price for retrieving His bride, from the evil one.

Some compare between St. John the Baptist and Herod, along the following lines:

1- Both of them were public figures; yet John performed his work, motivated by his deep inner feeling, kindled with love towards other people, yearning for their salvation;

Herod, on the other hand was performing his, as a son of Herod the Great, inheriting from him his selfishness and conceit, keen on having everyone glorifying him.

2- Both of them got to know the Lord Christ: The first through faith, while still in his mother's womb, leaping for joy, at the voice of Virgin Mary's greetings went to him (Lk.1:44); While the other received him, sent by Pilate for trial. His main concern, then, was not to enjoy His presence, but to have the chance to watch one of his miracles (Lk.23).

3- Both believed in resurrection from the dead: For its sake, the first surrendered his life courageously to death; while the other was overcome by fear, lest John, whom he murdered, could have risen from the dead.

4- Both received a message from the Lord Christ: The first through his two disciples, whom he dispatched to ask him:

"Are you the coming one, or do we look for another?" (Mt.11:3).

The Lord praised him, saying:

Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written: 'Behold I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You. Assuredly, I say to you, among those born from women, there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist'" (Mt.11:9-11).

As to the message sent by the Lord to Herod, it was:

"Go, tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day, I shall be perfected'" (Lk.13:32).

That was in response to the request of some Pharisees, to make Him depart from there for Herod wanted to kill Him.

5- Both of them died in prison: The first as a martyr who proclaimed the word of truth; The other was persuaded by his wife to go to Rome, to request from Emperor Caligola to bestow on him the royal title. But instead, he was exiled to Spain, to die in prison.

4-The disciples and the hungry multitude:

After narrating the episode of the martyrdom of St. John the Baptist, the evangelist mentioned how the disciples gathered around Jesus, to tell Him all what they had done, and what they had taught.

“And He said to them: ‘Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place, and rest a while’, for there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat” (verse 31).

Thus, was the Lord having chosen His disciples, and sent them to preach the word, it was fitting for them, every now and then, to sit alone with Him, to tell Him what they had done and taught during their ministry, to let Him be their true leader in all their actions... He took them aside to a deserted place to get some rest and food; thus, mixing life of ministry with contemplation; each motivating and supporting the other.

Strangely enough, as He took them aside to a deserted place, the multitude looked for Him and ran to Him...; as though he intended, for His disciples to combine their retreat with ministry; for their real rest should be in that of the tired souls.

Father Theophlactius in his comment on the gathering of the multitude around Him, says: [Are you waiting for Christ to call you?! Go back and present yourself to Him.]

The disciples, still, did not have the chance to eat, as they departed with the Lord to a deserted place; They forgot their hunger, and pleaded for the hungry multitude, saying to Him:

“This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late. Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread, for they have nothing to eat” (verse 35,36).

How strange, that even the disciples, had not yet realized, that He, who was in their midst is the “bread of life”, who is capable of fulfilling the whole world! They should have recalled how He granted them the authority to cast out unclean spirits; to anoint the sick to them; and how that all along their ministry, they did not need a single thing.... It is nice of them to plead for the hungry multitude, but it was also fitting for them to believe in His power to satisfy their hunger, and that He would not send them empty!

As to the miracle of feeding the five thousands, we have already discussed it (Mt.14:14-20). Yet we should mention here:

1- The five loaves refer to the Person of the Lord Christ; as He is the “living bread” that came down from heaven (Jn. 6: 41); The figure 5, refers to the name of the Master, as the word “Jesus”, in Greek, is formed in 5 letters; Each of the two tablets of the law, according to Jewish tradition, carried 5 commandments; The screen that used to cover the door of the tabernacle, was held upon 5 pillars (Exodus 26:37); And 5 priests were chosen in the wilderness: ‘Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithmar’ (Exodus 27:1)... etc. Thus, the Master is sanctified as the fulfilling living bread; as the Word of God; and as the true High Priest, ... etc.

At the same time, the multitude counted 5000 men: the figure 1000 referring to the Spirit, or to the spiritual life, to heaven, or to heavenly thought; while the figure 5, is referring to the Church, congregating around Christ, likened by the Lord, to the 5 wise virgins (Mt. 25).

2- Some scholars believe that St. Mark presents the miracle of feeding the multitude, in a way close to the ‘Last Supper’, or to the sacrament of the ‘Eucharist’. As though the Lord Christ, through that messianic banquet, is drawing His disciples’ hearts, not towards physical fulfillment, but rather to His Passover feast, so as to enjoy His Holy body and blood, as a mystery of eternal life, and of abiding in Him; and therefore, to enjoy the heavenly eternal banquet, as a communion of the eternal glory.

Feeding the multitude, was not merely one of the thousand miracles performed by the Lord ; and its goal, was not merely a proclamation of His love and compassion towards the hungry multitude, but it had a special significance: That He, who is in their midst is the expected Messiah, spoken of by the law and the prophets, as the grantor of fulfillment. In the ancient times, it was said of the messianic time, through symbolism and prophesy:

“Had rained down manna on them to eat; and given them of the bread of heaven. Men ate angels’ food. He sent them food to the full” (Ps.78:24,25).

The Psalmist also said of the Lord’s Messiah:

“I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread”
(Ps.132:15).

The golden table of the Showbread, an essential item of the tabernacle, was a symbol of the Messiah, the fulfiller of the holy souls. In the second Book of Kings (4:42-44), as a man came from ‘Baal Shalisha’, bringing to Elisha, bread of the firstfruit, twenty loaves of barley bread, and newly ripened grain, in his knapsack, the Lord ordered His prophet, to present that provision to 100 men, who ate and had some left over.

All these things, were like fingers pointing to the Messiah, the fulfiller of both the body and the soul. Yet, what the Messiah is doing here, is beyond the symbol and the shadow, to confirm that He is the Host of the unique Messianic table, which the early fathers, the prophets, and the angels, longed to behold. What is publicly presented by the Lord here, before the multitude, is intended to draw His own, to the Eucharistic table, to enjoy His body and blood, laid down for the sake of eternal life, to those partaking of them.

3- Before the evangelist presented that amazing work of the Lord Christ: feeding the multitude, he proclaimed the Master’s care and compassion for them, saying:

“And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd” (verse 34).

It was, as though the evangelist is taking us back to prophet Ezekiel’s proclamation, that God Himself, is taking over the care of His people, left unattended by their shepherds, saying:

“Therefore, you shepherds, hear the words of the Lord: ‘As I live’, says the Lord God, ‘Surely because My flock became a prey, and My flock became food for every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, nor did My shepherds search for My flock, but the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock. Therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the Lord!... Thus says the Lord: ‘Indeed, I myself will search for My sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep; so will I seek out My sheep, and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day’ (Ezekiel 34:7-12).

By the coming of the expected Messiah, the cloudy and dark days came to an end; and the Word of God, Himself, came to seek out His scattered people, to bring them back to Him through His love.

4- In our study of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, we saw that the two fish, refer to the Old and New Testaments, presented to us by the living Word of God, for the fulfillment of our souls; they refer as well to love (the figure 2), which is “the fellowship with God, the true love”. The green grass, which the multitude sat on, refers to the ‘flesh’, on which Jews were leaning: as for example their blood relationship to Abraham, and the physical circumcision. We would not be able to enjoy the messianic banquet, unless we subject all these things, and stop being enslaved to them through the killing letter.

As to sitting down in groups, in ranks, in hundreds and fifties (verses 39, 40), that refers to the one Church, which, even if it is congregated, on a local level, in ranks and groups, yet it still enjoys one Christ and one food, through the one apostolic thought. As to their sitting down in fifties, we have spoken several times of that figure as a symbol of absolution from sin through the Holy Spirit, enjoyed by the Church on the day of the Pentecost...; the Church, in its essence, is the congregation of God, freed of their sins through His Holy Spirit, to live by the righteousness of Christ Jesus our Lord.

5-The disciples and the waves of the sea:

Despite the mighty works performed by the Lord Christ for His people’s sake, He was denied by His own, who said mockingly:

“Is He not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas and Simon? (verse 3).

Through his troubled conscience, Herod thought of Him as John the Baptist, risen from the dead (verse 14); and through their wish for a material messianic king, some thought of Him as ‘Elijah’ (verse 15); and lastly, through their yearning for the Spirit of prophesy, that has been denied to Israel for the last 300 years, some thought that He is a prophet (verse 15). That is why the Lord performed two works, to reveal His true identity, to those who possess a true spiritual vision: The first of them was feeding the multitude, in a unique performance, that revealed that He is the grantor of the

Messianic banquet, long wished-for by the prophets, and symbolically proclaimed by the law. As to the second work, it was His walking on the sea, to join His terrified disciples; as narrated by the evangelist:

“And when He sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray. Now, when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night, He came to them, walking on the sea, and would have passed them by. But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out” (verses 46-49).

In that work, it is to be noticed:

1- By the miracle of feeding the multitude, He revealed Himself to them, as the Creator who cares for His flock (Ezek. 34); and at the same time, as the heavenly living bread, that fulfills the souls of His children. As for His walking on the sea, He is proclaiming His incessant loving endeavor, for His people’s sake, to set forth with them, even to the middle of the sea, carrying them to protect them from drowning.

In the ancient times, He gave His Divine order to Moses to stretch out His hand with the rod over the sea (as with the Cross) to make way for His people across the sea, to escape from the devil’s hold (Pharaoh and his soldiers); And then to Joshua, to let the priests set forth, with the ark of the covenant, to cross over the Jordan river, on their way towards the promised land. It is as though, God, with His love for humanity, always wishes to cross-over with His people, from the devil’s hold, to set forth, not towards a material promised land, but to the divine bosom. If water is blocking our way to freedom from the hold of the enemy, to enjoy the promised land, God, Himself, will carry us to cross- over, as expressed in the Holy Scripture:

“He alone spreads out the heavens, and treads on the waves of the sea” (Job 9:8).

“Your way was in the sea; Your path in the great waters; and Your footsteps were not known” (Ps.77:10).

2- The Master has forsaken them till the fourth watch of the night -- that is to say, up till about 3 o’clock at dawn (The Jews used to divide the night into 4 parts, calling each of them a watch: 6-9, 9-12, 12-3, 3-6). He did that, not out of neglect, but in order to

confirm their faith in Him; to let them recognize Him, as the walker on the sea, “*who has His path in the great waters*”; and to give them the chance to practice perseverance and long-suffering, especially in praying. He pretended to have the intention to pass them by, to let them cry out, so as to proclaim Himself and His care for them.

He went up into the boat of humanity at the fourth watch, in order to restore its peace. The first watch refers to the time between the fall of the first man, and the great flood; the second watch, between the renewal of creation and Moses; the third watch from Moses to Christ’s incarnation; and the fourth would be from the incarnation of the Word of God, and His dwelling in our midst, up to His second coming.

Thus, what He did with His disciples was, as though He did it to humanity as a whole, through His appearance over the waters of the world, by His Divine incarnation, to dwell in the midst of His Church, granting it peace and authority over the violent currents.

So, my dear brother, do not be afraid, if you get surrounded by the darkness of the night; because on the fourth watch, when every thing looks hopeless before your eyes, the Lord of Glory will appear, shining with His light within you, as expressed by St. John Saba: [Darkness precedes light; Thus we should bear trials, until the knowledge of truth, shines within our souls]. St. John Chrysostom also says: [He did not proclaim Himself to them, and did not abolish the darkness right away, but, as I had already said, He intended to train them to bear their fears, and to be prepared for pains.]

3- The evangelist says:

“He came to them walking on the sea, and would have passed them by” (verse 48).

If He made His disciples get into the boat (verse 45), to let them pass through affliction, to cry out to Him; Yet, now, even as He approached them, He “ would have passed them by”, so as to let them seek to find Him, to cry out to Him; to give them the chance to hear His sweet voice:

“It is I; do not be afraid” (verse 50).

And as expressed by St. John Chrysostom: [Christ did not proclaim Himself, before they cried out; so that, with the growth of their fear, so also their welcome for His advent would increase accordingly.]

As if the goal of affliction, is for us to enter into a life of prayer; crying out to the Lord, and entering into a communion with Him. St. John Saba speaks to us about the activity of prayer, saying:

[By prayer, the mind mixes with God; opening up, and sharing His treasures. By it, man becomes a dwelling place for God. By it, the soul unifies with Christ, and beholds the shine of His glory. By it, the fire of Christ's love would kindle within the soul; and the heart would burn by a lust for God, that consumes all other lusts. By it, the soul would rejoice with love, and the world would be uprooted from the heart.]

3- They heard His voice: *"It is I; do not be afraid"*, and right away, fear was taken away from them. And St. John Chrysostom says: [As they recognized His voice, they feared no more.]

How much we need to recognize Him, in the midst of bitter afflictions; through listening to the voice of His Divine commandments in us; to have Him transfigure within us, to take away all our fear.

6- People recognize Him:

"When they came out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him" (verse 54).

They began to lay the sick in the marketplaces, and begged Him that they might just touch the border of His garment;

"And as many as touched Him were made well" (verse 56).

In other words, as the Lord of glory transfigures within us, He rids us of the internal waves, to transform our depths into a kingdom of His, where He dwells, and where we share with His saints and angels their unutterable heavenly praises. Our souls would get in touch with Him, as though cured of an old ailment, to live in the perfection of health, enjoying the new exalted life, immune against any strange influence that would deprive it of its glory, its freedom, and its peace.

Concerning that, St. John Saba says: [If you are a stranger to all outer disruptions, you will hear, within yourself, the Spirit uttering glories. Your soul is the joyful Jerusalem of Christ; so why are the Babelonians, still roaming in its marketplaces?!.]

CHAPTER 7

THE INNER LIFE

The Lord Christ came to the world, to enter with us into our inner man, so as not to care,

just for the outer formalities and appearances, but to seek the renewal of our deep man. That is why He rebuked those who were keen on keeping the commandments, but not according to their spirit.

1- The Lord Christ and the washings	1 -- 23
2- Healing the daughter of a Phoenician woman	24 - 30
3- Healing a deaf mute	31 - 37

1- The Lord Christ and the washings:

The Pharisees blamed the disciples of Christ, because they saw some of them eating with unwashed hands. The evangelist explained to us, how the Jews used to wash cups, pitchers, couches, and every thing coming from the marketplace, holding the tradition of the elders.

The Master did not criticize the act of washing in itself, but He criticized getting preoccupied with it, at the expense of inner washing; caring for literal traditions at the expense of the commandment in its depths; So He answered them:

*“Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites; as it is written:
‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of man. For laying aside the commandments of God, you hold the tradition of men -- the washing of pitchers, and cups, and many other such things you do’ ... ; And He said to them: ‘All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition’”* (verses 6 - 9)

In these words of the Lord Christ, it is to be noticed:

1- The Lord Christ gives everyone what he needs; When the simple multitude came to Him carrying the sick to marketplaces, begging for a chance to touch just the border of His garment, to be healed, He granted them what they asked for, and “*As many as touched Him were made well*” (verse 56). As to the learned Pharisees, who came, not to get anything, but to fish for any wrongdoing, He likewise gave them what they need; He revealed to them their deeply hidden wound, to let them seek a physician, capable of healing the ailments of their souls.

2- The Lord Christ criticized the Jews for keeping the killing formalities , under the pretension of holding the tradition. ; as they were like those who honor God with their lips, while their hearts are far away from Him. In our study “Orthodoxy and tradition”

we discerned between the killing literal tradition, that contradicts the commandment, and hinders the soul from setting forth in spirituals towards the heavenlies, and what the tradition carried, of authentic spiritual legacy, and beautiful rites, like the Jewish liturgies, with all their praises and psalms, etc. ..., things that the Master or His disciples did not object, but used to go to the temple to partake of the Jewish worship, yet, with a new Christian concept.

To understand why the Lord Christ criticized those Jewish washings, we have to mention what some scholars said, that they were not intended for the sake of hygiene, but as literal rite formalities. When a Jew washed his hands for purification, he used to get water in a ritually clean stone trough, then raise his hands upwards, and pour on them some water, then lowers them downwards, and pours more water over the wrists, to get down over the fingers. A Jew used to believe that, unless he does that accurately, he will be possessed by an unclean spirit, by the name of ‘Shipta’, to be cursed eventually with poverty and destruction. It was claimed that, as a teacher, abstained from practicing that rite, he was interred at death in the tombs of heretics; and when a Rabbi was imprisoned in a Roman prison, he got to use the limited water, for washing his hands, rather than to drink, until he died of thirst.

There is no doubt, that the Pharisees’ criticism for Christ’s disciples, concerning eating without washing their hands , was only out of hypocrisy, as they did not really

stand the disciples who freed themselves of these formalities. A literal man cannot stand spiritual thinking, but opposes it, turning his life into one of idiotic, barren controversy !

3- The Pharisees accused His disciples of breaking, not the Lord's commandment, but the tradition of elders; But He revealed to them, from the law and prophets, that they are acting out of hypocrisy, breaking the Lord's commandment, and in need of a physician to cure them of their ailment. He presented them with a serious example of their deviation; that they allow anybody to refrain from subsidy of his parents, with the excuse that he has, instead, presented it as a 'Corban' to God. By doing that, he is actually breaking God's commandment , concerning the honoring of parents, supported in this by the deceiving tradition of elders, which is really aiming towards increasing the money coming to the temple, which they get a lion's share of...

Therefore, that tradition, was not meant to keep God's commandment, but to oppose and destroy it.

As they think of themselves as the guardians of the law, He assured them that they are actually nullifying the words of God and His law, by their wrong tradition. And as they pride themselves, as the great references of the prophesies, He presented them with one, by the prophet Isaiah, who said about them:

"These people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me" (verse 6 -- Isaiah 29: 13)

Having revealed to the scribes and the Pharisees, their inner wounds, He called all the multitude to Him, and said to them:

"Hear Me, everyone, and understand: There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him, but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear" (verses 14 - 16)

He revealed to them the concept of real defilement; a concept that a Jew would never be able to appreciate, unless he acquired the spiritual ear, that can apprehend what are high above the letters. The Jew has lived for a very long time concerned with which kinds of food, garments, furniture, could defile him (Lev. 11); he had in mind a long horrible list of these things. Now, the Lord came to reveal the roots of defilement, that touch the inner life, and not the outer appearances:

*“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts
adulteries, fortifications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness,
deceit, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness,
All these evil things come from within and defile a man”* (verse 21 - 23)

This list of evil things is frequently presented by the New Testament, for warning; as for example, that mentioned in the epistle to the Romans 1: 29 - 31; and in that to the Galatians (5: 19 - 23).

This list, needs no clarification; but, the word ‘covetousness’, in Greek, means, (wishing for more), that is to say, (never satisfied); the word ‘wickedness’, means (evil doings), a feature of him, who rejoices when misfortune happens to other people, That is why the devil is called ‘the wicked one’; as to ‘deceit’, it means, (ensnarement); and lastly, ‘foolishness’ means (spiritual idiocy).

4- Some people see in the disciples, eating with unwashed hands, a reference to stretching their hands in preaching work among the Gentiles, whom the Jews consider as unclean, and unholy people.

5- If the Savior has criticized those Pharisees, for their care for outer appearances, and not for inner essence; it is fitting for us, Christians, to have a greater care for the right behavior; Why ? ! Because, as St. John Chrysostom says: [Because, our continuous meetings here, should not be just for the sake of routine; we should always gain from them some fruit. If you share in singing two or three psalms, and practicing certain prayers, Do you think that, would be enough for your salvation ? !]

6- Certain scholars believe that this teaching of the Lord Christ, presented to the scribes and the Pharisees, as well as to the multitude, is a fitting introduction to the following episode, concerning the healing of the daughter of the Phoenician woman; as through it, the Lord intended to confirm, that there are no clean people and unclean ones; but the need is for the inner pure heart.

2- Healing of the Phoenician girl:

The Master did not feel comfortable among those who used to live according to the outer appearances, without inner depths; that is why,

“From there He arose and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon” (verse 24)

That is, He forsook His own, and went to a region of the Gentiles; to proclaim that His own, have lost Him by their formalities, while the strangers have enjoyed Him through their feelings of their need for Him. The evangelist says:

“He entered a house and wanted no one to know it, but He could not be hidden”
(verse 24)

Why did he enter in secret, and wanted no one to know it ? Probably because the time was not yet ripe for the preaching among the Gentiles; yet that was only a sort of a symbol that He has forsaken His own and set forth to the Gentiles. Some scholars believe that the Lord, having seen how the Pharisees have criticized His disciples for eating with unwashed hands; what would be their reaction if they saw the Lord himself getting to people considered by them as unclean, even designated as ‘little dogs’ ? !

The Lord could not hide, because,

“A Phoenician woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard about Him, and she came and fell at His feet” (verse 25)

It was as though the Master wished to proclaim to His disciples, how the Jews had closed before themselves the doors of His love, despite what He offered them; while the Gentiles came to Him, humbly and faithfully, despite His secret approach to them. And in order to reveal to them, more clearly, the extent of the faith of the Gentiles in Him, He was at first reluctant to grant the woman her request, saying to her:

“Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs” (verse 27)

Then comes the woman’s response testifying how, while the children have discarded their bread, those, counted by the Jews as ‘little dogs’, have become worthy of the children’s bread, by their humility and faith.

That conversation carried a message for the Jews: From one side, He came to offer them the children’s bread; yet they rejected the heavenly bread; and from the other side, they used to despise the Gentiles , counting them as unclean like dogs, although they, by their faith, enjoy what the children do not.

That conversation, also revealed the wisdom of the Phoenician woman; who was not offended by calling the Gentiles ‘little dogs’, but wisely said, that she wished to enjoy

even the crumbs that fall from the children; and thus she proclaimed that the children of this world are wiser than the denying Jews.

Some scholars see that the words ‘little dogs’, in Greek, designate ‘pups’, which are a kind of miniature dogs, kept as nice toys, and not the fierce dogs of watch; which alleviates the matter a little bit. That, together with the tone of speech and of voice, have encouraged the Phoenician woman to resume the conversation; as certain expressions, that seem harsh in writing, saying them in a gentle way, would alleviate their sharpness.

Anyway, it was not easy for the Jews to accept preaching among the Gentiles; but the Lord, here, opens the door for them, to make it easy for the apostles Paul and Barnabas to proclaim boldly:

“It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourself unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13: 46).

Another time, the apostle Paul said:

“Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles” (Acts 18: 6)

3- Healing a deaf mute:

It seems that the Lord Christ, did not wish to stay long among the Gentiles, to avoid offending the Jews, who would see Him as a breaker of the law, having fellowship with the ‘unclean’ Gentiles. That is why the evangelist says:

“Departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee”

(verse 31)

“There, they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him. Then He took him aside from the multitude, and put His finger in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue. Then, looking up at heaven, He said to him: ‘Ephphatha’, that is ‘be open’; immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly”

(verse 32 - 35)

That deaf mute, living at the boundary of 'Decapolis', was in need for the Lord Christ, Himself, to grant him the ability to hear and utter the word of God. If 'Decapolis' referred to the ten commandments or the law; that law revealed the inability of man to hear the voice of God, and to speak about His works. Therefore, the Master came to place His finger in his ear, that is to say, to send His Holy Spirit, termed "*the finger of God*" (Exodus 8: 19), to open up the inner ear, to hear the Divine voice working in it.

Spitting and touching his tongue, refer to the gift of Divine wisdom, granted by God to humanity, to be able to speak of the wisdom and works of God. As to His looking up at heaven, sighing, that was to proclaim that what He is granting, are heavenly gifts, that are rejected by those of flesh. The evangelist ends his narration of that miracle by saying:

"They were astonished beyond measure, saying, 'He has done all things well' He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak' " (verse 37)

With that phrase, he takes us back to the beginning of creation, when God saw that "*All was good*". He, who has been working from the beginning for the sake of man, is, Himself, who came to renew humanity, and to restore to man his joy and his peace. Some scholars see this phrase "*He has done all things well*", to mean, (All prophesies have been realized in Him well).

+++

CHAPTER 8

THE FULFILLING CHRIST

Chapters 8-10 address several questions, some of which are posed by the Lord Himself, some by the disciples, and on certain occasions, by the multitude or by the adversaries. They all reveal something about the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ who works for humanity, the very object of His love.

In this chapter, the following questions reveal His Person as the source of real fulfillment for the soul:

1- A question about the bread	1-10
2- Asking for a sign from heaven	11-12
3- A conversation about the leaven	13-21
4- A question about insight	22-26
5- A question about the identity of Christ	27-30
6- His proclamation about the Cross	31-33
7- His proclamation of the fellowship of the Cross	34-38

1- A question around the bread:

The Lord had blessed the bread and two fish to feed 5000 men, besides women and children (6:34-44), having been moved with compassion for them because they were like sheep having no shepherd. He talked to them for a long time in a deserted place, and the disciples wanted Him to send them away that they might go to buy themselves bread; But He declined to send them away hungry. Now, another opportunity came by, when the multitude stayed with Him for three days, having nothing to eat; the Lord, likewise, declined to send them away hungry, lest they would faint on the way, for some of them had come from afar. (v.3).

St. Mark could not give a count of the healings of the sick and the casting out of unclean spirits performed by the Lord, but the evangelist St. John says:

“And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they

were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." (Jn. 21: 25)

As far as feeding the multitude is concerned, Jesus probably only did it twice, lest the crowd would gather around Him for the sake of the material bread. He did not want their vision to deviate from spiritual fulfillment to earthliness. Still, He did not ignore their physical condition; He reveals His concern for the flesh without sacrificing the spiritual.

We have already discussed these two miracles, especially the symbolic sides they embrace (see the interpretation of Matthew 14:14-21; 15:32-38); I will only mention here, the following points:

(1) We cannot ignore the close resemblance between the two miracles included in chapters 6 and 8, and the similar conditions in both of them:

- Feeding 5000 men (6:35-44); Feeding 4000 men (8:1-9)
- Crossing the lake (6:45-52); Crossing the lake (8:10)
- Crossing to Gennesaret (6:53-56); Crossing to Dalmanutha (8:10)
- A dispute with the Pharisees about the unwashed hands (7: 1-23);
A dispute with the Pharisees about a sign from heaven (8:11)
- Conversation with the Phoenician woman about the children's bread (7:24-30);
Conversation with the disciples about the leaven of Pharisees (8:13-21)
- Healing of the deaf mute (7:31-37); Healing of the blind (8: 22 - 26)

The great resemblance between the conditions surrounding the two miracles binds them very closely, as we have already seen in our study of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, the evangelist. The first miracle is proclaiming the Person of the Messiah, the fulfiller of the Jews, the keepers of the law; the second, on the other hand, is proclaiming the Person of the Messiah as the fulfiller of the Gentiles as well. The two miracles bear the same meaning and concept; yet, the similarities of the conditions surrounding and following the two incidents, could not have been just a matter of coincidence. Rather, they must carry a spiritual message that touches our life, which can be summarized as follows:

a- In the two miracles, after feeding the multitude, the Lord Christ, together with His disciples got into the boat to cross the lake to the other side. This exemplifies that Christ's goal is the fulfillment of our souls which is accomplished when we taste the "cross-over."

In this manner, we exit with Christ through His life-giving Cross (the boat) through the wilderness of the world, and its waves and currents, to enter into the other life, to enjoy eternity.

This exodus would not be realized, far from the Lord Christ, the Head and leader of the Church.

b- Having fulfilled the multitude, the Pharisees started, in both occasions, to dispute with Him, one time about the unwashed hands, and in the other, asking for a sign from heaven. It seems that while the Lord Christ preoccupies Himself with fulfilling us internally, and setting forth with us to His Father's bosom so that we may abide in Him, the evil one tries hard to engage us in idiotic disputes in order to cloud the purity of our inner hearts. The enemy wishes to draw us away from the inner fulfillment, towards vain formalities, or to exciting signs.

c- After the first miracle, He talked to the Phoenician woman about the children's bread, which He wished those of the law to keep, as children; but having rejected it, it was given to the foreign Gentiles. After the second miracle, He talked to His disciples, warning them against eating of the leaven of the Pharisees, asking them, instead to enjoy Him personally, the sole Bread coming down from heaven!

d- After the first miracle, the Lord Christ healed the deaf mute; while after the second, He healed the blind. The Lord, the fulfiller of souls, came to open up our spiritual ears, to hear His word; our tongues to sing His praises; and our eyes to be able to behold the splendor of His glory.

(2) The bread presented by the Lord to the multitude after they had been with Him for three days with nothing to eat (verse 2) could be none other than His Holy Body, risen from the dead on the third day! Whoever shares His passion, carries His Cross, and is buried with Him, would be like someone, who having fasted from the world, is being given by the Lord His own Body as life-giving Bread, the Body risen from the dead.

Some fathers believe that that Bread refers to the Word of God, or to the word of preaching of the Gospel, presented to the hungry humanity. St. Augustine says:

[What you eat, I also eat; And on what you subsist I also do; We have in heaven, a mutual store, from which we get the word of God ...God's banquet, concerns the heart and not the belly].

Pope Gregory (the Great), says:

[He did not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on their way. It is fitting for Him, who hears the word of preaching, to get a word of comfort, lest his hunger and need for the food of truth, would cause him to fall under the burden of life].

If that bread refers to the word of preaching, some scholars see in the figure 7 (7 loaves), a reference to the 70 disciples, who carried out the preaching task among the Gentiles; and to the 7 deacons (Acts 6: 3). Still several others see in the figure 7 a reference to the works of the Holy Spirit in the Church of Christ; as though that bread, which is the word of preaching, is the gift of the Holy Spirit to believers within the Church of Christ. In other words, the Holy Spirit, working in the Church, especially through the 7 sacraments, offers to us the word of God, living, active, and practicing, in our life, to lead us to perfection.

St. Augustine says: *[The 7 loaves mean the 7 works of the Holy Spirit; the 4000 men are the Church built on the 4 Gospels; and the 7 baskets with the leftover fragments are the perfection of the Church; as this figure always refers to perfection.]*

Father Theophlactius says: *[The figure 7 refers to the Holy Spirit, which consummates every thing; as our life would be consummated through the 7 days].*

St. Ambrose believes that that food refers to the strength He grants to those who believe in Him; So, while He, in His commandment, requests from us strife and perseverance, yet, He gives us the strength, lest we faint on our way. He sends strength to everyone never ignoring anyone; but if someone refrains from stretching his hand to get the strength of the inner Spirit, he would faint on his way of strife.

(3) He gave a count of the men, yet, did not ignore the women and children; and as said by St. Augustine: *[Let children eat, to grow and become children no more; and let those soft as women, get fortified]*. Actually, some scholars believe that the figure 4000 here covers all, and not just men, as was the case in the previous miracle.

(4) Concerning the 7 baskets of leftovers taken up by the disciples, that is a sign of the Messianic blessing; it refers to the 7 Churches (Rev. 1: 12 - 20) in the midst of which the Son of Man dwells, illuminates, and encourages, through the Word of the Gospel, working by His Holy Spirit in it.

It is to be noted that the word 'baskets' used here, came as the Greek 'Spiris', while, in the first miracle, it came as the Greek 'Kophinos', which means, in Arabic 'koffa'. So, if the miracle with the 7 baskets refers to the fulfillment of the Gentiles by the Savior Messiah, and the previous one refers to the fulfillment of the Jews by Him, the word 'Spiris,' meaning a regular fish basket used by all, and 'Kophinoi' which represents a special kind used by the poor Jews in Rome, show direct significance towards these accounts. For the same reason, the miracle of the 7 baskets refers to the consummation of preaching in the whole world, while in the previous one, their 12 count refers to the 12 apostles.

2- Asking for a sign from heaven:

“And the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, testing Him. But He sighed deeply in His Spirit and said, ‘Why does this generation seek a sign ? Assuredly I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation. (vv. 11, 12)

Even after the 5000 men were fed by the hands of the disciples, they did not discover the realization of the prophecies. Rather, they only saw that the disciples' hands were unclean because they were not washed before eating, according to the tradition of the elders. Even the Messiah who came and granted His disciples to offer His blessings to fulfill the multitude with the Divine gift and to collect the blessed leftover fragments was unclean in their eyes. The Lord confirmed for them that He is the Messiah, the desire of nations, and the consummation of the prophecies by feeding 4000 more. Instead of reconsidering their attitude, they added to their ignorance by asking for a sign from heaven to test Him. And as said by St. John Chrysostom: *[They asked for a sign, not to believe, but to test Him; If the adversaries had been ready to receive faith, He would have given them the sign they asked for].*

The Lord Christ wished to enter with them into heaven itself, offering Himself as the true manna, the bread from heaven, for the eternal life (Jn. 6). However, they did not seek fulfillment, but asked for a visible sign for the sake of dispute and resistance.

With that, they could not differentiate between the first coming of the Lord Christ to grant salvation to the whole world through His exalted love, and His second coming to judge the world. The sign of His first coming has been to stretch His hands in compassion and love towards every soul, especially on the Cross; while that of the second coming for judgment rocks the powers of heaven and stops the sun and the moon from giving their light, etc.

The Lord sighed deeply in His Spirit, and said: ‘Why does this generation seek a sign?’ As though, in bitterness, He sees that the generation, which should have been preaching the Gospel and teaching the world about salvation through the Cross, had deviated from that mission to testing the Lord, as did their fathers before them. The prophet Moses says:

“So He called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the contention of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not ?” (Exodus 17: 7)

And the Psalmist says:

“Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, and as in the day of trial in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me; They proved Me, though they saw My work; For forty years I was grieved with that generation.” (Psalms 95: 8 - 10)

3- A conversation around the leaven:

“And He left them, and getting into the boat again, departed to the other side. Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat. Then He charged them saying, ‘Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod” (verses 13 - 15)

(1) The evangelist revealed how the disciples were keen about following Him; So, although they collected 7 baskets of leftover fragments, yet, when they saw the Lord entering the boat, they overlooked taking bread with them; their love for the Lord drew their hearts from everything earthy. That is why St. John Saba says: *[Who tastes the sweetness of the fruit of the tree of life, then would rush towards the fruit of love of the*

stinking world?], and also says: *[Those who have not tasted the love of God, are poor and wretched; God grants those who love Him what would get them drunk with joy.]*

(2) The evangelist says, “They did not have, but just one loaf of bread” to proclaim that even the disciples, after the miracle of the feeding of the multitude, have not yet opened their eyes to realize that in their midst was “the Bread of Life” (Jn. 6:51) which fulfills the whole Church and grants it the unity of Spirit, according to the words of the apostle:

“For we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread” (1 Cor. 10: 17)

The disciples were in need of the teaching of the Lord Christ, to rid them of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod, in order to open their eyes to behold the secret of the bread, our Lord Jesus Christ.

(3) Since the disciples were still unable to understand the concept of spiritual food and to recognize the Lord Christ as the bread of life, they got confused when He asked them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. He presented them with 7 questions to reveal to them their wounds, and to lead them towards spiritual understanding, even though He did not give them the answers:

1- *“Why do you reason because you have no bread?”* (v.17)

To reveal that He is aware of their thoughts which were still not capable of rising above the material concept.

2- *“Do you not yet perceive nor understand?”* (v.17)

To exhort them to enter into the depths, to recognize who in their midst is, and what the goals of His works are.

3- *“Is your heart still hardened?”* (v.17)

To proclaim their need for a total renewal of their hearts, to carry Him inside, and to apprehend the secrets of His kingdom.

4- and 5- *“Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear?”* (v.18)

He reminds them of the word of the prophet Jeremiah, concerning the old people, *“Who have eyes and see not; and who have ears and hear not”* (Jer. 5:21). Since they have the physical senses and lack the spiritual ones, they are not able to enjoy the

heavenly concepts. It is as though He is exhorting them to seek the capabilities of the New Covenant in order to enjoy, through the new man, the heavenly concepts.

6- and 7- *"When I broke the five loaves for the five thousands, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?" They said to Him, "Twelve." "Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets, full of fragments did you take up?" And they said, "Seven." So He said to them: "How is it you do not understand?" (vv.19-21)*

He is exhorting them to recall His works, which proclaim -- through the Old Testament -- the secrets of the kingdom of God, and that remind them of the symbols and prophecies that are being realized now before their eyes. He is also asking them to look into the two miracles of feeding the thousands in order to apprehend that He is "the Bread of Heaven", Who fulfills the souls.

(4) The two evangelists Matthew (16:12) and Luke (12:1) interpret the leaven of the Pharisees as their hypocrisy; the Jews consider the leaven as a symbol of corrupting power (1 Cor 5:6-8); As for the leaven of Herod, it represents his shrewdness; he was called a 'fox' by the Lord Christ. The Pharisees shared with Herod his resistance to the Lord, pretending to defend the truth while actually they were keen on keeping their social positions. The Lord was warning His followers against hypocrisy and shrewdness, to be able to apprehend the truth through a heavenly spiritual vision.

I have already talked about the leaven of hypocrisy in our study of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. I will only present here some of St. Cyril the Great's sayings: *[Hypocrisy is hated by God and men; it never pays a reward, and never saves a soul, but actually ends in its destruction. If somebody uses hypocrisy to get away with something he has done, that would be only for a limited time, after which he would be surely exposed and defamed. He would be likened to an ugly woman, after the superficial make-up is removed from her face. Hypocrisy thus, is not the way of saints; Nothing done or said is hidden from the Divine eyes; as is written:*

"For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known." (Lk. 12: 2)

So if our talks and actions will be revealed on the day of judgement, hypocrisy would then be in vain].

4- A question around insight:

After feeding the multitude from five loaves and a few small fish, Christ proclaims that He is the secret of true fulfillment for the Church. This is accomplished through His dwelling within the Church, working His commandment in it, and the gift of His Holy Spirit. We find Him now, opening the eyes of a blind man in Bethsaida to confirm that He is also “the true secret of enlightenment. The evangelist says:

“Then He came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him, and begged Him to touch him. So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town. And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything. And He looked up and said, ‘I see men like trees, walking’. Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly. And He sent him away to his house, saying, ‘Neither go into the town, nor tell anyone in the town.’” (vv.22-26)

(1) Bethsaida was known for its lack of faith, spiritually likened to that blind man; as revealed by what the Master said addressing it:

“... Woe to you Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.” (Mt. 11: 21)

The name Bethsaida, also means "house of the valley", a symbol of the world, the valley of tears, that gave humanity the spiritual blindness, and took away from it the inner enlightenment.

Those who brought the blind man to Jesus are none other than the fathers and prophets of the Old Testament, who also brought the blind world to the Lord Christ. They presented Him to the world as a Savior to be enjoyed through prophecies and symbols, and to receive His work in the world, presenting it with the spirit of enlightenment. The disciples and apostles added to the work of the men of the Old Testament, by preaching the word to the Gentile world, bringing it to the Lord, to open its insight.

(2) *“He took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town.”* (v.23)

As the Lord Christ takes us by the hand the first thing He does in our life, is to lead us “out of town”; to carry us through His Cross, out of the T. To live, not for our own sake, but for His, He who loved us and died for us. To live by the Cross, not centered around our selves, but to receive, with love, God and His creatures within our depths, in a heart, wide enough to embrace everyone in it. Probably, that was what the apostle Paul meant by saying:

“I have been crucified with Christ: It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” (Gal 2:20)

and,

“Just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.” (1 Cor. 10: 33)

The Lord Christ leading the blind man out of the town may represent a Divine invitation to us, to *“go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing the disgrace He bore.”* (Heb. 13: 33)

(3) When healing the blind man, the Lord spat on his eyes, and then put His hands on him. The first act refers to the wisdom coming out of His mouth, and the second, to the need for His Divine hands, or His godly capabilities for the work.

It is as though, the inner insight is not based on the wisdom independent of work, or on the work independent of knowledge or Divine wisdom. Our inner enlightenment is based on our enjoying practical fellowship with God in Christ Jesus, in order to enjoy knowing Him and to walk by His Spirit. In other words, our faith is not a mental thought that we embrace, nor an ethical behavior we practice, but it is an integral life, through living faith working by love; without separation between faith and works!

(4) The Lord Christ asked Him if he saw anything, not that He needed him to know what he sees because the Lord already knows everything. Rather he did it to exhort him to believe, as He did before when He asked Adam, 'Where are you?' not to know his location, but to give him the chance to repent.

Because of his weak faith, his vision was not perfect; so he needed to ask the Lord for help. He answered saying that he sees men like trees, walking (v.24). He sees, yet

without discernment; that is why the Lord put His hands on him another time, granting him that gift, to be able to see everything clearly.

Seeing men like trees reflects his despair. He thought of everybody, as high trees moving towards heaven to present Divine fruit; while he, in his own sight, seems among them, disabled, and in need of somebody to give him support and hope, to turn into “*a green olive tree in the house of God.*” (Psalm 52:8)

(5) Granted the ability to see people clearly, He sent him to his house, as though He wished for him to go back to look into his heart, to discover in it the kingdom of heaven. And as St. John Saba says: *[Blessed is he, who has his treasure within him, and out of himself he does not get his nourishment! Blessed is he, whose sun shines in him, and does not let others see it! Blessed is he, whose ears are closed to the tunes of evil, but are open to those of the heavenly! Blessed is he who smells the fragrance of the Holy Spirit, and his body smells of it! Blessed is he, whose soul has got the sweet taste of God, and his bones acquired of His fat].*

(6) Finally, the Lord asked him to keep silent, proclaiming that what He did to him, was for the sake of love, and not to seek compliment or glory from people.

5- A question around the identity of Christ:

Christ asked the blind man what he is seeing to exhort him to ask for more, in order that he would enjoy the enlightenment of his eyes more perfectly; Now, on the way to Caesaria Philippi, in order to let His disciples apprehend and enjoy His Person, and to see Him with the enlightened eyes of faith,

*“ He asked His disciples, saying to them, ‘Who do men say that I am?’
And they answered, ‘John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah, and others,
one of the prophets’. He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’
And Peter answered and said to Him, ‘You are the Christ’. Then He
charged them that they should tell no one about Him.” (v.27-30)*

After knowing Him through a Divine proclamation, Christ asked them the above question to reveal Himself to them and to exhort them to acknowledge Him. They could obtain a better position and glorify Him more than the commoners. St. John Chrysostom says: *[He led them to a more exalted feeling and to higher thoughts concerning His*

Person, so as not to be like the rest of the common people]. And St. Jerome comments on the words of the Lord, "But who do you say that I am?" by saying: [The disciples are not ordinary men anymore, but, through Him, became gods; As though He is saying to them, 'the others, being human, thought along human lines, but you, as gods, who do you say that I am?! '

In our study of the sixth chapter, we saw that Herod thought of Him, through his troubled conscience, as John the Baptist. Others said, through their yearning for the Messianic Kingdom as a material kingdom, that He is Elijah. Still others, out of the bitterness of their souls, and as a result of the absence of prophets for the last three centuries, thought of Him as one of the prophets. All these assumptions came out of pure human feelings; But Peter, apprehended His secret, through a Divine Proclamation, and said:

"You are Christ, the Son of the living God." (Mt. 16: 16)

The following are quotations of the comments on that situation, by St. Ambrose: *[We may consider the testimonials of the multitude as useless; some thought of Him as Elijah, risen from the dead, in their belief that he would eventually come; others thought of Him as John the Baptist, although they knew for sure that he was beheaded; and still others thought of Him as one of the ancient prophets.]*

Although researching the Person of Christ is something beyond our capabilities, it is not so for the mind and wisdom of someone like St. Paul who is:

"Determined not to know anything ... except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."
(1Cor. 2:2)

What knowledge could he wish for more than the fact that He is Christ? In this very name, "Christ", Divinity is transfigured and incarnation is proclaimed, together with passion.

All the rest of the disciples recognized Him, but it was up to Peter alone to proclaim that He is "The Christ of God" (Lk. 9:20), a name that embraces everything, expressing His nature and including all His virtues.

Is it appropriate for us to raise questions concerning the way the Lord was born, when we consider Paul who is determined not to know anything except "Jesus Christ and Him crucified?..." and for Peter to proclaim that He is "the Christ of God?!" While we use

our weak human minds to research when, how, and what the Lord's greatness consists of, Paul opposes this way of thinking believing it to be destructive rather than constructive. Peter knew that everything lies in "the Son of God;" in Him is the eternity and greatness of the Father.

"The Father ... has given all things into His hands." (Jn. 3: 35)

If I come to believe that He is "The Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16:16), I should not question how He was born; yet, I should not be ignorant of the truth of His birth.

Let us, then, believe, the way Peter did, in order to be blessed, and be likewise worthy of hearing the Divine words:

"Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."

(Mt. 16: 17)

Flesh and blood do not acknowledge anything but earthliness; but he who utters the secrets of the Spirit, does not depend on the teachings of flesh and blood, but on Divine proclamation.

I wish you do not depend on flesh and blood as sources of instructions, lest you yourself would be flesh and blood;

"But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him." (1 Cor. 6: 17)

God says:

"My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh." (Genesis 6: 3)

May the Lord not allow the listeners to be flesh and blood, but to become foreigners to the lust of flesh and blood, in order that each one of them would proclaim:

"I will not fear, what man (that is flesh and blood) can do to me."

(Psalm 56: 4)

Whoever conquers the flesh, will become one of the pillars of the Church. If he can attain what Peter did , he will also enjoy the limitless gifts of God.

We should ask ourselves, "Why did the multitude think only of Him as Elijah, Jeremiah, or John the Baptist?" They probably saw Elijah in Him because the former was taken up to heaven. However, Christ is not like Elijah because He was not taken up to heaven, but rather came from it; Elijah was taken up to heaven, while Christ

“Who, being in very nature of God, did not consider equality with God, something to be grasped” (Phil. 2:6)

Elijah took revenge with the fire he requested from God (1 Kings 18:38) while the Lord Christ longed for the salvation of those who did Him wrong, not for their destruction.

Why did they think of Him as Jeremiah? Probably because,
“before he was born he was sanctified” (Jer. 1:4).

But Christ is not like Jeremiah: The latter was sanctified, while the former is the One Who sanctifies.

Why did people think of Him as John the Baptist? This is probably because John knew Christ while he was still in his mother’s womb. Still, Christ is not like John. John worshipped while still in the womb while Christ is the One towards whom the worship is directed; John baptized with water while Christ baptized with the Holy Spirit. John proclaimed repentance while Christ absolved sins.

Finally, *“He warned them not to tell anyone about Him” (v.30)*

Christ did this in order to let what is written about His crucifixion be consummated because if they had known that He is the Lord of glory, they would never have crucified Him.

St. Ambrose offers another interpretation that states that the Lord wanted the preaching about Him being the Christ to be done after His crucifixion and resurrection. He wanted to be known to them as the crucified Christ who rose from the dead. St. Ambrose says, *["He warned the disciples not to preach about Him simply as the Son of God, but as the crucified Son of Man.."]*

This is the splendor of faith, to apprehend the truth of the Cross of Christ! It is only the Cross of Christ that is of benefit to me,

“... by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”
(Gal. 6: 14)

If the world has been crucified to me, I should know that as long as the world is dead, I should not love it. I should know the corruption that is in the world so as to avoid its filthy odor, to escape from it, as though from plague, before it harms me.

6- Proclamation about the Cross:

Certain scholars believe that the Gospel according to St. Mark could be divided into two main consummated parts. The first part starts from its beginning up to just before the question posed by the Lord Christ to His disciples concerning what the people think of His Person. The second starts by that question and continues until the end of the chapter. The first part proclaims the Person of the Lord Christ, the Worker and Teacher, who serves humanity through love and compassion, accompanied by the shadow of the Cross. With the second part, the actual stage of the crucifixion starts. He begins it by proclaiming His Person to the extent that sustains them until crucifixion is consummated, to be glorified by His practical love. He would then reveal to them the splendor of His glory through His resurrection, His appearances, his ascension, and particularly, by sending His Holy Spirit that would tell them every thing.

What took place between Him and His disciples, was a personal talk, an introduction to the proclamation of His crucifixion; as the evangelist says:

“And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He spoke this word openly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter saying, ‘Get behind Me Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.’” (vv.31-33)

The apostle Peter was able, through a Divine proclamation, to recognize “Jesus” as “Christ” on His way to the towns of Caesarea Philippi (v.27), the center of Baal and Greek pagan worship and Roman authority. Yet, it was not possible for Peter to apprehend the Person of Christ as a Redeemer to be crucified for the sake of humanity which he will raise with Him because that was completely rejected by the Jewish way of thinking. Thus the Lord Christ hastened to correct that concept.

We can summarize the Jewish concept concerning the coming of the Messiah in the following points:

a- Prior to the coming of the Messiah, there would be a great tribulation upon the whole world, resulting in horrible devastation, accompanied by wars, disturbances, and blood shed, ... all of which are likened to the labor of a woman delivering a baby.

b- In the midst of all this devastation that affects the lives of humans, animals, birds, and even fish, the prophet Elijah appears to prepare the way to the Messiah. The appearance of Elijah is considered such an essential part to the extent that the Jews, in their celebration of the Passover, used to leave a vacant chair for Elijah. They called it 'Elijah's chair,' as they were expecting Elijah to enter unexpectedly during one of these celebrations.

c- The Messiah Himself would not come humanly born, but as a full grown mighty man, to deliver His people.

d- His coming would turn kings against Him, cause a war in which they would be defeated and the Messiah would be the greatest conqueror in the history of mankind, and would overcome His enemies.

e- Having prevailed over the Gentiles, He would begin cleansing Jerusalem, or a new Jerusalem, with new columns. He would come down from heaven, where Jews from all over the world gather as masters of humanity, before whom the rest of the remaining world would bow in humiliation. The Jews would then live in such great jubilation that the dead would rise to share that joy. By this fanatic, materialistic way of thinking, the Jews see how eternal peace will prevail in the world. With such a fanatic vision, it would be impossible for them to accept the mystery of the Cross or the opening of the gate of faith to the Gentiles. That is why Peter rebuked his Master when He talked about the Cross and suffering.

St. Ambrosius comments on the words of the Lord Christ to His disciples concerning suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection, saying, [*"In appreciation of the strife required by His disciples, in order to be able to believe in His suffering and resurrection, He preferred to confirm those issues to them personally, to let that be a start and cause, for the initiation of faith in them."*]

It is to be noted here that the evangelist, while telling us how the Master told His disciples of His commitment to suffer, be rejected, killed, and resurrected after three days,

does not tell us the details of that teaching. Did He talk to them about the prophecies of the Old Testament or did He present to them the theological concept of His work of salvation?!

The Lord Christ revealed to them that it would not be possible to fulfill salvation through the death of anyone except that of the Son of Man, the only One capable of putting to death itself, and of rising again. St. Ambrose says: [*"Nobody has reached the level of greatness that qualifies him to absolve the sins of the whole world; neither 'Enoch,' nor 'Abraham,' nor 'Isaac,' who surrendered himself to death, yet was unable to forgive sins.*

Who is He, by whose death all sins are put to death? Nobody of the congregation or the leaderships can do that. So the Father chose the Son, the Son of God, who is above all, to offer Himself for everyone's sake. He Himself wished to die, as He is stronger than death and capable of saving others; He rose from the dead without help, conquered death without support from man or any other creature; he rose to abolish slavery to lusts, as He did not acknowledge the chains of death"].

7- His proclamation about the fellowship of the Cross:

The Lord Christ did not only rebuke Peter for not accepting the Cross of the Lord, but He also invited him and his fellow disciples to the fellowship of the Cross with Him, saying to them:

"Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (v.34-38)

a- He asked them to bear the Cross with Him, through denying themselves. Self-denial means not getting involved in oneself by worrying about the future, fearing sickness, tribulation, or death. It means to be very strict with the 'self,' refraining from

enjoying the lusts of the flesh. St. John Chrysostom says: [*"He did not say 'Man should withdraw from himself,' but went beyond that to say, 'He should deny himself.' To withdraw from oneself is to have nothing to do with it; he faces danger and looks at it as though it is somebody else who is facing it; but, to 'deny oneself' is to take up the cross, that is to say, to accept, even disgraceful death. "*]

We deny ourselves, when we avoid what is old in ourselves, striving to gain always what is new, *"until we come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."* (Ephes. 4:13).

St. Augustine says: [*"If man, through his love for himself, is lost, surely through denying himself, he will be found! ... Man should withdraw from himself, not for worldly affairs, but to get attached to God."*]

b- Having exhorted His disciples to deny themselves and to take up the cross, He offered them the reward; Whoever acknowledges Him through his life and takes up the cross, will receive the fellowship of His glories on the final coming of Christ. On the other hand, for him who is ashamed of His Cross and rejects His commandment in this world, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him on the day of His great glory and will count him as someone unknown to Him. As expressed by St. Jerome: [*"God does not know the evil man, but the righteous"*].

The Lord Christ, describing His final coming says:

"When He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." (v.38)

And as said by St. Ambrose: [*"To reveal that the greatness and glory of the Father are the same as the greatness and glory of the Son ... The angels come in humility, but He comes glorified! They come as followers, but He will sit on His throne! They stand, but He sits! And if we use the language of our daily human relationships, we can say, He is the Judge, while they are only courthouse staff."*]

CHAPTER 9

THE PRACTICAL KINGDOM

As the evangelist St. Mark presents to us the Person of Christ, ministering for the sake of humanity, He, approaching the incidents of the Cross, reveals to us His practical Kingdom, for which He is working, to grant it to His believers:

- | | |
|---|----------|
| 1- The promise to behold the Kingdom of God verse I | |
| 2- The kingdom and the transfiguration | 2 -- 13 |
| 3- The kingdom and overcoming the devil | 14 -- 29 |
| 4- The kingdom and the Cross | 30 -- 32 |
| 5- The kingdom and humility | 33 -- 37 |
| 6- The kingdom and the spacious heart | 38 -- 50 |

1- The promise to behold the kingdom of God:

“And He said to them, ‘Assuredly I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power’ (verse 1)

That promise came as a consummation of the talk of the Lord Christ, about the taking up of the Cross, and the care of man for the salvation of his soul, and the enjoyment of the kingdom of God, on the day of the final coming of the Son of Man. ... And now, some people may ask: How was that promise realized? Were there any of the contemporaries of the Lord Christ, who did not taste death till they see the kingdom of God come with power ?

(1) Some believe that that promise was realized, when three of the disciples enjoyed the transfiguration of the Lord Christ, especially that the mention of the transfiguration directly followed that promise. Transfiguration, in its truth, is the enjoyment of the glory Divine splendor of the Lord Christ, to the extent, the disciples could stand.

St. Ambrose says: [Peter, James, and John beheld the glory of resurrection; so they did not know death].

(2) Some believe, that “the kingdom of God”, coming with power, is nothing but the preaching of the Gospel among the Gentiles; the Church of the New Covenant is called “The kingdom of God”. Some of the disciples beheld that great glory, while

still in flesh, as they enjoyed the day of the Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down in the upper room, and beheld the old temple being destroyed, and the mission of preaching setting forth to many of the capitals of the pagan world ... They saw the kingdom of God being proclaimed within the life of men against the vain glory of the world.

(3) Others believe that that Divine promise is always holding, being enjoyed by believers

in every generation; when their souls enter into the inner splendor of God’s glory; the kingdom is proclaimed in them, not tasting the death of sin, or getting overcome by the devil (death). St. John Saba says: [Blessed is the soul that kept itself free from offenses; entered to within itself, and beheld God reclining on His throne, which is the mind; and received from Him a new commandment, that is the spiritual love, which is the consummation of the law].

St. Ambrose presents to us the same concept, as he proclaims that man, in his weakness, is in need, not only of an eternal promise, but to be able to taste a (deposit) of that promise, here in this present life. What the Master promised here, He presents to every man standing with Him, that is enjoying the presence of the Lord and fellowship with Him; thus, never tasting the death of spirit, but enjoying the power of Divine kingdom, in his present life here, as a (deposit) of the eternal kingdom. Of his words:

[While drawing our attention to the benefit we get for despising the things of this world, the Lord supports our human weakness, by presenting us with a reward in the present world.

Surely, it is very difficult for you to take up the Cross, to subject your life to dangers and your body to death, to forsake your self, with the hope of possessing what you do not have here. It is tough for humans to live on hope alone, facing dangers, for the sake of the blessings of the coming life. That is why, our good and compassionate God, not wishing that anyone should fall under the yoke of despair or depression, supports weakness by present goodies, and supports strength by future ones ... (in other words, He helps us here

with a sort of (deposit) of the inner kingdom and rewards us, in eternity, with the perfection of the glory of eternal kingdom). If we do not have fear of death, let us stand where Christ is, to hear Him say to us:

“Assuredly, I say to you, that there are some standing here, who will not taste death ...” (verse 1)

Whoever gets the fellowship with Christ, will not taste death ... The body will die, for the spirit to stay alive.

What does “taste death” mean ? There are some who taste the bread of tears; while others eat of the poisons of the dragon; As to us, we have the true bread which came down from heaven; Whoever keeps the words of God, will not taste the bread of death.

Who is he, who will not taste death, when there would be no resurrection unless one dies ? ! There are some who are dead, while still living; as there are people living, even after their death. It is said: “

“ Let death seize them; let them go down alive into hell” (Psalm 55: 16)

Those who go down alive into hell, are the sinners, while there are those whose life comes to an end; as it is said:

*“I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob;
God is not the God of dead, but the God of the living”* (Mt. 22: 32)

Peter did not die, as ‘the gates of Hades shall not prevail against him’; nor did James and John, the ‘sons of thunder’, who beheld the exalted glory; the things of this world could not subject them, but they crushed them under their feet. Now, be like Peter and the sons of thunder ! How ? When you do not care for the earthlies, but rest your head on Christ’s chest; Let the earth tremble before you, before it gets hold of you; Subject the body by the power of the Spirit; You would also be a son of thunder, if you become the son of the Church, to hear the voice of Christ addressing you from the Cross: “Behold your mother”].

2- The kingdom and the transfiguration:

Having promised His disciples that there are some, standing with Him, who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God come with power, He did not designate the names of those who are going to enjoy that privilege, to protect them from envy or

jealousy. And now, we see Him take Peter, James and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves (verse 2), to proclaim to them the splendor of His Deity.

We have already dealt with the incident of transfiguration , with some comments by certain saintly fathers, in our study of the Gospel according to St. Matthew (17: 1-8).

Here, I shall mention just some simple and short quotations:

(1) St. John Chrysostom believes that what the evangelists wrote concerning that episode, was confined to what the language can express. What took place was beyond human imagination, saying, [If He had become shining like the sun, the disciple would not have fallen on their faces, as they are used to the sun every day of their life; but He became shining with a greater splendor than the sun ...; so they could not stand it, they fell].

(2) The evangelist says:

“Now, after six days Jesus took Peter, James and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves: (verse 2)

We had already said that; six days passing, before the enjoyment of the transfiguration, refers to that, our strife on earth should be consummated before we get our reward of entering the fellowship of the Divine glory. St. Ambrose sees in these six days, a reference to 6000 years to pass before reaching the great resurrection. While Origen sees in them a reference to our real rest in the Lord, through crossing the six days of creation, and entering into the seventh day, or the spiritual Sabbath.

How beautiful are the words of St. Ambrose, inviting us to enjoy the inner transfiguration: [Whoever rises above the world, and abides in the highness, will look forward to the fruits of eternity, that of the anticipated resurrection. So, let us step over the works of life, in order to be able to behold God, face-to-face.

As to those three who enjoyed God’s love, and ascended with Him up on a high mountain to behold His splendor: Peter, James, and John; they, as I have already said, refer to faith, working in love; as without living faith working in love, we can not behold His glory. St. Abrosius noticed that that gift was presented to them, after the personal talk that took place between the Lord and His disciples, who, as proclaimed, through the apostle Peter, is Christ; as though the transfiguration was a reward for that proclamation. St. Ambrose says: [They will enjoy the blessings of resurrection, those who proclaimed

that He is Christ; Therefore the ungodly and sinners shall not stand in the congregation of the righteous (Psalm 1: 5), but, shall be punished by the judgment under which they have fallen]. The same St. Believes that choosing three, is an opening of the door to God's mercies, and to enjoyment of His glories, for mankind, with no discrimination between a Jew and a Gentile; as three represent the three sons of Noah, from whose descendants, the whole human race originated. This same line of thinking was adopted by St. Hilary, the Bishop of Poitier.

St. Ambrose sees in choosing three of the disciples, a reference to the need for belief in the Holy Trinity, saying, [Nobody can behold the glory of resurrection, unless He or She, strongly and steadfastly, believes in the secret of Trinity].

Choosing three disciples, probably refers to our need for the life based on Christ Jesus, risen from the dead on the third day.; By that new life, we ascend to the mountain of Tabor, to rise above death, enjoying the splendor of resurrection, working within us.

(3) In a quotation from St. John Chrysostom, it was claimed that the features of the Lord Christ, during His transfiguration, remained the same; yet the splendor of His glory was proclaimed. The Lord Christ, though remaining in body, yet His Body, carried a new nature full of splendor and glory. We also, in the general resurrection, will still carry the body, that shared our strife; having the same features, but marked with the mark of the exalted glory, granted by God, to fit the eternal heavenly life.

(4) What does the evangelist mean by saying:

“He was transfigured before them”

(verse 2) ? but, that the glory proclaimed through His transfiguration, was not a new thing for Him, nor an external gift given to Him; but, it was rather, a proclamation of a hidden glory, that became visible before them at that moment. ... That change has not been a matter concerning the nature of the Master, but concerning the eyes of the disciples, which were opened to behold what they could behold.

How much is our need to sit with the Lord Christ, apart by ourselves, within our inner depths, to get our spiritual eyes opened, to behold the crucified, of whom it was said:

“As a root out of dry ground; He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him” (Isaiah 53: 2)

Although, *“He is fairer than the sons of men”* (Psalm 45: 2)

Also said of Him: “*Despised and rejected by men*” (Isaiah 53: 3)

Although He is “*The desire of all nations*” (Hagg. 2: 7)

In that concern, St. Ambrose says: [All these things, carry true secrets and meanings, that vary in size, smaller or bigger, according to your capability; If you are not cautious in your ascent to the summit, no wisdom, nor secrets, nor the glories of God’s word and beauty will be revealed to you, but you will only see the word of *God, as in flesh*, “*with no form or comeliness*” (Isaiah 53: 2), as a man exhausted with passion, that He bears for the sake of our weakness; as a word clothed by the garments of the letter, that do not go up to the level of the Spirit].

(5) “*His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them*” (verse 3)

What are these clothes on the Master, shining with splendor, but His Church, of which is said by St. Augustine: [That is the mark of true believers: exalted splendor] and by St. Gregory (the Great): [For, in the splendor of high heavens, those shining with the life of righteousness, attach to Him, as do His clothes].

St. Ambrose gives us another interpretation for these splendid clothes, saying:

[Probably, the clothes of the Word, are the sermons on the Holy Scriptures, as they are garments of Divine thought. Thus, as He appeared to Peter, James and John, in a different posture, with shining white clothes, so the meanings of the Holy Scriptures are revealed to you, becoming like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them]. It is as though, as our thoughts rise up with our Lord Jesus Christ, to dwell in us, His words become transfigured in us, with unutterable heavenly splendor, unlike any done by an earthly launderer, as it is the work of the heavenly One, which is the Holy Spirit, the forgiver of sins, who cleanses us by the blood of the only- begotten Son, to be made whiter than snow (Psalm 50).

(6) The appearance of Moses and Elijah, carries several meanings, that we have already discussed. St. John Chrysostom presents to us an explanation for it, that, when the multitude said that He is Elijah or one of the prophets, He intended to appear to His disciples together with Moses and Elijah, in order to demonstrate to them the difference between Himself and His servants. Also, because He was accused of being a breaker of the law, and a blasphemer, taking on Himself the glory of the Father, He intended to bring

with Him Moses the receiver of the law, and Elijah, the zealous for the glory of God, to proclaim the slander of His accusers.

He might also have intended, through their appearance prior to crucifixion, to proclaim to His disciples, that they should not have fear of the Cross, as He accepted it by His own will, or else it would not have happened.... ; as He is far greater than Moses, who rescued the children of Israel from the hand of Pharaoh, and than Elijah, who asked for, and got, fire from heaven, that consumed the two leaders of fifties together with their men.

Peter wanted to erect three material tabernacles for protection; but a cloud came and overshadowed them, to teach him, that at resurrection, we are in no need for human-made tabernacles, nor for material houses, because we would be protected by the glory of God Himself, that brings no dark shadows, but grants splendor. St. Ambrose says: [The source of that shade, is the Spirit of God, that does not darken the hearts of men, but reveals the hidden things. That, we also find in the words of the angel: “The power of the highest will overshadow you” (Lk. 1: 35). That cloud did not materialize because of the humidity of the smoky mountains, nor of the vapor of the air; it did not cover the sky with horrible darkness, but was a shining cloud that causes no rain or flood, but its dew, sent by the Word of God, would cover the hearts of men with faith.]

(8) *“A voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, hear Him’. Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves”* (verses 7, 8)

What does the voice of the Father wish, but, for us to receive the incarnated Word of God in our life; to hear Him, and to abide in Him, to become, ourselves, beloved children of the Father The Father desires, is to see us glorified in His Son. And as St. Ambrose says: [As we behold the glory of God with uncovered faces, we will, ourselves acquire that same countenance (2 Cor. 3: 8)].

We also have a beautiful comment on that gospel phrase by St. Ambrose, saying, [On hearing that voice, after seeing three persons, there was Jesus alone; at the beginning, they saw three, but at the end they saw only one. By perfect faith, all will be one, as requested by Jesus from the Father; *“that they all be one”* (Jn. 17: 21); Not only Moses and Elijah, to be one in Christ, but we also, to be one in the body of the One Christ (Rom. 12: 5) ... That, may also refer to the fact, that the law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah),

have their origin in the Word. ...; As the goal of the law is Christ “*for righteousness to everyone who believes*” (Rom. 10: 4)].

Therefore the goal of the transfiguration, is for all believers, to gather as members in the one body, through abiding in Christ, and enjoyment of membership in His one body; thus to be counted truly, as beloved children of God, glorified in Him.

(9) “*Now, as they came down from the mountain, He commanded them that they should tell no one the things they had seen, till the Son of Man had risen from the dead*” (verse 9)

St. Hilary, the Bishop of Poitier explains the cause of that commandment, saying, [He commanded them to keep what they saw, until they are filled with the Holy Spirit, to testify to the spirituals]. That commandment, no doubt confused them; They knew for sure that He is Christ, and bore testimony to that; and according to the Jewish thought, the Messiah does not die; So, what did he mean by saying, “till the Son of Man had risen from the dead” ? !

They did not doubt that He is Christ, but began to doubt what they received through the pharisees and the scribes concerning Christ; that is why they asked:

“*Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first ?* “
(verse 11)

By that question, they probably express how the Jews were preoccupied by Elijah, as a preparatory of the way for the undying Christ. They believed that Elijah was still working for the sake of Israel, while he is in heaven, and that he would appear, three days before the coming of Christ: The first day, he would stand on the top of a high mountain, to raise a lamentation for the destroyed land, and to proclaim that peace would come on it; On the second day, that good fortune would come to it; and on the third day, that salvation would be granted to it; Then, Christ would finally come to save Israel. ... Therefore, there is no place for death nor resurrection !

The Lord Christ drew them away from their material thinking, as to the coming of Elijah and Christ; confirming that all that the fathers and prophets desired, are being realized in their days; that Elijah came, but not according to the material literal thought; and that the Messiah also came; but He will not reign materialistically, but, through passion and the Cross. The Lord says:

“Elijah does come first, and restores all things. And how is it written concerning the Son of Man, that He must suffer many many things and be treated with contempt ? But I say to you that Elijah has also come, and they did to him whatever they wished, as it is written of him” (verses 12, 1)

As though He is saying to them, they put all their hope on the coming of Elijah and Christ. Elijah did come; and instead of listening to him, they killed him; And Christ did also come; and instead of believing in Him they are going to kill Him. In other words, the Lord Christ demands from them to reconsider their way of thinking; to apprehend matters through spiritual concept and new faith.

Elijah did come; the angel says, concerning John the Baptist:

“He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Lk. 1: 17)

And as the scholar Origen says, that it is John, who carries the characters of Elijah, and not his person. Father Theophlactius also says: [John rebuked iniquity; He was as zealous and a hermit as Elijah; but they did not listen to him as being Elijah, but murdered him in a vicious way, cruelly beheading him.]. St. Ambrose says: [Both

John and Elijah dwelt in the wilderness; the ravens fed the first; the second, in the wilderness treaded upon all luxuries, loved poverty and despised wealth. Elijah did not seek to please King Ahab; and John despised the favors of King Herod. The mantle of Elijah divided the water of the river Jordan (2 Kings 2: 14); and John turned it into a wash basin to grant salvation. Elijah appears with the Lord in His glory; and John dwells with the Lord on earth. Elijah would come prior to the second coming of the Lord; and John come before His first coming. Elijah brought rain upon earth after three years of draught; and John cleansed the dust off our bodies in the water of faith along a period of three years. If you may ask me: what are these three years ? I will answer you by what is written:

“For three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none” (Lk. 13: 7)

The first year is the time of the fathers, when the harvest reached a level not to be realized again; the second year is that of Moses and the prophets; then the third year is when our God and Savior came,

“To preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Lk. 4: 10)]

3- The kingdom and overcoming the devil:

While the Lord Christ led three of His disciples up to a high mountain, to proclaim to them His kingdom coming with power, we see some of the disciples standing helplessly before an unclean mute spirit; until the Master came to reveal to them the need for fast and prayers, as the ways in the struggle against the devil and to overcome him by the Lord, the grantor of victory. Thus the kingdom is not just a revelation to be enjoyed by the disciples on the Mount of Tabor, but it is also the fruit of spiritual strife against the devil, by the Lord, the conqueror. In this work, it is to be noticed:

(1) While Peter, on the mountain, desired to stay there (verse 5), to enjoy the glory of Christ and the heavenly revelation, the Master led him and the other two disciples down, to see a great multitude and scribes around the other disciples disputing with them (verse 14) ... The reason for that dispute was because the disciples were unable to cast out an unclean spirit from a young man suffering since his childhood (21).

How wonderful for a believer to sit alone with his Lord, in his room, as on the Mount of Tabor, To enjoy spiritual meditation and heavenly comfort; he would desire to stay all his life in that heavenly revelation. Yet, as long as we are in the flesh, we have to get down to the field, to work for the sake of every suffering soul; No wonder, that even hermits and monks, care for the salvation of souls; St. John Saba, the famous hermit says: [Whoever hates a sinner, would be rejected by God].

Spiritual ministry, is an integral part of the life of a believer, whatever his position in the Church is: a priest, a monk, or one of the congregation; Only the ways of conducting that spiritual ministry would differ !

(2) *“He saw a great multitude around them, and scribes disputing with them”*
(verse 14)

That gospel is not portraying a particular moment, but is rather recording an incessant state of affairs; All the time, the Lord Christ is looking to see a great multitude around His disciples, simply eager to share the gift of Christ to them; and to see, as well adversary scribes disputing with them. The Lord, then, would always grant His Church the

ability to fulfill the multitude of the gifts of its Master, and to stand fast before its adversaries.

We should not be disturbed, feeling the great responsibility of the Church towards the multitude of hungry and thirsty humanity, that seek fulfillment and satisfaction; and concerning those opposing the truth in every way; because the Bridegroom of the Church is dwelling in its midst, fulfilling the hungry, and overcoming the adversaries. That is why the Psalmist says:

“God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved” (Psalm 46: 5)

And the Lord Himself, commands us”

“But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you” (Mt. 10: 19, 20)

(3) The Lord Christ rebuked His disciples for their inability to cast out the unclean spirit:

“O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you ? How long shall I bear with you?” (verse 19)

He rebuked them for their little faith; then He took over the task Himself. He is the One responsible for the Church, being His bride, rebuking its ministers for any lapse in their faith or their performance, then taking over the task Himself. ... Let us put all our works before Jesus our Lord, for, even if He rebukes us for any weakness on our part, yet, He would consummate every defect in us.

(4) Having rebuked His disciples, He demanded that the young man with the unclean spirit be brought to Him.

“When he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth” (verse 20)

why did He allow the spirit to convulse him ? The Master does not bear to see someone suffering; and yet, He let that poor fellow suffer for a short time, in order to persuade his father to believe. According to St. John Chrysostom. The father said:

“If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us” (verse 22)

The Lord responded, telling him that the key to healing is in the hands of man, if he believes, saying to him:

“If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes” (verse 23)

In faith with humility, the father cried out and said in tears:

“ Lord, I believe; help my unbelief” (verse 24)

Thus, the Lord Christ, allowed the son to suffer for a little while, to reveal his father’s belief, to motivate him further to humility, to ask God to help his unbelief; and also to proclaim the authority of man through belief.

The Lord Christ probably also allowed that, in order to expose the cruelty of the devil and his soldiers; and as said by father Theophlactius: [He allowed the son to get agitated, to expose the evil of the devil who could have destroyed him, if the Lord had not rescued him]. For that same reason, the Master asked the father:

“ ‘How long has this been happening to him ?’, And he said, ‘From Childhood; and often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him’ (verses 21, 22)

The evil one has no mercy for a child or an old man; for man or woman, but is eager to push all into the fire of lusts, or to draw them into the whirlpools of the world to destroy them. He always fights us with contradictories, like water and fire; if we escape a trap, he sets up another. Anyhow, if the devil is throwing us into water or

fire to destroy us, our Lord Jesus is presenting us with His Holy Spirit, through the water of Baptism, to extinguish the evil fire by His Divine fire, and to cancel the corruptness of the water of the enemy by the Holy Jordan !

(5) How amazing is the love of the Lord Christ. In the midst of His mighty works, He demonstrates the virtues of others, however imperceptible they might be ... He healed the young man, yet, He was keen on demonstrating the love of his father, his belief, and also his humility. I say, I wish we have a heart like that of that father, towards every suffering soul, not to rest before we present it, in the spirit of humility and loving faith, to Him who is capable of saving it. Father theophlactius says:

[Whoever binds himself by love, with his neighbor, would be to him like salt, and would be in peace with him].

(6) That father, who cries out with tears for the rescue of his son, represents the soul of every believer, who found the Lord and knew His amazing salvation; he would not have peace with the suffering of denying souls that fell into the captivity of the evil one “from childhood”, that came into to the world from the beginning, bearing the serious sin, saying with the Psalmist:

“I was conceived in iniquities, and in sins my mother conceived me” (Psalm 50)

That son, probably also, refer to the Gentiles, who lived from childhood, under the authority of the evil one, through the pagan iniquities.

(7) Pope Gregory (the Great) comments on the phrase:

“He became as one dead, so that many said, ‘He is dead’ “ (verse 26)

by saying: [Whoever is delivered from the authority of the evil spirit, is counted as dead; because having been subjected to lusts of the flesh, then putting that sort of life to death, he appears to the world as one dead. Those who do not know how to live according to the Spirit, count him, who does not walk according to lusts of the flesh, as completely dead]. Such is the perception of the world, up to the present day, of the spiritual people, considering them as dead, being deprived of the niceties of life !

(8) When He had come into a house, His disciples asked Him privately, ‘Why could we not cast him out? ‘, so he said to them:

“This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting” (verse 29)

St. John Chrysostom says: [They were afraid that they probably have lost the gift they were granted, namely, the authority over unclean spirits].

Truly, the disciples have got that free authority; yet, they need to get it kindled through life of piety, by prayer and fasting, to enjoy a deep fellowship with God in His Son.

St. John Saba tells us about the activity of prayer, saying: [The key to the safe is in your hands, to give and take], [Sanctify your bed by prayers; the Holy Spirit will make the members of your body smell like sweet fragrance]. He also speaks to us about fasting in moderation, saying: [Do not overfill your stomach, lest adultery would torture you; and do not weaken your body, lest those who hate you would rejoice. Do every thing in moderation, to be able to walk the royal way, without fear].

4- The kingdom and the Cross:

As the events of crucifixion were approaching, several times the Lord took His disciples aside, to confirm to them the necessity of His rejection, crucifixion and resurrection Indeed, the last time, Peter rebuked Him (8: 32), But now, they did not understand what He was saying, and were afraid to ask Him (verse 32); It was not possible for human thought to appreciate the idea of establishing the kingdom of God upon the tree of disgrace (the Cross) ! That Cross which the disciples could not bear to hear about, once they tasted it and apprehended its activity in them, they loved, and gladly and joyfully carried it with their crucified Bridegroom.

St. Augustine says: [There is nothing greater and more amazing, than the portrait of our Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God ... who had conquered the whole world, not by military might, but by the (foolishness) of the Cross (1 Cor.) ! ...; He raised Himself on the Cross to subject all spirits]. St. (Mar) Ephram, the Syrian, says: [On the same tree, the devil used to kill us, the Lord raised Himself to save us].

5- The kingdom and humility:

If the Master has established for us the way of salvation through His Cross, contrary to what was expected by humans, He, in His love, desires to carry us with Him along that way through humility.

The world thought that dignity and authority are the ways to the kingdom; but the Cross is proclaiming that humility is the true way.; That is why, as the disciples were disputing among themselves on the road, who would be the greatest among them (verse 34), the Lord called the twelve and said to them:

“If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.

Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when

He had taken him in His arms, He said to them: ‘Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives

Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me’ “ (verses 35 - 37)

The Lord Christ placed His hand on our ancient human wound, which is the love of man for dignity and authority. He exposed our weakness, offering Himself as a role model and a remedy ! He started by exposing the wound, when He asked them, what was it they

disputed among themselves on the road, in order to proclaim that He is aware of every thought they harbor within their hearts. Then, He administered the remedy through His teaching about the spiritual concept of greatness, through humility that is mixed with love. ... He presented them with a practical demonstration, by taking in His arms a child, in order to exhort them to receive humanity with the spirit of love, as a child, they take in their arms and wash his feet; turning themselves into servants and not into people of authority. But, for others, he added that “whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me”, although He is One with the Father ! In love mixed with obedience, the Son puts the Father ahead of Him, although they never separate !

The following are some quotations of the sayings of saintly fathers, concerning the true ministry and the spirit of humility:

+ The disciples, on the road, disputed among themselves, who would be the greatest?

But the Lord Christ, Himself has come to teach us humility. Haughtiness brings about trouble, but in humility is comfort !

(St. Jerome)

+ He wants us, not to take over exaltation for ourselves, but to reach up for it through humility. How great is humility; It earns for itself the dwelling of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

(Fr. Theophlactius)

+ He exhorted them to acquire humility and simplicity, demonstrating in that child, purity from jealousy, from vain glory, and from love of authority.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ Humility exalted Moses, but the proud were swallowed by the earth.

+ God does not dwell in a lover of greatness; so also should you !

+ Humility is a soil sown with virtues; If humility is uprooted, all virtues would be destroyed.

+ Our great fathers paved for us the way, by being clothed with humility, which is the robe of Christ. With it they rejected the devil, and put him in the chains of darkness.

+ Put on humility all the time, to turn yourself into a dwelling place for God.

(Father John Saba)

6- The Kingdom and the spacious heart:

Having spoken to us about the Divine kingdom, and how we should minister to it through the Cross, the Lord Christ, in order to avoid our taking it in a negative way, revealed here, the commitment of the children of the kingdom, to minister with a spacious heart. For if the Lord Christ, Himself, came to the Cross, for humanity, with a spacious heart, it would be fitting for His children to follow His example.

“John said to Him: ‘Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us, casting out demons in your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us’ “ (verse 38)

Most probably, St. John did not forbid him, out of jealousy or envy, but because he desired that that man would follow the Lord and get to meet Him, not just use His name to cast out demons. But the Lord said to John:

“Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My Name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us, is on our side. For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My Name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward” (verses 39- 40)

That talk reveals that that man who was casting out demons, was not against Christ, neither by mouth nor by heart; but was working for His sake with a true faith, although he did not have the chance for an obvious fellowship. Our faith should never be based on bigotry and love of control of others, but rather on a spaciousness of heart, and on unity, as long as all are working through a straightforward belief. Our Church ecumenical unity, is not based on congregations, but on the unity of living faith.

We notice here, that the Lord was conservative in His words, as there are also, those who work powers in the name of Christ, but harbor evil in their hearts, as for example heretics who cause dissensions, and are evil in their own lives, of whom the Lord says

“Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ “ (Mt. 7: 22, 23)

With such heart, humble and spacious with love, we should walk, without stumbling others, and at the same time, not to get stumbled by others ... That is to say, let us have a spacious heart with love, but not on the expense of the salvation of our little brothers, nor of that of our own souls. He warns against causing these little ones to stumble, saying,

“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it should be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea” (verse 42)

In other words, it is fitting for us to have wise hearts, to bear the weaknesses of others as though they were little ones, for whom we should have compassion, and should not cause them to stumble in faith. Pope Gregory (the Great), contemplates in that phrase, saying, that the millstone refers to a layman who preoccupies himself with affairs of this world, going around himself as does a millstone, with no goal or rest. As to being thrown into the sea, that refers to the severest of punishments; that means, it would be better for him, who puts on the garment of preaching work or ministry, and causes these little ones to stumble, to forsake his mission to turn into a layman; for then, even if he gets the severest of punishments, it would still be better for him, than to cause others to stumble while being a minister; his suffering would be undoubtedly more bearable.

As much as we should have a spacious heart with love, and avoid causing these little ones to stumble, we should also wisely, escape from those who could cause us to stumble, yet, without judging them; the Lord says:

“And if your hand makes you sin, cut it off; It is better for you to enter into life maimed, than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” (verse 43)

And what he is saying of the hand, he says, spiritually, of the foot and eye. We have already discussed the spiritual concept of the hand, the foot, and the eye; I shall only include here, the following phrase by St. John Chrysostom: [He is not talking here of our body members, but of our intimate friends, whom we consider indispensable to us, as our own body members; nothing could harm us like a corrupt and evil friendship].

Finally, He ends His talk on the activity of a Christian, likening his spacious heart, to the salt, that seasons against corruption, saying,

“For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it ? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace in one another” (verses 49, 50)

As the salt, loses its identity, if it loses its capability to season food, so also a Christian would lose his identity as a Christian, if he loses his love to, and peace with others. Love, is not merely an essential feature of our life; it is our whole life, without which we lose our Christian identity.

What does He mean by saying, “Everyone will be seasoned with fire” ? In the Old Covenant, sacrifices had to be seasoned with salt, before offering it to be burnt on the altar. So also, if our life is to be offered as a sacrifice of love, God will not accept it, unless it is seasoned with the salt of brotherly love.

THIRD SECTION

HIS MINISTRY IN JUDEA

CHAPTER 10

THE DIFFICULT WAY

The Lord Christ came to minister to humanity, the object of His love; Yet many people stumbled in Him, because he came presenting the Cross, as a narrow road to reach the glory of the kingdom. In this chapter, the evangelist gives us live examples to demonstrate the difficulty of that road, presented by the Lord.

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| 1- Forbidding divorce except for reason of sexual immorality | Verses 1 -- 12 |
| 2- Receiving children with love | 13 - 16 |
| 3- The rich man and following Christ | 17 - 27 |
| 4- The act of leaving for the sake of following Christ | 28 - 34 |
| 5- Forsaking the love of authority | 35 - 45 |
| 6- Need for receiving sight | 46 - 52 |

1- Forbidding divorce except for reason of sexual immorality:

Up till the previous chapter, the evangelist St. Mark, narrated what the Lord said and did in Galilee; Starting with this chapter, he tells us about His work in Judea, having crossed the Jordan from the east. That region was called 'Judea', to designate it from

Samaria , Decapolis, and other regions ... There, in Judea, He faced a lot of opposition, as He proclaimed the difficulty of the way along which He is walking, and towards which He is carrying His believers, to set forth together with them to the glory of His kingdom.

One of the features of the narrowness of that royal way, is presenting the difficult commandment, as the Master did not come to grant men what they desire, but in order to raise them to a level, fitting for the children of God; He presented them with a commandment that appears almost impossible ... One item of that commandment was the concept of married life, as one of exalted unity, that should never be dissolved except for reason of sexual immorality. The evangelist says:

“The Pharisees came and asked Him, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife ? ‘ testing Him. And He answered and said to them, ‘What did Moses command you ? ‘ They said, ‘Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to dismiss her’. And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Because of the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept; but from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female”
(verses 2 - 6)

The Pharisees, often came to Him, not to benefit from His teaching or to enjoy the truth but, out of fear, that if they did not, all people would follow Him. They used to approach Him in groups, to ask Him questions with the intention of confusing Him before the multitude. And now, realizing from His actions, filled with love and compassion, that He would not permit divorce, having already proclaimed that (Mt. 5: 31, 32), they presented Him with that question, in order to fish for a fault in His teaching, whether he approves divorce or refuses it. But the Lord, rejecting the easy way of divorce, took His believers along the difficult commandment, answering wisely, along the following lines:

(1) He intended to uproot from their hearts and minds, the permission of divorce; so His answer came in an indirect form, to avoid falling in their trap. He dignified the law and Moses by saying, ‘What did Moses command you ? ‘... He did not ignore what He had already proclaimed through His prophet Moses, but intended to reveal the depths of the law, to enter with them into its spirit and not its letter.

(2) He let them answer His question, to respond on the basis of their answer itself. They said, 'Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to dismiss her' ... Thus Moses did not permit divorce, but rather permitted to write a certificate of divorce, and to dismiss her'. Here, there is a difference between the two expressions: For permitting divorce, makes of it an easy task; while getting first, a written certificate of divorce, means that, before divorcing his wife, a man has to go to a scribe, to let him write for him a certificate of divorce. In that case, a wise scribe would discuss the matter with him, would approach the elders of his tribe if needed, in order to try to make peace, and to reconcile the two parties.

For fear, that, in the infancy of their spiritual life, a man may kill his wife, or may deviate to one of the pagan religions that enables him to divorce his wife.....He permitted him to divorce, but cautiously. That is why the Lord Christ goes on saying: '*Because of the hardness of your hearts he wrote you this percept*' ...; The Mosaic commandment was not a free permission for divorce, but within certain limits, for reason of the hardness of their hearts, a thing that should not be. To confirm it to them, the Lord took them back to the natural law, established by God at the beginning of creation, saying:

"From the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (verses 6 - 9)

It is as though, at the beginning of creation, before falling, it was fitting for man to be joined to his wife to become one flesh; then, after his nature got corrupted, and his heart got hardened, that natural law was no longer suitable for him; he saw it as a deprivation and a difficult way. God, permitted him to write a certificate of divorce to calm him down. ... And now, the Lord Christ came, not to present a new commandment, but rather a new nature, free of hardness of the heart, to get man back to the pure old life, so as to accept that commandment -- refraining from divorce --, seen by him as difficult,

as an easy Divine commandment, fitting for his new self. It bears the image of the spiritual marriage joining the Lord Christ and the Church, His one and only bride ! Concerning this the apostle Paul wrote:

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church”
(Ephes. 5: 31, 32)

St. John Chrysostom says: [If God was to permit the rejection of one woman , to be replaced by another, He would have created for Adam several women. God did not only join man with a single woman, but He also ordered him to leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife. From that expression it is obvious, that destroying marriage by divorce is out of question].

St. Ambrosius says to whoever wishes to divorce his wife: [Fear God and listen to His law, *“What God has joined together, let not man separate”* (Mt. 19: 6); You are not only going against a Divine commandment, you are destroying His work]

If Christian marriage is the fruit of God’s work; much more so would be the spiritual marriage between the soul and its groom, carried out by God’s Holy Spirit, and consummated in the worthiness of the blood; We should not destroy it through public denial, because of tribulation or persecution, or through rejection of God’s commandment; For then, we are practicing a detestable divorce.

2- Receiving children with love:

If the pharisees came to the Lord Christ inquiring about divorce, with the intention of accusing Him of breaking the law; the multitude, on the other hand, apprehending His love and feeling His simplicity; brought young children to Him, that He might touch them to bless them”

“...The disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when

Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, will, by no means enter it'. And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them and blessed them"
(verse 13 - 16)

St. Cyril the Great says: [The blessed disciples rebuked them, not because they envied the little children, but because they assumed that by so doing they are protecting the dignity of their teacher, and saving Him of unwarranted trouble}. St. John Chrysostom also says: [The disciples thought that bringing the little children to Him is not fitting for His dignity ... But the Lord Christ, wishing to teach His disciples the virtue of humility and treading on worldly pride, took the children in His arms, referring to them the kingdom of God]. St. Ambrosius says: [The disciples did that, fearing for the safety of their Master; as they, in another occasion said to Him; "*Master, the multitudes throng you and press you ...*" (Lk. 8: 45)

The disciples wanted for the Lord Christ the easy and respectable way, rejecting the nuisance and trouble of the little children,; but the Lord presented to them the simple, yet difficult way, which should be followed equally by disciples, by apostles, as well as by the whole congregation. Taking the children in His arms; who were then, a downcast with no rights, reveals that the Lord was not seeking respect or glory for Himself, but seeking a soul attached to the Lord: that of a child, a slave, or even a thief.. It is the way of love for all, not that of dignity. He did not just take the little children in His arms, but went farther to make of the child a role model, that, unless we follow it, we shall not enter the kingdom of God. The Lord honored childhood, having once been, Himself a child through incarnation; and now, He is commanding the disciples, the leaders of the Church, together with the congregation, to follow their lead, in order to share with them the kingdom of heaven.

+ A child's mind is indeed free of sins; that is why it is fitting for us to practice, what children are doing by nature.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ He did not say 'for these', but said, "for such as these"; that is to say, to those who naturally, have the simplicity and innocence of children. A child does not hate, nor harbor an evil intention; If beaten by his mother, he does not get away from her; and if clothed by her in cheap attire, he sees it better than a royal garment. The same

is done by him, who walks in the ways of the Church, the good mother of all; he would never honor anything more than he honors it; that is why the Lord says:

"Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, will by no means enter it" (verse 15)

(Father Theophlactius, Pope of Bulgaria)

+ By childhood, He does not mean preferring a certain age; maturity would not be a privilege to be desired, if it robs one of his strife to enter the kingdom of God. And God, would not allow us to grow, if it entails a growth in iniquities and not in virtues; And would not have chosen grown-up disciples. Children do not harbor secrets, nor know deception; they do not seek wealth, and are not possessed by love of dignity. Ignorance, does not grant virtue; and virtue is not in inability to practice sin, but entails rejecting it, and persisting in strife to get back to our nature and childhood.

+ Let us then, escape from pride, and adopt the simplicity of children; Truth contradicts with pride, and is exalted by humility.

(St. Ambrosius)

+ The Lord Christ does not want us to be with no understanding; He likes us to apprehend fully, all that is beneficial and necessary for our salvation. For even the

wisdom has promised:

“To give prudence to the simple; To the young man knowledge and discretion” (Prov. 1: 4)

In the Book of Proverbs, it is as though wisdom is raising her voice, saying:

“To you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. O you simple ones, understand prudence; And you fools, be of an understanding heart” (Prov. 8: 4)

But how can one be simple and wise at the same time ? That is clarified by the Savior in another occasion, saying:

“Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Mt. 10: 16)

Likewise the apostle Paul writes:

“Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice, be babes, but in understanding be mature” (1 Cor. 14: 20)

We should investigate the meaning of being “children in understanding”. How is it possible for someone to be like that, while being, in understanding, a mature man ?

A child is of little knowledge, and sometimes of no knowledge whatsoever. That is why, we should seek to follow his example, as far as corruption and evil, are concerned, by uprooting the evil habits from ourselves altogether. We would be looked upon as men, who have no knowledge of the ways that lead to deception; as men, simple and innocent, who practice humility and compassion, and ready to face hate and persecution. By that we would confirm that we are carrying the features of those who are still little children ! While we acquire such simple and innocent personality, it is fitting for us to be consummated in mind, with understanding, built clearly on Him, who is, by nature and truth, the creator of the universe, the Lord God

Perfection of mind, is to be mainly built on faith, lest our understanding would be corrupted. The next important, parallel thing, that goes hand in hand with that main perfection, is a clear knowledge of the way of behavior that would please God, which we learned from the Holy Book, the perfect and blameless way. (Here the Saint discerns between the way according to the teachings of the gospel, and that, according to deceptive philosophies.). Whoever walks along that way, would, knowledgeably, lead a life, characterized with simplicity and innocence. Such people would enter through the narrow gate, would not reject troubles, that is necessary for life of piety in God, leading to a glorified life. Thus they would truly proceed on the way of God, and rejoice in His gifts, gaining for themselves the kingdom of heaven, by Christ, to whom, with God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, will be praise and authority, forever and ever, Amen.

(St. Cyril, the Great)

Let us then, follow the example of the little children, in malice and not in understanding; Let us accept in true faith, that the Lord would stretch His hand to take us up in His arms, to bear us upon His shoulders, and to let us enter with Him to His Cross, through the narrow way; His heavens would then, be opened within us, to enjoy His glories, and live His eternal kingdom in true and exalted joy.

Going back to presenting the little children to be blessed by the Lord, we recall what

St. Cyril, the Great says, seeing the children as the Bishops lay their hands on their heads, to invoke the grace of the Holy Spirit (the confirmation) after Baptism, not through a human hand but through that of the Lord Christ Himself, saying: [Up to the the present time, children are presented to the Lord Christ, to get blessed through the dedicated hands].

The scholar Origen is quoted commenting on presenting little children to have them blessed, saying: [If someone responsible for teaching in the Church, sees somebody

bringing to him certain of the retarded, the weak, or the lowly, who are accordingly looked upon as little children, let him not forbid them from being presented to the Savior, lest his work would be tinted with prejudice].

3- The rich man and following Christ.

Thus, the features of the new way, in its simplicity and difficulty, are equally revealed to the non-spirituals, being the way of the crucified Christ. His commandment is seen by the body-oriented people, as difficult deprivation; and His call embraces the children--then despised; and exhorts us to adopt the spirit of childhood, in its simplicity and purity. And now, He encounters a rich young man, whose heart is committed to the love of wealth of this world; depriving him of the grace to cross with the Lord, through the gate of love, to enter into the narrow way ... Wealth, in itself, is not evil, if it does not weigh upon the soul concerned, causing it to lose its life, and deprive it of getting attached to its Savior.

The evangelist narrates to us that encounter, saying:

“Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, Knelt before Him, and asked Him, ‘Good teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life ? ‘. So Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good ? No one is good but One, that is God. You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery; Do not murder; Do not steal; Do not bear false witness; Do not defraud; Honor your father and mother’ “ (verse 17 - 19)

The Lord went out on the road, to encounter there, the rich young man who is obsessed with the love of wealth. Despite his wealth, he was ‘on the road’, as someone seeking fulfillment and not finding it.

The young man felt hunger and thirst, so he came running to the Master and knelt before Him, and asked Him, ‘*Good teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life ? ‘* and, as that young man was still not aware that he was addressing

Christ, the Son of God, the Lord rebuked him: *‘Why do you call Me good ? No one is good but One ,that is God ? !’* He did not deny being good; He has called Himself before *“the good Shepherd”* (Jn. 10: 11; Lk. 2: 15); Yet, He refuses to be called as such by the young man, in the way the Jews used to do, when they address religious leaders, calling them by certain titles, that should be used for God alone. He wished that man to re-evaluate his inner (accounts), as far as his belief in Him is concerned; as well as that, he should refrain from using titles concerning God to honor anyone. St. Ambrosius says: [When he said: ‘Good teacher’, he said it, in terms of partial, and not absolute goodness; although God’s goodness is absolute, and that of man is partial. That is why the Lord responded to him by saying, ‘Why do you call Me good, while denying that I am God ? Why do you call Me good, when no one is good but One, that is God ?’ The Lord did not deny that He is good, but refers that He is God. ... If the Father is good, He is likewise good, as *“All what is the Father’s are His”* (Jn. 17: 10) .Isn’t He good, who manages the goodness of that soul that seeks Him ? Isn’t He good, who *“satisfies your youth with good things”* (Psalm 103: 5) ? Isn’t He good, who said, *“I am the good Shepherd”* (Jn. 10: 11) ? !

And St. Cyril, the Great says: [He approached Him, pretending to be seeking to be a disciple to Him; He called Him ‘teacher’ and ‘good’, and said, ‘What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life ? Notice how he mixed hypocrisy with malice and deceit, as mixing bitterness with honey, assuming that he is deceiving Him. About such people, a saintly prophets said,

“Their tongue is an arrow shot out; It speaks deceit; One speaks peaceably to his neighbor with his mouth, but in his heart he lies in wait”
(Jerem. 9: 8)

“Their mouth is full of cursing and deceit and oppression” (Psalm 10: 7)
“The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart. His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords”
(Psalm 55 21)

He tried to deceive Jesus pretending to be submissive to Him; but He, who Knows all, said to him: “*Why do you call Me good ? No one is good but One, that is God*”; As it is written:

“He catches the wise in their own craftiness” (Job 5: 13)

The Lord proved that that man was not as wise and learned as he pretended to be, though he was “ a ruler” among his people (Lk. 18: 18).As if He is saying to him: ‘You do not believe that I am God; being clothed with a body, has deceived you. Why, then, do you call Me, by what is only fitting for the supreme nature, when you are seeing Me as an ordinary man like yourself ? Unchangeable and absolute goodness, by nature, is referred only to God; As far as angels, and ourselves, who live on earth, are concerned, we may be good, through following His example, or rather our fellowship with Him. ... As though, He is saying to him: ‘While I do not seem to you as God, and you see Me as an ordinary man, you, ignorantly and idiotically, refer to Me by what is only God’s; He, who possesses goodness, as an unchangeable nature, according to His Divine will]

As the young man asked Him about eternal life, the Lord referred him to the commandments: “Do not commit adultery; Do not murder; Do not steal; Do not bear false witness; Do not defraud; Honor your father and mother” (verses 18, 19). We can not enjoy eternal life outside God’s commandment.. The response of the Lord Christ was not according to what that ruler of the synagogue expected; as St. Cyril, the Great says: [That man expected to hear the Lord saying:

‘Man ! forget the writings of Moses ! Forsake the shadows ! They were only just symbols ! Rather head My commandments, which I present you in My Gospel’.

Such was not His response; He realized, through His Divine knowledge, the real goal of that man. So, as though, He has no other commandments beside those given to Moses, He dispatched to them (to the synagogue), that man (the ruler), saying, “*You know the commandments*”. And in order not to let them think that He is talking

about other commandments of His own, He referred to those mentioned in the law of Moses].

With wisdom, the Lord answered him, to avoid any accusation that He is a breaker of the law; But at the same time, He drew him towards the Divine commandment, as the real source of enjoyment of eternal life. And as St. Mark, the hermit says: [The Lord Christ, Himself, is hidden in the commandment, to be revealed practically to him who practices it. In other words, if eternal life is an enjoyment of Christ (life itself), we would practically encounter Him, as we believe in Him, through our entrance into the depths of the commandment, to find Him, the secret of our sanctification, our purity, and our life].

The young man proclaimed that he had observed all these from his youth; For that, Jesus loved him. And as the scholar Origen says: [He loved him, seeing that he answered in good conscience].

Some people may wonder, how could the Lord love someone He knows that he does not follow Him ? ! To answer that, we say that He loved the man's good beginning, although He rejected his later deviation; He loved in him what deserves to be loved, in order to motivate him to what is greater; yet, not through compulsion, but with complete freedom. He loved him, and presented him with the commandment that would get him to perfection:

“One thing you lack; Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me”
(verse 21)

Of commentaries of the saintly fathers, on what the Lord said concerning forsaking the love of the world and taking up of the cross:

+ It was well to say to him, “You will have treasure in heaven”, and not “eternal life”, as He is speaking about the issue of forsaking wealth, to confirm to him, that he would enjoy something far greater than what he sells, as much as heaven is greater than earth.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ There is no one, in whose soul and bones, love of Christ is, who can stand the filth of the detestable lust ... Whoever has his mind captivated by the sweetness of the God of all, could be captivated by any of the lusts of this world.

+ Those who tasted the greatness of His sweetness, have become haters of all luxuries.

+ The consummation of commandments is the cross; namely, forgetting and forsaking worldly lusts; together with a yearning and desire for departure, saying with St. Paul:

“For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” (Philipp. 1:23)

(St. John Saba)

Before that Divine commandment, the young man stood offended..., He saw the way of the Lord Christ as a difficult one; his love for wealth, deprived him of walking it; as is said by the evangelist:

“He was sad at this word, and went away grieved, for he had great possessions” (verse 22)

The Master was grieved before that situation, when he saw that things in this world, created by God to be used by man, have enslaved man. Instead of supporting him, they humiliated his heart, and got him in their snares.

“Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, ‘How hard it is

for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God’ “ And as the disciples were astonished at His words, He said to them: ‘Children, How hard it is for those who trust in riches, to enter the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God’ “
(verses 23 - 25)

He revealed to them, that there is nothing wrong with richness in itself, but in the heart that trusts in it !

+ The Lord said that to His disciples, who own nothing, to teach them not to be ashamed of their poverty, explaining the reason He forbade them to own anything.
(St. John Chrysostom)

+ St. Ambrosius presents to us an exegesis for these words of the Lord Christ: *“It is easier for a camel to go through a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God”*, that the camel refers to nations of the Gentiles (Isaiah 30: 6), while the eye of a needle, refers to the narrow way of the cross. In other words, the entrance of the Gentiles through the narrow way of Christ, is easier than the entrance of the Jewish nation, which represents richness, as far as its enjoyment of the law, the fathers, the prophets, and, the covenants, etc. are concerned..., into the kingdom of God !

+ St. Cyril, the Great, believes that the word ‘camel’ here, refers to the thick ropes, that are used by the sailors on ships ...; these which are impossible to go through the eye of a needle. Hearing the words of the Lord, the disciples were astonished beyond measure, saying among themselves, *“Who then can be saved ? “* But looking at them, Jesus said

“With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible” (verse 27)

The disciples apprehended the difficulty of the way, caused by the temptation of wealth, but the Lord revealed to them that nothing is impossible for God; If God allows someone to get rich, He can, by His grace, turn his wealth to the good; as He did with that of Abraham, of Joseph, and others, to His glory. The need is only for One: For God, who supports the soul, and draws it away from traps of evil, to grant it the capability of working for the sake of the kingdom of God.

St. John Chrysostom says: [The reason He said that it is God who works, is to confirm that whoever is put by God along that way (wealth), is in need of a great grace, revealing that the reward would be great for the rich man who follow Christ].

4- The act of leaving for the sake of following Christ:

When the disciples saw how the young man was not capable of keeping the commandment, concerning the act of leaving for the sake of following Christ, they began to wonder what would be their reward, having left every thing to follow Him;

“Peter began to say to Him, ‘See, we have left all and followed You’, So Jesus answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for My sake or the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold, now in this time -- houses, brothers sisters, mothers, children and lands, with persecutions -- and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first”
(verses 29 31)

+ It seems to me, that by these words, He intended to tell them about persecutions, but in a concealed way; as it occurs that many parents who persuade their children, and many women their men, to do evil. (St. John Chrysostom)

+ No soldier would go to war with his wife. (St. Jerome)

+ Notice how He led His listener to sure hope ... confirming His promise with a vow, by saying “Assuredly”, before proclaiming His promise. ...

Those strong in mind, who prefer the love of Christ, firmly hold to faith, and zealously seek to be referred to His house, through spiritual relationship, not caring for wars and schisms, directed against them by their relatives according to the flesh. Some people forsake their homes and families for the sake of Christ, to gain His name: to be called Christians; and for the sake of His glory, as His name designates His glory.

Let us see now, how can anyone, who leaves house or father or mother or brothers or sisters, or even a wife, receive a hundredfold “now in this time” ? ! Will he become a husband of many wives, or will he find on earth many fathers to make up for the one he left ? ! It could not be like that, as far as relationships according to the flesh, are concerned; but, rather, as we forsake what concern the body and the world, we receive what are a hundredfold greater than what we had.

Every one of us, who believes in Christ and loves His name, if he forsakes a house, will receive dwellings that are high above; and if he leaves a father, he will acquire the heavenly Father; and if he leaves brothers, he will be taken up as a brother by Christ; and if he leaves a wife, he will find the house of wisdom descending from God above, as it is written:

“Say to wisdom, ‘You are my sister’, and call understanding your nearest kin” (Prov. 7: 4)

As through wisdom (as a wife), he gains beautiful spiritual fruits, by which he partakes of the hope of the saints, and be joined to the company of angels. And if he leaves a mother, he will find an incomparable mother, a much more exalted one,

“Jerusalem above, the mother of us all, which is free” (Gal. 4: 26)

He, who is found worthy of getting all these blessings, is counted in this world, as exalted and admirable, as he would be decorated with glory by God and men. These blessings, granted by our Lord and Savior, are counted as hundredfold of things related to the world and the flesh.

(St. Cyril, the Great)

+ Who follows Christ, would be relieved of the worldly sufferings and earthly lusts, to receive brothers and fellows in this life, with whom he would be spiritually related; thus acquiring even in this life, love that is hundredfold better than that which is based on blood relationships.

Relationship between fathers, children, brothers, wives and relatives, is based merely on blood bond; that is why it is short-termed and easily dissolved. ...; but, monks, on the other hand, as they forsake marriage, keep an everlasting unity, and possess every thing in a common fellowship; every one of them considers what is his, as his brothers', and what is his brothers' as his. Thus, if we compare the grace of having such love, with love that is based merely on flesh relationship, we shall definitely find it a hundredfold sweeter and more rewarding. So also, we acquire from 'marriage celibacy' (the soul being bound to the Lord Jesus as its Bridegroom), happiness that is a hundredfold more exalted than that acquired through the union of flesh. In place of the joy that man can have through possessing a house or a lot of land, he would enjoy a hundredfold joy through knowing that he is a son of God, possessing all that is God's, the eternal, establishing within his heart and spirit the example of a true son who says:

"All things that the Father has are mine" (Jn. 16: 15)

He gains every thing for himself, listening every day to the apostle's proclamation:

"All are yours" (1 Cor 3: 22)

(Father Ibrahim)

(Debates of St. John Cassian)

Speaking about the act of leaving for the sake of the gospel, He proclaimed to them that He is doing the same for their sake, surrendering Himself to crucifixion; He would be delivered by the scribes and the high priests to the Gentiles, to be mocked, spat on, scourged and killed, then,

“The third day He will rise again” (verses 32 - 34)

+ He seemed to be hastening to face His passions, and not refusing to die for their salvation.

+ He said that in order to steadfast His disciples’ hearts; as when they hear beforehand what is going to happen, they would be in a better condition, than if confronted by the actual events unprepared. He wanted to make it clear to them that He is suffering by His own choice, knowing the danger that is chasing Him, not trying to avoid it, despite His power to do that. ... He took His disciples aside, as it is fitting to proclaim the secret of His passions, only to those very close to Him.

(Father Theophlactius, Pope of Bulgaria)

+ He told them what is going to happen ..., so that they would not be disturbed, if they were suddenly confronted by the actual events.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ Here also, the Savior of all, as He was approaching Jerusalem, prepared the minds of His disciples for what would happen to Him on the Cross -- His death in the flesh. He assured them that He is going to rise again, wiping out all His sufferings, and disgrace, through the power of a miraculous resurrection. It is a glorious thing, fitting for God, to destroy the chains of death, and to regain life ... The resurrection would bear testimony that He is God and the Son of God, as expressed by St. Paul. By that, He spared them beforehand all unfitting thoughts, and saved them of any chance of offense.

(St. Cyril, the Great)

5- Forsaking the love of authority:

The proclamation of the difficult way began by revealing the difficult commandment; to be followed by proclaiming the need for embracing the children and the weak through practical spiritual love; then He spoke of the act of forsaking, not only the love of wealth but even relationships according to the flesh, if it proved to present an obstacle on the way. ... And now, the most dangerous difficulty to face ministers, is forsaking the love for authority.

“Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, ‘Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask’. And He said to them, ‘What do you want Me to do for you ? ‘ They said to Him, ‘Grant us that we may sit, one on your right hand, and the other on your left, in Your glory’. (Verses 35 - 37)

St. John Chrysostom says: [As the disciples heard Christ speaking frequently of His kingdom, they assumed that that kingdom would be established before His death; and now, as He speaks of His death, proclaiming it beforehand, the two disciples came to Him to enjoy the blessings of the kingdom]. He also says,: [Christ’s question to them, ‘What do you want ?, was not because He does not know, but to commit them to an answer, in order to open the wound, and to present the cure].

The Lord answered them,

“You do not know what you ask” (verse 38)

St. John Chrysostom says: [As though, He says to them, that they are speaking of dignities, when He is speaking of struggles and troubles. It was not the time for rewards, but rather of blood, of danger, and spiritual battle; So He added,

“Can you drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the

baptism that I am baptized with ? “ (verse 38)

He drew them, from their question, to the commitment of fellowship with Him, to strengthen their zeal]. Father Theophlactius says: [He meant by ‘ cup’ and the ‘baptism’, the ‘Cross’; the cup is the dose that we accept sweetly through it; and the baptism is the purification of our sins. They answered Him, unknowingly, saying: “We can”, assuming that He is speaking of a visible cup, and of the baptism, practiced by the Jews, that of washings before eating].

They hastened to answer, as seen by St. John Chrysostom, assuming that they would gain the dignities of the kingdom on the spot; that is why He responded:

“You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with, you will be baptized; but to sit on My right and on My left, is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared” (verse 39, 40)

As though, He was saying to them: ‘You will enjoy suffering with me, and martyrdom also; Yet, as far as enjoying the glories of the kingdom is concerned, that is a Divine matter which is to be granted to you, not according to your materialistic thought, but according to God’s salvation plan.

In His saying “...is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared”, He is proclaiming the role of the Father in the great day of the Lord; as they are working together ... St. John Chrysostom says: [Although He is the condemner; yet, He reveals, through these words, His genuine Sonhood]. The evangelist says:

“And when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John” (verse 41)

They were driven by human weakness, into jealousy. That is the curse, sown by the

devil in between ministers: love of authority and worldly dignity. That is why :

“Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles, lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet, it shall not be so among you; But whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever desires to be first shall be slave for all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many’” (verse 42 - 45)

+ Let us follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ; For

“He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked”
(1 Jn. 2: 6)

The Lord Christ did not come to be served, but to serve; He did not come to order, but to obey; He did not come to have His feet washed, but to wash the feet of His disciples. He came to be beaten, not to beat; to receive smites from others, not to smite anybody; to be crucified, not to crucify... Therefore let us follow His example:

Whoever bears the weaknesses of others, is following His example; while the aggressive, is following that of the antichrist.

(St. Jerome)

6- Need for receiving sight:

As the Master was going out of Jericho, on His way to Jerusalem, to go through passion and get crucified for us, He encountered two blind men, one of whom was mentioned by the name, by the evangelist St. Mark: 'Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus'. That man was sitting by the road begging.

“And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me ! ‘

Then many warned him to be quiet; but he cried out all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me ! '. So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. Then they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you'. And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus. And Jesus answered and said to him, 'What do you want Me to do for you ? ' The blind man said to Him, 'Rabboni, that I receive my sight '. Then Jesus said to him, 'Go your way, your faith has made you well'. And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road" (verses 46 - 52)

That Divine action has its special importance: Firstly, it occurred while the Lord was hastening on His way to the Cross. It is as though, He intended by it, to proclaim that the goal of His passions is to open up the inner eyes of humanity, that is to say, its heart insight, to be able to behold the glories of His kingdom, based on His crucifixion and resurrection. Secondly, that action, was recorded by the evangelist, after the rejection of the rich young man of the fellowship of Christ; the preoccupation of the disciples with the first positions and worldly dignity ... It is as though His difficult way, needs His Divine work, to grant the soul an inner enlightenment, that enables it to recognize the features of the way, to walk it. The evangelist presented us with the details of that incident of healing the blind man, because of its deep spiritual concepts:

(1) That incident occurred on the road leading to Jericho ... St. Jerome sees that the name of this town is convenient to the situation; as it means 'moon', or 'Anathema', that is to say, 'accursed', as the Master was setting forth to Jerusalem, to bear in His flesh, the passion and curse, for the sake of our salvation.

The blind man was sitting on the road begging ... Thus, if the way of the world is easy, and that of the Lord is difficult, yet, the first would deprive the soul of its insight, and its vitality, turning it, as though 'sitting on the road, idle and without

work', sitting in despair, begging.

(2) By crying out, 'Jesus Son of David' , the blind man proclaimed his belief that He is the Messiah, the expected and promised ... He is the Son of David, anticipated by the generations. St. Cyril, the Great says: [Having been raised in Judea, and, by birth, of the Jewish race, he was aware of the prophecies that came in the law and prophets, concerning the Messiah.. He heard these verses from the Holy Book:

*“The Lord has sworn in truth to David; He will not turn from it:
I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body”*

(Psalm 132: 11)

*“There shall come forth a rod from the stern of Jesse, and a
branch shall grow out of his roots”*

(Isaiah 11: 1)

*“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call
His name Immanuel, which is translated, ‘God with us’ “*

(Isaiah 7: 14 and Mt. 1: 23)

Therefore, believing that the Word, being God, has put Himself down, through His will, to be begotten according to the flesh, from a holy virgin, he approached Him, as God, and said to Him, “Son of David, have mercy on me”. He also bore testimony to His glory, by asking Him to perform something that only God could do].

(3) A great multitude was surrounding the Lord; And when the blind man wished to approach Him in faith, he was faced by resistance from the crowd, as is said, *“Many warned him to be quiet. But he cried out all the more”*, driven by his strong faith.

Even, inside the Church, when someone wishes to approach the Lord through the Spirit, he may face resistance and spirit of criticism, that can drive him to despair. But a soul, that abides in the living faith, feeling its need for the Savior, would only

be strengthened by such resistance, and would go on “*crying out all the more*”, to be rewarded by hearing the Lord’s invitation to come to Him, to enjoy His presence, as well as His inner work within it. St. Cyril, the Great says: [Apprehend from that,

dear brethren, that faith makes us enter into the presence of Christ, and presents us to God (the Father), to be counted worthy of His Words]

(4) The Lord, having commanded him to be called, the powers of resistance turned into powers of action, as they said to him: “*Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you*”.

If that multitude also refers to the flesh, which often resist the soul, when it wishes to encounter its Savior, through injecting the spirit of idleness and relaxation, yet, the persistent soul would pray the Savior to turn the flesh into an instrument of righteousness, to help the soul in its encounter with God. St. John Saba says: [Both soul and flesh would enjoy the Lord together in love and joy].

(5) The blind man threw his garment aside, rose and came to Jesus ... It is a daily pious practice, through which a believer throws aside, as a garment, the works of the

old man, to enjoy the resurrection with the Lord, to be, always with Him and in His presence.

(6) The Lord asked him, “What do you want Me to do for you ? “; not because He needs to be told, but to proclaim his faith before all, and to confirm that He is willing to give those who would ask.

(7) Having enjoyed his sight, he followed Jesus on His way. And as St. Jerome says: [You also, would restore your insight, if you cry out to Him, and throw aside your old dirty garment, when you hear Him inviting you. ... Let Him touch your wounds and your eyes with His hands; If you were born blind, in the wombs; and if in sin, your mothers conceived you,

“He will purge you with hyssop, and you shall be clean; He will wash you, and you shall be whiter than snow”
(Psalm 51: 5, 7)].

+++

FOURTH SECTION

HIS MINISTRY IN JERUSALEM

CHAPTER 11

HIS ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

Up till now we have been used to see the Lord Christ, withdrawing from the multitudes, ordering the evil spirits, and those He healed, to refrain from telling about Him; Yet, in this chapter, and for the first time, we find Him giving much attention to prepare for His entry into Jerusalem, on a similar level of the preparation for the feast of Passover (14: 13 - 16).

He enters in a great procession that rocked the whole city ... That action was not meant to seek glory, dignity or authority, but was a spiritual procession that touches our inner life and our eternal salvation.

1- His triumphal entry verses	1 - 10
2- The barren fig tree	11 - 14
3- His jealousy for His temple	12 - 19
4- Withering of the fig tree	20 - 26
5- His authority questioned	27 - 31

1- His triumphal entry:

In our study of the Gospel according to St. Matthew we experienced the Lord Christ, as a true king, who came to reign over the heart through His Cross. We saw in His entry into Jerusalem (Mt. 21), the royal procession by which the Lord set forth, to reign on the Cross, offering His life for the sake of His people. Now, in our study of the Gospel according to St. Mark, what do we see in this procession ?

The previous chapters, were like an invitation to receive the Lord Christ, the Worker in suffering, the owner of authority, ordering the evil spirits to be cast out, and touching the sick to chase the ailments away ... All submit and obey. But now, He is setting forth towards Jerusalem to realize what He had already proclaimed more than once, that the Son of Man is to suffer pain. He is entering into a battle against the evil one for the sake of humanity, in order to grant it the power of conquest and victory, to enter with it into His exalted Jerusalem and His heavenly Holies, into the bosom of His Father. He set forth in a great procession , not seeking a worldly glory, but to proclaim the general triumphal procession of the Church, abiding in Him. In other words, that procession is that of the (catholic) Church, from the time of Adam till the end of ages, setting forth, through union with the Head, to receive the life of suffering and the fellowship of crucifixion, then to enjoy triumph in the Lord, and resurrection, by and in Him. The evangelist says:

“When they came near Jerusalem , to ‘Bethphage and Bethany’, at the Mount of Olives, He sent out two of His disciples ...” (verse 1)

The Master, Himself, began to make preparations for the procession, as the route of His passion and crucifixion; and accordingly, our own passion and crucifixion, are not merely, the result of a human plan, or the fruit of malice on the part of evil people, and their plotting for opposition and murder, but it is actually a route, prepared by the Lord Himself, and allows it, in order for us, to gain the power and joy of resurrection through the Cross.

Thus, whatever sufferings and temptations we encounter in our life, are not mere chances or a destiny that we have to go through, but it is a route prepared by the Lord for us, to walk along the procession of His triumph, to reach Jerusalem with and in Him.

By saying, *“When they came near Jerusalem”*, he proclaims that the way, however narrow and difficult, yet, it is very short; As the heavenly Jerusalem is not far from us, but very near, or rather, we came to be very near to it, through joining the procession

of passion of the Lord Christ; That is why the first words of His preaching were:

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”

(verse 1: 15; and Mt. 4: 17)

The same was proclaimed by His forerunner who came to prepare the way for Him (Mt: 3: 2); and were as well, put by the Lord, on the tongues of His disciples, as He sent them on their way to preach (Mt. 10: 7).

The Lord Christ came to lead by Himself the procession of the Cross, through which we got very near to His true Jerusalem, His heavenly Kingdom, to enter by Him into it, saying with the apostle Paul:

“Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place” (2 Cor. 2: 14)

The start of the procession was the two villages ‘Bethphage and Bethany’. The evangelist did not mention just one of them, the figure 2, as St. Augustine says, refers to love for God and men: by two mites, the widow gave all the love of her heart in the treasure box of the Lord; and by the two dinari, the good Samaritan proclaimed his love for the wounded man We too, We shall not be able to start the procession of the Cross, and will not have a share in the suffering and glorified body of the Lord, unless unless we start by the two villages , and encounter Him in His procession through love. The Cross is not an injustice or temptation we endure, but it is rather the opening of the inner heart in love to God and men, without any prejudice or discrimination, in order to embrace all, to bear the sign of the Crucified, of whom is said:

“While being enemies, we were reconciliated with God by the death of His Son” (Romans 5: 10)

By true love, even towards our adversaries and enemies, and all humanity, the Holy

Spirit will let us join the [procession of the Cross, to experience the fellowship of Divine love through passion, and to enjoy spiritual triumph, as we see ourselves yearning to occupy, even the last rows of the procession, to watch with joy the souls glorified in the Lord, saying with the apostle Paul:

“For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh”

(Rom 8: 3)

He, who, when he sees the people of God joining the heavenly procession, counts their glory as his glory, and their joy as his joy.

If ‘- Phage’ means (Jaw), and ‘-any’ means (tribulation), or (obedience) ... , we would be joining the Lord in His procession, if we keep the commandment concerning the jaw or the other (cheek), when we turn it to those who slap (Mt. 5: 39); and if we receive with joy every tribulation and pain in complete obedience to God. It is as though, these two villages are referring to life of practical love, mixed with sufferings.

As to saying “*At the Mount of Olives*”, the reference to the Mount of Olives, according to several scholars, proclaims the ‘Messianic’ nature of that procession. There are three things that gave to the entry of the Lord into Jerusalem, a Messianic concept: His connection to the Mount of Olives, His sending for a colt, and His reference to the kingdom of David ... These three points revealed the nature of that procession, that it is not that of a man going to war, but of the Messiah, the Savior; the procession of God Himself, as previously proclaimed by the prophet :

“In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem from the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley;

Thus the Lord, my God will come, and all the saints with You”

(Zechariah 14: 4, 5)

The Mount of Olives is the mount or hill of oil for anointment, proclaiming the coming of the anointed One, who plants us as “a green olive tree in the house of God” (Psalm 52: 9); who establishes us, on His holy mountain, as a true paradise, in the spiritual garden east of Eden (Genesis 2: 8), where He would shine on us with the light of His Cross. That is why the Jews’ expectations was that the coming of the Messiah was connected to the Mount of Olives, as confirmed by the Jewish historian Josephus in more than one occasion.

That procession was characterized by several amazing situations, but the evangelist St. Mark, gave special interest to the issue of bringing the colt on which the Master is to ride; narrating in some detail:

“And He said to them, ‘Go into the village opposite you; and as soon as you have entered it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has sat. Loose it and bring it. And if anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this ? ‘ Say, ‘ The Lord has need of it’, and immediately he will send it here’. So they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door outside on the street, and they loosed it” (verses 2 - 4)

The Lord, Himself, sent His two disciples to bring the colt, after providing them with information concerning its location and condition, as well as telling them what they should say to whom who might question their action ... All this bear spiritual concepts, that touch the procession of triumph, concerning:

(1) The interest of the evangelist in concentrating on the master’s entry riding on a colt, was to proclaim, that His procession was that, of those with open eyes; The Romans used to gather around those of authority who come riding on mighty chariots; while many of the Jews were expecting the new leader to come in a procession from heaven; and as the priest ‘Josiah the son of Levi’ (around 250 A D.) said, ‘If Israel is worthy, the Messiah will come riding on the clouds of heaven, but if unworthy,

will come riding on a colt. The evangelist, contradicting those two theories, presents to us the Messiah riding on a colt, in order that only those with open spiritual eyes,

would be able to apprehend the truth of Him, who is coming to Jerusalem, of whom the prophet Zechariah has prophesied, that,

“...He will come riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey”
(Zechariah 9: 9)

The evangelist St. John, commenting on the way the Lord entered into Jerusalem, riding on a colt, said:

“His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him, and that they had done these things to Him” (Jn. 12: 16)

Even the disciples, were unable to apprehend the significance of the procession, before their eyes got opened by the Holy Spirit, to understand the secrets of the Messiah, and the realization of the prophesies in Him.

(2) The Lord said, concerning the colt He wanted:

“You will find a colt tied, on which no one has sat” (verse 2)

If many of the fathers of the Church, saw in the nations of the Gentiles, qualities of animal life and idiocy of a colt, because of their bitter deviations and abominations, the Lord has received these nations to be a throne for Him, to become *“the clouds of heaven”* on which He would ride to come.

The Master describes it as being *“tied”*. The Romans thought of themselves as free and who have absolute authority on the whole world; they did not realize that they

were in need of the disciples of Christ, to preach them the Gospel of salvation, in order to untie their inner bonds, and to turn them into a Divine throne for the Lord.

As to saying “*No one has sat on it*”, the Scholar Origen comments that the nations of the Gentiles, were not worshipping the living God, did not receive His law, nor His Covenants, as the Jews did; They were without spiritual experience, as if “no one has sat on them”. The expression, “no one has sat on it”, proclaims that that procession was religious, heavenly, spiritual, and Divine. We recall what the priests and the diviners said, as they saw what happened to the Philistines, because of the Ark of the Lord:

“Give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will lighten His hand from you ... ; Now therefore make a new cart; take two milk cows which have never been yoked, and hitch the cows to the cart then take the Ark of the Lord and set it on the cart ... then send it away, and let it go” (1 Sam. 6: 7)

The priests and diviners of the Gentiles knew that the Divine procession requires a new cart and two cows which have never been yoked ... , a thing known to the prophet David , who demanded from the choice men of Israel: “*to set the Ark of God on a new cart*” (2 Sam. 6: 3); And when the prophet Elishah wanted to cast salt in the bad water to heal it, as a symbol of the Lord Christ who heals the world, he demanded a new bowl to put the salt in it (2 Kings 2: 20). So also, the soul, in which the Lord dwells, to become His bride, has to be a virgin (Mt. 25), not belonging to anyone else. It may be, for this reason, that the Lord Christ has granted His Church His Holy Spirit, that casts away the ancient man, to turn the new one, who is in the likeness of his creator, truly into a new throne for the Lord, on which no one has sat. Even if we sinned, and opened the heart to some other God, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to renew continuously, so that God will always find a new heart, not taken over by anybody; a throne on which He sits alone, with no other partner.

(3) St. Athanasius, the apostolic, commented on sending the two disciples to untie the colt, saying that it is a symbolic mission to untie the bonds of the Gentiles, the bonds of pagan abominations: [Dear brethren, untying of the colt is a gift ! a gift granted to the greats, not the greatness of the body, but that of faith, love, mind, and virtue; as was said of Moses, ‘who was great among his people’ ... Whoever is great, is capable of untying the colt ! ... As the book testifies, every one of us is tied up by the ropes of his sins; Let us pray to the Lord Jesus Christ, to send His disciples to us all, to untie our binding ropes; as some of us are tied by love of silver, while others by adultery, and still others by drinking , etc.].

As such, St. Athanasius sees in that action, a symbolic portrait of the enjoyment of absolution from sins, through apostolic authority, according to the commandment of the Lord Christ and His word. Absolution is a Divine gift granted by God, Himself, through His priests !

(4) *“They found the colt tied by the door outside on the street”* (verse 4)

Representing the prodigal son, who, having desired to leave his father’s house, found himself, as if *“outside on the street”*, with nobody to have him or to care for him. Anyhow, the Messiah came, as though coming out of His heavens; He, who is filling the heaven and earth, to go to Him, who is *“outside on the street”*, to hold his hand in love, embrace him, and get him back home.

St. Athanasius also sees in it a symbolic portrait of the first man, Adam, who was driven out of paradise, to find himself in a village *“outside”* Jerusalem, standing on the way, not able, by himself to return to the paradise of Eden; saying: [They were sent to untie the colt; as it is the desire of our Savior, and His love for mankind, to bring us back from that village *“outside”* of Jerusalem, the heavenly city. I believe that, owing to the trespass of Adam, he was driven out of paradise, and moved to a village *“outside”*].

St. Ambrosius says: [They found it “*tied by the door*”, as he, who is not in Christ, is “outside on the street”; but who is in Christ, would not be outside].

(5) The Lord instructed them to say, “*The Lord has need of it*”. Therefore, it is fitting for its owner to offer it to the Lord, if “the Lord has need of it”, as the widow did with her badly needed mites; as the Lord is demanding.; He has need of our hearts, to pay Him back, our love for His love.

St. Athanasius, the apostolic, sees that the colt had not just one owner, but several ones; He might mean by that the several sins that reigned over him, making a slave of him. But, when the Lord demands what is his, there is nothing that sins or devils could do, except to surrender, and even to escape.

Here we quote certain phrases said by St. Athanasius in that concern: [The colt had several owners, as they said to the disciples: ‘why are you doing that ? Do not you see how it is tied; we are responsible for it, so why are you taking it away ? It helps us in our work. If it gets untied, we will, certainly, be tied in its place’. The devils got terrified when they saw the colt got untied; the adversary powers got disturbed, when our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ came; They got frightened and depressed, as they heard the Lord saying to His disciples,

“I give you authority to trample on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy” (Lk. 10: 19)

They got terrified when they heard Him saying to them,

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”

(Mt. 28: 18)

They were afraid that it is Him, who would illuminate the darkness; having heard the prophet saying,

“People sitting in the darkness , have seen a great light”]

{The Lord has granted us great gifts: He did not just untie our bonds to sin, but also gave us authority to trample on the serpents and scorpions and all the power of the enemy; for the evil one and the powers of darkness of this world took us captives and tied us with unbreakable ties, to keep us from walking along good paths. But our Lord Jesus Christ came to set the captives free and give the blind eye sight.}

[The guardians of the colt said to the disciples: Why are you untying the colt ?, to which they answered: (His owner) is in need of it ... Listen to the wise answer of the disciples; The false owners of the colt, when they heard that its rightful owner is in need of it, did not respond, but hastened to their evil boss to tell him the new developments ... Here, the plot against the Lord started brewing; the bad powers got together, to fulfill the prophesy of the prophet David:

“The kings of the earth set themselves; and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His anointed” (Psalm 2: 2)

The demons said to their evil boss, ‘What shall we do ? The colt was untied and got back to its rightful owner; and from now on, it is no longer in your possession. The devil began to think, what he should do with Jesus; and the pharisees and priests hurried to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, where they held council to destroy Him. ... Now, having been set free from the slavery of the evil one, let us recognize our beneficent, our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory forever, Amen.

St. Ambrosius says: [It did not have just one owner, but many; Strangers tied it to have it in their possession, but Christ untied it to keep it as His own; He knows that gifts (absolution) is stronger than ties]. Father Theophlactius says: [Those who tried to stop them were the devils, who are far weaker than the disciples].

(6) Who were these two disciples sent by the Lord to untie humanity, but the preachers of salvation all along the New and Old Testaments ? The Lord granted His people His word, to let us enjoy reconciliation: in the Old Testament, through shadows and symbols, and in the New Testament through the truth.

Sending the two disciples. may refer to 'love', as we know that the figure 2 refers to 'love'; for nobody can enjoy absolution from his sins, unless his faith is working through love ! If we have love for God and men, we shall be granted forgiveness of our sins, and enjoy getting into the bosom of God through love ! That is why it is written: "*Woe to him who is alone*" (Eccles. 4: 10). When the children of Israel came

out of Egypt, they were led by two (Moses and Aaron); Joshua sent two persons to spy the promised land; The Ark of the Lord was carried by two poles; The Lord spoke to them through two Cherubs; We praise the Lord by Spirit and mind; and The Lord Christ sent His disciples to preach two by two.

"They threw their garments on (the colt) and He sat on it; and many spread their garments on the road" (verses 7, 8)

Placing garments under Him, refers to their acknowledgment of Him as their king, as what happened with 'Jehu, the son of Jehoshaphat' (2 Kings 9: 13). That action, may also refer to what the apostles did with the Gentiles, throwing on them their garments, namely, their apostolic teachings, their virtuous life in the Lord, and their exegesis of the Holy Books, in order to clothe their life after so many years of nakedness, to turn them into a throne for God to sit on and reign. These garments, the Church still throws over every naked heart, trembling of cold, to turn it into a place for the Lord to rest !

As to spreading the garments on the road under His feet, that refers to the submission of the body to the Lord, after it was submissive to unclean lusts. Many

people spread their garments on the road for the Lord: The martyrs spread their bodies, through their readiness to spill their blood for the sake of faith, as a path for God to walk through the simple people who accepted faith; Also the spiritual monks, spread their bodies through spiritual biblical monasticism, turning their life into a path for God to walk along the ages; The same could be said of preachers laymen, and even children, who may spread their garments under the Lord's feet to walk on.

St. Ambrosius says: [The spreading of personal garments by the disciples, under the Lord's feet, is a reference to the illumination in their preaching the Gospel; Garments, in Divine Books, often refer to virtues].

The evangelist goes on to say:

“Others cut down leafy branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Then, who went before and those who followed cried out saying: ‘Hosanna ! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord’ “
(verses 8, 9)

Those who went before the procession of the Lord, are fathers and prophets of the Old Testament; while those who followed Him, are the apostles and the disciples of the New Testament; For all of them -- men of both Testaments -- have gathered around Him, seeking His salvation. The former, walked with Him through symbols and prophecies, and the others are walking with Him through preaching the Gospel. It is, nevertheless, one and the same procession, whose center is occupied by the One Christ, who dwells in the midst of His extended Church , from the beginning of creation to the end of time.

Father Theophlactius believes, that this procession relating to the Lord Christ, is realized within the believing soul, through good works in the Lord. It would not be enough to celebrate our previous works for His sake, but also through continuation of spiritual work for the sake of God's glory.

This procession reminds us of the feast of booths, when people used to go out to the fields every day of the feast, then return to the temple in a great procession, carrying tree branches; to gather around the altar waving them and joyfully and loudly praising the Lord, asking for His salvation, crying out: ‘Hosanna’.

It is true that the feast of Palm Sunday was not on the same day of that of ‘booths’; Yet, the multitude, unknowingly, saw in the Lord Christ a realization of all the prophecies; In Him Passover is realized, being the One sacrifice, that crosses over with them, not from the servitude of Pharaoh, but from the captivity of the devil, to the freedom of glory of the children of God. In Him the feast of the ‘booths’ is realized, where they carry the palms and tree branches and sing the liturgy of the feast. In Christ, we enjoy the joy of the feast of the ‘booths’, apprehending that we live as strangers and foreigners within a body, that resembles a grass booth, which will come to an end, to enjoy it as a spiritual body in the day of the Lord, and to dwell in an eternal house, not made with hands, as expressed by the apostle Paul,

“For we know, that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor 5: 1)

The multitude were holding tree branches, as in the feast of the ‘booths’, that were called ‘Hossana’ or ‘Hoshaana’, being connected with the outcries of the people, asking for the salvation and help of the Lord.

Every one was crying out for the Lord Christ with the liturgical cries of the feast of the booths... ; As if the multitude, seeing in Him both the altar and the sacrifice, were rejoicing, for the day of their salvation has come. It is as if the Psalmist saw that procession, as he sang the same liturgical outcries, saying,

“This is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be

glad in it. Save now, I pray, O Lord; O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. We have blessed you from the house of the Lord. God is the Lord, and He has given us light; Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar” (Psalms 24 - 26)

The Psalmer celebrated the feast of the ‘booths’, his eyes being illuminated by God to realize that the Lord is God; and apprehended the secret of the sacrifice, that was bound to the Cross “the horns of the altar”.

To reveal that the procession was that of the anticipated Messiah, the evangelist presented one of His main signs, which is His relation to the prophet David; The multitude were crying out:

“Blessed is the kingdom of our father David, that comes in the name of the Lord; Hosannah in the highest” (Verse 10)

It is the procession of the promised Messiah, the Son of David; a heavenly procession, as the One who came, came from “the highest” It is the kingdom of God Himself ! Father Theophlactius says: [They called Christ’s kingdom, “the kingdom of David”, as Christ came as a descendent of David; as well as ‘David’ refers to the one with the strong hand, as by his strong hand, as that of the Lord, so many miracles were done].

It was noteworthy, that the Lord Christ did not avoid the procession, nor forbade the multitude from calling Him King; though He taught them that His kingdom is not of this world, nor of that earthly level; He is a heavenly King, His path is that of the Cross and death.

The outcries of the multitude were in harmony with the words of the Archangel Gabriel, when he gave the Holy Virgin the good news of the birth of the Lord

Christ:

“The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Lk. 1: 32, 33)

As to cutting the palms and tree branches, and using them in the procession of the Lord Christ; it refers to our plucking of the spiritual words and teachings of the fathers out of their mouths, being the spiritual palms and heavenly trees growing in the paradise of the living Church, for us to use in the procession of the Lord Christ, on His entry into the Jerusalem of our inner heart. Father Theophlactius says: [I wish we cover our life path with the branches we cut from the trees; that is to say, be like the saints who are holy branches; Whoever follows the example of their virtues, would be like cutting branches for himself].

2- The barren fig tree:

The Lord Christ did two things on His entry into Jerusalem, namely, cleansing the temple, and cursing the barren fig tree; These are, as a matter of fact, two integrated actions that bear one significance, namely, destroying the deadly literalism of the ancient man, in order to establish a new temple, based on deep and renewable spiritual work. Because many scholars questioned the significance of cursing the fig tree, the Church dedicated its readings, on Monday of the Pascha week (the week of passion), and the eve of Tuesday, to deal with the spiritual concept of the issue of “the fig tree”.

The fig tree, according to the biblical concept, symbolizes Israel (Jerem. 8: 13; Hos. 9: 10; Joel 1: 7; Ezek. 17: 24; Mic. 7: 1 - 6). ... That tree -- Israel -- having rejected its Savior Messiah, has fallen under the curse of denial. That curse did not come to it promptly, but constituted the fruit of long term denial, that started since its beginning, and continued until the coming of the Savior. God, did not stand doing

nothing, before what happened to old Israel, He established the new Israel, the fruitful fig tree.

The readings of Monday and the eve of Tuesday of the holy Pascha revealed the following points:

(1) The readings began by proclaiming God, as the creator of the world (Genesis 1,2).

Thus, if the fig tree has withered, it is, nevertheless, a creation by the hands of God, who loves and desires nothing but its salvation; The reason behind its withering, is its persistence on denying, that deprived it of God, the source of its life.

If the story of the fig tree terrifies the soul, for fear of falling under a similar curse, yet, the Church elevates our heart with hope towards the Savior, being the creator and renewer of our nature, who does not avenge for Himself, but carries for us all the love ... If we wished for salvation, we would find the eternal arms waiting to save us and to renew our life.

(2) We probably wonder: if God is the creator of that tree, why would He curse it ? ! We shall find the answer to this, in the prophecies of Monday of the holy Pascha, that proclaim that:

“the Spirit of God divided the light from the darkness” (Genesis 1)

It is as though, the curse that came on that tree, is a natural fruit of the division of good from evil, and the discernment of the children of God from those denying Him. If God, with His love has created us, He will never, with His goodness, leave the good, attached to the evil. That is why the readings came, concentrating on the spirit of discernment, to be likened to our creator, to discern good from evil. The prophet Isaiah says

“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness

for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter” (Isaiah 5: 20)

The readings also warned us against mixing the worship of God with that of the golden calf, as did the children of Israel (Exod. 32).

The loving God hates the destruction of His creation; That is why He keeps exhorting us, to spare ourselves falling under the curse,

“Return to Me’, says the Lord of hosts, ‘And I will return to you’ “
(Zech. 1: 1)

To escape from that curse we brought upon ourselves, and to enter into God, our refuge.

The secret behind the curse of withering, is the loss of true wisdom; That is why the readings of Monday of the holy Pascha, dealing with the withered fig tree, draw our attention to the necessity of acquiring wisdom (Isaiah 5; Prov. 1); that “does not enter into an evil soul, and does not dwell in a sinning body”; So, if Israel has been defiled, soul and body, wisdom would not find a place in it; thus would losing its blessing, and wither.

(3) If the Lord has uttered His verdict, putting the tree under curse, because of its evil and denial; yet, the readings confirm the true relationship of the Lord with His people, calling Israel “His beloved” Isaiah 5: 1); also, “I have loved you” (Mal. 1:1); and then says in bitterness,

“How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing” (Lk. 13:34)

Although God does like divorce; Yet, Israel, His beloved, like a bride, compelled Him to write her “*certificate of divorce*” (Isaiah 50: 1 - 3).

Thus, the tree did not fall under that verdict in haste; as the judge was her creator,

and father of all, who wants to gather His children under His wings; and the heavenly bridegroom who hates to divorce His bride ... What occurred was the deed of the tree, that brought condemnation on itself.

We can add, that that action was unique in the life of the Lord Christ; We have not heard Him curse any other tree, nor passed a severe chastisement on anyone; but we see Him all along the four gospels, as the compassionate and merciful Master, who feels the weaknesses of sinners, and supports them till they stand up. Thus, if this story was narrated in all the gospels, that is to confirm that, though He is the compassionate Lord, who came to save, and not to condemn, yet, He is likewise, the Condemner ! He wishes that no one will fall under the curse of witherness: thus He only cursed that one tree.

(4) In the prayer of the ninth hour on Monday of the holy Pascha, we recall the fall of man, and his expulsion from paradise (Genesis 2, 3)... As though, the Church proclaims, that God has planted that fig tree (Israel), in His Divine paradise, to live and to give fruit by Spirit and truth. So, if it has deprived itself, by itself, of spiritual fruit, it is not fitting to leave it there, but should be expelled and fall under curse. In the sermon by St. Shenouda the father of hermits, he says:

[God has not sown in paradise, both good and bad trees, but only good ones; has not sown fruitless trees, or trees with bad fruits. Even people whom He put there, once they disobeyed, they were driven out.

From this dear brethren, take notice, that the holy dwellings of God should not embrace good and bad people, as does the world, that is full of both saints and sinners; the latter should be promptly driven out. I know that all the earth is God's, So if His house is like any other place, what will, then, be its privilege ? If I, as a priest, do what sinners on earth do, I am not worthy of being called a priest].

Now, we return to the gospel text according to St. Mark:

“And Jesus went into Jerusalem and into the temple. So when He

has looked around at all things, as the hour was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve” (verse 11)

The procession was heading towards Jerusalem, to the temple; He wishes to lead His people to His heavenly sanctuaries, through the altar that was in the temple, that is through the Cross. And as the temple was His sanctuary, “He looked around at all things”. Being the zealous God, who does not stand corruption or evil in His House, His eyes examined every thing to discern the sanctified from the corrupted, to drive out the later. He looked around, as though, He is seeking someone to accommodate Him in Jerusalem, but did not find.

As the hour was already late, the Lord did not find His comfort in Jerusalem, wide as it is, and with so many people of religion in it, but found His comfort with His disciples in a small village, “Bethany”, that is (house of suffering, or house of obedience). There, He would find the few remnants, who could stand suffering, and would accept the Cross, through obedience; There, the Lord would find His comfort with His disciples in their life.

“Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps, He would find something on it. And when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. In response, Jesus said to it, ‘Let no one eat fruit from you again’ “ (verses 12 - 14)

The Lord Christ was hungry ! And as St. Augustine says: [What is Christ hungry or thirsty for, but for our good works ? All along the ages He was hungry, wishing to find good fruits that are joy to heaven; But the fig tree - the nation of Israel - which He has provided with all possibilities to produce fruit, has given only leaves, but no fruits]. .

Some may question: Why did the Lord Christ demand fruit out of season; and when He did not find, He cursed the tree ? !

Some explain that by saying, that Palestine was known to have two kinds of fig trees; Thus, although it was not , as a whole, the right season, yet, the presence of leaves on that tree, would indicate that it was of the kind, that should have already carried fruits. Probably, that may also refer to the situation of the world at that time; It was not the time for figs! As the world so far, has not yet carried true spiritual fruit, because the Lord was not yet glorified by His Cross, to present the fruit of His obedience to the Father.

It was fitting for the Jewish nation, having preceded the pagan world in knowing God, and in receiving the law and prophecies, to produce fruit, but it produced leaves without fruit. That is why it was worthy of withering , to be replaced by the fruitful fig tree of the New Testament.

St. Cyril, of Jerusalem says [The Lord Christ Knows for sure that it was not the time for figs, yet, He came, not to curse the tree itself, but to remove the curse that befell us,by cursing the fruitless trees].

St. John Chrysostom responding to that question, ‘How could the Master order the withering of that fig tree, when it was not the time for figs ?’, says: [There is little sense in giving all that importance to cursing a tree, while not contemplating in what the Lord meant by that miraculous act, to glorify Him !].

3- His jealousy for His temple:

Entering Jerusalem, the Lord headed to His temple, to be seen holding a whip of cords (Jn. 2: 16), to cleanse it from buyers and sellers, from moneychangers and dove- sellers. We are used to seeing the Lord Christ, the meek, the gentle and

the compassionate, mildly treating all, and taking children in His arms; But now we see Him dealing firmly with those who are corrupting His temple; realizing what He has symbolically done to the fig tree, in driving out the evil people from the temple.

We can apprehend the Lord's attitude, if we meditate in the readings of the Church, of the two hours following the Liturgy of Palm Sunday (the ninth and eleventh), and also those of the eve of Monday of the holy Pascha; which deal with the issue of (the Lord cleansing the temple), revealing what He meant by His actions ... This can be summarized in the following points:

(1) If the Lord has entered Jerusalem riding on a colt, "*on which no one has sat*" (verse: 2), He meant by that to make every thing new; He wanted to destroy in us, completely, the deeds of the old man, to establish His new temple,

"The new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him"

(Col. 3: 10)

Thus, while the Jews, especially their various leaderships, were preoccupied with the appearances of apparent worships, and the temple was crowded with dove-sellers, and moneychangers, the eyes of the Lord aimed to establishing His new temple in the souls, through His exalted sacrifice; We hear the prophet 'Zephaniah' saying:

"For the Lord has prepared a sacrifice; He has invited His guests ...; will punish all those who leap over the threshold; who fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit" (Zeph. 1: 7, 9)

The Lord does not care for the great number, of those who crowd the threshold, in appearances of worshipping, and present spiritless offerings; but desires to draw all to His sacrifice, and to proclaim the sanctification of His guests by His Holy blood !

St. Cyril, the Great, believes that the Jews, having preoccupied themselves with the Mosaic liturgy in their worship in the temple, they did not practice it in the spirit, but in dry literalism. So the Lord came to destroy the dry letter, to replace it with the new Spirit.

(2) If the action of driving out the dove-sellers and overturning the tables of moneychangers, have caused sadness and bitterness in the hearts of many; Yet God turns that bitterness into sweetness, and the sadness into exhilaration, through establishing the new man, sanctified by His holy blood, in place of the destroyed ancient one; That is why we hear in the prophesy of the first hour:

“The sound of a mournful cry from the First Gate; A wailing from the second quarter” (Zeph. 1: 10)

As to the secret of turning the mourning into exhilaration, it is the grain of wheat that dies when buried in the ground, to grow into a plant that bears new fruits in abundance (Jn. 12: 24).

(3) If the Lord made a visible whip of cords, in order to cleanse the temple; Yet, He actually sent His fiery Holy Spirit, to burn up the deeds of the old man, and to grant in Baptism, the new man; then to keep working persistently, to destroy in us our earthly man, to establish the heavenly. That is why, in the prophesy of the third hour, we hear the prophet Zephaniah saying:

“In the day of the Lord’s wrath, the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy” (Zeph. 1: 18)

(3) He was acting with authority in the temple; nobody could oppose Him, as He was cleansing His own temple. The prophesy of the ninth hour came to reveal the secret behind driving out these people from the temple, that is, their evil and corruption:

*“Arise and depart, for this is not your rest, because it is defiled;
It is ruined beyond all remedy” (Micah 2: 3 - 10)*

His entry into the temple, spoiled for the evil people, their worldly enjoyment; the temple is no longer a place of comfort; they turned into fugitives, with nothing to drive them out, but their evil and their persistence on not repenting.

(5) Who are those dove-sellers but people of religion, who sell the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Its symbol being the dove) for money; where Simonism (Getting Clerical positions for money) is followed in ordainments; or where spiritual ministry, is used to gain material benefit.

Dove-sellers are also, those who sell what they gained through Baptism -- the work of the Holy Spirit -- because of lusts of the flesh and committing sins; losing therefore, their purity and deserve to be driven out of the temple.

Moneychangers, are those, who sell the word of God for money; that is to say, who use their preaching mission for getting worldly benefits.

St. Ambrosius comments on driving out the sellers from the temple, saying: [God does not want His temple, to turn into a marketplace, but a place for sanctification; teaching, that positions of clergy should not be given for money, but for free. Meditate in God's planning for that effect: He began by driving out those who buy and sell, and the moneychangers who used to seek wealth, without discerning between good and evil. The wealth of God are the Divine Books; When He traveled He delivered His goods among His slaves (He gave them His Word) (Mt. 25: 14; Lk, !9: 13). And for treating the wounded, He gave two dinarii to the inn-keeper (Lk, 10: 35). Driving out the evil moneychangers refers to driving out the leadership of religion, who trade in the holy books for their own benefit.

He likewise warns us, through driving out the dove-sellers; that those who gained

the grace of the Holy Spirit, should not trade with it; He said:

“Freely you have received; freely give” (Mt. 10: 8)

When Simon thought that he could purchase the gift of sanctification with money, he was told by St. Peter:

“Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money: (Acts 8: 20)]

4- Withering of the fig tree:

In the morning, as the disciples, were passing by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. In amazement Peter said:

*“Rabbi, look ! The fig tree which you cursed has withered away.
So Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain: Be removed and be cast into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will come to pass, he will have whatever he says”*
(verses 21 -23

Scholars believe that the moving mountain refers to every thing difficult; the Jewish Rabbis used to call whoever interpret a difficult Scripture text, ‘a mountain-mover’.

Who is that mountain, that, by faith, could be moved and cast into the sea, but the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ,

“The Mountain, cut without hands, that filled the whole earth”
(Dan. 3: 35, 45)

By faith, that mountain will move into the soul, as though, into the sea, where it

Will dwell. That move probably refers to His transfer from the Jewish nation into the sea of the Gentile nations, to dwell in their midst, to make of them a sanctified Church.

St Cyril, of Jerusalem speaks to us about the activity of faith saying: [Faith performs miracles within the soul in quick moments; by which it gets illuminated to enjoy the vision of God; and as much as possible, looks up to Him, and reaches to the ends of the earth. It beholds the judgment and the promised rewards, before the world comes to an end.].

If the prayer, coming from a believer's heart, could transfer to it the Divine mountain, to grant its inner sea, calmness and peace; In order that prayer can be active and receivable, the Lord says,

“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses” (verse 25)

In other words, the prayer to be received, has to come out of a heart, with practical faith; the sign of that practical faith is the forgiveness of the trespasses of others, in order to get the forgiveness of our Father, and the purification of our hearts ... The Lord intended, to let the response to prayers be in our hands; namely, if we listen to others, He will listen to us; and whatever is our verdict on them, will be the verdict on us. And as St. Cebrianus says: [There is no more excuse ... When you are judged by your own verdict, you are getting what you have earned].

In order to enjoy a response to our petition, our faith should go hand in hand with sanctified life in the Lord. And as St. John Chrysostom says: [How could I be sure of the response to my petition ? By not asking something contradicting what He is ready to give; or something unworthy of the Great King; or something worldly; but I should, instead, seek all spiritual blessings. Also, if I approach Him without anger,

but with pure and sanctified hands, that are used in giving; If you approach Him that way, you will surely have your petition granted.].

5- His authority questioned:

The high priests, the scribes, and the pharisees got disturbed, when they saw Him , alone, able to cleanse the temple from the moneychangers, the dove-sellers, and all the corrupt people; so they came to Him asking,

“By what authority are you doing these things ? And who gave You this authority to do these things ? “ (verse 28)

In other words, who appointed You a teacher; or who ordained You a High Priest ? They posted that question in order to catch Him with a word: If He says, it is by His own authority, He would be condemned as a blasphemer; and if He says, it is by an authority of somebody else, people would begin to doubt Him, because they saw Him performing Divine works ! That is why the Lord answered them by a question of His own, concerning the Baptism of John the Baptist, *“Is it from heaven or from men ?*

And as they found themselves in a corner, they did not reveal what was in their hearts.

St. Cyril, the Great says: [They approached Him asking, ‘You are teaching in the temple, while you are of the tribe of Judah, not having the right to be among ministers who serve the temple. Why do you teach what is against the commandments of Moses, and what contradicts the law given to us ? Let us ask these people, Did His work sting your minds, and arouse in you such distasteful envy ? Tell me, ‘Do you accuse the Giver of the law, that He is corrupting it ?... Tell me, ‘should the Lord submit to His law ? Did He set His commandments, that He uttered through His Sainly prophets, for our sake, or for His own ? ... God said plainly (through His prophets), that the Mosaic law will come to an end, to get replaced by a new law, to be presented by Christ:

“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; My covenant which they broke ...” (Jerem 31: 31, 32)

He promised a new covenant; and as the wise St. Paul says,

“In that He says, ‘A new covenant’, He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old, is ready to vanish away” (Heb. 8: 13)

As the old grew old, it has to be replaced by the new. That was realized, not by one of His Saintly prophets, but rather by the Lord of all prophets].

St. Cyril, the Great believes that the Lord Christ presented them with a question concerning John the Baptist, as the Jews used to accuse the true prophets of being false ones ... The pharisees got confused, and were afraid to accuse John of being false; so they refrained from answering the Lord’s question, proclaiming that they were not seeking the truth, and were not worthy of recognizing it; Thus the Lord refused to answer their question. St. Augustine presents us with an explanation for that attitude of the Lord, by saying: [They closed the door to themselves, through pretense of ignorance of what they know, that is why He did not open it for them, as they did not knock, according to what is said,

“Knock, and it will be opened to you” (Mt. 7: 7)

They did not only refrain to knock, but they also denied what they know; so tightly closing the door before their own face].

+++

Chapter 12

OPPOSITION IN JERUSALEM

The Lord Christ entered into Jerusalem to bear the Cross-for our sake. But the evil leaderships gathered together against Him because He frankly revealed their corruption and their love of authority. But, in the midst of that difficult atmosphere, an unknown widow was found, who opened her simple heart in love for God, to give far more than all:

Two mites, all of her livelihood.

1- The wicked vinedressers verses	1 -- 12
2- A question concerning paying taxes	13 -- 17
3- The Sadducees and the resurrection	18 -- 27
4-The scribes and the commandment	28 -- 40
5- The loving widow and the two mites	41 -- 44

1- The wicked vinedressers:

Having put His opposers in a corner, by asking them about the Baptism of John, The Lord intended to expose their evil opposition and its probable consequences, by presenting the parable of the wicked vinedressers. In this parable, which I have already discussed in my interpretation of the Gospel according to St. Matthew (21: 33), this should be noticed:

(1) The first point to draw our attention in this parable, is likening God the Father to a man who planted a vineyard, saying:

“A man planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a place for the wine vat and built a tower; And He leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country” (Verse 1)

God's love for mankind is great, being His earthly, exalted creation; He granted it His likeness and image; and even after trespassing against Him, He went after it, and gave it the possibility of getting back to His bosom, presenting His Son as a ransom for its sake. Now, He is likening God, the Father to man, something that proclaims His dignified look toward mankind.

(2) This parable shows God's sanctification of humanity as He likens Himself to man who planted a vineyard, He says:

“He leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country” (verse 1).

That does not mean that He left the place, as He is omnipresent; nor that He deprived His vineyard of His care, as He cares for every thing big or small; “He went”, indicates that He gave the vinedresser complete freedom to work; He gave them complete responsibility, a sign of His love for maturity, together with His appreciation of human freedom; He set up the vinedressers to work as mature men, responsible before Him.

(3) In this parable, the Lord Christ, did not only proclaim to His oppressors, that He is aware of what goes on inside them, but knows beforehand of their intentions toward Him, being the heir, whom the evil vinedressers do not stand... He is not afraid of what they are going to do to Him, as He came to consummate their evil chalice, and to take the vineyard away from them to give it to others (verse 9). He called Himself,

“The stone which the builders rejected, that became the chief cornerstone” (verse 10)

St. Augustine sees in this parable, that as the evil men took the Heir Son, and intended to kill Him, He did not resist them, but said: “I lay down” (Psalm 3: 5). He slept surrendering His body in the hands of His oppressors to crucify Him and to stab His side

with a spear, in order for the Church to emerge from it, as did Eve, who emerged from Adam's side, while asleep.

(4) Several fathers interpreted this parable in detail; I have already presented that of St. Cyril, the Great, in my interpretation of the Gospel, according to St. Matthew, together with interpretations of other fathers. I shall, here, present some other views.

In a text, said to be by St. Jerome: [The vineyard is the house of Israel; the hedge is the guarding by angels; the tower is the temple, and the vinedressers are the priests].

While father Theophlactius believes that the hedge is the law that kept them from mixing with strangers.

St. Ambrose presents us with the following comment:

The prophet Isaiah clearly mentions that the Lord's vineyard is the house of Israel (Isaiah 5: 7). He established it, and leased it to vinedressers, then went into a far away country; not that He left to some other place, as He is always omnipresent; but His presence is very much obvious in those who love Him, and keeps away from those who reject Him.

The Gospels mention that He set a hedge around it (Mt. 21: 33; Mk. 12: 1); that is to say, He surrounded it with Divine care, to defend it against the attacks of spiritual beasts. He set a hedge, as He granted them the law.

He dug a place for the wine vat; as the secrets of Christ's passions seem as the new wine ... People thought that the disciples were drunk, when they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2: 13); He dug a place for a wine vat, to pour into it the inner fruit.

At vintage-time He sent His servants; He did well to send them at vintage- time, and not at harvest time, as the Jews did not present any fruits ... their vats did not get filled with wine. The blood of 'Naboth' was shed in that vineyard (1 Kings 21:13), and his blood prophesied that, there will be numerous martyrs in that vineyard.

God sent many, which the Jews sent back with no dignity or respect, carrying no fruit from them. Finally, He sent them His only-begotten Son, whom they plotted to get rid of; being the heir, so they denied and crucified Him.

St. Ambrosius shifted from speaking of the Jews, as God's vineyard ignored by their spiritual leaders, to the soul or the life of a believer in the Church of the New Testament, being the Lord's vineyard, which the Lord presented with all possibilities to give fruit ... And now, He is asking for fruit! From his own words: The compassionate owner, used to take care of His vineyard, trimming it, and cleansing it of accumulating rocks; sometimes letting the sun burn out the unwanted weeds; and sometimes irrigating the plants with rain; watching all the time lest the land would produce thorns, or be choked with an overgrowth of leaves. The Lord does not want vain words to press on the virtues, to hinder the growth and maturation of simplicity and all good faculties.

May the Lord Savior, bring us to a good end of that vineyard, which He supports and guards against all deceits, by the hedge of eternal life....

Here is our harvest! Feeling happy and secure, some fill their inner guts with the delicious grapes of the vineyard, while others seek the gifts of heaven, while still others behold the fruits of Divine blessings, at the feet of their will, after taking off their sandals, to have their bare feet stained with the pouring wine. For the place where they stand, is a holy ground (Exodus 3: 5) ... Blessed are you, precious vineyard, because of that guardian; You have been sanctified by the precious blood of the Lord, not by that of Naboth, nor of uncountable prophets. Naboth died for the sake of his fathers' inheritance; but as for you, it was for our sake, that a multitude of martyrs shed their blood; and for our sake, the apostles tasted the Cross of the Lord; that is why, they gave fruit to the end of the world.

2- A question concerning paying taxes:

In our study of the Gospel according to St. Matthew (22: 15 - 22), We saw the Jewish leaders, having realized that the Lord's parables are exposing their inner wounds, did not go to go true physician to cure them, but plotted instead, to oppose Him the more. Some of the Pharisees and the Sadducees posed to Him a question concerning the taxes that were collected for Caesar. If He refused giving it, He would be accused as some revolutionary against the Roman authority; and if He consented, the multitude would lose their confidence in Him, as a Savior from the foreign aggressor. The Lord's response came to touch the depths of our souls, regarding the following:

(1) St. Ambrose says: "The Lord, here, teaches us, how to use wisdom in our responses to heretics and Jews." In another place, He says, "*Be wise as serpents*" (Mt. 10: 16). Which is interpreted by scholars as such: As the bronze serpent (Num. 21: 8) proclaimed the Cross of Christ that uprooted the venom of the evil serpent, so we, likewise, should be wise as Christ, and simple as the Spirit (symbolized by the dove).

(2) Those evil people hoped that He would insult the authorities, to have a chance to accuse Him; but, amazingly, the Lord, wisely, exhorted His listeners to submit to worldly authorities, in the Lord, and to give respect or taxes to whom they are due.

Despite that, they accused Him before Pilate, saying:

"We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King" (Lk. 23: 2)

In that, the Master did not defend Himself, presenting the principle of submission to authorities, not out of fear, nor in order to defend Himself, but, as a principle that should be adopted by the Christian, even if he is accused otherwise.

(3) Many saintly scholars believe that the principle saying:

“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (verse 17)

Although, in its apparent sense, means a commitment by believers to submit their duties, honestly, to authorities; not out of fear, and not reluctantly, but as a way of keeping the Divine commandment; Yet, that principle bears a deep spiritual meaning. If our souls bear the image of God, we shall be His coin, which He accepts with Joy.

But if they bear the image of the world, we shall be the coin of the world, and God would not find in us a place for rest or joy.

St. Ambrosius says: "The lord told them to bring Him a dinarius, and asked them, ‘Whose image is on it?’ as God’s image differs from that of the world." Thus the apostle St. Paul warns us:

“As we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly man” (1 Cor. 15: 49)

We do not find the image of Caesar, in Peter, who said: *“Behold, we have forsaken everything and followed you”* ; and we do not find it in James and John, the sons of Thunder; but you can find it in the sea. If Peter does not carry the image of Caesar, why, then, did he pay the tax ? He did not pay it out of his own pocket, but from the sea; returning what belongs to the world, to the world. You too, if you do not wish, to have anything in you, that belongs to Caesar, do not have any world possessions, but possess the blessings. ... If you do not wish to be indebted to the worldly king, forsake all your possessions, and follow Christ.

(4) The scholar Origen sees in that Divine principle, that it is fitting for us to present to the body (Caesar), its taxes, that is to say, its necessities; But as to God, we should offer Him our souls, completely sanctified.

3- The Sadducees and the resurrection:

Who are these Sadducees, who came to test the Lord?

They were a Jewish aristocratic religious sect; said by some, to be related to 'Zadok,' who, in the year 300 A. D. established that sect. But most probably they were related to 'Zadok', the high priest, at the time of David and Solomon; in whose family, the high priesthood was preserved until the time of the Macabians; his descendants were called 'Sadducees'. That, sect was considered by Josephus, the historian, as an opponent to the Pharisees; Yet, despite their relatively fewer numbers, they were wealthy, educated, and

of high statures, all along the fourth and third centuries B. C. , during the Persian and Greek reigns. They were fond of the Greek culture, and were preoccupied with politics more than with religion. Accordingly, they denied the authenticity of the Old Testament Books, except those of the 'Pentateuch', that is the first five Books by Moses; they did not care, as well for the tradition, contrary to the Pharisees, who considered themselves as the guardians of the tradition of the elders.

The Sadducees, believed that the 'Pentateuch' included nothing concerning the resurrection from the dead. They also believed that what was mentioned, concerning marriage according to the Mosaic law, that commits a wife, whose husband is dead, to marry his brother, if she was childless, in order to have, for her late husband, a child to inherit him and to bear his name; they saw in that, a proclamation and a confirmation, that there is no resurrection from the dead.

As the book of Acts says:

“For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection -- and no angels or spirits; but the Pharisees confess both” (Acts 23: 8)

Nevertheless, the Sadducees were allies to the Pharisees in opposing the Lord, but each according to their own way. The Sadducees came to Him with a fictional story, in which they imagine a woman whose husband died childless; so she married his brother, then a second and a third, up to the seventh brother, but remained childless; and finally, the woman also died. Therefore, in the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be, for all seven had her as a wife?

The response of the Lord Christ was twofold:

(1) In verse 25, He did not reveal to them their idiocy in denying the resurrection, but in their understanding of it; as their hearts were attached to politics and to the world, they thought of resurrection as a material worldly life, although:

“When they rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven” (verse 25)

There is no point in comparing between a life we live here, according to the flesh, with a material mind, and a life we anticipate, according to a heavenly, angelic, level.

(2) Having thought that the ‘Pentateuch’ of Moses, denies the resurrection, He confirmed it to them from these same books, that described Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as living after their death, through God’s relation to them; saying,

“Have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living” (verses 26 - 27)

St. Cyril, the Great, comments on that attitude of the Sadducees, saying:

‘They approached Christ, the Savior of us all, the life and resurrection, seeking to destroy the concept of resurrection; being so arrogant and unbelieving, they invented a story, loaded with ignorance, and unfounded suppositions, through which they sought to corrupt the hope of the whole world. We confirm that the hope of the whole world, is in the resurrection from the dead, of which Christ is its first fruit.’

For that, the wise St. Paul, basing our resurrection on that of the Lord, says:

“For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen” (1 Cor 15: 16)

And he also presents another thought, saying:

“Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead ? “
(1 Cor. 15: 12)

He meant by these, the Sadducees, with whom we are now dealing. Anyway, the question of the Sadducees was meaningless; and was in its entirety, not conforming to the Holy Scripture. The response of the Lord Christ confirms the idiocy of their story, and leads us to reject the idea on which their argument is based.

God said of those who died:

“I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, is your judgment ? Where, O Grave, is your sting ? (according to the Septuagint version)” (Hosea 13: 14)

What He meant by the judgment of death and its sting, was explained to us by the blessed St. Paul, saying:

“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is law” (1 Cor. 15: 56)

He likens death to a scorpion, whose sting is sin, and its venom kills a soul. He says that the law is the power of sin, saying in another place:

“I would not have known sin except through the law” (Rom. 7: 7)

“For where is no law, there is no transgression” (Rom. 4: 15)

That is why Christ takes His believers away from the guardianship of the law, that condemns and nullifies the sting of death, which is sin; As it nullifies sin, death goes with it; as death originates from it; and because of it, it came to the world.

As God gave His promise: *“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death”*, the blessed Prophets conforming with that exalted decree, spoke to us, not through the revelation of their hearts, nor the will of man, but through God’s mouth, according to the Scripture (see Jeremiah 23: 16); as the Holy Spirit speaking in them, proclaims God’s judgment and His unchangeable mighty will, in every issue. The prophet Isaiah speaks to us:

“Your dead shall live; those in graves shall rise; those who dwell in dust will shout for joy, because your dew will heal them”
(Isaiah 26: 19) (According to the Septuagint version)

I assume that the “dew” is the power of the Holy Spirit, the life-giver, or that activity, nullifying death, originating from God and life.

The blessed David also says in his psalms, concerning those on earth:

You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust; You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth” (Psalm 104: 29, 30)

Haven’t you heard about the work of the Holy Spirit, and His life-giving grace, by which He will renew the earth? By “the face of the earth,” He means, its beauty; and by the beauty of human nature, the incorruption, as it is said,

“The body is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power” (1 Cor. 15: 42, 43)

Once more, the prophet Isaiah confirms for us, that death, that came in because of sin, will not, eternally regain its power upon the inhabitants of the earth, but will be nullified, through the resurrection of Christ from the dead; renewing the world, and getting it back to what it was, as it is written:

“He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; The rebuke of His people, He will take away from all the earth” (Isaiah 25: 8)

The rebuke of people is sin; when it is taken away, death would be nullified, and corruption would be removed from the midst of people. When death comes to an end, tears would be wiped away and crying would stop; as there would be no more cause for people, to cry.

Thus, we have several evidences to debate the denial of the Jews; but, let us listen to what the Lord Christ, Himself, said to them: ‘Indeed, Children of this world, lead a life according to the flesh, full of lusts to beget offspring; That is why they marry and be married; While, those who reach an elect life, dignified, bearing all reverence, and qualified for the amazing and glorified resurrection, would naturally have a life, far above that of men of this world. They live in the presence of God, as saints; becoming equal to angels, children of God. Getting rid of every bodily lust, and having in themselves, no place for them, they are likened to the saintly angels, practice spiritual and not material ministry, as sanctified spirits; and at the same time, get qualified for a glory, like that enjoyed by angels.

The Savior proved the complete ignorance of the Sadducees, presenting them with Moses, their spiritual mentor, as preaching the resurrection from the dead, in a very clear way. He presents God saying in the burning bush: *“I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”*. Whose God is He, if these, as they presume, are not any more living? He is the God for the living; That is why they will be raised, through the

right hand of the Almighty; not alone, but together with all those who are on earth. Not so believing, is fitting for the ignorance of the Sadducees, not those who love Christ, we, who believe in Him who says:

“I am the resurrection, and the life” (Jn. 11: 25)

In Him who raises from the dead:

“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor. 15: 52)

Our Savior will change us all to incorruption, to glory, and incorruptible life; He, by whom, and to whom, is the glory, the praise, and the authority, together with God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, to the age of ages, Amen.

The symbolic concept of the woman who was married to seven husbands:

In our previous study of the talk of the Lord Christ with the Sadducees, in our interpretation of the Gospel, according to St. Matthew (22: 23), we saw how that woman, who was married to seven brothers, and remained childless, refers to the Church, that stayed long (the figure 7) under the law; and did not give any spiritual fruit, until it became dead to the works of the law, to live by grace, according to a spiritual angelic level.

A text, claimed to belong to St. Jerome, presents us with another symbolic interpretation:

“Who is that woman who was married to the seven brothers, and then finally died herself, but the Jewish synagogue, deprived of the sevenfold spirit (Isaiah 11: 2); that spirit which filled the seven Patriarchs fathers; to whom, the descendent of Abraham (that is to say, Jesus Christ) was not given? Although He was born to them, yet, He was granted to the Gentiles! That woman was dead to Christ; thus would not be connected in

resurrection, with any of the seven Patriarchs. By the figure 7, I mean the company of all believers, on the contrary to what is said by Isaiah,

“Seven women shall take hold of one man” (Isaiah 4: 1)

That is to say, the seven Churches, beloved, rebuked, and chastened by the Lord, will worship Him, in one faith.

4- The scribes and the commandment:

“Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He has answered them well, asked Him, ‘Which is the first commandment of all?’ Jesus answered him, ‘The first of all the commandments is, ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength’. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’. There is no other commandment greater than these” (verses 28 - 32)

If the Pharisees, and the Sadducees, have come to the Lord, in an evil attempt to catch Him, as a revolutionary against the Roman authority, or a breaker of the Mosaic law, their conversations with the Lord, attracted many, to enjoy new concepts, something that moved that scribe to pose a question, often debated by learned people of religion, especially scribes; and probably also, he intended, by his question to test the Lord (Mt. 22: 34, 35; Lk. 10: 25), assuming that He is discerning between the different commandments of the law, or that He is presenting a commandment of His own, as greater than what came in the law. If the Lord did not rebuke that scribe, He answered him instead, with an exalted Divine wisdom, presenting a spiritual basis for the concept of the commandment, which can be summarized in the following:

(1) All the commandments represent one unity, unspeakable from each other. While the scribe is asking for a commandment, which is the first of all, the Lord Christ presents

two commandments on the same level , closely related, that touch our relationship with God, through our belief in Him, our recognition of His oneness, our limitless love for Him, and our relationship with our neighbor, whom we love as ourselves. The gospel, according to St. Luke revealed who is our neighbor, through the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10).

In other words, there is no distinction between the belief in God and recognition of Him, and our love of Him. And there is no distinction between our relationship with God and that with our brethren ... It as though, the commandment is an enjoyment of an inner life, lived by man, in his depths, and proclaimed through his belief in God, and his relationship with other people.

In a text, claimed to be by St. Jerome, he says:

“That question used to represent a general problem for those learned in the law, namely, that the commandments included in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, are different. The Lord presented, not one commandment, but two, as if they are two breasts on the chest of a bride, by which our childhood is fulfilled. He referred to the first of the great commandments, that should be put in the first place in the heart of every one of us, as a basis for piety, that is the knowledge, and recognition of the unity of Godhead, together with practicing the good work, consummated by the love of God and the neighbor.”

(2) If love is the essence of the commandment, that love is not an external behavior that we merely project, but, it rather represents a life that touches all our possibilities, touches our being, “*love with all soul*”; touches our emotions and inner feelings, “with all heart”; touches our thoughts, “*with all mind*”; and also touches our visible behavior, “*with all strength*”. It is as though, love involves the dedication of man, in his whole, by the Holy Spirit of God, in order to bear the nature of his creator within him; Through “*God is love*”(1 Jn. 4: 8), we bear His life, and His attributes, working within the soul, the heart, the mind, the body, and all energies and possibilities!

The commandment is enjoyment of, and response to the Holy Spirit of God, who conforms us all the time, and elevates us from glory to glory, with the hope of reaching the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephes. 4: 13).

Father Theophlactius says:

“Behold, how He is enumerating all the strengths of the soul; as there is the living strength in the soul,” that He explained by saying, “with all

soul.” To that strength, he attributes wrath and desire, which should be surrendered to Divine love. There is another strength, namely, ‘the natural strength’, to which growth and revival are attributed, which should also be surrendered to God, as it is said, “with all heart”; and a third strength, namely, ‘the mind’, which should be completely surrendered to God”.

Anyway, it seems that a conflict of opinions occurred between the sects of the Jews themselves; some of them concentrated on liturgical laws, especially offering of sacrifices; while others, on that side of faith, and still others on the practical behavioral aspect. The Lord Christ came to confirm the need for a complete change in the soul, heart, and mind; together with a response of all energies and possibilities of man, with that inner change. The scribe liked that answer, saying,

“Well said, teacher, You have spoken the truth, for there is one God; And there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices’. (Verses 32, 33)

The Lord answered him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God”. He did not say,

“You have the kingdom of God within you”, as that scribe recognized the features of the way, but he had not entered it yet, nor enjoyed it.

Christ as the Son of David and, at the same time, his Lord:

As the arguments came to an end, and, according to the evangelist, “*no one dared question Him*” (verse 34), the Lord began to speak with the multitude, through the words of the scribes themselves, to reveal to them the way to their salvation by Him;

“Then Jesus answered and said, while He taught in the temple, ‘How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David ? For David himself said by the Holy Spirit: ‘The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool’. Therefore David himself calls Him ‘Lord’, How is He then his Son ?” (verses 35 - 37)

Now, the Lord Christ, speaks publicly about Himself, for the first time, to proclaim the following:

(1) That He is the Messiah, the Son of David, and at the same time, his Lord. ... David recognized Him before long generations, not by himself, but through the Holy Spirit; He was the subject of prophecies and the desire of the saintly fathers.

(2) If the adversary powers have gathered, not only to debate with Him, but also to plot to crucify Him, they are likewise opposing God the Father, who makes the Son’s enemies His footstool, not because of any weakness in the Son, but out of unity of work between the Father and the Son. It is as though, the Master is demanding from every one, before getting into the incidents of the road, to reconsider himself, lest the incidents would draw him over, to make of him an adversary to the truth and to the Lord.

As to His saying, “Sit on My right hand”; that means that He is sharing His power, and not indicating any discrepancy in dignity. If God the Father is making the enemies footstools for God the Son, God the Son is doing the same for God the Father, glorifying His Father on earth (Jn. 15).

St. Ambrosius says: “All what is the Father’s is the Son’s ... We designate the Father from the Son, according to difference in ‘Persons’, but they are One in power, One in the Other ... The glory of the Father is not abolished in the Son; and the beauty of the Son is seen in the perfectness of the Father; They are One in power.”

St., Cyril, the Great, says: “We too, pose the same question to the contemporary Pharisees (the Nastourians), I wish those who deny, that the One begotten by the Virgin St. Mary, is Himself the Son of God the Father, that is to say, God; those who divide Christ into two Sons, would explain to us, How can the Son of David, at the same time, be his Lord? Not in a human way, but a Divine. His sitting on the right hand of the Father, is a confirmation of His exalted glory. Having one throne, means they have one dignity; and hence one nature.”

(3) Although the Lord has been so much accused during His ministry, He is glorified by having His enemies as His footstool, on the day of His great glory. And as St. Cyril, the Great believes, the Lord Christ intended by these words, to draw His disciples’ hearts away from the Pharisees’ way of thinking, that cares for worldly glory, to seek the eternal glory, together with their Christ. In other words, if the Lord was opposed by many, during His ministry to humanity, yet, His glory is proclaimed eternally.

Likewise, those who follow Him would suffer oppositions here, for the sake of eternities ... For that, the evangelist resumes his talk, saying:

“Then He said to them in His teaching, ‘Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnations” (verses 38 - 40)

He warned His disciples against placing their heart in their garments; that is to say, in the outer appearances; like some Jewish religious leaders, who used to conceal their evil and malice underneath their outer attires; getting worldly dignity, while bearing

wolfish hearts. ... That is why we often hear St. John Chrysostom rebuking himself, saying:

“It is amazing to find a Bishop who is saved ”; in order to be -- though being an Archbishop -- in constant vigil for his salvation. In other words, the clerical attire, in itself, would not justify him, but would rather condemn him, if he does not carry inside an inner glory.

By the same spirit, the hermit St. John Saba says: “O man of God, until when, by blackness alone (probably meaning the monastic attire), you comfort yourself? You should become a flame to burn out all around you, to behold the glory within you. Woe to me, because up till now, I comfort myself only by blackness.”

Father Theophlactius says: “They used to walk dressed in dignified garments, in order to get, accordingly great respect; and following the same way, concerning several things, that give them worldly glory.”

What the Lord Christ says concerning going around in long robes, says it also concerning love of greetings in the marketplaces, and getting the best places at feasts, and, in pretense, making long prayers... However, the Lord did not mean to attack the dresses in themselves, nor people’s greetings, or sitting in the best places at feasts, or making long prayers, but to attack the inner thoughts and the deep desire to behave that way, for the sake of vain glory, while carrying inside a hard heart that allows man to devour widows’ rights.

5- The loving widow and the two mites:

Although all the Jewish leaderships have been united to oppose the Lord, there was a poor widow, full of love for God and men, who offered all her livelihood -- two mites -- to the temple; thus counted by the Lord far better than those who offered much gold and silver, saying:

“Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than

all those who have given to the treasury; For they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood” (verse 43, 44)

In a text claimed to be by St. Jerome, the author sees, as though, he himself is that poor widow offering to the heart of the people, as to the treasury, two mites, namely, the simple interpretation of faith, emerging from the two Testaments, the Old and the New, that, through the Holy Spirit, would find a place, to be applied into a practical life, in thought, talk, and work.

Father Theophlactius sees in that woman, a symbol of the believing soul, that got widowed, after her first husband, to whom she sold herself, namely, the devil, has died; then offered, to her new bridegroom, two mites, namely, her soul and body; offering them through modesty, offering him her whole life, to work in her.

St. Augustine sees in the two mites (the figure 2), a reference to love; As we can not approach God’s Holies; and the Lord would not be pleased with our offerings, if they are not coming from a heart filled with love for God and men; By Love we would enjoy the Holies and God’s pleasure with us.

That widow has opened the gate before all believers, to apprehend the true concept of giving ... It is the giving of the inner heart, that pleases God’s heart; and not just the apparent giving. Of the sayings of the saintly fathers in this concern:

“Did not that widow’s deed surpass the abundance of your riches, because of her inner readiness?

The wise St. Paul wrote:

“If there is a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has. And not according to what he does not have” (2 Cor. 8: 12)

+It is not only the rich who gets a grace from God, through his giving for the brethren, the Savior of all will definitely accept his sacrifice; But He likewise grants grace to him who gives a little, as he owns just a little; God, who knows all, praises his inner readiness, accepts his little offering, and makes him equal to the rich.; if not granting him a greater grace than that he gave to the rich.

(St. Cyril the Great)

+ Do you say that you can not afford to offer any deed of compassion ? ... Do not you possess two mites ? Whatever your poverty is, you have two feet, by which you can visit the sick and the prisoner; You have a roof, under which you can give hospitality to strangers. There is no excuse for not doing deeds of compassion.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ What the widow purchased for her two mites, St. Peter purchased by leaving his nets (Mt. 4: 20); and Zacchaeus by giving half of his goods to the poor (Lk. 19: 20).

+ What is greater than the fact that, Whatever Zacchaeus purchased (the kingdom of heaven) by giving half of his goods to the poor, the widow has purchased for only two mites, to give, both of them equal shares ? ! The same kingdom, for which a rich man is qualified, by offering his treasures, the poor gets, by offering a cup of cold water (Mt. 10: 42)! !

+ Little are her possessions; Yet, great is her love ! !

(St. Augustine)

+ Whoever offers himself to God, is offering Him every thing in one batch.

+ Although she was a poor widow; yet she was far richer than the whole nation of Israel.

+ Such offerings are not evaluated according to their weight, but according to the good will by which they are offered.

(St. Jerome)

CHAPTER 13

SIGNS OF THE END OF AGE

Entering Jerusalem, the Lord Christ, proclaiming His love for us, practically, through the Cross, He enters with us into His heavenly Jerusalem, and grants us His eternal glories.

In the previous chapters, we experienced the works of the Lord Christ, who came to destroy the old man of dust, to establish in us the spiritual new man, who is according to the image of his creator. By the same Spirit, speaking of His ultimate coming, He reveals the destruction of the old establishments, to let us enjoy an eternal one, not made by hand. As to the signs of the end of age included here, we have already dealt with, through the thoughts of the saintly fathers, in our interpretation of the Gospel according to St. Matthew (Chapter 24). Here they are paraded in the same sequence and sense:

1- Destruction of the old temple verses	I -- 2
2- Appearance of false christs	3 -- 6
3- Occurrences of wars and disasters	7 -- 8
4- Occurrences of afflictions	9 -- 13
5- Abomination of desolation	14
6- Commandments for entering the kingdom of heaven	15 -- 18
7- The great tribulation	19 -- 20
8- Appearance of false prophets	21 -- 23
9- Collapse of nature	24 -- 25
10- Coming of the Son of Man	26 -- 27
11- Parable of the fig tree	28 -- 29
12- Confirming His coming	30 -- 31
13- Not knowing the day or hour	32
14- Commandment to watch	33 - 37

Introduction:

This talk concerning the signs of the end of age, came in an intimate sitting of the Lord with His disciples alone; in a quiet encounter, after His entry into Jerusalem, His cleansing of the temple, and His cursing of the fig tree; especially that the events of the passions and crucifixion were very closely approaching. So what was the significance of that talk ?

We can realize the significance of that intimate talk, through the readings of Tuesday of the Holy Pascha (Passion week), in which the Church concentrated the vision of her children on the ultimate coming of the Lord Christ.

(1) What attracts our attention in the readings of the first hour of that day, is what God proclaimed in the book of Exodus (Chapter 19), that He bore His people as on eagles' wings, not to bring them from the land of slavery to the promised land, but to bring them to Himself personally. Saying,

"I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself"

(Exodus 19:

The disciples, having watched how firm the Lord Christ has been, as He cleansed the temple, and cursed the fig tree, were probably overcome by despair; Each of them feared lest he would have a similar destiny as that of the fig tree. His talk came, therefore, to put their hearts at ease; He is preparing for them, beforehand, His heavens; presenting the signs of His ultimate coming; which although bitter, yet, they were comforting. ... If He bore their fathers on eagles' wings to bring them to Himself, He is sending them His Holy Spirit, to carry them above all incidents , to enjoy His ultimate encounter on the clouds.

The Lord confirms to us,

*“You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world;
I am not of this world” (Jn. 8: 23)*

He is confirming to us, that, by ourselves, we are unable to rise up to meet Him on the clouds of heaven; but it is He who is capable, from high above, to embrace us to Him, to let us carry His mark: (*I am not of this world*). By Him our hearts will rise up; becoming not of this world, namely, carrying His mark, to enter with Him into the fellowship of His glories. Probably also, He intended, by proclaiming the signs of the bitter end of age, that He is allowing them to happen, in order to push u to set forth out of this world, that is to take off our love for the worldlies, and forsake any mark that indicates that we belong to it, to be capable of encountering Him, who is not of this world.

Indeed, the signs which He presented to His disciples, are very frightening, but the prophet Isaiah says:

*“Unless the Lord of hosts, had left to us a very small remnant, we
would have become like Sodom, we would have been made like
Gomorrah” (Isaiah 1: 9)*

It is as though, the disciples are that “small remnant”, that is incapable of getting saved by itself, if not for the mercy of the God of hosts. In other words, His heavenly kingdom is set for the small remnant, that is cared for by God Himself, as He says,

*“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure
to give you the kingdom” (Lk. 12: 32)*

Thus, the readings have shown the care of God himself, for offering the kingdom.... And probably the proclamation of the Lord Christ to His disciples, about the signs of ultimate coming, with all the bitterness it involves, was intended to let them know, that He is aware of the narrowness and toughness of the way; yet, they are in the palm of His hand, where He keeps them until He passes over and sets forth with them, to Him !

(2) Probably, the talk of the Lord Christ, of the signs of the end of age, to His disciples, was not only to confirm to them the role of God Himself, and His care for encountering them on the clouds, but also the role of the believers. These signs came to carry, in its wholeness, a complete destruction of the worldly life, and of nature, as a proclamation of a better eternal life.

The readings of the third hour of Tuesday of the Holy Pascha, carry a warning against eating to the full in this world, and caring for building beautiful houses to dwell in them (Deut. 8: 12); exhort us to chose the way of serving the Lord, where temptations await us (Ben Serakh 2: 1); and confirm to us that, “not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Mt. 24: 2). As though the Church, when presenting to us the signs of the end of age, is plotting for us the biblical way to enjoy Christ, coming on the clouds, demanding from us not to fill our inner bellies with the drunkenness of this world and its lusts, and not to preoccupy our minds with building earthly houses, and decorating them, as if we are to settle eternally on earth; but rather to hold the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, to bear temptations with a wide heart; and to destroy within us every stone, so that God would establish a new building, worthy of souls, that are setting forth to the higher Jerusalem, to unify with the heavenly bridegroom.

(3) In the talk of the Lord Christ to His disciples about the signs of the end of age, despite what it involves of an extremely long and tough way, yet, through an authority of love, He kindled their hearts with zeal to enter it. That is why the Church presents to us in the readings of Tuesday of the Holy Pascha, two very important stories: Elijah’s encounter with God and hearing His Divine voice, not through the great and strong wind, nor the earthquake, nor the fire, but through the mild and gentle breathe (1 Kings 19); and how Noah enjoyed salvation and was delivered from the flood in the ark. The story of Elijah represents the need for a holy zeal to encounter God; although an inner kindled zeal, yet, coming through a peaceful soul in the Lord, carrying His marks, He, who,

*“Will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice
in the streets”* (Isaiah 42: 2; Mt. 12: 19)

As to the ark of Noah, it melds with the zeal of Elijah, to interpret our inner depths and our heartily yearning to encounter the Lord, in serious work; to receive the Lord’s Cross practically, as someone who enters the ark, together with his family, beasts, and birds, to enjoy the encountering the Lord, amid the great chaos of the world, and the flood that destroyed many. That ark represents the new home in which we dwell here, that carry us above the waters. . That is why the readings on that day of the holy Pascha, tell us about

‘the house of wisdom’ (Prov. 9: 1 - 11), built on seven pillars, that are the works of the Holy Spirit.

In other words, in order to encounter our Lord Jesus Christ, who will come over the clouds, it is fitting for us, while we are here on earth, to train ourselves, through the Holy Spirit in us, to dwell in the ark that elevates us up, and on the high mountains, according to Isaiah’s prophesies of that day; Then we would enjoy with Daniel (7), to behold the Lord coming over the clouds.

(4) Finally, in order to kindle our longing to enjoy that eternal encounter, the Church tells us about the splendor of the glory, that we shall, then, enjoy. We quote of its readings, the words of Isaiah:

“The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun”

(Isaiah 30: 26)

As well as what the Lord, Himself, says:

“For to everyone who has, more will be given: (Mt. 25: 29)

In other words, the inner splendor that we are granted here, will be an advance payment

for a greater eternal splendor; If we, by the Lord, become a moon; there we will become a sun; the inner reward we get here, will be increased there.

Besides this ecclesiastical thought, concerning what came in this chapter, we should like to clarify some other features of that essay:

(1) What came in this chapter is considered as one of two long essays by the Lord Christ in the present Gospel: The first came in the fourth chapter (1- 34) ... Some scholars noticed, that the essay we have here, differs in its nature, from the other talks of the

Lord; some called it “The little Apocalypse”, a name flatly rejected by others, who claim that, that essay was not based on a particular revelation, but constituted an open talk between the Lord Christ, aware of all the secrets, and His disciples.

(2) No contemporary reader -- whatever his readings and knowledge are -- can appreciate the effect of that talk of the destruction of the temple, on a Jew living at that time; The temple constituted every thing in his life; representing the kingdom of God, and the sign of His presence in the midst of His people. The Jew was so attached to the temple, to consider any harm done to it, as a sign of a great displeasure on God’s part, with His people ! That is why, it was fitting, for the Lord, to reveal the destruction of the materialistic world as a whole, as a preparatory way for the ultimate coming of Christ over the clouds, and the destruction of the material temple, to establish the spiritual temple of the Lord.

(3) That essay, as a matter of fact, was not presented by the Lord, with the intention of recognizing the times and hours, nor as a prophetic act, to follow up events; but, through that revelation of future secrets, He intended to provoke His Church to persistent strife, and to overcome expected obstacles until His coming; also warning against false christs and prophets; and exhorting it to continuous watch, in anticipation of His coming !

(4) Finally, several scholars see in it, a 'final speech', or a 'farewell speech', that was presented by the Lord to four of His own, as was the custom of some fathers and prophets of the Old Testament, just before their death, as for instance, that of Isaac (Genesis 27), Jacob (Genesis 49), Moses (Deut. 31: 28; 32), Joshua (Josh. 24), Samuel (1 Sam. 12), David (1 Chron. 28, 29), and Tobia (Tob. 14).

That farewell speech, besides His general farewell speech to His disciples (Jn. 14 - 16), is totally different from any farewell speech that was given by a father or prophet, before his death. Isaac, in his old age, bid farewell to his two sons, while blind, unable to discern between Jacob and Esau; While Lord Jesus, speaks with His disciples, prior to crucifixion, strongly proclaiming that the powers of darkness would never destroy

His plan to save humanity; thus opening their inner vision to behold Him, coming over the clouds to carry them to His glory. Jacob, spoke to his sons, concerning establishing

God's people on earth; while the Lord of glory, is proclaiming the establishing of His eternal kingdom. Moses commended his people, after being denied entrance with them into the land of promise; while Jesus Christ is coming to carry them to his exalted glory; and so forth, with other fathers and prophets, what they could not achieve for

themselves, they desired their brothers, children, and people to realize; While the Lord Christ, is the Head setting forth to His glories, carrying all those who believe in Him to the bosom of His Father, in power.

Now, I resume our study of the gospel text, begging my readers to refer to my interpretation of the gospel according to St. Matthew the evangelist, to avoid repetition, praying to God, to kindle in our depths, the desire to encounter Him, on His coming on the great day.

1- Destruction of the old temple:

*“As He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him,
‘Teacher, see what massive stones ! What magnificent buildings !’
And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Do you see these great
buildings ? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not
be thrown down’ ” (Verses 1, 2)*

That question was posed by one of His disciples, while the Lord Christ was going out of the temple; the great buildings of the temple were then preoccupying the minds of the Jews, as a sign of God’s pleasure with them. The building the second temple began at the time of Zerubbabel , with permission of Cyrus, king of Persia, who allowed the Jews to return from captivity, and to rebuild the temple, during the sixth century BC. The new temple was greater, although not as magnificent as the old one. At the time of

Herod, before the birth of the Lord Christ, about the year 20 BC, an extensive project of reconstruction and restoration started, and went on up till the year 60 AD, seven years prior to its ultimate devastation, as stated by the Jewish historian Josephus. Its location is the Mosque or the Dome of the Rock in the Old Jerusalem.

That question came, while the Lord was “going out” of the temple ... Its motive probably has been, a wish by that disciple to hear from the Lord’s mouth, what was going on in the minds of all of them, that the Lord cleansed the temple, in order to prepare it, as the center of His kingdom, and as His royal palace, from which He is going to reign over the world. The Lord’s response came to completely destroy their materialistic thoughts, contrary to what they expected. The Lord Christ used that chance to proclaim to His disciples the total abolishment of the temple, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the end of the material world as a whole, in order to draw their hearts to the spiritual kingdom, and the heavenly glory.

St. Cyril, the Great says: [The disciples expected Him to admire what He was seeing;

but He, whose throne is in heaven, did not give any impotence to earthly establishments, considering them worth nothing, if compared to exalted ones. He halted the conversation concerning these structures, directing it to what is of benefit to them. That temple, the subject of their pride and admiration, will, in the right time, be devastated, by the Romans, who will also burn up Jerusalem, so that Israel would get what it deserves for killing the Lord; all of which happened after His crucifixion].

Yet, the Lord, while uttering that, was not seeking revenge, nor desiring the devastation of His adversaries, but, being the Word of God, was revealing to His disciples the true way: On one side, He is committing them to refrain from binding their hearts to stones and buildings, but to bind them to an inner spiritual temple, where the Lord would dwell and establish His kingdom. On the other side, He is proclaiming the necessity of destroying those stones of literal thoughts, in order not to walk the way of the law literally, but to enjoy it spiritually. Finally, we should have the temple of our old man completely destroyed, with no one stone left upon another, not thrown down. This is our experience concerning what occurs in the water of Baptism, in which the Holy Spirit of God destroys our old man, to leave no trace of him in our life. If we walk according to God's Spirit, a new spiritual building, a free grace of God, would be set within us; But, if our hearts get back to seek what was behind, we shall, again, have inside us the old temple of sin, and our life would be turned into a pillar of salt, like Lot's wife, losing the splendor of God's kingdom and His exalted glories in us.

St. Ambrosius says: [These words refer to the temple of Solomon, and its destruction by the enemies before the time of judgment; as there would be no work of our hands, that would not be destroyed and consumed by fire. They also refer to the synagogue of Jews ... when the visible material temple of the material law, would be destroyed, so also would be the visible material Passover ... ; the temple would be spiritual, the law would be spiritual, and the Passover would also be spiritual]

2- Appearance of false christ:

Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple,

Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately, “Tell us, when will these things be ? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled ? ‘ And Jesus, answering them, began to say, ‘Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am He’, and will deceive many” (Verses 3 - 6)

The Lord Christ’s talk about the destruction of the temple, was a chance for Him to have a private talk with four of His disciples. These were the first four, the Lord chose and invited to follow Him as His disciples. As we have seen, He called them two by two; They represent the team of horses set forth with the Divine chariot towards heaven; carrying the Church, as a chariot of fire, from glory to glory, towards the Divine bosom. They also represent the four living stones set by the Lord for the building of His living Church. They may also represent the four virtues, necessary for the Church, in order to enjoy the knowledge of the secrets of His ultimate coming: Peter, refers to the (Rock of faith); Jacob, or ‘Chase’, refers to (persistent strife or wrestling); John, that is to say, ‘God is compassionate’, refers to the (grace and compassion of God); and Andrew, that means ‘seriousness or manhood’, refers to (setting forth towards eternity, seriously and without delay). In other words, these four disciples enjoyed that private Divine talk, concerning His coming, so that we, would also enjoy it, if we have inside us, these four: the faith, that raises us over the earthlies, towards Christ the Savior; the practical strife, springing from our faith in Him who loved us; the grace of God, on which we lean, to take us away from the earthlies, raising us to eternities; and finally, seriousness on the way, as God would never work in negligence.

That talk happened while the Lord Christ was sitting on the Mount of Olives, facing the temple. That was not without meaning; as on the Mount of Olives the Lord, on His day, will stand with His feet, to abolish evil (Zech. 14: 4); It is the mountain, east of the city, on which the cherubim lifted up their wings, to set forth with the Divine chariot, not to depart from the temple alone, but from the whole city of Jerusalem (Hez. 11: 22, 23);

On that mountain, the Lord proclaimed His departure from the old temple, raising our sight towards a new temple, He would, Himself, build within us, setting His heavenly kingdom in us.

The Mount of Olives, is likewise the Holy Church of God, in which believers are planted, as olive trees, in the house of God; In it, God, Himself, sits with His believers, to carry them over to His exalted Divine secrets. ..., to proclaim to them the destruction of the old temple, and set a new one within them, that would never get old, but would always be renewed by His Holy Spirit.

The first sign of His coming, would be the appearance of false christs and prophets, to deceive humanity, and to set the kingdom of the devil; pretending to do that in the name of God. It might be that the Lord started by it because of its importance; as, in every generation, the evil one does his best to deceive men, to draw them away from the kingdom of God, and from enjoying His salvation.

He presented them, at the beginning of His talk, with that sign of the end of age, and proclamation of His eternal kingdom, in order to reveal to them, that the way to the kingdom, is a very narrow one, that requires persistant strife against the powers of darkness. The disciples became sad, hearing about the utter destruction of the temple, and started to inquire about the time of realization of those things, with the hope that they would enjoy with the Lord, His kingdom, or that they would have a share with

Him in the temple, before its utter destruction. Now, the Lord Christ drew their hearts, from sadness over the destruction of stones and buildings, to getting ready to oppose the evil one himself, who seeks the destruction of the kingdom of God within every soul.

That is why, St. Paul, the apostle, says:

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against

flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephes. 6: 10 - 12)

It is as though, the Lord Christ, is warning His disciples, not to preoccupy themselves with the destruction of the temple, but rather with getting aware of the deceits of the devil, who is opposing them , using the name of Christ Himself, confirming: *“Take heed that no one deceives you; for many will come in my name, saying: ‘I am He’, and will deceive many”*.

The Jewish historian Josephus mentioned, that several magicians and swindlers have drawn many people to the wilderness, some of whom lost their minds, and many others were condemned by ‘Felix’ the governor, like that Egyptian whom the prince mentioned as he said to St. Paul: *“Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago raised an insurrection and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness ? “*

(Acts 21: 38)

If the Word of God is offering all practical love, to draw souls to Him with truth, in order to enjoy union with Him, the evil one, on his part, is deceiving many, dispatching his accomplices, to pretend piety, to lead people astray; sometimes even working under the name of Christ Himself.

The martyr St. Ceprianus, warns us, not only from the devil who hides behind the name of Christ, but even from ourselves, lest we may bear the name of Christ, and not His power, saying: [The same way the devil deceives, through falsely using the name of Christ, so also the one who bears the blessed name, but does not abide in the truth of His Gospel and faith in Him, would not be truthfully called a Christian].

3- Occurrences of wars and disasters:

“When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled, for such things must happen, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there

will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows” (verse 8)

That sign would precede the destruction of the temple, on the hand of the Roman leader Titus; The Roman empire was aflame with wars, all along the interval between the ascension of the Lord Christ and the destruction of the temple; like that war which took place in Alexandria at about the year 38 A.M., between the Egyptians and the resident Jews; and the war in Selukia, in which 50,000 Jews were killed ... ; as well as the great tension between the Jews and the Samaritans; the famines like the one prophesied by the prophet Agabus (Acts 11: 28), that occurred in the year 49 AD; the plague that took place in Rome with its 30,000 victims; and the earthquakes in Crete, 46 AD; in Rome, 51 AD; in Aphamia, 53 AD; in Ladakia Frigia, 60 AD; and in Jerusalem, 67 AD

That sign, of the occurrences of wars, troubles, earthquakes, and famines, will also precede the end of the world, and the second coming of the Lord Christ. As the last day approaches, the devil feeling the collapse of his kingdom, and the setting up of the eternal kingdom of God in His heavenly Church, will exert all his energies to draw souls to him, away from the Lord Christ, confusing them with human concerns, that would disturb man, like wars, natural catastrophes, as earthquakes and famines. But the soul, steadfast in Christ, would not be disturbed, but would rise above all events, to get to enjoy His kingdom and exalted peace.

In the same way, the evil one, would not stand to watch you encounter your Savior; so he surrounds you with troubles to preoccupy you and deprive you of His transfiguration within your heart ... I wish you do not get concerned with the wars within you, nor with the famines or earthquakes, but put your trust in the Lord Christ, the giver of peace, fulfillment, and real comfort.

St. Ambrosius says: [Beside wars, plagues, and famines, we find other wars that may confront the Christian, wars of lusts and conflicts of various desires ... ; fear of,

“spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephes. 6: 12)

A brave Christian, however, will say with the Psalmist:

“Though an army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear” (Psalm 27: 3)

He will stand firm, even if faced by the giant Goliath; will be like David who, in the midst of the fear of others, cast away the weapons and equipments of the king (1 Sam. 17), held the sling of true faith, and placed in it the stone of pure faith; With it he broke the arrogance of the oppressor, to be worthy of being mentioned by the Lord Christ ...

Before that conqueror of Goliath, the Philistines escaped, to make the Israeli girls sing,

“Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands” (1 Sam. 18: 7)

Which proves that those who overcome this world, would surely, precede even kings.

4- Occurrence of afflictions:

The signs will not stop at outer and general troubles, like wars, famines, plagues, and earthquakes, but will proceed further to personal affliction, concerning the believer himself; to let him bear the Cross of the Lord; as is said:

“But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. And you will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. And the Gospel must first be preached to all nations. But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.

Now, brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all men for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved" (verses 9 - 13)

'Afflictions', as far as a believer is concerned, is not just a sign among several others, for the coming of the Lord, but it is the living atmosphere in which the crucified Lord is transfigured within the heart. Affliction is the acceptance of the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, in order for His kingdom to be proclaimed within us.

Affliction is not just a passing matter in the believer's life, but it attaches itself to him permanently, until he comes out of this world, as from the great tribulation (Rev. 7: 14). That is what the Lord clearly proclaimed to us. And as St. Theophylact says: [He uttered that, so that by hearing it, they would be ready to face persecutions and evils with great resilience and patience. In that Divine proclamation we notice the following:

(1) The Lord says, "*Watch out for yourselves*"; In other words, Whatever severe the affliction is, and whoever its source may be,; people of authority, as kings or governors, or close relatives, as fathers, brothers, or children, the secret of strength or weakness, depends on the inner depths of the soul. If we watch through faith, into our inner souls, to behold the Lord reigning in them, with glory and splendor, any affliction will not be able to pass through to our souls, but will stay outside ! We can say that, if our insight is opened to the inner heaven, earth, with all its deceits and capabilities, will not be able to catch up with us; But, the Holy Spirit will lift us from the dust, and carry us above worldly currents, and keep us in an exalted Divine peace.

(2) Even if affliction is inevitable, yet, preaching of the Gospel will never cease. The Lord Christ is assuring us that although the work of God is always opposed, yet, through opposition, it increases in strength, and splendor.

(3) Affliction is transformed into a testimonial to the afflictors themselves ... When they assume that they are capable of suppressing the voice of truth by worldly authority and violence, the truth comes to transfigure before them, with a voice much more clear and obvious in their thoughts. That was what we saw, when Herod killed John the Baptist, with the intention to suppressing the voice of truth; But that voice kept on screaming in his ears, even after John was martyred.

(4) The real source of affliction is not humans, but the war between God and the devil; Therefore it is fitting for us, not to worry beforehand what we will speak, but, as the Lord says, *“It is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit”*. The Spirit of God is the leader of the Church, sent by the Son, who ascended to heaven, from His Father, to take over the leadership of the Church.

5- Abomination of desolation:

The Lord Christ presents to us the “Abomination of desolation” of which the prophet

Daniel spoke (Da. 12: 11; see 9: 27; 11: 31), as a sign of the devastation of the temple, and also a sign of the end of age, and the ultimate coming of the Lord Christ. We can summarize the views concerning that abomination of desolation as follows:

(1) Some fathers and scholars see that that abomination of desolation, refers to the entrance of enemy soldiers into the temple and defiling it, before destroying it and burning up the city. Father Theophlactius says: [He probably means by that abomination of desolation, the forced entrance of the enemy into the city].

(2) In the first Book of the Makabians (1: 54), that abomination of desolation was realized, when Antichus Apiphanius set the statue of Zeus Olimpus upon the altar of sacrifice in the temple, in the year 167 BC(see also Mark. 6: 2). Some people believe that that abomination was repeated, when Pilate set the statue of Caesar in the temple, and when Caligula tried to set for himself a statue in the temple of

Jerusalem in the year 40 Ad. approximately; and there was also a statue of Adrian that was set in the Holy of Holiness, itself, for a long time.

(3) A group of scholars rejected the two previous views, seeing that the Greek text does not refer to an abomination of desolation through the setting of a statue, or the entrance of pagan soldiers into the temple, but rather through the appearance of a real person against Christ, who sets himself a god in the temple, as said by the apostle Paul in his second epistle to the Thessalonians ... As if that sign refers to the appearance of the antichrist, who sets himself an idol in the temple of the Lord.

6- Commandments for entering the kingdom of heaven:

Having presented to His Church the signs of the end of age, from general tribulations, as wars, famines, plagues and earthquakes; to personal afflictions for the sake of Gospel preaching; and proclaimed the appearance of false christs and prophets, particularly the antichrist, the Lord Christ presented to His Church certain private commandments, to support it in that difficult atmosphere, until it passes through the persistent tribulation, and crosses over to His kingdom.

We have already talked about these commandments in our study of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, chapter 24. Here we say, that that text carry two meanings:

(1) The literal meaning; as it is claimed that Christians, seeing the signs of the nearness of the desolation of the temple, escaped from Judea, and headed to the mountains,

according to the commandment of their Master; and thus, they were spared the siege of Jerusalem by Titus, and the tribulation, that the Jews went through.

(2) As to the symbolic meaning; In order to encounter the Lord Christ, coming to our hearts, to transfigure as if on the clouds of heaven, we have to set forth, out of the 'Judaism' of fatal literalism, to the mountains of the Spirit, in order to live the

freedom of the Bible, not the servitude of the letter of the law. Thus, if the Lord is proclaiming to His disciples the futility of resisting the Romans, or coexisting with them; being impossible to hide from them in a city, it is likewise, fitting, as our fight with the devil grows more fierce, not to face him, nor to coexist with him, but should rather escape to the Lord Himself, being the Holy mountain who bear us inside Him.

In a text, claimed to be by St. Jerome, he says: [Our escape to the mountains, means ascension to the heights of virtue, in order not to descend to the depths of sin]. Whoever ascends to the roof, namely, climbs up the staircase of virtue, he would be able to see, with the apostle St. Peter, the sheet descending from heaven (Acts 10: 11); and would never again descend to lower levels, or seek lower things. In other words, whoever ascends above bodily works, and lives in spirituals, inhaling the pure breath of freedom, and seeing heavens open before his eyes, would never descend again to his old arguments, nor seek the lusts of flesh, and things of this world.

Likewise, whoever set forth along the path of preaching, will not retreat from ministry, and will not care again for his garment, that is to say, for things of the flesh. As to His saying,

“Woe to those who are pregnant, and to those who with nursing babies in those days” (verse 17)

This refers, according to Father Theophlactius, to what the Jewish women did at that time, cooking and eating their babies, out of hunger. Likewise, those who are pregnant, and those with nursing babies, probably, may refer to souls, not yet mature, and having not yet delivered fruits of the spirit, that would not be able to stand affliction, nor escape, being as heavy as a pregnant or a nursing woman.

He demands from us to pray that our flight would not be in winter; and as Father Theophlactius says, [We should avoid sin fervently, not reluctantly and coldly].

7- The great tribulation:

“For in those days, there would be tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days” (verses 19, 20)

Indeed it is the great tribulation, that occurs through the appearance of the antichrist, opposing the Church in the world. But it is a short one, permitted by God, and within His care ... shortened by Him for the sake of His elects, to keep them from despair.

At the time of the Old Testament, God allowed for severe tribulations for the sake of repentance on the part of the fallen; but He would again have compassion, to spare the remnants, attached to God amid a twisted generation and thick-necked people. At the time of the desolation of the temple -- bitterly described by Josephus, a contemporary historian -- the Romans mockingly crucified hundreds of Jews, until the arenas were crowded with crosses; The famine was so severe, that women cooked and ate their children; They used to feed voracious beasts with naked priests covered with mud. God shortened these days for the sake of sparing the Christians who fled to the mountains.

But, at the end of age, when the antichrist comes to prosecute the Church everywhere, and to prevent believers from buying or selling, unless they have the mark of the beast on their foreheads or right hands. ... These days also, will be shortened for the sake of the elects.

With the same spirit, in the life of each one of us, God allows afflictions to get stronger up till the last watch of the night, when we think that there is no more chance for being saved, He will come over the water, abolishing the waves, to proclaim Himself to us, as the Savior of both the souls and the bodies.

8- Appearance of false prophets:

“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is Christ !’, or ‘Look, He is there !’, do not believe it. For false Christ and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand”
(verses 21, 23)

The evil one will not stop, along the times, to strongly oppose the kingdom of God, especially in the last days, using every way of deceit, as did the magicians at the time of Moses; But God keeps His elect.

+ There are many, who claim to bear the name of Christ, in order to deceive, if possible, even the elect. (Father Theophlactus)

+ Then, the devil will be released, to act with all his strength against Christ; He may perform real wonders, to lead people astray from the truth, on the assumption that they are Divine power. (St. Augustine)

+ Why does He say, “if possible”, as though, He doubts it; although God knows beforehand, what will happen ? It would be one of two things: If they are really ‘elect’, they would never be deceived; and if it is possible for them to get deceived, they are, therefore, not of the elect.....: (He said that, to draw attention to how far the deceit of those false prophets is). (St. Gregory, the Great)

9-Collapse of nature:

“In those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in heaven will be shaken”
(verses 24, 25)

Many fathers believe that these things are going to happen literally, before the coming of the Lord Christ over the clouds; The material world, will totally collapse, in order for the eternal heavenly kingdom to appear.

This scene is portrayed in the book of the prophet Isaiah (13: 9), to proclaim the day of the Lord to be cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to destroy everything earthy and material ! ! In connecting the desolation of earth, with the shaking of heavens, and loss of light of its stars, he probably wishes to proclaim, that those, in their glory, who thought of themselves, as becoming like a sun, a moon, or a twinkling star, will not escape God's anger and condemnation.

That portrait, is not only clear, in the book of Isaiah, but in those of several other prophets as well:

“For the stars of heaven and their constellations, will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth; and the moon will not cause its light to shine. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.... .. Therefore, I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts, and in the day of His fierce anger”
(Isaiah 13: 10 - 13)

“And the host of heaven shall be dissolved; And the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll; All their host shall fall down, as the leaf falls from the vine”
(Isaiah 34: 4)

“When I put out your light, I will cover the heavens, and make its stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light; and the bright lights of the heavens, I will make dark over you;

and bring darkness upon your land; Says the Lord God”

(Ezek. 32: 7, 8)

[He may refer here, to the believer, rejecting God’s grace, persisting on evil, and accepting the deceits of the evil one, would not be anymore worthy to enjoy the light of the sun of justification, namely -- the work of Christ in him; and would be deprived of enjoying the light of the moon, namely -- the blessing of the Church; as well as that of

the stars of heaven, namely, -- the fellowship of the heavenlies and the saints ...

Thus, losing every blessing, and every enlightenment; His depths would transform, as though, into a darkened land, that does not see a glimpse of heavenly light].

“And it shall come to pass on that day, says the Lord God, ..., I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation”

(Amos 8: 9, 10)

“The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble; The sun and the moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness”

(Joel 2: 10)

As the Lord Christ, the Sun of justification appears; together with the Church -- His bride, the heavenly moon, and the believers, the eternal stars; the sun will disappear, the moon will darken, and the stars will lose their brightness, before that new eternal

heavenly scenery.

According to a text, claimed to be by St. Jerome, he sees the collapse of nature here, as a spiritual collapse of souls that accepted the antichrist and had fallen under his evil authority, thus losing, in their life, every inner enlightenment, saying: [At that time, the sun will be darkened because of the coldness of their hearts, as in winter; and the moon and the stars will not give their bright light; when all descendants of Abraham, likened to the stars of heaven (Genesis 22: 17), would disappear, and when the hosts of heaven,

accompanying the Son of Man in His coming, would rise for revenge].

10- Coming of the Son of Man:

“Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven”

(verses 26, 27)

As the visible world deteriorates, the new invisible, heavenly world will be proclaimed, through the coming of the incarnated Word of God, in clouds, in power and glory. St. Augustine, believes that His coming in clouds means His coming in His Church every day, having carried the heavenly mark, and rose above worldly thought, thus turning into a heavenly cloud. The Lord comes born on a cloud of saints, spoken of by the apostle Paul, saying.

“We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12: 1)

The Lord of glory will come with His angels, as reapers, to gather fruits from all parts of the world. St. Augustine sees that the Lord gathers, by His angels, Adam, who, previously, had been dispersed all over the world, east, west, north and south. The word ‘Adam’, in Greek is formed of the first four letters of the four directions of the universe: ‘Amatole’ or east; ‘Dysis’, or west; ‘Arctos’, or north; and ‘Mesembria’, or south.

It is as though, God, seeing Adam dispersed among all parts of the world, gathers him, to get him back, not to the paradise of Eden, but to the eternal kingdom of heaven.

Of the sayings of the saintly fathers in this concern:

+ We truly believe that He will come, not only in the same body, but on the clouds; in a way similar to that, when He ascended.

(St. Augustine)

+ The vision of Christ, as the Son of Man (Manhood), is for the evil ones; While that of Divinity, is only for the pure in heart, those who see God (Mt. 5: 8).

The evil ones can not see the Son of God, being equal to God the Father; But He can be seen by all, evil and good, as He comes to judge the living and the dead.

(St. Augustine)

+ Christ, does not come secretly nor in a vague way, but as the Lord God; He comes in glory, that is fit for Divinity, to turn everything to the better; renewing the creation and reconstructing the nature of man. (St. Cyril, the Great)

11- Parable of the fig tree:

Presenting to us the signs concerning His coming, He likened it to the fig tree, which, when it puts forth leaves, we know that summer is near (verse 28). What is that summer

that is nearing to us, but eternity that is kindled to Divine love, with no place in it for spiritual coolness.

Many scholars, from early times, believed that, that tree, which, when its branches has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, we know that summer is near, that tree is the Jewish people, who became like the fig tree, that fell under curse because of their

Denial. For once it comes back to life, through regaining faith at the end of age, we know that the time is near. That interpretation was according to St. Paul:

“ Hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved” (Rom. 11: 25, 26)

Several events and texts in the Holy Bible, proclaimed the return of the Jews at the end of age, to accept the Lord Christ, after recognizing their transgression of rejecting and crucifying Him. Of these events, was the return of Miriam, sister of Aaron and Moses, cured, after getting infected with Leprosy and staying for seven days outside the camp;

“And the people did not journey on, till Miriam was brought in again” (Num.12).

According to the scholar Origen, that Miriam, refers to the Jewish people who were infected with the leprosy of disbelief, and were cast out of the camp; until they would again return, at the end of age, to the camp, to join the Church of the Gentiles of the whole world !

12- Confirming His coming:

The Lord confirmed His coming by saying:

“Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words by no means pass away” (verses 30, 31)

That saying by the Lord had been literally realized; when some, if not all those listening have witnessed the events of the desolation of the temple and destruction of Jerusalem. As to the rest of events, they were all actually realized, when the Gentiles accepted the Lord Christ in their lives, as though He came to proclaim His glory within them.

Those words of Christ, have inflamed the Church, in the time of the apostles; assuming that they were living the end of age, and that they are going to see His coming on the clouds. That feeling had its impact on their lives, their behavior, and their worshipping; The majority lived with eschatological minds; with their bodies on earth, while their hearts were in heaven.

13- Not knowing the day or hour:

Before ending His talk by persuading them to watch, He intended to exhort His disciples to avoid preoccupying themselves with knowing the day and hour, but rather with getting ready through persistent watching and anticipating His coming, saying:

“But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father” (verse 32)

Is it possible for the Son, not to know the hour ? !

(1) St. Ambrosius says, that the Lord Christ, the Condemner, who presented the signs of His coming, could not be unaware of that knowledge. If the day of His coming, is the true ‘Sabbath’, in which God and His saints would rest, so how could He, being “the Lord of the Sabbath” (Mt. 12: 8), be unaware of it ? !

(2) St. Augustine believes that the Lord Christ knows the day, yet, proclaims otherwise; in the sense, that He does not know it, in a way to reveal it. He may mean by that, what a teacher does, if asked to reveal the questions of his examination, his response would be that he does not know; in other words, it is a secret that he could not reveal. Likewise, if a father of confession was questioned about the confession of someone, he would pretend not to know it.

St. Augustine says: [Indeed, the Father does not know anything that the Son does not know; as the Son is the knowledge, the Word, and wisdom of the Father Himself. But it would not be for our own interest, to know what is not good for us to know He, as a teacher, teaches us certain things, but not other things, that would harm us to know of.

And he says: [That was said, in a sense, that humans are not to know it through the

Son, and not that He Himself does not know it. That is similar to the expression: “*For the Lord Your God is testing you to know...*” (Deut. 13: 3); namely, that (He let you know); And to saying, “Arise O Lord” (Psalm 3: 7), namely, (Make us arise) Thus, when it is said that the Son does not know that day, it is not that he does not know it, but He would not reveal it.

St. John Chrysostom says, along the same line of thinking: [By saying, “*Neither the angels*”, He is keeping from them what even the angels themselves do not know; and by saying, “*Nor the Son*”, He is not only forbidding them to know, but also, even to ask].

Also Father Theophlactius says: [If He told them, He knows the day and hour, but He would not disclose them, He would have distressed them; but he, wisely, kept them from asking about it]. St. Hilary, Bishop of Poitier also says: [The Lord Christ has got treasures of knowledge; So saying, that He does not know the hour, would only mean that He is not revealing the treasures of wisdom in Him].

(3) St. Irinaos sees, that if the Lord Christ, who knows everything was not embarrassed to refer the knowledge of the day of the Lord, to God the Father alone, as though He does not know it Himself; Is it not fitting for us, in the spirit of humility, to follow His example, when we are asked about certain exalted things, as for example, the way the Son is begotten from the Father; to proclaim that it is something beyond our comprehension to talk about.

14- Commandment to watch:

The Lord Christ ended His talk about His ultimate coming, by commanding His disciples to lead a life of watching, in anticipation of encountering Him:

“Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the

doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming -- in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning -- lest coming suddenly, he finds you sleeping” (verses 33 - 36)

Father Theophlactius says: [He teaches us two things: watching and praying; as many of those who watch, spend the night in evildoings].

The Lord commands us to watch the whole night, lest the Master would come to find us asleep. Here, he divides the night into four watches, each of three hours (evening, midnight, rooster crowing, and morning); although Jews in Palestine prefer to divide it into three watches (Lk. 12: 38). Anyway, it is obvious that the watching, that the Lord is commanding us to follow, means the wake-up of the inner heart; for the believer to say,

“I am asleep, yet my heart is awake”.

+++

FIFTH SECTION

PASSION AND RESURRECTION

OF THE LORD

CHAPTER 14

PREPARATION FOR THE CROSS

In the previous chapter, the Lord Christ sat, on the Mount of Olives, to proclaim to four of His disciples, the signs of the end of time; drawing their hearts to His heavens, confirming to them that He cares for His elect, despite the tribulations they will pass through, at that time.

Then, here comes this chapter, to present us with a portrait of humanity that does stand Christ, and intends to reject Him. The high priest together with the scribes got together to plot to kill Him, but were afraid of the multitude; and the disciple Judas, found it a chance to betray his Master for a little silver. Thus, while the Lord opened His heavens, longing to gather all in them, the religious leadership, even among His disciples, were plotting to deliver Him to death ...But, amid this painful scene, there was a loving woman, who poured a very costly oil of spikenard over the head of the Lord, to fill the house of Simon the leper with its sweet fragrance; Despite that, that woman was not spared harsh criticism .

Anyhow, as the Passover was nearing, every thing was proceeding towards the Cross, to slay the true Passover, who is capable of crossing - over with us, through His passion and His death, to the power of His resurrection:

- | | |
|---|----------|
| 1- The high priests and the scribes plotting to kill Him verses | I -- 2 |
| 2- Breaking a flask of spikenard | 3 -- 9 |
| 3- Judas betrayal of his Master | 10 -- 11 |
| 4- The Passover banquet | 12 -- 16 |
| 5- A proclamation of the betrayal | 17 -- 21 |

6- Institution of the Eucharist	22 -- 26
7- Proclamation of His disciples' stumbling because of Him	27 -- 31
8- Heading to Gethsemane	32 -- 43
9- His arrest	43 -- 52
10 - His religious trial	53 - 65
11 - Peter's denial	66 -- 72

=====

1- The high priests and scribes plotting to kill Him:

“After two days it was the Passover and the feast of the Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put Him to death. But they said, ‘Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people’”

(verses 1, 2)

The Old testament discerned between the Passover feast and that of the unleavened bread. The Passover lamb was usually slain on the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month; Then the feast of the unleavened bread would begin on the fifteenth day, for a week. Yet, the two feasts were connected together in the minds of the Jews, as though they became one and the same feast, to use the term ‘the feast of the unleavened bread’, to include also that of the ‘Passover’; as well as ‘the Passover’, to include that of the ‘unleavened bread’.

The chief priests and the scribes sought a plot to kill the Lord Christ after the feast, for fear of the people; and did not apprehend that the Lord Christ came as a Passover for the world, the true Passover slain on the feast. The Lord of glory , while, joyfully and happily, consummating His salvation plan, disregarding disgrace, for the sake of receiving every soul to Him, the leadership of the Jews were consummating their plan to get rid of

Him, and driving Him out, not just from Jerusalem, but from the whole world through killing Him !

How miserable were the chief priests and the scribes, whose hearts were, much too inflamed with jealousy, to preoccupy themselves with spiritual preparation of the Passover ... How It was to be fitting for them, to spatter the Holy Book, together with the (posts of their thoughts) with blood, and to put the crimson thread (on the door of their prayers), and to bind it on their hearts, in order to apprehend that the Lord Christ who appeared in their days , is the true Passover.

Amid their evil jealousy, they did not recognize the true Passover, nor apprehend the allegorical sacrifice on their hands, with all its secrets; that the fathers have apprehended and lived. In a text claimed to be by St. Jerome, he says: [It was allegorized to the Passions of the Lord Christ, and the people's salvation from hell, by the sacrifice of the lamb, and the crossing- over of the people on their way out of Egypt. We were saved (on the Passover) when the moon was whole, as there was no chance of darkness in Christ; Let us eat the body of the lamb, without blemish, who will take away the sins of the world; Let us eat it in one house, that is in the (Catholic) Church, which is spattered with love, and bears the weapon of virtue].

The chief priests and scribes plotted to kill Him, not apprehending that, even in their evil intention, they were consummating the plan of the Lord Christ, who assigned, by Himself, the day of His passion , to be crucified on the day of Passover !

2- Breaking a flask of spikenard:

“And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. And she broke the flask and pored it on His head” (verse 3)

The Lord Christ was in Bethany, that is to say, the house of suffering and passion, with His eyes, joyfully looking forward to the Cross, according to the words of the apostle Paul:

“Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame” (Heb. 12: 2)

He was watching the huge and swift actions occurring among the Jewish leaderships, normally opposing each other, but, for the first time, getting together, with one goal, that is to get rid of Him ! Amid that bitter atmosphere, there was a woman who encountered Him, while He was in the house of Simon the leper, to offer Him her pure love, together with her living practical faith, to get from the Lord, in return, an eternal praise and glory !

She encountered the Lord in the house of Simon the leper; Who was so called, because he has been leprous and healed by the Lord. He carried on that name, in remembrance of his past condition, and to glorify the Lord Christ who healed him. The house of Simon the leper, may refer to the Church, that includes within it, nations and people, who have previously been defiled by the leprosy of sin, then got purified by the blessed blood of the Lord ! In that Church, there was a woman, whose name or identity were not mentioned by the evangelist; referring to every true soul, in its encounter with the Lord.

The flask of the very costly oil of spikenard, refers to the inner love ... of the soul for its Savior, whose fragrance would fill the whole Church, and rises to the very heaven; if the flask is broken; that is to say, if man bears suffering, and accepts daily death, for the sake of the One Crucified.

If the name of Christ is *“spilled oil”*, whose sweet fragrance spread out, as His blood was spilled, when *“He trod the winepress alone”* (Isaiah 63: 1 - 3) ; the Church, in its turn, offers its life, as a broken flask, to proclaim the fragrance of her inner love.

As to pouring the oil over the Lord's head; In a text claimed to be by St. Jerome, he says that the woman poured it on the feet to reach up to the head !, although, here, the evangelist thought that she poured it over His head. That might refer to How the Lord

Christ looks at deeds of love; considering all of them offered for His sake. All what we offer to the poor, the sick, the afflicted, the grieved, and those in prison, as deeds of love, the Lord Christ accepts them, as though, they are offered to Him personally, being the head of all. In other words, when we pour the oil over the members, it is counted as being poured on the head.

Judas, the silver lover, did not stand that joyful act; He would have preferred to be handed the cost of the flask of oil, on pretense of placing it in the treasury, but actually to take it for himself. That is why he aroused indignation among the others:

*“For it might have been sold for more than three hundred dinarii
and given to the poor, and they criticized her sharply”*
(verse 5)

Judas did not care to lose his whole life, and his eternal salvation, but he aroused indignation among the disciples, for what he considered loss of more than three hundred dinarii !

In a text claimed to be by St. Jerome, he presented the following allegoric interpretation of that story: Simon the leper refers to the world, that was defiled (leprous through unbelieving), then was purified by embracing faith; The woman with her flask of oil, refers to the faith of the Church who says:

“My spikenard sends forth its fragrance” (Song 1: 12)

It is called 'oil of spikenard', referring to the costly faith; The house that was filled with its fragrance, is heaven and earth; And the breaking of the flask, refers to

breaking of bodily lusts in the head that controls the whole body. The head (bowed down), so that it could be reached by the sinner. That was how the woman set forth from the feet to the head, to go down from the head to the feet; that is to say, she reached, through faith, to Christ and His members]

Judas, counted that oil as loss, because it costs more than 300 dinarii; but he did not apprehend that, what he counted as loss, is rather a gain, in the eyes of the Lord, who is longing to receive similar fragrance from everyone. In the figure 300, the outcome of (10 x 10 x 3), The first figure 10, refers to keeping the 10 commandment; the second figure 10, refers to the sanctification of the senses (5 inner and 5 outer senses); and the figure 3, refers to the sanctification of the soul, the body and the Spirit, through enjoyment of the resurrected life in Jesus Christ, who had risen on the third day; the figure 3, also refers to the sanctification of the soul, the body and Spirit, through the faith in the Holy Trinity.

Anyway, if that woman was criticized by people, yet, she was privileged by the praise of the Lord Himself, who proclaimed how her episode was connected to the preaching of His Gospel in the whole world.

Finally, the episode of pouring the costly oil over the Lord Christ, was mentioned in all the four gospels (Mt. 26: 6; Mk. 14; 3; Lk. 7: 21; Jn. 12: 3) It is obvious that the action of pouring of the costly oil, happened more than once. There were different views concerning the identities of those responsible for these actions; yet, the prevailing views are:

- (1) The woman mentioned in the gospel of John, is Mary, the sister of Lazarus.
- (2) The one mentioned in the gospel of Luke, is a sinner, who did that during the ministry of the Lord.
- (3) The woman mentioned in the gospels of Matthew and Mark, poured the oil during days of the Passion week (the Holy Pascha). Some say, it was not the sinner, most probably Mary, the sister of Lazarus, who poured it, as an offer of love and

thanksgiving; while others say, it was that sinner herself, who poured it with tears, begging for the remission of her sins.

3- Judas betrays his Master:

“Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Him to them. So when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. So he sought how he might conveniently betray Him”

(verses 10, 11)

If the Church embraces a simple woman, who breaks a flask to pour the costly oil over the head of the Lord, to fill the whole house with its sweet fragrance; There, even among the disciples, was the one who betrays Him to His enemies. The Church includes, both saints, who are true members in the body of Christ, as well as those, who bear the name of Christ, while their hearts are completely separated from Him ... These, in truth, are not members in the Church, but are cast away from it, even though nobody actually castle them away. !

How strange that the traitor bore the name ‘Judas’, the very name of the tribe from which the Lord Christ has come in the flesh. Thus, while there is ‘Judas’, the lion who is out to destroy the devil, who “*walks about like a roaring lion , seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Pet. 5: 8); the evil one picks up a disciple carrying the same name, to be the instrument by whom the Lord is to be betrayed.

If the name ‘Judas’ means (praise) or (confess); it, on the other hand, refers to those bearing the name of Christ, clergy or laymen, who praise the Lord by their tongues, and confess faith by their lips, while their hearts and actions are instruments of destruction. They are like the devil who is said to “*believe and tremble*” (Jam. 2: 19), but does not carry in his heart, love, but animosity and hate; Such people are much more dangerous than enemies. The chief priests could not have been able to arrest the Lord, without the help of Judas ! I say that in order to warn, not the others,

but ourselves; as the devil, the (outer) enemy, can not arrest our (inner) Christ, or crucify Him, unless we deliver Him ... ourselves ... That is why the Lord Christ warns us, saying,

“A man’s foes will be those of his own household”

(Mt. 10: 36)

That is to say, his inner life, and his evil will.

When our ‘Judas’, namely, our faith, gets corrupted, through lack of love, it delivers the heart to the enemy; crucifying the Lord Christ one more time ... The reward for that is a little silver, promised by the enemy.

How ridiculous for the heart to betray its Christ, the *“Word of God”*, *“the silver, purified seven times”* (Psalm 12: 6), for false silver, given by evil hands ! ; to give up the heavenly as a captive, to enjoy a little of the earthlies, which he will eventually leave, to strangle himself !

The following are some comments of the fathers on the story of the betrayal of Judas:

+ Why do you tell me about his hometown “Iscariot” ? ... Because there is another disciple by the same name, ‘Judas, but designated as the ‘Zealous’, brother of James; So the evangelist, to avoid any confusion between them, discerned the one from the other. He could have called the first, ‘Judas the traitor’, but intended to teach us to avoid accusing others... Anyway, by saying, ‘one of the twelve’, he demonstrated how horrible the crime of betraying Him has been; There were seventy others, who did not follow his lead, nor take part in his act. As to the twelve, chosen by the Lord, these were the royal group, from among whom, that evil betrayer emerged.

+ What a folly ! Yes, love for silver and greed, were what brought all that evil on the

traitor. Love for silver takes souls over, leading them everywhere, and transforming minds into a state of madness !

Love for silver captivated Judas by its madness, to forget all the talks of the Lord Christ, His discipleship, His warnings and His confirmations.

(St. John Chrysostom)

+ He was one of the disciples, in number, but not in worthiness, according to flesh, but not to Spirit ! He went to the high priest, after being possessed by the devil; for every one is uniting to his like !

+ He promised to betray the Lord, the way the devil did, when he said to Jesus, “*All this authority I will give you*” (Lk. 4: 6)

+ The two parties lost their lives: They lost theirs when they promised to give him silver; and he lost his by taking it.

(A text claimed to be by St. Jerome)

+ He said, “one of the twelve”; That is a very important statement, demonstrating the betrayal more clearly. The one He dignified by making him equal to the rest, whom He privileged with apostolic honors, that made of him a member of the Holy table ..., has turned himself into an instrument to Kill Christ.

(St. Cyril, the Great)

4- The Passover banquet:

As the Lord Christ did, when He prepared for His entry into Jerusalem, sending two of His disciples to bring Him a colt; we see Him here, on the first day of the feast of the unleavened bread, dispatching two of His disciples to the city, where they are to encounter a man carrying a pitcher of water -- most probably St. Mark, according to the Coptic tradition -- to follow him; and wherever he goes in, to ask the master of the house to show them the upper room in which the Lord would eat the Passover with His disciples. ... That guest room belonged to St. Mary, mother of St. Mark;

that became the first Church in the world, where the Lord instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist; and where He used to meet His disciples; and where the Holy Spirit descended on them, on the day of the Pentecost.

In the text, it is to be noticed:

(1) The disciples were very much keen about enjoying the Passover feast with their Master, saying to Him:

“Where do you want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover ? “ (verse 12)

And as St. John Chrysostom says: [While Judas was plotting how to give Him up, the rest of the disciples were preoccupied with preparing for the Passover feast].

That question also revealed to us, not only that the Lord had no place to call home, where he could eat the Passover, but that His disciples, likewise, had no homes to dwell in; as they found in their teacher and Lord Jesus Christ, their home and dwelling place.

The disciples did not take leave from the Master, to go, each one to his own, to celebrate the feast, as they felt that they became in Him one family. Although they were actually from different tribes, they were bound in a true unity, based on union of love with their Savior, which raised them to what is far greater than that of blood bond.

Their question also revealed a complete submission to the Savior ... inquiring from Him about every detail, big or small; having no preference to go to a particular location, as their only desire was to be always with Him.

(2) The Lord sent two of His disciples to prepare for the Passover, Peter and John (Lk. 22: 8)... Thus, if the figure 2 refers to ‘love’, we can not offer our heart, to the Lord Christ, to set the sacrifice of His Cross, without love. If Peter represents faith, and John represents love, the Lord sent the faith that works with love, in order to prepare every simple heart , as an (upper room), where He gets together with His

disciples, to set His secret altar, and to proclaim His Cross, and to establish His Spiritual kingdom.

(3) The Lord did not tell the two disciples the name of the owner of that upper room, as it was known to them, the father of St. Mark the apostle ... But He only gave a sign, saying:

“ Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. And wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, ‘The teacher says, where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples ?’ “

(verses 13, 14)

Why did the Master did that ?

a- St. Cyril, the Great, sees that, as the devil has entered into Judas’ heart , the Lord kept the name of the owner of the upper room secret, in order not to let Judas plot to give Him up while He was there.

b- St. Cyril, the Great also gives another interpretation, saying: [He probably meant, that, wherever is water in the Holy Baptism, there will be Christ. How, and in what way ? As it sets us free of every defilement, cleanses us from all uncleanness of sin, to turn into a Holy temple for God, and to partake of His Divine nature, through the communion of the Holy Spirit. Thus, in order that Christ finds comfort, and dwells in us, let us accept the saving waters, confessing faith, that justifies the sinners, and raises us up, to be counted as an (upper room). As those, in whom Christ dwells in faith, have an exalted and high thought, that keep them from creeping on the dust; and, let me say, they would refuse to remain on earth, seeking always exaltness in virtue, as it is said,

“For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come”

(Heb. 13: 14)

So, while they walk on earth, their thoughts are far in the highs, and,

“Their citizenship is in heaven”

(Philipp. 3: 20)]

Father Theophlactius comments on the ‘Pitcher of water’ saying: [Whoever is baptized, carries a pitcher of water; and whoever carries baptism on him, will find comfort if he lives reasonably; will find rest, as though, getting into his home].

And St. Ambrosius says; [I wish God allows me also, to carry a pitcher of water, as the owner of that upper room did ! What should I say about water ?

“The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters”

(Genesis 1: 2)

O Water, that raised above the universe, that defiled by human blood, and was a symbol of the exalted baptism ! O water, that was granted to have the secret of Christ to cleanse all ! ... You begins the sacraments and consummate them; In you is the beginning and the end ! ...].

(4) The Lord goes on to say,

“Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared; there make ready for us” (verse 15)

St. Ambrosius says: [The furnished upper room refers to the great worthiness of its owner; so that the Lord Himself together with His disciples, could find comfort in it; or may refer to his exalted virtues].

So as to be enjoy the Passover of Christ, we have to get privileged with the waters of Baptism, which will raise us to the (upper room) of the Spirit, instead of the deadly letter; and as expressed by Father Theophlactius: [The owner of the house is

the mind that refers to the large (upper room), that is to the exalted thoughts, which, nevertheless, does not carry any pride or vain glory, but is prepared through humility. There, in such thought, the Passover of Christ is prepared, by Peter and John, namely, through work and meditation].

5- Proclamation of the betrayal:

“In the evening He came with the twelve. Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me’. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, ‘Is it I?’ and another said, ‘Is it I?’ . Then He answered and said to them, ‘It is one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish. The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed ! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born”

(verses 17 - 21)

The Lord Christ, having more than once, proclaimed about His betrayal, death and resurrection, in order to support the disciples, when they come to face those events, we see Him now proclaiming the betrayal, to give His betrayer a chance to repent and retreat if he so wished. Indeed, the Holy Scripture has spoken of the traitor, yet it did not commit Judas to betray. He could not claim, that in him, the prophesy of betrayal had to be realized; as God’s prior knowledge of it, does not commit him to act, and does not free him of the responsibility. If Judas’ heart happened to move in repentance, the crucifixion events, would have taken place in another way, as God plans, without the condemnation of Judas.

In His proclamation of the betrayal, the Lord Christ did not mention the name of the traitor, in order to spare him any embarrassment, hoping for him to rethink; but at the same time, He gave his disciples a sign, when He saw their sorrow, to spare them

falling into despair. The Lord was kind and gentle, even to the traitor, yet He was

straightforward and firm with him, using every way to seek his repentance. St. John Chrysostom says: [It is obvious that He did not reveal his identity, to spare him a greater shame; yet He refrained from keeping silent altogether, lest, assuming his action to be unknown, he would hasten to undergo his betrayal more aggressively].

Once the Lord proclaimed that bitter betrayal, each disciple started to ask Him, 'Is it I ?' Despite their confidence in themselves, that they would never betray their Master, yet their confidence in the words of the Lord has been greater than their confidence in themselves; so each of them started to doubt, for fear that he would fall in that evil deed.

The Lord gave them a sign, "*It is the one who dips with Me in the dish*"; Then He firmly revealed the destiny of that poor traitor. St. Cyril, the Great says: [Judas, the traitor , who dipped with the Lord in the dish, was rebuked by the Lord's words.. Yet.. with his complete loss of feeling, or rather with his getting filled by the arrogance of the devil, he assumed that he is capable of deceiving the Lord, the God. But, as I said,

although the Lord knew that he was totally evil, a hater of God, and a traitor, He allowed him to join the banquet, and counted him as worthy of the Divine compassion till the end; and so, his judgment was greater. The Lord Christ said in another occasion, through the Psalter:

*"For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it.
Nor is it one who hates me, who has magnified himself against
me; then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal,
my companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together,
and walked to the house of God in the throng"* (Psalm 55: 12 - 14)

6- Institution of the Eucharist:

The events of crucifixion were proceeding all around the Lord Christ, proclaimed by Him to be the way of salvation. All along the centuries, He offered His Church, His

crucified body, resurrected from the dead, and His blood shed for the remission of sins. He offered His Church the one and only sacrifice of the Cross, through the sacrament of the Eucharist, the life-giving banquet of the Lord. The evangelist says:

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it to them and said, ‘Take eat, this is My body’. Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, ‘This is My blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many” (verses 22- 24)

What does he mean by saying “*As they were eating*” ? He means that after eating the Jewish Passover, He offered the new Passover; The symbol preceding what it symbolizes. He presented first the Passover according to the law, so as not to be counted as a breaker of the law, and from it He set forth to the true Passover: His body and His blood shed for the sake of the whole world !

Father Milano of Sardes says: [The sacrament of Passover is realized in the body of the Lord ... He was led and slain like a lamb, saving us from the servitude of the world (Egypt), and setting us free from the servitude of the devil (the Pharoë); stamping our souls with His Spirit, and our body members with His blood ... He is the One who moved us from servitude to freedom, from darkness to the light, from death to life, and from oppression to eternal kingdom. ... He is the One, who is the (Passover) of our salvation. ... He is the silent lamb, taken out of the herd, and led to be slain by the evening, then to be buried by night. ... For all that, the feast of the unleavened bread was bitter, as said in the Holy Book:

“With unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it” (Exodus 12: 8)

Bitter for you were the nails used in crucifixion; bitter was the tongue that blasphemed; bitter was the false testimony that you uttered against Him].

The Lord presented His disciples with His body and blood, proclaiming that He is heading to the Cross by His own will, and according to His Divine plan, to grant those who believe in Him remission of sins, and union with Him. ... This gift is sustained all along generations, enjoyed by the Church of Christ, received from the Savior Himself. St. John Chrysostom says: [Up till now, Christ who set the table, is sanctifying it Himself; No man changes the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, but Christ Himself who was crucified for us. The priest utters the words, but the, sanctification (the Eucharist) occurs through the power of God, and His grace; through His words, ‘This is My body, and this is My blood’, they are sanctified] . St. Ambrosius says: [It is Christ Himself who is proclaiming that through the priest].

Presenting to them that great sacrament, He said:

“Assuredly I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God” (Verse 25)

We have already interpreted this proclamation in our study of the book of Leviticus (10: 9), where we apprehended how the Lord will joyfully drink of the fruit of the vine, when the elects are consummated in the kingdom of God ...

The evangelist ends His talk about the sacrament of the Eucharist by saying:

“And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives” (verse 26)

Having offered His disciples His body and shed blood, as a unique sacrifice of love, for the remission of sin, He sang with them the joyful hymns of the Passover, filling the upper room with joy and praise for the Lord. I say that, our inner upper room would be filled with Divine joy and exalted hymns, if it receives inside it its crucified Christ, and if it carries His marks. In other words, Whenever man presents

His inner life with love, for the sake of others in Jesus Christ, his life would get filled with praise; not just from the mouth and tongue, but, all his body members, together with his feelings and the depths of his soul, would turn into a guitar in the hands of the Holy Spirit. On it, our Lord Christ Himself would sing hymns of Passover and of the Cross, to be received by God the Father as a Joyful heavenly Symphony. On the other hand, when man lives confined within the shell of his own interest... whatever much praise and hymns he may utter, will not save his soul from despair.

Having presented His disciples with His body and blood, to carry within themselves His life given up for them, and to walk bearing His Cross, He granted them to praise with His Joy and to enjoy His salvation ... Then He set forth to the “Mount of Olives”

He might have taken them to the Mount of Olives, that mountain we said is connected to the Messiah, anointed, not by olive oil, but by His Holy Spirit for our salvation ... He took them to that mountain, to partake of His work, particularly concerning three aspects:

(1) In His crying and mourning for Jerusalem, as He sat on the Mount of Olives, to watch the city, saying:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her ! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Mt. 23: 37)

He demands from us to sit with Him to meditate in the fallen humanity, to moan with tears for the sake of every soul, hoping that it may come back to embrace the crucified Lord.

(2) On the Mount of Olives, in a place which was named 'Gethsemane' (verse 32), it was as though, the Lord had entered into an encounter with God the Father, to receive from His hands the cup of the Cross with its bitterness The Lord demands from us, not to stop at crying and moaning, but to bow our heads together with Him, to bear our practical cross from the hands of God the Father, in order to have a positive role in the ministry of the kingdom through the Cross.

(3) On the Mount of Olives, the Lord Christ sat with some of His disciples who showed Him the great buildings of the temple; to proclaim to them that not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down, and to tell them about the signs of the times and the end of the age (Mk. 13). It was, as though, He intended to draw their hearts from the apparent ministry, to that of encountering our Lord Jesus.

Actually, on that same mountain He took His disciples, and there He blessed them, then ascended. An angel came then, to give them the good news, that this same Jesus, who was taken up from them into heaven, will so come in like manner from the east.

We can say that our going with our Lord Jesus Christ to the Mount of Olives, is to share with Him His love for His people, to extend our hands to positive work for the sake of His kingdom, and to look forward to the destruction of our old man to enjoy the eternal temple, that is the continuous dwelling of the Lord Christ, until He comes over the clouds, to carry all the Church with Him as His bride.

7- Proclaiming that His disciples will be made to stumble because of Him:

Having presented His body and blood to His disciples, He proclaimed to them His death and that one of them will betray Him. He did not create an atmosphere of depression and sadness, but rather opened their mouths to praise with Him, as though, He was anticipating the events of His passion and crucifixion with Joy....

And now, He is taking them to the garden , to carry, alone, the cup of passion for the sake of all humanity. Before reaching the place called Gesthemsne, He proclaimed:

“All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night” (verse 27)

It is difficult to describe how the disciples felt after hearing that Divine proclamation, that would have totally destroyed them, but the Lord did not let them surrender to despair; He presented them with help: He began by explaining the severity of the situation, as expressed by the prophet Zechariah:

“I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered” (verse 27)

Then, He revealed to them how they will encounter Him once more after His resurrection:

“But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee” (verse 28)

He proclaimed to them, that what is taking place is through a Divine ordinance; On one side God the Father would strike the Son who carried our sins, and accepted death for our sake, would strike Him through falling under the same verdict that was meant for us When the disciple took that very hard, He gave them the good news that, after His resurrection, He will encounter them in Galilee.

Father Theophlactius says: [God the Father says: *“I will strike the Shepherd”*, He allowed Him to be stricken. The disciples were called *“sheep”*, because of their innocence, and having committed no crime. Finally, He comforted them by saying: *“But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee”*].

In the Gospel according to St. Luke (22: 31), the Lord intended to demonstrate the severity of the war that His disciples will face, by saying:

“Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan asked to sift you as wheat, But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fall” (Lk. 22: 31)

But Peter thought that he is capable of standing fast, even if all the others are made to stumble, saying:

“‘Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be’, And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times’. But he spoke more vehemently, ‘If I have to die with You, I will not deny You’, and they all said likewise” (verses 29 - 31)

There is no doubt that the apostle Peter, with his zeal and his great love for the Lord, thought that he is capable of standing by Him till death. But the Lord knows about him what he does not know about himself. Despite Peter’s zeal and love, he is weak, and in need, not to testify for himself as having courage, but humbly to ask for God’s support. St. Cyril the Great says: [Peter in his vehement claim, was wrong; It was fitting for him, having been told by the Savior that he will deny Him, not to protest so openly, as the “Truth” does not lie. It was fitting for him to ask for strength, to spare him that suffering or to save him from that fall ... I wish, that all of us should not think arrogantly of ourselves, even if we see that we are adorned with virtues, but we should rather, offer to Christ praises of thanksgiving, because He saves us and grants us, even the desire to do good].

As far as the crowing of the rooster is concerned, the evangelist St. Matthew did not say how many times it crowed, but the evangelist St. Mark mentioned that before the rooster crows twice, Peter would deny Him three times. That is why many scholars believe that Peter denied once, before the rooster crowed; then denied twice more, before it crowed again

What is that rooster that crowed twice ? And why did Peter denied three times ?

Probably the rooster refers to the Holy Spirit, who “*will convict the world of sin*” (Jn. 16: 8); and who crowed in the Old Covenant to no avail; then crowed again in the New Covenant, to convict nations and people to return to the God they denied. Peter’s three denials, refer to what the world did with God, denying Him three times, namely, by thought, by speech, and by action; a denial set forth through vehemence and knowledge. Despite that, the Holy Spirit is capable of turning the world back from its denial, and, together with the looks by the Lord Christ, to encounter it, to crush its heart inside, and to cry bitterly with Peter.

In a text claimed to be by St. Jerome: [Who is that rooster that gives the good news of sunrise, but the Holy Spirit. Through His voice in the prophesies and the apostles, we stood up again after our three times denial, crying bitterly for our fall; having thought evil of the Lord, spoke evil about our neighbors, and did evil to ourselves]

If we denied the Lord three times, through thought, speech and action; denied Him thrice, doing wrong to His Divine Person, to our neighbors and to ourselves; I wish God’s Spirit would (crow) twice in our ears, by His proclamations through the prophets and apostles, to carry us to our crucified Lord Jesus Christ, crying for our sins, and proclaiming our genuine repentance, and our longing to return to Him and to abide in Him eternally !

8- Heading to Gethsemane:

Having revealed everything to His disciples, the Lord Christ set forth with them to a garden, bearing the cup of passion; the evangelist says:

“Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane, and He said to His disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray’. And He took Peter, James and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, ‘My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch’ “

(verses 32 - 34)

'Gethsemane' is an Aramic word that means 'Oil presser', It was a garden of Olive trees, and a preeser to press oil. That garden was located east of Jerusalem, to the west of the Mount of Olives, over the Brook Kidron (Jn. 18: 1),

"And Judas, who betrayed Him , also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with His disciples" (Jn. 18: 2; Lk. 22: 39)

If humanity had lost the secret of its life, joy, and peace, through the disobedience of the first Adam in the garden; In the garden, the second Adam entered, as though into an oil-presser (Gethsemane), in order to be pressed by passion for the sake of humanity, in order to bring back to it, by His obedience to the Father, even to death, what it previously lost.

He took with Him His three disciples, who were with Him during His transfiguration, so that, when they see Him *"troubled and deeply distressed"*, and *"His sweat becoming like great drops of blood falling down to the ground"* (Lk. 22: 44), they will apprehend the reality and truth of His incarnation, and His coming under pain, without getting troubled or offended; having already seen Him in His transfiguration and glory.

He entered with His disciples to the garden, to present them with a practical living example of life of praying and watching during times of afflictions, He said to them, *"Sit here while I pray"*; and advised them, *"Stay here and watch"*... He taught us as well, to face death fearlessly, and to surrender ourselves completely in the hands of the heavenly Father; The evangelist says,

"He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for you; Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will"

(verses 35, 36)

St. John Chrysostom wrote an essay about “*If possible take this cup away from Me*”; that I have already translated and published; It says:

(1) It could not be said that the Lord Christ, had no knowledge if it would be possible to take that cup away from Him, [His knowledge concerning His passion , is not different from that concerning the essence of His nature, something only Him knows thoroughly and utterly, having said,

“As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father” (Jn. 10: 15)

And why should I speak about the only-begotten Son; when, even the prophets, seemed not to be ignorant of that fact (namely Christ’s passion and crucification), but knew it clearly, and firmly proclaimed it beforehand].

(2) That expression, “*If possible take this cup away from Me*”, is not to be taken as a desire to escape crucification. [He called Peter, who was granted a revelation from the Father; and whom He beatified and given the keys of the heavenly kingdom ...; He called him “Satan” and “offense”, and accused him as not mindful of the things of God ...; All that, because Peter said to Him, “*Far be it from you, Lord; this shall not happen to you*” (Mt. 16: 22, 23); that is You could not be crucified. How then, would He not desire the Cross, for which He rebuked the disciple and called him ‘Satan’, just because he asked Him to avoid crucification ? ! How can’t He desire the Cross, He, who presented Himself as the good Shepherd, who gives His life for the sheep, saying,

“I am the good Shepherd. The good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep” (Jn. 10: 11) ?

Behold, how He is commended by the apostle Paul, because of His proclamation that He would “give His life” :

“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient to death -- even death on a cross” (Philipp. 2: 6 - 8)

He, who once spoke of Himself saying,

“Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again” (Jn. 10: 17)

And how the apostle Paul also says of Him:

“And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us” (Ephes. 5: 2)

And as the Lord Christ approached crucifixion, He lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said:

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son” (Jn. !7: 1)

Behold, how He speaks of the Cross as a glory ! So How could He try to avoid it, when He is actually asking the Father to hasten it ?]

(3) That phrase was recorded by the evangelist, to confirm His incarnation, and His coming under Passion. [His sweat became like drops of blood falling down to the ground. Being in agony, an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. Before He utters the words *“Not My will, but Yours be done”*, He said: *“My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death”*].

Despite all that, Satan spoke through many heretics, like Mercion of Pontos, Valentino, and Mani of Persia, who tried to deny the doctrine of incarnation,

claiming that the body He acquired was not a real one, but rather imaginary and illusionary ... Actually, the Lord, very clearly revealed human feelings and emotions, in confirmation of the truth of His incarnation].

(4) Beside confirming His incarnation, He presented Himself as a role model : [There is another consideration, not of less importance ... The Lord Christ came to the world, intending to teach virtues to humanity, not just by words, but also through deeds; the best way of teaching ... as He says:

“Whoever does and teaches them (the commandments), he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 5: 19)

He commanded His disciples to pray, *“Lead us not into temptation”*, then He put that commandment into a practical form, when He said: *“Father, if it is possible to take this cup away from Me”*. Here, He teaches us all, not to throw ourselves purposely into danger ... , to teach us the humility of thought, and to remove from us the love of vain glory...We should entreat Him not to lead us into temptation, yet, if it is not according to His will, we should ask Him to do, whatever He chooses, saying:

“Not what I will, but what you will”. He said that, not because the will of the Son is not that of the Father, but to teach men to submit their will to that of God, even if they are troubled, afflicted, and facing danger, and even if they are not yet willing to leave the present world.

St. Ambrosius speaks to us about the secret of the sorrow of Christ, who said, *“My soul is exceedingly sorrowful”* (verse 34), saying: [How great is the compassion of the Lord; If He had not my feelings, His goodness would not be as complete ! ...He became tired for my weaknesses ! He carried my grief to grant me joy ! He descended even to the pain of death, to get me back to life; He Suffered to conquer sorrow. It was written of Him,

“A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53: 3)

Joseph taught us not to fear the prison; And in Christ we are taught how to conquer death. ... You are suffering, O Lord, not because of Your wounds, but You are,

“ Wounded for our transgressions” (Isaiah 53: 5)

We behold You as a victim of pain, yet, You are suffering for our sake,

“bruised for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53)

That weakness is not according to Your nature, yet You acquired it for my sake ... Since the fall of Adam, our only chance of getting out of this world is by death. But as God did not create death, and does not desire the death of the sinner, as much as his penitence, He was sorrowful to bear what He did not create].

St. Ambrosius completes his comment on the sorrow of the Lord Christ, to confirm that it did not affect His Deity, but only to His human soul; the incarnated Son of God having a human soul that shares our feelings. [He says, “Now My soul is troubled”]; It is the trouble of the human soul, as the Deity is not prone to pain ... The Lord is not sorrowful (by His Deity), or His Divine nature, but His soul is. He was sorrowful, not because of Passion, but on account of our scattering, as He says,

“I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered” (Mt. 26: 31)

He was also sorrowful on account of His persecutors, knowing that He is redeeming their transgressions by His Passion.... He prays for them saying,

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Lk. 23: 34)

Father Theophlactius presents another reason for the Lord’s sorrow, saying:

It is, as though, He was saying, ‘I am sorrowful , not because I will die, but because the Jews who are My own people, are crucifying Me, and would therefore, be denied the kingdom of God].

St. Augustine likewise comments on the Lord’s sorrow, saying: [The Lord probably uttered these words, because of the secret it carries; revealing that He is to suffer according to His body, that is to say according to the Church, to which He became its cornerstone; and that would embrace members , both from the Hebrews and from the Gentiles]. The Saint based his statement upon the Lord’s talk to the Father, saying, “*Abba, Father*” (verse 36); the word “Abba” symbolizes the Jews, and the word “Father” symbolizes the Gentiles, in the relation of each of these two groups with God; as He is the Father of both the Jews and the Gentiles

Following this address to the Father, the evangelist says:

“Then He came and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, ‘Simon, are you sleeping ? Could you not watch one hour ? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak’. Again He went away and prayed, and spoke the same words. And when He returned, He found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy, and they did not know what to answer Him. There He came the third time and said to them, ‘ Are you still sleeping and resting ? It is enough ! The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of the sinners. Rise up, let us go. See, My betrayer is at hand” (verses 37 - 42)

In this text, it is to be noticed:

(1) The Lord had commanded them to watch and pray, yet they could not; Every time He comes back, He finds them asleep; “*their eyes were heavy*” The third time, He said to them, “*Now, sleep and rest*”

The watching, demanded by the Lord, was not just refraining from sleep, but means spiritual alertness, inner awareness, and apprehending the secrets of redemption ... The disciples were representing humanity, which was incapable of watching, and of apprehending the secrets of God's work, despite all the symbols and prophecies He sent to wake it up. The disciples' deep sleep, and their heavy eyes, refer to a state of denial and lack of faith, that affected humanity, yet did not keep God from practicing His works of love, and as the apostle says:

“For ... when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Rom. 5: 10)

As to His saying, on the third time, “*Now sleep and rest !*”; He did not mean, sleep of listlessness and laziness, but complete surrender to the hands of God, and the inner rest, the way St. Peter the apostle slept in his prison (Acts 12: 7); and according to the Psalm: “*He gives His beloved sleep*” (Ps. 127: 2). As to the third time, there is, here, a reference to His resurrection on the third day; We can now, sleep and rest, as we do not fear death anymore; ... The Lord died and rose for our sake.

(2) The Lord commands them, “ Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation”. A Christian, whatever his spiritual stature is, does not desire to enter into temptation, but beseeches God to spare him from entering into it; so that if it happens and he did enter into temptation, he can, with the Lord's help, avoid falling, and he can even rise above it; he would not think of it, being preoccupied with the Savior Himself !

(3) He says, “*The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak*”. Although their spirits are strong, ready to testify to Him even to death, yet, because of the weakness of

the flesh, they would collapse, unless supported by the Lord Himself. St. Jerome says: [While my spirit is strong leading me to life, yet my flesh is weak drawing me to death].

Mildly rebuking Peter, He says to him, “*Simon, are you sleeping ? Could you not watch one hour ?*” As though He is saying, ‘Where is your great zeal, and your kindling love; and where is your promise, that if you have to die, you would not deny Me ? Because of the weakness of the flesh, you could not overcome sleep, your eyes got heavy; So how can you bear death for my sake ?

9 - His Arest:

As the Lord Christ came into the garden, to receive the cup of Passion for the sake of all humanity, He proclaimed to His disciples,

“The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise up, let us go. See, My betrayer is at hand”
(verses 41, 42)

The Lord came to the garden, to surrender Himself, in obedience, to bonds, in order to release the bonds that tied humanity, through the transgression of Adam ...

In the garden the Lord came to His disciples three times, to find them asleep; as though representing humanity, fallen under the weight of sin, through thought, speech, and action. ... For the sake of this humanity, the Lord set forth to deliver Himself to sinners, to be crucified in its place ! St. Augustine says: [They arrested Him, by whom they would have been released from their bonds; Probably among them were some who mocked Him; but also among them, were those who were saved through Him, who said with the Psalmer: “*You have loosed my bonds*” (Psalm 116: 16).

The evangelist say

“And immediately, while He was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, ‘Whomever I kiss, He is the One, take Him and lead Him away safely’. And as soon as he had come, immediately he went up to Him and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi’, and kissed Him. They then laid their hands on Him and took Him. And one of those who stood by, drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear” (verses 43 - 47)

Once more, speaking of Judas, St. Mark confirms that he is “*one of the twelve*”, to underscore how horrible his crime was, especially that he made of the ‘kiss’ a way to give Him up.

Indeed when the prophet, with spirit of prophesy asked the wounded Messiah, “*What are these wounds in your hands ?*” (Zech. 13: 6), He answered bitterly, “*Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends*” (Zech. 13: 6).

St. Ambrosius comments on the Lord’s rebuke to His disciple:

“Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss ? “ (Lk. 22: 48)

saying: [A marvelous expression of the Divine power; and a great lesson in virtue. Although the betrayal was revealed, He did not deny him His long-suffering ! You have revealed, O Lord, the identity of the one who is going to betray You; and revealed that the One to be betrayed is “the Son of Man”; as though, You are saying to him: ‘For your sake, I acquired this body that you are betraying !.... He was compassionately rebuking him: “*Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss ?* “. In other words:

‘Are you wounding Me and shedding My blood with the sign of love ? Are you giving Me up to death with the sign of peace ? ! You, the minister and disciple, betrays your teacher and creator ? ... This proverb applies to you:

“ The kisses of an enemy are deceitful ” (Prov. 27: 6)

... The Lord received that kiss, not out of hypocrisy, but to reveal that He is not getting away from the betrayer, whose destruction will be much more serious, through that gesture; as it is written:

“With those who hate peace, You were one of peace” (Psalm 119: 9)]

In a text claimed to be by St. Jerome: [Judas gave a kiss as a deceitful sign, just like that deceitful offering of Cain, the son of Adam].

St. Cyril the Great, comments on what Judas did, saying: [Many are the sins, and bitter are those that wage war against the soul of man, in an unbearable conflict, to let it fall into an abyss of lowly deeds. The worse of these sins is love of silver, the source of all evils, in the fierce snares of which the traitor disciple fell, to turn himself into an instruments in the hands of the evil leaders of the Jewish synagogue.

For a fistful of valueless silver, he rejected his discipleship to Christ, lost his hope in God, lost the crowns, the life, and the glory, prepared for the true followers of Christ, and his right to reign with Him...

He gave to those murderers a sign, saying: *“Whomever I kiss, He is the One”*. He altogether, forgot the glory of Christ; and in his idiocy, assumed that he would get away with it; He offered a kiss, a sign of love, while harboring in his heart a bitter and evil deceit. While, still in the company of the Savior, together with the rest of the disciples, he heard Him reveal things of the future, being God, the ‘Omniscient’, he even heard Him reveal the identity of his betrayer, saying to His saintly apostles:

“Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me” (verse 18)

How then, could his betrayal be hidden ? The serpent within him was wrestling against God; he was a dwelling place for the devil. One of the evangelists said, that while Judas was sitting at the table with the other disciples, the Savior dipped a piece of bread and gave it to him, and immediately Satan entered him].

Judas gave a deceitful kiss, to betray his Master, to a mob of troops and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, who came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons; as did the brothers of Joseph, who sold him to strangers ... Peter tried to defend his Master, drew his sword and struck the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear ... but the Lord rebuked him for that, then healed the servant.

St. Cyril the, Great says: [He does not want us to use the sword to oppose our enemies, but , rather, to use love, with prudence, to overcome our adversaries. St. Paul the apostle presents us with a similar teaching, saying,

“Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10: 5)

The war, for the sake of truth being spiritual, the weapon fitting for the saints, is prudence, filled with the love of God. It is fitting for us to:

“Stand therefore, having girded our waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, And took the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God” (Ephes. 6: 14 - 17)]

St. Ambrosius presents us with some comments concerning the cutting of the servant's ear, of which are: [Peter struck the servant of the high priest, but the Lord healed the bloody wounds, and replaced them with the Divine sacraments.

The servant of the ruler of this world, and of the powers of the time, was wounded;

...

He was wounded in his ear, because he did not listen to the voice of wisdom....

Peter cut the ear, to teach, that he, who does not have the spiritual ear, does not deserve to have, even the material one. The Lord gave him back his ear, confirming what Isaiah said, that healing is possible through repentance, even for those who wounded the Lord in His Passion (Isaiah 6: 10)....

Why did Peter cut the ear ? Because he got the keys of the kingdom of heaven; ... He got the authority to bind and to loose ! He cuts the ears of him, who hears evil, with a spiritual sword ! ...

There are many, who think they got ears, when they have not. In the Church all have ears, while those outside it, do not have...]

The evangelist resumes his narration of the Lord's arrest, saying:

“Then Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me ? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and you did not take Me. But the Scripture must be fulfilled.

Then they all forsook Him and fled. Now a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young men laid hold of him, and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked” (verses 48 - 52)

St. Cyril the Great, sees, that in saying this, He wanted to confirm to them, that it would have been easier for them to take Him while He was teaching, yet, they did

not do that because, at that time, He would not have permitted them to do it. So, if He is now, surrendering Himself to their hands, it is by His free will, and in the right time He chose for the crucifixion; That is why He said to them:

“But this is your hour, and the power of darkness” (Lk. 22: 53)

[That is to say, you were given a short time (an hour), in which to have authority on Me. But, how did you get that authority ? Through the will of the Father, that conforms with My will....; I desired to submit Myself to passion for the sake of the life and salvation of the world.... You have got an hour against Me; ... Very short and very limited, is the interval between the events of the precious cross, and the resurrection from the dead; That was the authority that was given to the darkness. The “darkness” is a name of Satan, being a pitch black night and darkness, described by the apostle Paul:

“Whose minds the God of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Cor 4: 4)

Therefore, Satan and the Jews were given the authority to oppose Christ, but they dug for themselves the pit of destruction].

As for the young man who fled naked, that was St. Mark, the author of this gospel. In a text claimed to be by St. Jerome: [In the way Joseph forsook his robe and fled naked from the wicked woman, I wish that, whoever intends to flee from the hands of the evil ones, would cast away every thing from his mind, and flee toward Christ].

10 - His religious trial:

Having surrendered Himself to the hands of those adversaries, He was led to the residence of Caiaphas, the high priest, to be tried religiously.

According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Caiaphas was the high priest that year, having purchased that position from the Roman governor. That position, according to the law, was to be held for life; nevertheless the Roman authority at that time, had the power to appoint and to remove the high priest at will. Caiaphas unaware, prophesied Christ's salvation work; According to St. John,

“And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them: ‘You know nothing at all , nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish’. Now this, he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation; and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad”

(Jn. 11: 49 - 52)

Caiaphas' second prophesy was not by words, but by action, the evangelist says:

“Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, ‘What further need do we have of witnesses ? ‘” (verse 63)

He proclaimed the end of the Levite or Mosaic priesthood, by tearing his clothes as a high priest ! when, even the Roman soldiers, could not tear Jesus' clothes at the time of crucifixion. By tearing his clothes, that should not have been torn according to the law, he condemned, not just himself, but the Levite priesthood as a whole !

By tearing his clothes he proclaimed his disgust for Christ's words, that he considered as blasphemy; and accordingly, all the Sanhedrin, condemned Him to be worthy of death (Verse 64). Yet, as he or they, had no authority to put their verdict into effect, Jesus was led to the Roman governor (Jn. 18: 28) to ratify His crucifixion. Caiaphas took part, after the resurrection of Christ, in condemning Peter and John (Acts 4: 6); before he was expelled from his position by the Romans by the year 36 AD

And Now let us follow up the events according to the evangelic text:

“And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were assembled all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes. But Peter followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he sat with the servants and warmed himself at the fire” (verses 53, 54)

It was more fitting, for the residence of the high priest, to be a holy Church, testifying to Christ before the whole world, drawing every soul to approach the Word of God, by the flame of the fiery Holy Spirit, to get fulfilled by secret of life. But, because of envy and love of the world, that residence turned into a location for condemning the Lord Christ to death. Instead of having souls approach in it the Savior Messiah, Peter was kept away from his Savior. . And instead of the fire of the Holy Spirit, a fire of evil lust was kindled, to warm up the servants and slaves of this world.

Through the water of Baptism, we all became priests and kings, bearing the laical or general priesthood, by which we have the privilege of standing before the Father in His Son, to offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving in our hearts, as though on the inner altar of the Lord; and we enjoyed the fiery Holy Spirit through the sacrament of ‘Meron’. I wish we would not surrender our inner sanctuary to the evil one; so that, in place of having the Lord transfigured in it, He would be recondemned to crucifixion; and in place of the sacred heavenly fire, would be kindled the fire of deadly sin (Hosea 7: 4); and our inner Peter would stay away from the Lord, sitting with the servants of this world, warming himself with their evil fire, and denying his Master with an oath several times !

The high priest and the whole council sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but their testimonies did not agree (verses 55, 56); as though, they are the wife of Potiphar who falsely testified against Joseph.

The Lord Christ faced two accusations:

(1) *“We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days, I will build another made without hands’ (verse 58)*

This accusation, actually, bore false witness, as He did not say, ‘I will destroy this temple’, but said, ‘*Destroy*’; and did not say ‘this temple that is made by hands’, but, ‘*this temple*’, meaning the temple of His body. They misunderstood His words; yet, that testimony anyway, despite its falsification, confirmed His talk about His death and His resurrection on the third day, becoming therefore, a living basis for preaching after His resurrection.

(2) When the Lord answered the high priest, who asked Him:

“Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed ?, Jesus said, ‘I am’; and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven’ (verses 61, 62)

The high priest did not like that answer, and he tore his clothes, saying,

“What further need do we have for witnesses ? You have heard the blasphemy ! (verse 63)

The first accusation was based on a false witness; but the second one was based on complete ignorance, and a misunderstanding of the words of the Lord Himself. The Sanhedrin got offended by the first testimony concerning the destruction of the temple of His body and His resurrection; and did not bear to hear about the glory of the Son of God and His ultimate coming, considering that as a blasphemy worthy of death. Through the first accusation, they probably thought of Him as a breaker of the

the law, wishing to destroy the temple, under-evaluating it by saying that it is made with hands; and through the second accusation, they considered Him a blasphemer

..

The evangelist says,

“But He kept silent and answered nothing” (verse 61)

St. Augustine says that He was silent during His trial on more than one occasion, once before the high priest, and another before Pilate, and a third time before Herod; In Him the Scripture saying:

“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet, he opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53: 7)

He was likened to a lamb, to be counted as righteous and not guilty; He did not open His mouth just as a lamb; namely, as He was not One with an evil conscience, who committed sins, but, in His humility He offered Himself a sacrifice for the sins of others.

The high priest, furious because of the silence of the Lord, said to Him:

“Do you answer nothing ? What is it these men testify against you ? “ (verse 60)

The Lord did not intend by His silence to offend anyone, but He knew that they would not benefit from His words, but rather they were looking for a chance to find in them something to condemn Him with; so He kept silent hoping that they may reconsider their attitude.

His silence was that for the sake of love, hoping for them to reconsider their position; and when He did talk, He uttered only few words, revealing His true identity, to deprive them of Any excuse for what they were doing ... In other words in His silence, as well as in His talk, He was motivated by love, not by resistance or

vengeance.

The high priest asked Him: “*Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed ?* “, that is to say, “Are You the Son of God ? “ The Lord answered calling Himself “*the Son of Man*”, proclaiming that He is the incarnated Son of the blessed; confirming that His incarnation does not separate Him from the Father, or deprive Him of His Divine work as a condemner, who comes with the clouds of heaven, and appears sitting on the right hand of the Father.

Finally, as all of them condemned Him to be worthy of death, He remained there up till the morning suffering all kinds of degradation; The evangelist says:

“Some began to spit on Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him, and to say to Him, ‘prophesy !’, and the officers struck Him with the palms of their hands” (verse 65)

St. John Chrysostom says: [I am proud of these things, not only of His raising some from the dead, but also of His suffering that passion]. St. Cyril the Great says, [He, who is the breath of every holy spirit in heavens, is despised as one us, patiently bearing smites, and scorns of the evil people, presenting Himself to us, in the perfection of long-suffering; or, rather, proclaiming His incomparable Divine humility ... They mocked Him, as an ignorant man, who is the giver of all knowledge, and the revealer of every thing hidden in us]

11- Peter’s denial:

The evangelist St. Mark narrates to us, how, what the Lord told Peter, was realized: “Before the rooster crows twice you will deny Me three times” (verse 29).

a- As he was below in the courtyard, warming himself at the fire, Peter denied for the first time before one of the servant girls of the high priest. When he went out on the porch, a rooster crowed.

b- Then he denied for the second time before those who stood by, when the same slave girl confirmed that he is “*one of them*”

c- When those standing by said to him: “*Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean , and your speech shows it*”, he denied for the third time, and he began to curse and swear, “*I do not know this Man of whom you speak*”. For the second time the rooster crowed. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said to him; And when he thought about it, he wept (Verses 66 - 72).

In these events, it is to be noticed:

(1) St. Ambrosius comments on the location where Peter denied, and the circumstances around it, saying:

[When Peter followed Lord Jesus from afar, he denied Him; But when he got very near to Him, he did not deny Him....

In the house of the high priest, there was a fire kindling, and Peter approached it to warm himself; as the heat of the Spirit in him has cooled down, because the Lord was a prisoner....

Where did Peter deny ? He did not deny him on the mountain, nor in the temple, but in the house of the Jews, ... in the residence of the high priest,.... in a place, where there is no place for the truth, ... where Jesus was imprisoned ! ...

Let us meditate in Peter’s condition as he denied; He was cold, may be not because of the weather, but because the (spiritual) atmosphere in that place, where Lord Jesus is not recognized, was cold ... The cold affected the Spirit more than the body;... There Peter stood at the fire warming his trembling heart.

I wish that our inner Peter, would not, any more, enter such house, to live with a

cold Spirit, not kindled by the Divine Spirit, and to seek a fire from the world to warm himself up... so as not to deny his Lord, and to lose in his heart the eternal kingdom.

(2) The evangelist says that Peter was, below in the courtyard, when he denied for the first time before a slave girl; While when he went up on later on, to the housetop (Acts 19: 11), his eyes were opened to behold a Divine vision, and set forth, not to witness before a slave girl, but preach among the Gentiles, (Cornilius and his household). In other words, when our inner Peter is below in the house, he would seek the worldlies, and would worm himself up with the fire of worldly love and bodily lust; But when he goes up (on the housetop), he would behold the heavenlies, and would be kindled with the fire of the Holy Spirit.

(3) We see in the crowing of the rooster for the second time, that brought to Peter's mind his Master's words, to make him weep with remorse, a reference to the work of the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant, that,

“will convict the world of sin” (Jn. 16: 8)

and, *“will bring to (our) remembrance all things that (He) said to us”* (Jn. 14: 26)

Yet, Our teacher St. Luke, the evangelist, presents us with another reason for Peter's repentance, saying:

“And immediately , while he was speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter, and Peter remembered the word of the Lord” (Luke 22: 60, 61)

If the crowing of the rooster refers to the work of the Holy Spirit, to rebuke the

heart , and to bring to its remembrance the word of the Lord, the turning of the Lord and His looking at Peter, would lead to a repentance filled with hope ! Concerning this, St. Ambrosius says: [Nice is the tears that cleanse sin ! Those to whom the Lord turns and look, would cry; Peter denied at first and did not cry, because the Lord did not turn and look at him; he denied for the second time, yet he still did not cry But, when he denied for the third time, and the Lord turned and looked at him, he cried bitterly ... We can not say, that he cried because of a mere look of rebuke by the Lord's bodily eyes, but his remorse was realized deep within, in his mind and will..... The Lord, with His mercy, got in touch with him, silently and secretly, reminding him of His inner grace, motivating him to offer visible tears, that express the feelings of his inner self. Behold, how the Lord is present with His help, to support us in will and work, ... to motivate us to will and to work].

In another occasion, he says: [Lord Jesus, turn and look at us, to motivate us to experience crying for our sins].

+++

CHAPTER 15

THE EVENTS OF THE CROSS

After the Lord Christ was tried religiously at the residence of the high priest, He was led to Pilate, the Roman governor, who had the authority to put their verdict into effect, and who, at the persistence of the multitude, condemned Him to death on the cross.

1- His civil trial verses	1 - 15
2- Lord Jesus mocked	16 -- 20
3- On the way to the cross	21 -- 22
4- Offering Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink	23
5- Dividing His garments	24
6- Crucifying Him between two robbers	25 - 28
7- Blaspheming Him	29 - 32
8- Darkness over the whole land	33
9-Lord Jesus breathing His last	34 - 37
10- The veil of the temple torn in two from top to bottom	38
11- Confession of the Centurion	39
12- Women gathering around Him	40 - 41
13- Lord Jesus buried	42 – 47

1- His civil trial:

After a whole night, in the house of the high priest, suffering their insults and dark thoughts, they decided to deliver Him to the Roman governor to be condemned to death. The evangelist says:

“Immediately, in the morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and the scribes and the whole council; and they bound Jesus, led Him away, and delivered Him to Pilate” (verse 1)

They arrested Him, and plotted against Him, because He did not give them their heart desire: to save them from the Roman oppression, and to realize the Zionist supremacy in the world. And in order to have Him killed, they delivered Him to the Roman governor, with the accusation that they

“found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King’ (Lk. 23: 1,2).

They delivered Him to the Roman governor to have Him killed; to be, themselves, delivered in their turn, by God, to ‘Titus’ the Roman, who burnt their city and devastated the temple, for the sake of which they revolted against the Lord Christ, with claim that He intended to destroy it ... In them was realized the saying of David the Psalmer:

“Give to them according to their deeds and according to the wickedness of their endeavors; Give to them according to the work of their hands; Render to them what they deserve” (Psalm 28: 4)

They brought Him to Pilate, with the most serious accusation in those days, that He is reigning Himself a king, something that could not be taken lightly by a governor, lest he would be counted as traitor to Caesar. That is why,

“Pilate asked Him, ‘Are You the king of the Jews ?’; And He answered and said to him, ‘It is as you say’ “ (verse 2)

By that, the Lord Christ did not deny His identity as King; yet -- according to the Gospel by St. John -- He made it clear to Pilate, that He is a Spiritual King,

“My Kingdom is not of this world” (Jn. 18: 36)

Pilate expected to listen to a long speech from the Lord Christ, defending Himself against that accusation, that could be punished by death; especially since he heard of Him, as a great teacher, who preached in the temple, on the mountains and on the beaches, who does not lack eloquence or ability to defend Himself. But the Lord Christ kept silent; to be asked again by Pilate,

“Do You answer nothing ? See how many things they testify against You ! But Jesus still answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled” (verse 5)

St. Ambrosius says: [It is a marvelous example, exhorting the hearts of men, to stand insults with a steadfast Spirit. The Lord was accused, but said nothing ! In His silence, He was right, as He was in no need to defend Himself. Self defense is only for those who fear defeat. He does not confirm the accusation, but does ignore them as being unexecutable. I wonder, what would He has to fear, if He is not wishing to save Himself, but rather to save all people, ... to sacrifice His life to acquire their salvation. Susanna kept silent, and conquered (Da. 13: 35) ! ... The best cases are those which we are justified without defense].

The scholar Origen says: [He was convinced that His whole life, and His works among the Jews, are far better defense than any words to counteract the false witness].

The silence of the Lord Christ carried a strength, that captured the heart of Pilate, who wished to release Him, presenting the Jews with several opportunities to reconsider their position; Yet, out of fear, he submitted to their request; Of these opportunities are the following:

(1) He was accustomed to release one prisoner to them , whomever they requested (verse 6); So he asked them:

“Do you want Me to release to you the king of the Jews ? For

he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy” (verses 9, 10)

But the chief priests stirred up the crowd, so that he should rather release to them Barabbas, who, together with others had committed murder in an insurrection. Thus the cup was getting filled more and more, as the Roman desired the release of the Lord, while they were insisting on killing Him !

The scholar Origen sees in the release of Barabbas and the slaying of the Lord Christ, a realization of what came in the book of Leviticus, concerning ‘the day of atonement’ (Lev. 16), when Aaron was to take two goats and present them before the Lord at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. He was to cast lots for the two goats one lot for the Lord, and the other for the scapegoat. Aaron was then to bring the goat whose lot falls to the Lord, and sacrifices it for a sin offering. But the goat chosen by lot as a scapegoat, was to be presented alive before the Lord to be used for making atonement, by sending it into the wilderness as a scapegoat. In a text claimed to be by St. Jerome, he repeats Origen’ view, that there were two goats before Pilate: one to be released into the wilderness of hell accompanied by the sins of people, and the other to be slain as a lamb for the remission of sins. Barabbas was to be the share of ‘Azazel’, the devil; while Christ was to be the lamb, the share of God.

(2) The second opportunity was, when Pilate, again asked them, hoping that they might reconsider their position, saying to them,

“What then do you want me to do with Him Whom you call the King of the Jews ? So they cried out again, ‘Crucify Him’. Then Pilate said to them, ‘Why ? What evil has He done ? ‘ And they cried out more exceedingly, ‘Crucify Him’ (verses 12 - 14)

Pilate speaks to them in their own way, calling the Lord Christ “*the king of the*

Jews”; They should not have rejected that heavenly King, but they persisted on rejecting Him, requesting His crucifixion; so that through their fall, the door would be opened to the Gentiles, according to the words of the apostle Paul:

“Through their fall , ...salvation has come to the Gentiles. Now, if their their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness ! “ (Rom. 11: 11, 12)

Out of ignorance and envy, they were crying, ‘*Crucify Him*’; not knowing that they were realizing unintentionally, the prophecies in their hands. They did not know, that within their hands was Abel, who was viciously killed in the field by his own brother; his blood was crying out, not for revenge but for purification of the world. Within their hands was Isaac, carrying the wood for the burnt offering; He is Moses, carrying his rod, not to cross with them the Red Sea, heading towards Jerusalem, but crossing with them death, to grant them a new life in Him, to enter with them into the bosom of God the Father.

He is the bunch of grapes carried by Joshua, not as a deposit for the promised land, but as an eternal life for those who partake of, and abide in Him. He is Elisha, who threw his wood, not to let the iron ax float from the depths, but to raise up humanity, loaded with sins, to set it free from the depths of hell, drawing it by the cross, the tree of life, to take it back to the heavenly paradise

The Jews desired to get rid of the Lord Christ through the cross, while the prophets desired to sit beneath the shade of the crucified, saying with the bride:

“I sat down in his shade with great delight. And his fruit was sweet to my taste” (Song 2: 3)

That cross which drew the hearts of the faithfuls, to sing with the apostle saying:

“But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6: 14)

Anyway, Pilate submitted to their request, not out of conviction, but to gratify them:

“So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them, and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified” (verse 15)

He delivered Him to scourges and insults, to hear the Lord say on the mouth of His prophet Isaiah:

“I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting” (Isaiah 50: 6)

And as St. Ambrosius says: [He was scourged to spare us the scourge]

2- Jesus mocked:

“Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and called together the whole garrison. And they clothed Him with purple; and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His head, ... and struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshipped Him. And when they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him” (verses 16 - 20)

What happened on the way to the cross was not meaningless; He Himself planned that way from eternity for our salvation. For our sake,

“For the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb. 12: 2)

Some exegetists see that taking off His clothes temporarily, to clothe Him with purple, refers to the casting off of the Jews, who were close to Him according to the flesh. They denied Him; thus casting themselves off Him; so that if they repent and get back to Him with belief, rejecting their material (Zionist) thought; that is to say, became Christians at the end of age, they would again reattach to Him, as the apostle says:

“Hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom. 11: 25)

St. Ambrosius talks to us about the purple garment given to Him by the soldiers, as referring to the victory of the martyrs, as well as to royal authority. It was destined for His body to collect, for our sake, the spilled blood, and to grant us, by His passion, His reign in us]

St. Jacob El-Serougi comments on these events, saying:

[They bared Him of His clothes like shearers; Yet He was silent like a lamb in the shearers' hands !

He discarded His clothes, so as to clothe those who left the paradise naked ! Clothed them with His clothes, to remain Himself in disgrace; ... He knew that they were suitable for the disgraced Adam !

They bared Him of His clothes, and clothed Him with a purple robe, the color of blood, to adorn the murdered bridegroom !

They twisted a crown of thorns for His head; that is fitting for Him, as He came to uproot thorns from earth !

He carried the curse of the earth, through the crown put on His head; and mightily bore the weight of the whole earth !

Sins, transgressions, afflictions, sufferings, and strikes were twisted with the crown of thorns, to be placed on His head to carry !

Through the thorns, the curse of Adam was dissolved !

He became a curse, in order that the returning heirs would be blessed !
Through His crown of thorns, He uprooted the cursed seed of the serpent !
Through the crown of thorn, He destroyed the crown of the devil, who desired to
become a god over creation !
Through His crown of thorns, He twisted a crown for the daughter of the Gentiles,
the bride He betrothed from among the idols, and gave her His name !
With a reed, they struck the exalted Head, that caused the angels to tremble !
Behold, how much the Lord Christ had from the sinners ? !
That ignorant man, how did he dare to spit on His face ? !
That also happened for the sake of Adam, who was the one worthy of being spat on,
because of his iniquity !

3- On the way to the cross:

The evangelists tell us:

“They compelled a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus, as he was coming out of the country and passing by, to bear His cross. And they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a skull” (verses 21, 22)

If the word ‘Simon’ means (to hear, or to obey), and the word ‘Cyrenian’, referring to a Gentile town in Lybia, means (heir); Simon the Cyrenian refers to the Church of the New Covenant, that became a heir through the obedience of faith; It came of the Gentiles to share with its Christ His cross, and to enjoy with Him that great honor.

The Lord Christ bore His cross (Jn. 19: 17) on His shoulder, as a sign of His reign, as told by Isaiah:

“The government will be upon His shoulder” (Isaiah 9: 6)

He was symbolized by Isaac who carried the wood of the burnt offering to the place of sacrifice (Genesis 22: 6)... Along the way, when the Lord fell under the weight of

the cross, the soldiers compelled Simon the Cyrenian to carry it; becoming a reference to the Church that share with its groom, His Passion, to enjoy the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His heavenly glories.

They brought Him to the Place Golgotha, that is translated as the place of the skull (verse 22), claimed to be the burial place of Adam ... ; As though the Lord Christ was raised on a tree, in order to grant life to Adam, who lost his life because of the tree. St. Cyril of Jerusalem believes that nomenclature reminds us of the fact that the crucified is:

“The head of all principality and power” (Col. 2: 10)

The Head suffered above the place of the skull !

4- Offering Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink:

“They gave Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink, but He did not take it” (verse 23)

That was the custom of the Romans, as a way of numbing the senses, to spare the one crucified feeling the whole weight of pain; But the Lord came, for our sake, to carry, willingly, the pain; to bend, on our account, under its weight.

5- Dividing His garments:

“And when they crucified Him, they divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take” (verse 24)

If His garments refer to the Church, the Body of Christ, dividing them among the Roman soldiers, without tearing it apart, refers to the Church extended to all nations. They are numerous, but should be free of tearing or dissension. St. Cyril, the Great says: [The four corners of the world, divided among them the garment of the Word, namely, His Body, which also remained intact, symbolized by the “tunic” (Jn. 19: 23). As the Only-begotten Son divides His Body, by which He sanctifies the souls and bodies, of those partaking of the Communion, into little portions as needed ... Yet His

Body is One, live in the whole Church, undivided; as is stated by St. Paul (1 Cor. 1:13). This is the significance of the sacrament concerning Christ].

Some fathers see in the division of the garments among the soldiers, a reference to the enjoyment of the one faith, by all categories: priests, virgins, widows, and married.

6- Crucifying Him between two robbers:

“Now it was the third hour, and they crucified Him. And the inscription of His accusation was written above:

‘THE KING OF THE JEWS’

With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left. So the Scripture was fulfilled which says,

‘And He was numbered with the transgressors’ ” (verses 25 - 28)

St. Mark considers that the crucifixion started from the time the Jews cried out before Pilate, ‘Crucify Him’, and Pilate granted them their request ..., although raising Him on the cross took place at the sixth hour. That is why, St. Augustine and St. Jerome, see, by saying that, St., Mark putting the responsibility of His crucifixion on the Jewish Jewish who crucified Him with their tongues, before the Romans execute their verdict !

The inscription of His accusation was written on the cross, *‘The King of the Jews’*, that was not haphazardness, as the Jews got annoyed and asked Pilate to change it to: ‘Who claimed to be the King of the Jews’ ... But they could not, by the cross, deprive Him of His reign; the cross came to establish His kingdom in us ! St. Ambrosius says: [The crucified Jesus Christ, and His royal glory were radiating from the cross].

St. Cyril of Jerusalem tells us, concerning His crucifixion between two robbers: [Referring to the two robbers who were crucified with Him, it was written, *“He was numbered with transgressors”* (Isaiah 53). They were both transgressors, but one of them is no more; the other, who rejected salvation until the end, though his hands were tied, yet his tongue kept blaspheming ... For one, it was the end of his life, but the beginning of his repentance and salvation. After rebuking his partner, he said to Jesus:

“Lord, remember Me when you come into your kingdom” (Lk. 23: 42)

Remember Me, O Lord, to you I cry out ; the eyes of my mind are closed, but remember me ! I do not say remember my deeds, for which I am frightened ... Everyone is kind to his fellow traveler; ... I do not say remember me now, but when you come into your kingdom.

What power has illuminated your soul ? Who taught you to worship the despised , who was crucified with you ?]

St. Cyril the Great says: [Two robbers were crucified with Him, started by mocking Him; one of them likened, in his behavior the evil Jews, while the other, admirably took a different trend. He believed in Him; and amid his bitter suffering, condemned the vicious attitude of the Jews, and the blaspheming words of his partner crucified with him. Confessing his sins, and admitting that he is justly receiving the due reward of his deeds, he condemned his evil ways, to be forgiven by God, saying with the Psalmer:

“I will confess my transgressions to the Lord. And You forgive the iniquity of my sin” (Psalm 32: 5)

He presented Christ with a blameless testimony, rebuked the Jews for their lack of God’s love, and condemned the verdict of Pilate, saying,

“This man has done nothing wrong” (Lk. 23: 41)

What a beautiful confession ! ... He gained the inheritance of saints, and his name is now written in heaven; after having been condemned to death, he was numbered among the dwellers of the exalted city]. Some scholars see in the two robbers, a reference to the nations of the Jews and the Gentiles; one of them was condemned to death through the Mosaic law, while the other, through the natural law. The Lord Christ was crucified between them, to bind them together in Him, being a corner stone for the (catholic) Church, offering His blood a price for unity in Him !

7- Blaspheming Him:

“And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, ‘Aha ! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross !’ Likewise the chief priests also, together with the scribes, mocked and said among themselves, ‘He saved others; Himself He can not save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe’. And those who were crucified with Him reviled Him” (verses 29 - 32)

All forces, with no exception, mocked the cross: those who passed by, the chief priests the scribes, and even the two robbers who were crucified with Him, they all reviled Him

... It was not possible for them to apprehend the secret of salvation, or to appreciate the work of God. They considered the cross as His end; thus He became in their eyes a deceitful and a swindler; if unable to save Himself,... how could He make Himself a King ? !

Probably the evil one, starting to apprehend the danger he faced, as the Lord was raised on the cross; and feeling that heaven and earth were watching the events, he hastened to persuade his followers to seek a visible sign, namely, that He descends from the cross, that they may believe in Him... But the Lord, who in many occasions refused to perform a ‘show’ sign, did not care for their blasphemy, that would become a testimony against them. They would be condemned through their very behavior, certain aspects of which are the following:

(1) The passers-by were blaspheming Him, saying, *‘You, who destroy the temple and build it in three days’*. This phrase quickly spread throughout the events; so that when the resurrection takes place, no one could deny His saying, that He would raise the temple of His Body in three days ! The blasphemers themselves, therefore, have spread the testimony for His resurrection, during the bittermost moments of crucifixion.

(2) The chief priests, together with the scribes, confessed that He “*saved others*”; That was the testimonial of the Jewish religious leaderships, during the moments of weakness.

(3) Those people said, “*Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe*”. In a comment claimed to be by St. Jerome: [They saw Him rising from His tomb, yet, they did not wish to believe that He could descend from the cross. How far is your lack of faith, you Jews ? I will set you, yourselves, to judge yourselves ! What would be more amazing: A dead man to rise from the tomb, or a living one to descend from the cross ? ! You sought a little thing, to be faced with a greater one. But your lack of faith, would not be healed through more signs than you gave seen].

8- Darkness over the whole land:

“Now when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour” (verse 33)

As the creator was raised on the cross by the hands of His creation, that intended to get rid of Him through its denial, it deprived itself of the sun of righteousness, so that darkness came into the hearts, demonstrated by the veiling of sun from the sixth until the ninth hour.

The book of Genesis mentions that Adam and Eve, after falling,

“Heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day; and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden” (Gen. 3: 8)

Some exegetes believe that Adam listened to the verdict of death at the ninth hour. It is as though, at the moments Adam and his wife hid from the face of the Lord God, and

apprehended that they became condemned to death, darkness fell over the whole land; The new Adam carried the same verdict, as He was nailed to the tree ! The darkness here, refers to the power given to the followers of darkness over the Lord

Christ, for a certain time, as He says:

“This is your hour, and the power of darkness” (Lk. 22: 53)

The scholar Tertelian addresses the Jews, saying: [There was darkness over the whole land in the middle of the day; thus,

“Your feasts turned into mourning; and all your songs into lamentations” (Amos 8: 10)

After the Passions of Christ, you were scattered and taken, as though, into captivity , as foretold by the Holy Spirit].

St. Cyril the Great says: [They worked on delivering the Author of life to death; so they crucified the Lord of glory. But, as they nailed the Lord of all to the cross, the sun withdrew from over their heads, and the light was clothed with darkness, as previously indicated by the prophet Amos through Divine inspiration (Amos 5: 18)... That should have been a clear sign for the Jews, that the minds of His crucifiers became darkened, as

“Hardening in part has happened to Israel” (Rom. 11: 25)

The prophet David, in his love for God, cursed them, saying,

“Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see” (Psalm 69: 23)

Yes ! Creation itself mourned its Lord; the sun was darkened, the rocks were split, and the temple itself, seemed to be saddened, as its veil was torn in two from top to bottom. That was What God meant, saying through the prophet Isaiah:

“I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering” (Isaiah 50: 3)

9- Jesus breathing His last:

“And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani ? ‘, which is translated, ‘My God, why have You forsaken Me ? ‘. Some of those who stood by, when they heard it, said, ‘Look, He is calling for Elijah’. Then someone ran and filled a sponge full of sour wine, put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink, saying, ‘.Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to take Him down. And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last” (verses 34 - 37)

According to the flesh, the Lord Christ was totally exhausted, and could not, at that time, cry out with such loud voice; But He did, to proclaim that what was going on on their hands, was not out of weakness on His part, but a fulfillment of His Divine work, that He stated beforehand through His prophets.

The words, *“My God, Why have You forsaken Me ? “*, do not indicate despair, as some may assume, as the Son is never separated from the Father; But He wanted to demonstrate how horrible was the sin, that He carried in our place, and that made Him, the beloved Son, seem as being fallen under the wrath of God.

With that cry, He is also reminding them of the twenty-second psalm, that narrated the events of the crucifixion. With that cry, He offered the Jews a final warning, to reconsider what they were doing, before He breathes His last; hoping that they would apprehend that He is the Messiah, the fulfiller of the prophecies, and would thus retreat. As to their assumption that He was calling for Elijah, The person of the prophet Elijah was connected to Christ, as a forerunner, to prepare the way for Him. Likewise, the Jews saw in Elijah their helper in heaven, who intercedes on behalf of the afflicted and the persecuted; So, as they assume, He was asking for His intercession !

10- The veil of the temple torn in two from top to bottom:

“Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom”

(verse 38)

Why was the veil of the temple torn, as the Lord Christ breathed His last ?

(1) The Lord Christ has already proclaimed that He lays down His life through His power, and not out of weakness, saying,

“No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again”

(Jn 10: 18)

The events of the cross came to proclaim that; as said by St. John Chrysostom: [That cry tore the veil and opened the graves. That was not an insult to the temple, but a proclamation that they are unworthy of dwelling in it; as He previously delivered it to the Babelonians]. By His cry, He proclaimed His power, and tore the veil of the temple, confirming the grief of the temple for what the worshippers in it were doing, declaring its rejection of their worship, after they have covered their hands with the innocent blood, in envy and viciousness !

(2) The apostle Paul presents us with a theological concept of the tearing down of the veil of the temple, in his epistle to the Hebrews; that is the opening up for us, of the heavenly sanctuaries, through the sacrifice of the cross. The veil that is a divider between the holy place and the Most Holy, refers to the inability of man to enjoy the Divine heavenly sanctuaries. The Lord Christ came to open up the way to heaven by His blood, to enter with us into the bosom of His Father, to enjoy His sanctuaries. Of His words:

“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast,

and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”

(Heb. 6: 19, 20)

In a text claimed to be by St. Jerome: [The veil of the temple was torn , and the heavens were opened].

St. Ambrosius says: [The veil of the temple was torn in two, to let our souls and spirits cross over to God, to see Him face-to-face, and to behold the hidden secrets].

(3) The tearing down of the veil of the temple, may probably mean the opening of the door to the Gentiles, who could not possibly share with the Jews in worshipping in the temple. That what the apostle Paul proclaim by saying:

“For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace; and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity” (Ephes. 2: 14 - 16)

11- Confession of the Roman centurion:

“Now when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, ‘Truly this Man was the Son of God !’” (verse 39)

How amazing! the Roman centurion believed in the crucified Lord Christ, when he saw Him cry and breathe His last. As though he apprehended through that, that He did not die out of weakness, but with power and authority. St. Augustine says: [The soul of the intercessor revealed that the verdict of sin, had no power on it; as it did not leave the body without, but according to its free will; The soul had been united (personally) with the Word of God].

And in a text claimed to be by St. Jerome, [Some last became first; the Gentiles believed while the Jews denied, rendering their last evil, far worse than their first].

12- Women gathering around Him:

“There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses and Salome, who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem” (verses 40, 41)

Origen says, there were three women mentioned by name: Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, and a third, called by St. Matthew, ‘mother of Zebedee’s sons, was mentioned as Salome by St. Mark. ... Anyway, while the disciples refrained from following the crucified, even from afar, the women were following Him, and some of them got the honor of enjoying the Christ risen from the dead, before the disciples did. By that, the gospel gave the woman back her dignity, and proclaimed her sanctity, after suffering a long history of bitter resentment on the part of the world.

13- Burial of Lord Jesus:

“Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, coming and taking courage, went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate marveled that He was already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him if He had been dead for some time. And when he found out from the centurion , he granted the body to Joseph. Then He (Joseph) brought fine linen, took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen. And he laid Him in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. And Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of Jose observed where He was laid” (verses 43 - 47)

The body had to be taken down before sunset, as the crucifixion took place on Friday the 'preparation day', on which the Jews prepare for the Sabbath rest. On that day the Lord was crucified, on the sixth day ... Thus, as God created all creation in six days, to take rest on the seventh day, so also He was raised on the cross, renewing His creation on the same sixth day, to enter with it into the secret of the true rest. The crucifixion of the Lord on the sixth day, 'the preparation day', may embrace our commitment, to be carried by the cross to Him, as long as we are still in this world, by making of all our life 'a preparation day'.... ; to stay with Him on the cross until we breathe our last. And when our worldly life comes to its end, He would send His angel, as though 'Joseph of Arimathea', to lay our body to rest for a short while, until it is raised again on the great day of the Lord.

The Lord did not wish, His body to be wrapped by His disciples, lest there would be accusation, that they stole the body before burying it; But He was wrapped by an honorable righteous man.

St. Ambrosius comments on the wrapping of the Lord's body, saying: [The righteous man anointed the body of Christ with spices and wrapped it with linen ! Righteousness is the clothing of the Church (the body of Christ), and innocence is its beauty. So, you too, clothe yourself with the glorious body of the Lord, to become righteous !

If you believe in His death, then wrap Him in full Divinity; anoint Him with myrrh and spices, the sweet fragrance of Christ (2 Cor. 2: 15).

Joseph of Arimathea wrapped Him in a new linen, probably the new sheet, seen by Peter descending from heaven, and in it were all kinds of four-footed animals, beasts, and birds of the earth (Acts 10: 11). By it, the Church was wrapped, uniting the dif He was placed in a new tomb, in Joseph's tomb, as Christ did not have His own burial place; A tomb is set for those under the law of death, but the Conqueror of death has no tomb of His own.

The death of Christ has its own nature, different from that of other humans; that is

why, He is not to be buried with others, but in a separate tomb by Himself. Through the Lord's incarnation, He is unified with the whole humanity, yet, with some Difference. He likened us in His birth, yet, differed in being conceived by a virgin ...

Who would be this Joseph, in whose tomb Christ was buried ? He is surely that righteous man who surrendered his tomb to Christ, to give the Son of Man somewhere to lay His head (Lk. 9: 58), and there, to find rest. ...

“A throat is an open tomb” (Psalm 5: 9); That is the throat of a man without faith, who utters dead words; but, in the depths of man, there is a tomb, hewn by the righteous, so that the Word of God would enter into the hearts of nations through faith....

A rock is to be placed on the door of the tomb, to keep it closed; As Christ is well wrapped in our souls, He has to be carefully kept, lest we lose Him.

The tomb was hewn in a rock; that is established upon the steadfast faith in God.

Not every one can wrap Christ; That is why the pious women stayed afar; yet they carefully observed where He was laid, so as to come later to anoint Him with spices. In their love, they were the last to leave the tomb, and the first to return to it].

Finally the burial of the Lord Christ by Joseph of Arimathea, represents a pious spiritual experience, that is fitting for us to live by every day. This Joseph came from Rama, said to be ‘Ramathaim Zophim’ (1 Sam. 1: 1) -- ‘Ramallah’ nowadays. As the word ‘Rama’ in Hebrew means a (high place); No one could enjoy that honor , unless he comes from the heavenly high places; that is to say comes from Rama; enjoying heavenly life, as his home and where he is raised ... How could he carry the body of the Lord, if he does not have the heavenly spiritual mark ?

What is that body which we carry, but our life, being ourselves, members of His

body, which we wrap in linen, namely in true purity, anoint with the sweet fragrance of Christ, and enter with it into the Lord Christ Himself, as though into the rock. Thus our life would carry the power of His resurrection, and would be in the company of angels, as angels were inside the tomb of the Lord.

+++

CHAPTER 16

THE EVENTS OF THE RESURRECTION

St. Mark, presenting to us the Lord Christ as a Minister, working with love even to the Cross, intended to carry us with him to the glories of resurrection. That is why he did not let the curtain of his narration fall with the events of the cross, but set forth with us to the Resurrection and Ascension of the Lord.

1- The stone rolled away	1 - 4
2- The angel gives the good news of the Resurrection	5 - 8
3- Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalene	9 - 11
4- Christ's appearance to the two disciples of Emmaus	12 - 13
5- Christ's appearance to the eleven	14 - 18
6- Christ's Ascension	19 - 20

1- THE STONE ROLLED AWAY

St. Mark draws down the curtain at the scene of Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joses, observing from afar where the Lord was laid. As he raises the curtain of the Resurrection, we see them together with Salome, carrying spices, setting forth to the tomb to anoint His body. Whoever encounters the Lord on His Cross, and accompanies Him on the road of Passion until his burial will be worthy of experiencing the joy of His Resurrection. The evangelist says,

“Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun has risen. And they said among themselves, ‘Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?’ But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away -- for it was very large” (verses 1 - 4)

St. Ambrose believes that the Lord Christ had risen after the Sabbath came to an end, with the breeze of the dawn of Sunday. It is as though these women, carrying the spices and setting forth towards the tomb, refer to the Church of the New Covenant, which sets forth from the literal darkness of the Sabbath into the light of the freedom of Sunday, to enjoy her Groom the Sun of Righteousness, rising on the believing souls, abolishing the darkness.

St. Jerome says: [Once the grief of the Sabbath passed, a day of joy has risen. Now risen, it gained the priority over all days. On this day, the first light has shone, and the Lord had risen, conquering death.]

If the ‘Sabbath’ refers to rest according to the law, (symbolizing the true rest in Christ Jesus, risen from the dead), the Lord waited for the end of the Sabbath to rise with the beginning of the new day, proclaiming the end of the symbol and the beginning of the symbolized.

St. Athanasius the Apostolic, Pope of Alexandria, wrote of the Passover: “The Passover is our feast... It is no longer the feast of the Jews, as it came to an end, as far as they are concerned. The old things passed away, and now come new things, according to which, every one has to keep the feast, abiding in Him who says, “*Observe the month of Abib (the new things), and keep the Passover to the Lord your God*” (Deut. 16: 1).”

The women set forth to the tomb not thinking about the guards nor the seal, They had left the previous day, before the Jews went to Pilate to ask for of the guarding and the sealing of the tomb. They only worried about the stone; “who will roll it away from the door of the tomb?” All had forgotten, amid the horrible events of the Cross, the issue of His Resurrection; that is why the women worried about the stone that closed the door of the tomb, not thinking of Him, who is capable of rising while the door is closed !

Father Sefrianus, Bishop of Gebala, and a contemporary of St. John Chrysostom,

comments on that stone, saying, “That stone is nothing but the literality of the law, written on stone: That literality should be (rolled away) from the heart, by the grace of God, to be able to behold the divine secrets, and to receive the Spirit of the life-giving gospel. As long as your heart is sealed and your eyes are closed, you will not be able to behold the splendor of the open and spacious tomb”.

Father Paul of Bush says, ”The Lord has risen while the stone on the door of the tomb was sealed. In the same way He was delivered by St. Mary, while still a virgin, according to the prophesy of Ezekiel (Ezek. 44: 1 - 4). The rolling away of the stone from the door of the tomb was in order to proclaim the Resurrection clearly; lest, if the stone stayed sealed, it would be assumed that the body was still in the tomb”

2- The Angel Gives the Good News of the Resurrection

“And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. But he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed, you seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen ! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go and tell His disciples - and Peter - that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you’” (verses 5 - 7)

The evangelists tell us of more than one visit by the women to the tomb. Each of them presented a scene to consummate together the events of the Resurrection. Here, St. Mark the Evangelist tells us of the entrance of the women into the tomb. They saw an angel, in the form of a young man, sitting on the right side and clothed in a long white robe. St. Augustine says that this does not signify their actual entrance into the tomb, but rather their very close approach, to the extent of being able to behold everything inside the tomb.

They saw an angel inside, although they saw him later outside. As St. Augustine also says, there were angels all around area, inside as well as outside the tomb. The tomb turned into a heaven, where the angels desire to dwell. According to the law, the tombs represented uncleanness, where no one dwelt except the dead, the lepers, and those possessed with evil spirits. Whoever touched a tomb, was considered unclean and in need

of purification. The entrance of the body of the Lord Christ into the tomb has taken away its uncleanness, and turned it into a place where believers from all over the world desire to come together to enjoy the blessings of the Living One who has risen in it.

The angel appeared in the form of a young man, not of a child or an old man; because since he is preaching the Resurrection, he is presenting to us, by his person, a mark of life risen in the Lord. This life knows no immaturity of children, nor inability of old age; but is of unfailing strength, and does not get weak or old. His sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white robe, refers to our life risen in the Lord, that exalts us to be on the right hand of God and to be clothed with purity and joy.

Father Gregory the Great says: “He appeared clothed in white to proclaim the joys of our feast.” St. Jerome also says; “Now the enemy escaped, and the kingdom is restored. So the shining white robe, refers to the true joy; the King of peace being sought and found, never to be taken away from us. That young man, therefore, has proclaimed the nature of the Resurrection for those who fear death.”

As to the preaching message of that angel, it embraced the following:

(1) He proclaimed the message of the Resurrection to the women seeking the crucified: “*You seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified*”, No one can receive the message of the Resurrection in his inner life, or can encounter the Lord Christ risen from the dead, unless he seeks Him in his inner depths.

(2) Although the Lord Christ had risen, the angel called Him, “*Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified.*” The words “*of Nazareth*”, refer to His incarnation, having risen in Nazareth. His Resurrection confirmed His incarnation, and revealed the mission for which He came. As to calling Him “*Who is crucified,*” the Resurrection did not take away from the Lord Christ His mark as “*crucified,*” but proclaimed the acceptance of the sacrifice of the Cross. In ancient times, God sent a fire to consume the sacrifice offered by Elijah to confirm His acceptance of it. But in the new covenant, the Resurrection came to proclaim the glory of the sacrifice of the Cross, not through the consumption of the sacrifice, but the

proclamation of the power of life in it, being the sacrifice of the Living Christ, , who is capable of rising from the dead.

The Resurrection made the sacrifice of the Cross present at all times, granting the power of the Resurrection to whoever enjoys communion in it.

(3) Having gone to the tomb, where they encountered Christ risen from the dead, they enjoyed the privilege of testifying of the Lord Christ before others: *“Go and tell His disciples -- and Peter --that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.”*

The women came heavy hearted, but the Resurrection of the Lord turned their grief into joy and granted them the ability to preach the Resurrection to all, telling them to set forth to Galilee to encounter the One risen from the dead, according to His promise.

(4) The invitation for all to encounter Him in ‘Galilee’ a word meaning ‘crossing’, came to proclaim, that the Lord had risen from the dead to cross with us all from death to life, from the Passion to the glory of the Resurrection, and from our ancient man to the new life in Him. St. Augustine believes that Galilee designates the crossing over of the disciples to preach among the Gentiles, after He opened the door for them, saying, *“I am going before you into Galilee.”*

3- Christ’s Appearance to Mary Magdalene:

“Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.

She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe” (verses 9 - 11).

Mary Magdalene enjoyed that encounter: Having been relieved of the kingdom of the devil once set within her by seven demons, her heart became kindled to enjoy within her the kingdom of the One risen from the dead. In other words, we can not experience the joy of His Resurrection in us, and the reigning of His kingdom in our depths unless we

submit our heart for Him to dwell in after first casting out the evil from it.

St. Mary Magdalene saw Him early on the first day of the week, that is after the darkness of the night was cast away from her heart, and enjoyed Him after being freed of the seven demons.

St. Ambrose says, "If you wish to find Him, the sun is now rising: Come like those women, that is, with hearts devoid of the darkness of evil, as the lusts of the body and the evil deeds are all darkness. Whoever has darkness of this sort, will never behold the lights or have Christ; since Christ is light. Brethren, cast away the darkness from yourselves: namely, cast away all evil lusts and deeds: Have the sweet fragrance, which is the zealous prayer, saying with the Psalmist, *"Let my prayer be set before You as incense"* (Psalm 141: 2).

If you wish to behold the Lord, and to come to your heavenly home, you will have to forsake the evil, abiding in the goodness that you started to adopt."

4- Christ's Appearance to the Two Disciples of Emmaus

"After that, He appeared in another form to two of them as they walked and went into the country. And they went and told it to the rest, but they did not believe them either"(verses 12, 13).

St. Luke the Evangelist talked about that encounter in some detail. We intend, with the help of God, to deal with this when we study the Gospel according to him (Lk. 24: 13 - 35).

St. Augustine says about that encounter "When the Lord approached the two disciples, they lacked the faith ... they did not believe that He had risen, nor that anyone can ever do this... They lost faith and had lost all hope ... They walked with Him along the way, as dead with the living. 'Life' was walking with them, yet their hearts were not pulsating with life."

5- Christ's Appearance to the Eleven

“Afterward He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after he had risen. And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover” (verses 14 - 18).

As the One risen from the dead appeared to them, He granted them the ability to preach to the whole creation; so that, as the apostles enjoy life risen in the Lord, they could present others with the ‘power of Resurrection.’

In the talk of the Lord Jesus with His disciples after His Resurrection, the following are to be noticed:

(1) The Lord rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart; and as St. Jerome says: “He rebuked their unbelief to replace it with submission, and rebuked their hardness of heart to replace it with softer hearts full of compassion.” Thus the first work in our lives, through the Resurrection of the Lord, is a complete inner resulting in a lively faith and a compassionate heart. This change should involve both faith and works amalgamated together. He grants us faith in Him, working inside of us and through us. That is why St. John Chrysostom says, “We do not see that there is nothing we can do without Christ!”

(2) Having enjoyed the work of the Resurrection within them, having been granted a lively faith, and having enjoyed the change of heart to experience the life of virtues in the Lord, they were commanded to preach the gospel to the whole world and to every creature.

The Resurrection frees the preacher of narrowness of heart, raising it above any

bigotry. He sees himself like everyone else, fallen beneath the weight of death, and risen with no goodness on his part. That is why he desires the entire world to be raised, and to enjoy the new life of freedom. “A bishop or a priest”, in the eyes of St. John Chrysostom, “has been assigned to the world as a whole to become a father to all People.”

The evangelist started his book with the voice of the one crying in the wilderness, and ended it with the Lord’s invitation to preach to the world as a voice crying in the wilderness.

Pope Gregory the Great says, “We can consider ‘every creature’, to mean every nation).” This expression also presents us with a symbolic interpretation that “every creature”, means man as a whole; as he shares, certain aspects with non-living things without sensation; other aspects with plants living but lacking sensation; others with animals, living, sensing, but lacking reason; as well as sharing aspects with reasoning angels. Preaching to man is preaching to every creature in him, through utterly sanctifying him.

(3) Baptism, amalgamated with faith, is the main object of salvation. Through it, the baptized enjoys the new risen life, according to Christ’s words:

“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned”(verse 16).

St. John Chrysostom says: “It is not through a mother or a father, nor through human union, nor through pains of labor that we are born again. But by the Holy Spirit, we gain the tissues of our new nature. In water it is formulated, and from water we are secretly born, as though from the womb. In baptism, the (deposit) of our covenant with God is realized: death, burial, resurrection, and life. All that happens at once.”

St. Augustine comments on the importance of Baptism, saying: “If children are not baptized, they would be counted as nonbelievers, and would never have life.

“He who does not believe in the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (Jn. 3: 36).

(4) He granted them possibilities, that are not their own, but gifts that support them in preaching. Such as casting out demons, performing wonders and speaking in tongues, in order to preach among those whose language they do not understand. As St. Ambrose says: “He granted them everything, not to be seen as human power, but as grace working through them.”

6- The Ascension

St. Mark, the Evangelist ends his book with the Ascension of the Lord to heaven, and the going out of the disciples to preach, saying:

“So then, after the Lord has spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen”
(verses 19, 20)

If the Gospel according to St. Mark is about Christ working for the Church, then having accomplished much for the sake of His Church hidden in Him, He ascended to heaven so that the Church would work for the sake of Christ hidden in It. He ascended to heaven and sat on the right hand of God the Father to grant His Church to sit in the bosom of His Father (or on His right hand).

Pope Gregory (the Great) comments on the Ascension of the Lord Christ, saying: [We should notice that Elijah was said to have gone up in a chariot, to reveal that a saintly man is still in need of some help ... But we did not read about our Savior, that He ascended with any help from an angel or a chariot; as He, who created everything through His authority, is above all...

Enoch who was “taken” and Elijah, who “went up” to heaven, were two symbols of

the Lord's Ascension. They proclaimed and witnessed to His Ascension - the first one before the law, and the second under the law - until He, who truly can enter heaven, will come.]

St. Augustine presents us with an interpretation of the expression "the right hand of God" saying: [We should not understand His sitting in the physical sense, as though the Father is on the left and the Son is on the right. But the right here designates the authority given to Him by the Father, being a man (a representative of humanity). In order to come and to condemn, He, who first came to be, Himself was condemned. The word "sits" means (dwells), as we may say of someone, that he sat (stayed) in some place for so many years. Thus we believe that Christ dwells at the right hand of the Father, as He is blessed and is dwelling in the beatitude, designated as "the right hand of God."]

The evangelist confirms that the Lord who ascended to heaven, is "working with the preachers, and confirming the words through accompanying signs..." Although He ascended up in glory, yet He continued to work so that the whole Church would (ascend) with Him and in Him, and would enjoy the fellowship of His glories.

+++

CONTENTS

A preface by the author.

An introduction: A biography of St. Mark; His upbringing; St. Mark and the lion; 1 His missionary work.

The gospel according to St. Mark: Time and place of writing; St. Peter and the gospel of St. Mark; Features of this gospel; Sections and contents.

FIRST SECTION: HIS MINISTRY IN GALILEE

CHAPTER 1: THE BEGINNING OF THE MINISTRY OF LORD CHRIST

1- Introduction. 2- Ministry of St. John the Baptist. 3- Baptism of Lord Christ 4 - His temptation 5- His preaching the gospel of the new kingdom. 6- Calling of the disciples. 7- His amazing works of love.

CHAPTER 2: OPPOSITION TO HIS MINISTRY:

1- Opposing His authority: Healing a paralytic. 2- Criticizing His conduct: His love for sinners. 3- Criticizing His rites of worshipping: Not fasting. 4- Accusing Him of not keeping the Sabbath (the law).

CHAPTER 3: HIS INCESSANT WORK:

1- Healing the man with withered hand. 2- His ministry from a small boat. 3- Choosing disciples to work with Him. 4- His relatives and the scribes accusing Him 5- His Mother and brothers sending for Him.

CHAPTER 4: THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER AND THE SEEDS:

1- Encountering the multitude by the sea. 2- His Divine labor as living seeds. 3- His Divine labor will never be hidden. 4 His incessant Divine labor. 5- His Divine labor and the mustard seed. 6- His Divine labor and the opposing word..

CHAPTER 5: HIS AUTHORITY OVER UNCLEAN SPIRITS AND OVER DEATH:

- 1- Christ and the dweller among the tombs. 2- His encounter with Jairus.
- 3- Healing the woman with the flow of blood. 4- Restoring Jairus' daughter to life.

SECOND SECTION: HIS DEPARTURE FROM GALILEE:

CHAPTER 6: IMPRESSIONS AS TO THE PERSON OF CHRIST

- 1- His relatives stumble in Him. 2- Sending out the twelve. 3- Herod's attitude towards Him. 4- The disciples and the hungry multitude. 5- The disciples and the Waves of the sea. 6- People recognize Him.

CHAPTER 7: THE INNER LIFE:

- 1- The Lord Christ and the washings. 2- Healing the Phoenician girl.
- 3- Healing a deaf mute.

CHAPTER 8: THE FULFILLING CHRIST:

- 1- A question around the bread. 2- Asking for a sign from heaven.
- 3- A conversation around the leaven.
- 4- A question around insight. 5- A question around the identity of the Lord Christ.
- 6- Proclamation about the Corps. 7- Proclamation about the fellowship of the Cross.

CHAPTER 9: THE PRACTICAL KINGDOM:

- 1- A promise to behold the kingdom of God.
- 2- The kingdom and the Transfiguration
- 3- The kingdom and overcoming the devil.
- 4- The kingdom and the cross.
- 5- The kingdom and humility 6- The kingdom and width of the heart

THIRD SECTION: HIS MINISTRY IN JUDEA:

CHAPTER 10: THE DIFFICULT WAY:

- 1- Forbidding divorce except for reason of sexual immorality.
- 2- Receiving children with love.
- 3- The rich man and following Christ.
- 4- The act of leaving for the sake of following Christ. 5
- 5- Forsaking the love of authority.
- 6- Need for receiving sight.

FOURTH SECTION: HIS MINISTRY IN JERUSALEM:

CHAPTER 11: HIS ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM:

- 1- His triumphant entry.
- 2- The barren fig tree.
- 3- His zeal for His temple.
- 3- Withering of the fig tree.
- 5- His authority questioned.

CHAPTER 12: OPPOSITION IN JERUSALEM:

- 1- The parable of the wicked vinedressers
- 2- A question concerning paying taxes.
- 3- The Sadducees and the resurrection.
- 4- The scribes and the commandment.
- 5- The loving widow and the two mites.

CHAPTER 13: SIGNS OF THE END OF AGE

- 1- Introduction. 1- Destruction of the old temple.
- 2- Appearance of false christs.
- 2- Occurrences of wars and disasters.
- 4- Occurrences of afflictions.
- 5- Abomination of desolation.

- 6- Commandments for entering the kingdom of Heaven.
- 7- The great tribulation.
- 8- Appearance of false prophets.
- 9 – Collapse of nature.
- 10- Coming of the Son of Man.
- 11- Parable of the fig tree.
- 12- Confirming His coming.
- 13- Not knowing the day or hour.
- 14- Commandment to watch.

FIFTH SECTION:: PASSION AND RESURRECTION:

CHAPTER 14: PREPARATION FOR THE CROSS:

- 1- The high priests and the scribes plotting to kill Him.
- 2- Breaking a flask of Spikenard
- 3- Judas betrays his Master.
- 4- The Passover banquet.
- 5- Proclamation of betrayal.
- 5- Institution of the Eucharist.
- 7- Proclamation that His disciples will be made to stumble because of Him.
- 8- Heading to Gethsemane.
- 9- His arrest.
- 10- His religious trial.
- 11- Peter's denial.

CHAPTER 15: THE EVENTS OF THE CROSS:

- 1- His civil trial.
- 2- Jesus mocked.
- 3- On the way to the Cross.
- 4- Offering Him wine mingled with myrrh to drink.
- 5- Dividing His garments.
- 6- Crucifying Him between two robbers.

- 7- Blaspheming Him.
- 8- Darkness over the whole land.
- 9- Jesus breathing His last.
- 10- The veil of the temple torn from top to bottom.
- 10- Confession of the Roman Centurion.
- 12- Women gathering around Him.
- 13- Burial of Lord Jesus

CHAPTER 16: THE EVENTS OF RESURRECTION:

- 1- The rolled away stone.
- 2- An angel gives the good news of resurrection.
- 3- His appearance to Mary Magdalene.
- 4- His appearance to the two disciples of Emmaus.
- 5- His appearance to the eleven.
- 6- His ascension.